

that evening why York should have illuminated itself, I must have asked a dozen, and not one of them could tell me. If it was anybody's birthday or something's anniversary or Shopping Week, the secret had been well kept. Perhaps it had occurred to somebody that York was on the Ouse and not on the Tyne or the Tees, and that was considered excuse enough for a display of coloured electric bulbs: as indeed it was. Later in the evening, after dinner, I visited an empty pub, which had a few bright glints of red and green outside, but when I asked the landlord, who joined me in a drink, why the city was decorating itself, he could not tell me. 'It's something they 'ave on,' he muttered vaguely. His talk was all of the vanished military glories of the city, of the time when soldiers *were* soldiers, real thirsty Kipling characters, and not mild lads who preferred a cup of tea to an evening of this landlord's beer. He had a passion for some cavalry regiment that had been stationed in the city, years ago, and discussed their conduct in great but obscure detail. When he could think of nothing new to say about them, he repeated: 'When they were on parade, they were on parade, and when they were off parade, they were off parade. On parade, *on* parade. Off parade, *off* parade.' Every time he brought out this idiocy, he goggled at me, solemnly. After a quarter of an hour of this, I escaped, and walked into the nearest cinema. It was showing an English film, all about rich women and crooks on the Riviera, so painfully bad, being neither decent entertainment nor exhilarating silliness, neither on parade, nor off parade, that I left it after another quarter of an hour. I walked all round the illuminated streets, but nothing appeared to be happening, so I returned to my hotel, which was filled with sunset-faced racing men guffawing over double whiskies. So, gloomily, I went to bed.

## TO LINCOLN AND NORFOLK

## I

NEXT morning it seemed as if I awoke in another England. The northern desolation had been banished. My face was turned away from the Tyne and the Durham coalfields and the Tees. Even the weather temporarily conspired to persuade me that I was now looking towards another England. There was neither fog nor heavy rain. From my bedroom window I could see, across gardens of freshening green, the towers of the Minster, only a shade more substantial than the smoky pearl of the sky, ready to float away at a sign, like Aladdin's palace. The trees in the gardens were bare and black so that their branches made a pretty tracery against the green. The morning itself, at that hour and for two or three hours more, was clean out of season. It was April or a most lamb-like March. I took the road to Barmby Moor like a man reprieved. That road, through Barmby Moor to Beverley, seemed to me to cut through a most delicious landscape, at once homely and remote. The land rose in shallow terraces, all charmingly laced with those black branches I had noticed in the gardens at York. These, I suppose, were the wolds. But you had the huge sky of flat countries, and on this sky the morning worked furiously, as if it were one of our old landscape painters. It suddenly swept curtains of cloud across the sky, pulled down showers of rain, poked a little hole here and there into the clearest azure, and for a long time hung out a gigantic rainbow in the most shamelessly romantic fashion. Old Turner himself might have been up there, pulling the strings. Below this fine extravagance of lighting, the fat levels of land, the fields and hedgerows and farm buildings, were never the same for two moments together but were un-

failingly appealing. It was Arcadia with a faint Dutch flavour. Durham might have been a thousand miles away, or lost in another age. This south-east corner of Yorkshire, which is not on the way to anywhere but Hull, has a curiously pleasant remoteness of its own. You feel there that you are a long way from anywhere but you also feel, for once, that is is a good thing to be a long way from anywhere. There is none of that awful homelessness, that little lost-dog feeling: you do not know where you are but it is all as good as bread. There are some charming villages on the way. One of them – I think its name was Bishop Burton – gave me the most entrancing glimpse of a pond, old walls and red roofs. Within a second, I had settled there and was done with the world: the bookish hermit of Bishop Burton. It was that kind of place, one of our ten thousand might-be homes. I was expecting Beverley, and yet when it came, suddenly towering in that pretty rustic flatness, it was, as these things always are, an overwhelming surprise. To see Beverley Minster suddenly hanging in the sky is as astonishing as hearing a great voice intoning some noble line of verse. I am no Catholic, no medievalist, no Merrie Englander – though I have seen things on this journey that have come nearer to converting me than all their books – but I cannot help asking myself and you why our own age, which boasts of its conquest of material things, never seems to offer us here any of these superb aesthetic surprises. You go up and down this country and what makes you jump with astonishment and delight is something that has been there for at least five hundred years. And it is not its age but its mere presence that does the trick. If you want to know the difference between working for the glory of God and working for the benefit of debenture-holders, simply take a journey and keep your eyes open. I find it difficult to believe in the God who inspired the creators of Beverley Minster. But I am beginning to find it even more difficult to believe in the debenture-holders who inspired the creators of the Black Country slag-heaps and the Durham 'tips'. If it has to

be a choice between Beverley and Jarrow, write me down a medievalist.

So I came again to Hull, after many years. I found I could not remember anything about the city except that it has a railway station called Paragon, from which I took a train home, twenty years ago, when I landed there from the Continent. I had never been to Hull since. Unless you should happen to be going to one of the Baltic countries, Hull is out of your way. You cannot pass through it to anywhere. The long wide estuary of the Humber cuts it off from the south. It is not really in Yorkshire, but by itself, somewhere in the remote east where England is nearly turning into Holland or Denmark. It is a large and growing city, with a fine trade of its own in timber, grain, oil-seed, fruit and fish; but nevertheless it is one of those places you must determinedly visit and not one of those places you are always arriving at by accident. I went to the hotel at the station and found myself for once in a brand-new bedroom, for a whole floor had just been opened. As I have complained about hotel bedrooms more than once in this chronicle, I must put on record that this was a reasonable approximation to what an hotel bedroom should be: it had running water, of course; good lighting; an amusing little electric fire set about two feet from the floor; and a comfortable armchair. I soon needed that electric fire, for the almost April morning had gone and in its place was a cruel sleety day that might have been brought over in the last ship from Finland. But even the weather – and I never knew such a place for icy rain – could not make Hull look as cheerless as most big ports. It had an air of prosperity. The actual figures for local trade have not actually been very brilliant these last few years, and you could easily prove from them that it has suffered as much from the depression as most of the other larger ports. But if atmosphere is more truthful than statistics – and I believe it is – then Hull has been fortunate. It has not the usual down-and-out look, nor any suggestion of stagnation in the docks. Something of the outward character of the Scan-

Scandinavian and Baltic countries with which it trades has crept into the appearance of Hull. It has a cleanish, red-brick look. Go to big ports like London and Liverpool and you find the docks themselves and all the roads leading to and from them buried in a thick gloomy atmosphere, as if they were the last places the daylight found and the first it left. They are regions of huge dark walls, mud and smoke and perpetual winter dusk. Hull has none of this terrifying murk. Its docks have daylight in them. The roads leading to them are honest roads and not Stygian avenues in warrens of darkness. Hull is the third port in the country. All the figures known to the Board of Trade will not convince me that it is not relatively well off. It certainly has the air of having escaped the depression, or at least the lower depths that the Mersey and the Tyne have known. Even with icy rain flaying the streets, there were plenty of people about, and not out-of-works but brisk shoppers and spenders. These people are pleasant but queer. They are queer because they are not quite Yorkshire and yet not quite anything else. They are, in fact, citizens of Hull, like their fathers and grandfathers before them. Unlike many ports, Hull has not a population that has drifted there from all over the place; partly because it is not one of those cities that have grown very rapidly and have about them a faint fungus odour. It was founded by Edward the First, and it has been growing steadily ever since. It is still growing.

The docks now belong to the London and North-Eastern Railway Company, and one of its officials, a Hull man, showed me round. I saw more timber than I have ever seen in my life before; there seemed to be miles of it. I may have seen some of that very timber being loaded in Vancouver Harbour when I was there two years ago. But the great King George Dock does not handle timber but grain. At the end of the long row of electric elevators is the enormous Silo, into which you can pour 100,000 tons of grain. We climbed to the top of this strange monster, with its elaborate internal organization of conveyer belts and giant bins, and found ourselves on what must have

been the coldest and slipperiest roof in England. From there, however, we had a noble view of the Humber, with the whole seven miles of Hull's dock-front below us on one side and across at the other side the mysterious smudge that was New Holland. It was good, even though one's eyes were watering, to see an estuary that had ships on business in it and not merely rows of ships lying up. Hull is the great port for lighters and barges, because an unusually big proportion of the cargoes arriving there is carried on by water, after being transhipped. You could, in fact, go to almost any large town in England from here and never set foot on shore, by using the Ouse, the Trent, or the canals. I was shown one tidy-sized vessel, in dock not far away, that has a very odd routine of her own. She is a small old liner that has been converted into a fish-carrier. Early every spring she sets out for Iceland and Greenland with a skeleton crew, picks up Icelanders, and then goes fishing in Arctic waters, until her refrigerator holds are crammed full with halibut and cod. Then she returns and docks, selling her two thousand-odd tons of fish, not in a lump, but day by day, not, I take it, without some consideration of the prevailing market prices. There are two of these Arctic fishing liners.

Hull has an enormous trawling fleet, and I was taken to see a new trawler being completed in the old Prince's Dock, which is in the centre of the town, where you can have trawlers and trams almost running into one another. (You have the same odd mixture in Bristol.) There were riveters, engineers, carpenters, and painters at work on her, so that it was hard to move about, but I managed to see about half of her with the prospective skipper, who proudly showed his chart-room and told me that the vessel would do over eleven knots and carry, in the best season, about eighteen men. These Hull trawlers do not fish the North Sea but sail up to the Arctic and may be away for three weeks. I liked the look of this new one, but I can think of many things I would rather do than go plunging about in the northern seas, somewhere between North Cape and Spitzbergen, in such

a craft, with seventeen other fellows and a great deal of ice and fish. But the skipper's face, a young and clean-shaven one, lit up every time he mentioned her. He was the bridegroom, and there, in Prince's Dock, noisy with hammerings and smelling of paint and varnish but his own and beautiful, was the bride. And to understand how far he would probably take her on their honeymoon trip, you should get a big atlas and turn to the North Polar Chart.

Later in the day, with sheets of rain still falling outside, I smoked a pipe or two in the private office of one of the oldest firms of shipping agents, and talked to its senior director. He was, as they all are, a Hull man, and began by talking about the changes he had known. Among other things, he told me that in his youth the smaller coasting ports really had an authentic W. W. Jacobs flavour. Although no enemy of the railway company and appreciative of its enterprise, he disliked its possession of the docks, which should, he declared, be under the control of a Harbour Board, as in London. Also he condemned the recent developments in town-planning that had resulted, here as elsewhere, in the creation of new workmen's quarters outside the town. The men, especially the dockers, should have been rehoused in their old districts, within a stone's throw of their work. Most of the dockers have no regular employment; they have 'to stand a ship', which means going down to the docks to see if they are wanted, early in the morning and then again in the afternoon. If there is no work for them on the morning shift, they can do nothing until the afternoon. When they lived close at hand, they could 'stand the ship' on a cold winter's morning and return at once to their firesides, if not wanted, and keep warm and dry until they tried again in the afternoon. But now that they live a bus or tram ride away, they do not want to make the long journey back home if there is nothing for them in the morning, and so they hang about - or alternatively spend money they can ill afford on shelter and hot food and drink - until the afternoon. Thus they are worse off than they were

before, simply because they have been removed so far from their work. Their womenfolk especially grumble about it. All this seems sound reasoning as far as it goes; though it is rather pitiful that, first, dockers cannot be paid enough to make a twopenny bus-fare no great matter, and that, secondly, in these days of telephones, it should be necessary that they should have to travel several miles without knowing whether they are required or not. I would have thought, in my ignorance, that if a fairly large number of dockers have been re-housed together outside the city, a little elementary organization at both ends, a telephone message or two from the docks to some little office near where the men live, could soon put an end to these futile journeys and this waiting about in the cold and wet. But there may, of course, be difficulties I do not understand. In any event, there is a good deal to be said in favour of building on the old sites, instead of going outside, a long way from places of work, and there destroying a good piece of country. We ought to make up our minds to use all the space inside our towns, without overcrowding, of course, and then to keep as much as possible of the surrounding countryside unspoilt. For my part, I would much rather live in the centre of a town and have quick access to unspoilt country, than live in a wide wilderness of little bungalows, in neither honest town nor country.

My acquaintance, the shipping agent, went on to say that a foreign friend of his had just been criticizing our habit of living well outside the cities in which we work. 'You people,' said this foreigner, 'should have bungalows and cottages in the country where you could spend two or three months in summer - as we do. But then the rest of the time, especially in winter, you should live here in Hull. You could then have a good social life.' My acquaintance, who lives in the country himself, confessed that there was something in this criticism, and admitted that he and his wife knew little of the social life they had once known. As there were a great many others, substantial citizens, who also lived a long way out of the city, the social life of the place

was not what it had been. And this habit, he pointed out, had a bad effect on many things, notably, the theatre. He himself had been a constant playgoer in the old days, but now that he lived so far away, he rarely stayed in the city to visit a theatre. And there were dozens like him, all of them men of standing and comfortably off. It was he himself who pointed out how bad this was, but I was quick to agree with him. I think the foreign critic was right. It would be much better if our provincial citizens lived in their cities, except during the summer months, instead of merely working in them. This habit of living outside, which owes much of its growth to the increased use of motors, explains in part the social disintegration that one notices in so many provincial cities. The very people who, at one time, would have been the chief supporters of local music and drama and so forth now spend their evenings with bridge and the wireless twenty-five miles away. That is one reason why the provincial theatre is not what it was. The competition of the cinema has of course done something, and so have the cheap bad touring companies, but the fact that the richer citizens no longer live in the city partly explains the decline. (There is an excellent little repertory theatre in Hull, but it has a hard struggle to keep going.) In spite of so many prophecies to the contrary, we are now less urban than our fathers and grandfathers were; the country-gentleman tradition is livelier today than it was twenty-five years ago; and I understand there are far more people hunting now than there were before the war. Men of the director or manager kind have moved, or are moving, out of the city, and tend to be interested in it only as a place in which to earn money. I have noticed in more than one big provincial town that the old residential districts, where once the solid citizens lived in comfortable rows, have fallen from majesty and grace, and are given up to dentistry, corsets, boarders, and estate agents' boards. The result is that the various social and artistic activities of these towns are now chiefly organized by people who belong to the employed and

not the employing class, people who cannot afford to live miles away and who also cannot afford to spend much money on these activities. A further result is that these activities themselves are taking on a new character. For example, the only theatre that is really alive in many of these towns is one in which speeches that challenge the existing order of things receive the loudest applause. Thus I suspect that this retreat of the wealthier and more conservative classes from a full urban life in the provinces may produce – probably is already producing – some curious results, which will ultimately be more distressing to those classes than to the rest of us. But how general this retreat is, I cannot tell.

As I have already complimented my hotel on the room it gave me, I feel I am at liberty to remark that I disliked my dinner so much that I had to give it up as a bad job. I returned to the lounge, which had been almost deserted all day, to find that it was nearly full. There were couples who mumbled over drinks; there were pairs of young men who stared at the young women, and pairs of young women who pretended not to stare at the young men. The whole scene had that gloomy furtive air which inevitably accompanies the gay disreputable life in provincial England. I would have fled from it at once if I had not been buttonholed by a talkative chap who insisted upon standing me a drink and at the same time pouring out a liberal supply of local scandal, some of it relating to people in the room. It seemed that there were unsavoury dramas ripening all round us, with many of these shy and gloomy drinkers cast for leading parts. I helped my new acquaintance to smack his lips over them, then went out into a night so cold and wet that it drove me into the repertory theatre, a pretty little place. But better than anything in the play was a remark made to me, earlier that evening, by one of the hotel's employees, a mature spectacled woman who had tried her hand at various jobs and had at one time, she told me, been engaged. I asked her why nothing had come of this engagement, and she replied quite

eriously: 'Oh - I broke it off because he was always telling me how much he liked me and then asking me if I liked him - and I got sick of it.' Most of us would guess a long time before arriving at that particular reason for a broken engagement.

Next morning I was up in good time, for I had arranged to go round the Fish Market. They claim there that it is the finest in the world. Most of us still think of Grimsby as pre-eminently the fishy place, but now Hull beats Grimsby - for sheer quantity, if not for quality. Last year's catch approximately weighed 215,000 tons and was sold for over two and a half million pounds sterling. Fishing is the biggest industry of the city. Its fleet of trawlers are very up-to-date, long-distance craft, which use wireless, direction-finders, depth-sounding apparatus, and every other scientific device that can possibly help them to reap the deep seas. So off we went, through a raw morning, to St Andrew's Docks. It was cold on the way, and it seemed colder still when we arrived there and found ourselves surrounded by dead fish, ice, and blue-handed porters. It was not, I was promptly told, a good morning. It looked good enough to me, for it did not look as if there could be a cod left in the Northern seas. On one side was a misty and pleasing confusion of masts and funnels, finely tangled in the silvery mesh of the morning; and on the other, where we were standing, was a tremendous perspective of 'kits', the open wooden barrels, about three feet deep, in which the fish is packed after it has been sorted. We looked down on an apparent infinity of cod and codlings. But before making their nearer acquaintance, we were taken round the central building of the Market. Hull is very proud of this building. It contains the merchants' offices, banks, railway offices, and a post office. I had to inspect all these, which were not very different from the various offices one sees anywhere, except that they were surrounded by leagues of dead fish and that their hours are not the same. They must open at the small hours - and a very cold dark business it must be too - and I suppose when I looked in upon them, it was well past

their noon. Fantastic working hours of this kind have an atmosphere of their own. I believe that if I were a clerk, I would prefer them to the ordinary hours. To set out for work in the very black of the night, to see the dawn break over the cash-book, to be finishing when other fellows are just settling down to the day's grind; all this would please me, give the job an urgency and romantic flavour; you would always feel you were working somewhere between Christmas Eve and a declaration of war; and, not least, these must be jobs at which you have to be sustained by frequent cups of tea. The room I liked best, however, was the trawler owners' and merchants' club, which smelled cosily of sausages and cigars and had a chart in it showing the position of all the trawlers still out. After eating your sausage, which you have earned, having been up since before dawn, you light your cigar and stand in front of that chart, wondering how the *Annie Brown* is getting on somewhere off the Murman Coast. I remember reading a novel in which the hero, in the very first chapter, rebelled against being a wholesale fish merchant, like his uncle, on the ground that such a career was too painfully prosaic. That novelist can never have known anything about fish merchants. He ought to visit Hull. You can justly object to this fishy life because it is too wildly romantic and speculative and keeps such queer hours; but it is monstrous to suggest that it is prosaic. It offers you a better gamble than Monte Carlo, and a far more poetical atmosphere.

We descended into the actual Market, among the ranged kits. It was very raw down there, among the cod and codling and the ice and salt. The breath of the Arctic was stinging our cheeks. We too might have been just off the Murman Coast. Cod, of every possible size, easily dominated the morning's catch. I saw only a few halibut, but these were of gigantic size, lying there like murdered Roman emperors. What a pity it is that this generous fish is not so exciting to taste as it is to look at, blanched in death. I had a talk with one of the trawler owners, who told me among other things that the trawler crews

were still a race apart, perhaps the last of the wild men in this tamed island of ours, fellows capable of working day and night without food and sleep, when the occasion demanded it, and then also capable of going on the booze with equal energy and enthusiasm. They are intensely loyal to their skippers, he told me, but do not give a damn for anybody or anything else. I could not help thinking it a shame that somebody does not give us a film about these men, slaving and roaring away just round the corner, as a change from anachronistic Wild West heroes or gangster gutter rats. The existence of such fellows, not yet forced into the dreary pattern of cockney clerks and shop-walkers, is yet one more reason for preserving our fishing industry. Let us – for sanity's sake – keep some variety in our manhood. We could also do with more variety in our menus. I was shown several varieties of fish here that were quite useless for the home market because the English, even the poorest, will not touch them. They are re-shipped to the Continent, where folk are either wiser or less fastidious. One of these rejected fish was that horny pink fellow known to the trade as 'the swaddy', which is, of course, old-fashioned slang for 'soldier'. I heard a story of one trawler skipper hailing another in the Northern Seas and asking from where he had come. 'From Aldershot', was the reply, in deepest disgust. 'I've got nothing so far but a load of so-and-so swaddies.' Kits of these fish had been sold that morning at three shillings each, and there would be easily enough in each kit to feed a large family for a week. I am not suggesting that any family should try to feed itself for a week on this fish; but there is nothing wrong with it – the French, whose palate is at least as good as ours, make great use of it, and I fancy I have eaten it myself in France – and it seems strange that this and a few other perfectly edible fish should still be totally rejected in a country where so many people are living miserably on bread and margarine. All the time I was being shown the huge Ice Factory and the Fish Meal and Oil Factories, I was wondering whether it would not be possible for an

enterprising Ministry of Health to tackle this problem of diet, not in order to bully a lot of poor folk into eating things they do not want to eat, but in order to give the more enterprising housewives among them an opportunity of getting clear of the wretched tea and bread and margarine and fried potato fare without spending any more money. It seems ridiculous that, every day, tons and tons of quite edible and wholesome fish should be brought here and then exported at a cheap rate, simply because there is against such fish a popular prejudice, dating probably from the good old give-me-a-thick-beefsteak days, when we were all hard at work and could live like lords.

I was glad to have had the chance of exploring Hull, even if only in the most perfunctory fashion. It remains in my memory as a sound and sensible city, not at all glamorous in itself yet never far from romance, with Hanseatic League towns and icebergs and the Northern Lights only just round the corner. I do not know if they have much music there, but if they do, they should insist upon hearing the symphonies and tone-poems of Sibelius. If these were played long and loudly enough, I can imagine the stacked timber creaking and stirring and perhaps suddenly putting out a green shoot, and the seemingly dead halibut raising their vast heads. That this paragraph will annoy the typical citizen of Hull, who prides himself upon being a plain and downright fellow, I have no doubt whatever; but he should give it a chance, for he is not so plain and downright as he would have us believe, and neither is that city of his.

2

A short but somewhat complicated train journey took me to Lincoln. Fog descended upon the brief afternoon; and there were patterns of frost everywhere. I stamped my feet on deserted station platforms, under dim lights; I travelled in old and empty carriages, which rumbled into the dark plain of Lin-

olnshire; and I peered through the misted windows at mysterious little stations. It was not a journey in this year, this life. I felt like a family solicitor in a mid-Victorian novel, something by Wilkie Collins or Charles Reade; probably going to some remote Grange to read a tortuous and sinister will. It was quite dark when I arrived at Lincoln itself, so there was no chance of seeing once again from the train that splendid apparition of the cathedral on the hill. There was a strange taxi on duty at the station. It was very tall and very old, furnished inside in red leather, with red leather tassels too; and the general effect was that of a club library. In this queer apartment, perfect for a visiting dean, I climbed the steep hill to the top, for my hotel was near the cathedral. This hotel was a surprise. It was comfortable and civilized. Once inside it, I became myself again. After settling in and indulging in that preliminary prowl familiar to all travellers, I inquired for the proprietor to congratulate him on his hotel, only to learn that he was away. He is, it seems, a Jew, and I was told that this was not his only hotel in the city. A very smart man, they all said. I could not help reflecting on the odd prominence of Jews in the history of Lincoln. The oldest house in the place is the *Jew's House*, and in the Middle Ages the Jews of Lincoln were notorious for their supposedly gruesome pastimes. And now, in the twentieth century, it is a Jew who controls the hotel business here, and makes his money looking after the tourists who come to see the Cathedral and the *Jew's House*. I should like to read a history of the Jews in Lincoln. As this was not the tourist season, there were very few other guests in the hotel. Most of them, I gathered, were there on educational business; and I was delighted to see a couple of examiners cracking a bottle instead of cracking my own poor husk of knowledge.

Before the fire in the lounge, I struck up an acquaintance with an engineer of about my own age, who was having a drink there. It appeared that we had a common friend. He invited me to call at his house, which was only a few hundred yards away,

later in the evening; and there I went. Once outside the hotel, you were walking in a medieval city, and might have been in the twisted, dark, and icy old Paris of Villon that lives for ever in the imagination. It was bitterly cold and the steep streets as slippery as glass. The house I was bound for was on the very edge of the hill, and at that hour, in that light, it might have been clinging to the frozen face of an Alp. We had some good talk. Both of the men present were much-travelled engineers. One knew the East very well; the other knew North America and Russia. 'I remember a party we had in Kharkov,' the latter began one reminiscence by saying, and it seemed to me a perfect opening phrase. Neither was a Lincoln man, but they had been there some years. I was laughed at for assuming, on the word of the guide-books, that Lincoln made agricultural implements. This, it seems, is a standing joke, for the fact is that the city has long ceased to make agricultural implements on any scale worth mentioning, but on the other hand does manufacture things like big excavators, pumps, oil engines. The tanks used in the war were made here. But not near where we were sitting, at the top of the hill, which is the ancient city, dominated by the Cathedral. The manufacturing Lincoln lies at the bottom of the hill, by the side of the railway. It appears that there is great local snobbery about this hill. To be anybody in Lincoln you must live 'uphill', like my host and his friend, who nearly sent themselves to social oblivion, in their innocence, by first considering residence on the mere plain. Maids wanting a job point out that they have 'uphill experience' and so demand 'uphill' mistresses. In short, a successful social life in Lincoln is essentially uphill work. You labour down below, in the clanging twentieth century, and spend your leisure by the side of the Cathedral, in the twelfth century. I was astonished to learn that the local council had recently pulled down some ancient buildings there and were contemplating further destruction, much to the indignation of my companions, although they were not natives themselves and neither antiquaries nor



aesthetes. They grumbled a good deal about the stupidity of the municipal authorities, but were rather surprised when I suggested that they should try to get on the council themselves. I have noticed this before, that there exists everywhere a large class of these sensible grumbling citizens, fully aware of what a town council should do or not do, who never think for a moment of offering themselves as prospective councillors. Their usual excuse is that they have not time, which in some instances is probably true enough. It is a pity that they cannot make time, or alternatively that councils cannot arrange their affairs so that other people besides retired shopkeepers and the like should be able to attend to them. I know nothing whatever about the City Fathers of Lincoln, but I am certain that in most towns nowadays the council are not getting the best types of citizen serving on them. That is one reason why the actions of so many municipal authorities appear so excessively narrow-minded and old-fashioned, as I have already remarked. But by this time I have re-crossed the two hundred yards of slippery Middle Ages, and am safely back in the hotel, there to curl up in bed and finish a detective tale by Earl Derr Biggers, the last I shall ever read for the first time, for Biggers died this autumn. Travel can never be quite the same for me, now that there are no more tales of Charlie Chan.

The morning was clear but ferociously cold. Nevertheless, I set out early to explore the old town. There was a wind straight from Siberia stinging this summit. Not another tourist in sight; and the inevitable shops filled with brass door-knockers and toasting-forks looked very forlorn. (Who are the people who load themselves with this trumpery brass in every cathedral city?) There were very few citizens about either. In that street or toboggan-run aptly named *Steep Hill*, the only persons visible were two young girls standing outside a shop, which one of them had just been sweeping out. They were not dressed for outdoors; the wind had a razor's edge; but they did not mind, they were happily gossiping, trying variations on the great

theme. As I passed, walking slowly because the surface was so slippery, I overheard one say: 'And so I says to him, "Well, how's your girl?"' And he says, "I ain't got none." And then he says, "Well, how's your boy?"' And I says, "I ain't got none." And then we laughed.' What a sturdy sex it is, and what a formidable ruling passion! Further down there were men with little zinc baths suspended round their necks, all busy throwing sand on the glassy slopes, down which you lean rather than walk. It is odd that in the middle of this immense flatness, our nearest approach to the prairie, we should have a town with streets that seem steeper than any we have elsewhere. A good deal of the exterior of the Cathedral has been restored, and it is nothing like so impressive close to as it is at the right distance, a mile or two away on the plain. But that is not so damaging a statement as might first appear, for few things in this island are so breathlessly impressive as Lincoln Cathedral, nobly crowning its hill, seen from below. It offers one of the Pisgah sights of England. There, it seems, gleaming in the sun, are the very ramparts of Heaven.

That east wind, however, blew all thoughts of idling in the Minster Yard out of my mind. I was not sorry to join my engineer acquaintance of the previous evening, who had promised to take me into the other Lincoln, smoking and spluttering below, and there show me the big excavators his firm was making. We dropped out of the Middle Ages and ran into a little industrial area as typical of our own time as anything that could be imagined. These giant excavators, which sink their great steel teeth into the earth and bite away tons and tons of it in a few minutes, are brutal fellows, and making them is a brutal job. Massive chunks of solid steel have to be planed and drilled to provide parts for these machines. There is about such processes, to a mere ignorant onlooker, a controlled ferocity that is rather frightening. We make a metal harder than any of our ancestors ever knew, and then we proceed to cut and shape it as if it were so much pinewood. You feel in places like these that

we have harnessed devils and demons that might break loose at any moment, and begin planing and drilling everything within sight, ourselves included. I saw one machine that was cutting out the teeth in a large cog-wheel, and this machine required no supervision whatever, but once set in motion, quietly went on cutting out teeth until the wheel was finished. There is no need to describe the excavators themselves, as most people, by this time, must have seen them at work. But here there were bigger ones than I had ever seen before, and I was shown a few giants. One monster I examined at some length, and went into the steel cab to see the controls, which were so ingenious that the enormous brute could easily be handled by one man, and not necessarily, I imagine, a very intelligent or experienced man. Yet this one machine could do the work of 800 navvies. This is a small fact that throws a sharply focused light on the industrial world of today. At one stroke, 800 manual labourers are obliterated. I do not protest against the fact. What little navvying I did, during the war, I heartily disliked. Let the steel monsters do it, by all means. But I cannot believe that an industrial and economic system, which assumes that 800 men are shovelling away, are drawing wages, are buying food and clothing, can possibly continue functioning properly when the 800 men have been dismissed and in their place is a solitary machine that only asks for one man and a regular feed of heavy engine oil. In other words, machines of this kind are obviously revolutionizing industry, and if we want to avoid a complete breakdown, it seems to me our economics will have to be revolutionized too. The trouble is, it would appear, that our engineers are miles ahead of us, are already living, professionally, in one world while the rest of us are living, or trying to live, in another world. Either they must stop inventing, or, what is more sensible, the rest of us must begin thinking very hard.

Some of these machines have been adapted for trench-digging, and I was told that a number of them have been sold to at least two foreign governments for that purpose. This is not

quite as bad as the armament ramp, in which the very people who tell you that your country is in danger are also busy selling the other folk the very stuff that constitutes the danger, but nevertheless it made me think a bit. There is something peculiarly idiotic about the present state of things. If there is always a real danger of war, then why do governments allow implements of war to be exported, possibly to be used against us? If there is no real danger of war, then why do governments allow such implements to be imported or spend a penny on them? As it is now, we seem to regard armaments or machinery with a military use as so many toys or sporting goods, as if they were of no graver importance than tennis rackets or golf balls. And yet most of us know very well that there are serious differences between Wimbledon and modern warfare. But the nations go on playing a sort of lunatic game, cosily exchanging and accumulating weapons of dreadful destruction. I do not include excavators among these, though, as I suggested to my guide, they could be very damaging weapons of offence on occasion. He agreed, and told me how one of their men, who had taken a machine somewhere out East, discovering that the corrupt native police had arrested his native assistants in order that they should buy themselves out again, promptly moved his great excavator over to the police station and threatened to set it going if the men were not released. The police, rightly jumping to the conclusion that this terrible machine would utterly destroy their station in about four bites, gave way at once. It would be a bad day for Lincoln if all these excavators suddenly went mad, for they would tear up the lower town in an hour or two. Mr Chesterton could write a capital fantastic and symbolic tale about this, and could show the machines trying, in vain, to reach the summit of the hill in order to eat the Cathedral. As he knows his Lincoln – for at the hotel they were full of a recent visit of his there – I commend the idea to him.

From Lincoln to Boston is no great distance, but the train makes a leisurely journey of it, lounging along by the side of the river, the Witham, like an angler. I noticed a lot of wild birds, but I cannot tell you what they were because I do not know anything about wild birds. I call them 'wild birds' not because you might expect to see clouds of tame birds in these parts, but because these birds seemed to me quite unusual and exotic. They were an essential part of the remoteness of the district; and I have never been in any corner of this country that felt more remote. That is rather odd, because, after all, I was sitting in a train, and not wandering about moors and fells, miles and miles from a railway and perhaps from a house. This South Lincolnshire country, first Kesteven and then Holland, is no dreary uninhabited waste; it is for the most part good settled land; and civilized long before my own West Riding. The sense of remoteness comes partly from its geographical situation, for it is tucked away in an odd corner; and partly from a certain foreign quality in it. They do not call this district Holland for nothing. This is Dutch England. The very train was ambling along in the Dutch manner. The morning was cold but very bright and clear. There were blue reflections in the ice on the river bank. The farmsteads were cosy red places. Nearer Boston there were windmills, real windmills, hard at work, and not merely sheltering tea-room patrons. Every minute it was all becoming more Dutch and less English. The train curved round and then I saw, for the first time, that astonishing church tower known as the 'Boston Stump'. This tower is not quite three hundred feet high; but nevertheless, situated as it is, it looked to me more impressive, not as a piece of architecture but simply as a skyscraper, than the Empire State Building in New York, with its eleven hundred feet. It is all a matter of contrast. Here the country is flat; you have seen nothing raised more than twenty or thirty feet from the ground, for miles and miles; and

then suddenly this tower shoots up to nearly three hundred feet. The result is that at first it looks as high as a mountain. Your heart goes out to those old Bostonians who, weary of the Lincolnshire levels and the flat ocean, made up their minds to build and build into the blue. If God could not give them height, they would give it to Him. And of course, although this tower looks blunt enough from a distance to be called a stump, it is actually a fine piece of architecture, like the grand old church from which it sprouts. When Boston was a port of some importance – and at one time, in the thirteenth century, it was the second port in the country – the tower was put to many uses, notably as a lighthouse and a watch-tower. But its chief use, then and now, is as a magnificent means of escape from mere flatness. It lifts the eyes and the heart.

It was market day in Boston. The square was filled with stalls, and any remaining space in the centre of the town was occupied by either broad-faced beefy farmers and their men or enormous bullocks. If there were any marked signs of an agricultural depression in these parts, I missed them. My hotel was in the market square, and it was so crowded with farmers and farm-hands, clamouring for beer, that it was not easy to get in at all. It was now early afternoon and I suppose that business was over for the day. This was the hour when bargains were sealed with a pot or two of ale. Never have I seen more broad red faces in a given cubic capacity. Two more farmers and another seed merchant, and the hotel would have burst. If Boston is like this when agriculture is under a cloud, what is it like when farmers are making money? The very Stump must be splashed with beer and decorated with froth. But this, of course, was their one great lively day in the week; and in an hour or two they would all return to those cosy red farmsteads surrounded by immense fields and probably not see anybody but a neighbour or two until next market day. Moreover, this is not a typical agricultural region. Boston is the market town of a district of large farms, of 500 acres or so, and these farms are

rich silty lands that are admirable for a great variety of crops. The very process that destroyed Boston's importance as seaport, pushing it further and further inland, enriched the whole farming community. Now they grow wheat, sugar beet, potatoes, and various garden produce. Though one local cynic said to me: 'Potatoes? Ay, we grow a lot round here. But some of 'em bought a lot o' cheap German potatoes, covered 'em up for a year, and now sells 'em as home-grown. Smartish chaps round here, I can tell you - ay.'

It was not very pleasant exploring the town because the wind was icy and curiously gritty, so that when your eyes were not watering from the cold, they watered to get rid of the grit. There was nothing remarkable about the stalls in the square, or you could have matched them in almost any market town. I looked inside the church, which was empty of visitors. Then I paid my sixpence and began to climb the tower. It was a very long and steep climb, up a staircase that got narrower and narrower and darker and darker until one was threatened with claustrophobia. At last, aching and exhausted, I tottered out to the tiny platform at the top, where a fiendishly cold wind was raging, making my eyes smart. Through a blur of protective ears, I stared down at the curiously Dutch landscape. The little old town was huddled at my feet. It was plain to be seen from here how the centuries had quietly ruined the place as a seaport, for there was the river, which had once found the open sea here, now wandering several miles beyond the town, through green pastures, in search of the receding Wash. But there was no staying long up there, at the mercy of that wind. I went clattering down the long dark steps, accompanied by an ache in both legs that did not completely leave me for several hours. There was still some daylight left at the bottom, and though the sun had gone and it was colder than ever, I decided to walk some way along the river bank.

Much of the old town must have been destroyed, but what remains has a very pleasant quality. Thus, the pantiles every-

where pleased the eye and the mind, as they always do. There were some fishing boats moored along the river bank, and just by the bridge a tramp was sitting warming himself at a fire he had made. He was the only tramp I saw in this part of the world, which is perhaps too cold in winter and not populous enough for them. The distribution of tramps about the country is a subject I should like to see handled by a competent authority. What determines their migrations? Here, for example, they were almost non-existent, so that the sight of one, sitting at his own fireside, called for some comment. Whereas in other districts, you are never out of sight of them. At one time, I lived in the country just north of Oxford, and there, along the Oxford-Woodstock road I saw more tramps than I have ever seen before or since. Winter and summer, in all weathers, there were dozens of them lining that road. I cannot understand why there were more there than anywhere else, though I can understand why they keep clear of this eastern England, with its bleak winds and weary long roads between villages. I might have questioned this tramp outside Boston, but having got thoroughly warm, perhaps for the first time for days, he looked more than half asleep, so I left him alone, to drowse and dream by his fire. Fortunately, it is not an offence to make a bit of a fire for yourself in the open, as it is to sleep in the open when you have nowhere else to sleep. It is worth remembering that the whole twelve apostles would have been liable to summary arrest in this Christian community, simply as vagrants, and quite apart from their subversive doctrines.

Turning at the bridge, I walked back to the town along the other bank of the river, past some little chandlers' shops that appeared to specialize in vast jars of piccalilli, evidently a favourite pickle with the nautical, probably because it offers a closer approximation to a hot meal than anything else you can get out of a cold jar. It was dusk and tea time when I found myself back in the square, where the stallholders were packing up their unsold toilet sets, linoleum squares, blankets, and

ocolate. I went into the cinema café for tea. There were some  
 ral folk in there and, as I waited for tea, I wondered why  
 ntrymen should so often have such high-pitched voices.  
 wo tables near me were occupied by girls, and it was curious to  
 how carefully they had modelled their appearances on those  
 certain film stars. Even twenty years ago girls of this kind  
 ould have looked quite different even from girls in the nearest  
 ge town; they would have had an unmistakable small town or  
 tic air; but now they are almost indistinguishable from girls  
 a dozen different capitals, for they all have the same models,  
 m Hollywood. It was only the girls here, however, who had  
 s cosmopolitan appearance; the young men looked their  
 nest, broad, red-faced East Anglian selves. Having nothing  
 ter to do, after tea, I attended the 'first house' of the cinema,  
 ich was showing a film version of Maugham's *Our Better*s.  
 was a poor film, but what interested me was the attitude of  
 small audience towards it. Either they were very bored or  
 zled - or possibly both - but certainly they hardly ever  
 ghed, never applauded, and gave no signs of taking any  
 rest in the picture. You cannot blame them. What have the  
 cs of a tiny remote smart set to do with them? When Mr  
 ugham sat down to be adroitly cynical about the marriages  
 American heiresses - a theme that is more Edwardian than  
 ctly contemporary - he was not thinking about the house-  
 lers of Boston, Lincs. We talk about the cinema giving the  
 ole what they want, but really I am not sure that it does not  
 ss of that than the older forms of popular entertainment. If  
 le fit-up theatrical company came to this place, they would  
 their audiences melodrama, broad farce, pantomime; and  
 would certainly never dream of offering them anything  
 resembled *Our Better*s. But the cinema is always offering  
 such things. What pleases Hollywood has to please South  
 olnshire. That week Hollywood was clearly not winning,  
 s it has already changed the faces of the more enterprising  
 g women of the district, it has some considerable victories

to its credit. What a mad mixture it all is, even here, in this  
 remote and decayed little town! The tremendous church tower,  
 the seaport no longer on the sea, the English town that looks  
 Dutch, the chandlers and corn merchants, the farmers and bull-  
 ocks, the floods of beer, the imitation Greta Garbos and Con-  
 stance Bennetts alongside the time-old rural figures, the tramp  
 crouching over his fire. *Our Better*s - what a crazy muddle! I  
 brooded over it, a trifle glumly, as I ate my dinner in the hot  
 little grill-room beneath my hotel. And a very bad dinner it was  
 too.

## 4

The next stage of this journey, from Boston to Norwich, I did  
 by road. It was not quite so cold as it had been during the last  
 few days, but there was still plenty of ice about. Nearly all the  
 morning the sky was a uniform darkish grey except in the east,  
 where there was a low band of pale gilt; so that it looked all the  
 time as if dawn were just breaking. Not far out of the town we  
 passed several huge farm waggons, the largest I have ever seen;  
 they were drawn by three horses, two in front, one behind. No  
 farming community that wants to suggest it is not prosperous  
 should use such waggons, which looked like the very symbols of  
 fat harvests and a teeming earth. The road, going to King's  
 Lynn, passed through country as solidly rural as any I ever  
 remember. It was almost as if they were all doing it on purpose,  
 like the manufacturers of children's toy farms. Nearly all the  
 faces we saw were very Flemish: long noses and long upper lips  
 and small eyes, and a self-contained, almost secretive look; you  
 could match them by the dozen in any gallery of early Flemish  
 portraits. I did not stay in King's Lynn, but merely walked  
 round the centre of it. A companion town to Boston, obviously;  
 containing far more impressive old buildings, but lacking that  
 superb tower and, perhaps, that air of being the most remote  
 town in England. It is rather larger, mote dignified, and more

ombre, though, oddly enough, one of its remaining industries is the manufacture – or is it the creation? – of merry-go-rounds or fairs. This part of Norfolk, I was told, is a great centre for our sporting gentleman farmer, who likes being in the neighbourhood of Sandringham.

Between King's Lynn and Norwich the country lost its distinctive flavour. We were no longer in Dutch England, but solidly in Norfolk, though that, of course, can be Dutch enough in places. I was not paying my first visit to Norwich, though I had never stayed there before. But I must have lunched several times at the *Maid's Head*, and then spent an hour looking at the antique shops in Tombland. The last time we were there, I remembered, we had bought a John Sell Cotman and a pretty set of syllabub glasses. Now I drove straight to the *Maid's Head*, a fantastically rambling but comfortable old place, and they gave me one of those Queen Elizabeth bedrooms you find in such hotels. It would have served as an excellent background for an illustration for *Barnaby Rudge*. But then, to my mind, Norwich has the most Dickensian atmosphere of any city I know, except perhaps Canterbury. And this is simply due to the look of the place and not to any strong associations with Dickens. It was dusk before I was able to go out, this afternoon, and I walked into a very gloomy old city – for this was half-day closing – the shops were shut, and Norwich is not brilliantly illuminated at any time. There were very few people about. Tombland was shuttered and deserted. In the narrow old streets running out of it, where the feeble light of occasional street lamps showed you ancient, gnarled and gnome-like houses and little shops, you expected to run into characters from *Edwin Drood* going muffled through the chill gloom. It was difficult to believe that behind those bowed and twisted fronts there did not live an assortment of misers, mad spinsters, faintly clergymen, eccentric comic clerks, and lunatic sextons. Impossible to believe that the telephone could find its way into this rather theatrical antiquity. You peered, in passing, through

the lighted window of an estate office, where an elderly clerk was at work so true to type that he looked like a good character part, and you felt that in there you could buy or rent nothing but remote crazy manors. In Tombland the trams and buses came and went incredibly, like lumbering time machines. Between the Cathedral and the Castle, both hearts of darkness, I spent a spectral hour, roaming about somewhere on the boundaries of dissolution. I had only to stand a moment too long at one of those dim street corners and my car and wireless set and typewriter would be whisked away from me and I would be lost and gone in some dusty limbo. I bought a local evening newspaper and held on to it, to keep myself in present time. I managed to get back to the *Maid's Head*, though this was a doubtful harbourage in such an hour, for it was so quiet and ancient and mazy, with not a Morris stirring in the rambling interior yard. Undoubtedly I was still in Norwich; but was I in the right one?

I dined that night with a friend, a Norwich man of some fame and one very knowledgeable about the city and the surrounding district. He lives cosily and conveniently on the outskirts, with a tram terminus at his left hand and a neat little potato crop, of his own growing, at his right. I always find myself happy and at home – though, alas, always far from home – in the cities where I am asked at once, confidently and proudly, what I think of the place. They do it in Bristol and they do it in San Francisco. And of course Norwich is one of these cities. As soon as I had been given my glass of sherry I had to tell them what I thought of Norwich. I answered truthfully that I knew little about it, but that I had always liked what I had seen of it. Like Bristol, it is no mere provincial town; it is not simply an old cathedral city; it is something more – an antique metropolis, the capital of East Anglia. In a very large slice of England, to thousands and thousands of good sensible folk who live and work there, Norwich is the big city, the centre, and has been these hundreds of years. My own native town is more than twice the size of Norwich, but some-

ow it does not seem half the size. This is not merely because Norwich has its cathedral and castle and the rest, but also because it has flourished as the big city in the minds of men for generations. It is no mere jumped-up conglomeration of factories, warehouses and dormitories. It may be minute compared with London, Paris, Rome, but nevertheless it lives its life as a city on the same level of dignity. It is not a place in which to make money quickly and then to plan a sudden exit. It is not filled with people who are there because they have never been offered a job elsewhere. No, Norwich is really a capital, the capital of East Anglia. I wish it were bigger and more important than it is. Perhaps it ought to be turned into a real capital of East Anglia. A great many people are coming to believe that government in this country is now far too centralized. Too much work has to be done in Westminster. There is too wide a gap between the local councils and Parliament. These people suggest that England should be divided into four, five or six provinces, and that these provinces should to some extent govern themselves. Their representatives would be able to settle among themselves the merits of a large number of local questions. Business in the House of Commons would not be so congested and unwieldy, and Parliament would be able to give undivided attention to broadly national affairs. Moreover, regional self-government of this kind would do something to revive the spirit of democracy. Under a democratic system, politics should be local, so that you can keep an eye on them. Indeed, in a large modern state you need a very elaborately constructed pyramid of representational government, with parliamental councils for the base and a national assembly at the apex, in order that the democratic system can work properly. It cannot work properly if legislature is something that is happening, under a cloud of mysterious etiquette, in a distant capital. It is a system that assumes that nearly everybody is taking an interest in government. The more difficult it is for anybody to concern himself in political matters, the worse it is for

democracy. Centralization is one of the deadliest enemies of the system. For this reason alone there is much to be said in favour of regional government in England. But I also suggest that such government would bring a new dignity to provincial life, just as it would increase the importance of the various new provincial capital cities, where the deputies or senators would meet. And on any such division of the country into provinces Norwich would be capital of its own region, as it has been, for nearly all practical purposes, these last three hundred years. That, however, is what I meant by wishing, above, that it were bigger and more important than it is. I should like to see it nobly housing the East Anglian senators, who would be as sagacious and weighty a body of legislators as you could wish to find. I heard that the local constabulary are rarely less than ten to a ton, and I believe that the senators would be equally massive, in mind as in body.

The East Anglian is, of course, a solid man. Lots of beef and beer, tempered with east wind, have gone to the making of him. Once he is sure you are not going to cheat him or be very grand and affected, he is a friendly chap; but if you want the other thing, you can have it. The Ironsides were recruited from these parts, which has produced a great many fighting men of all kinds, from pugilists to admirals. Perhaps we of the West Riding brought some of our aggressive qualities from Norfolk. My host reminded me of the connection between the two districts. The worsted trade of Bradford originally came from Norfolk, where Worsted is a village. Up to the Industrial Revolution Norwich had a fine trade in worsteds, but lost it to the West Riding, which had the coal and better communications. And when its textile trade dwindled, Norwich turned to the manufacturing of fancy boots and shoes, chiefly women's, and has continued in that trade to this day. But many of her textile workers migrated to the West Riding; and my host told me that he remembered an old bank cashier saying that in his youth more money orders came to Norwich from Bradford than from

any other place. But Norwich was concerned in much more important migrations than these. It was here that so many of the Flemish and Huguenot weavers came; solid and sober families of workers, escaping from persecution. It was intolerance that made us a present of them, and robbed France of their solid services. The Dutch came here in considerable numbers too, and my friend remembered hearing a sermon in Dutch in the city. Norwich is also the city of Quaker bankers, who were very prominent in the life of the place during the latter half of the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth, during which period the city was a literary and publishing centre and had its own famous school of landscape painters. It was the fact that the Quaker was a man of his word that made him so acceptable as a banker or trader in the eighteenth century, when the junketing squires had to look somewhere for money. You have then a very rich mixture in the city, equally famous for its old churches and its sturdy dissenters. And like all cities with mixed trades – here they are shoes, mustard and arch, ironware, beer – it has escaped the full weight of the industrial depression. Its citizens are proud of the old place. They have a right to be, and I, for one, wish there was more of Home Rule for East Anglia!

We had had some talk at dinner about villages and the local farmers, and the next morning, which was fine and not too cold, we went out exploring the countryside in a small car. It does not take you long to lose Norwich. A few turns down side-roads, once you are past the tram terminus, and you are soon in the true country. We stopped at a village grocer's and general store, known to my friend, and found the proprietor and his son busy setting out their stock, which was beginning to wear a Christmassy look. The little shop was very clean and bright, quite different from the nasty little shops that ask to be swept out of existence in all the larger towns. They were a busy, busy pair, cautious in their statements and given to rubbing their long chins. They had known better times, they admitted,

but 'couldn't grumble'. The small farmers in these parts – and they are nearly all small farmers – had, I knew, been having a bad time, and my friend, who is a trustee administering an estate and has had to do business with a lot of them, confirmed this. But he also showed the usual scepticism of those who have to deal with the farming community but do not belong to it. The East Anglian farmer, he declared, is a very stubbornly conservative fellow, who will often insist upon raising a certain crop simply because his father and his grandfather before him always raised that crop, without reference to the needs and conditions of the time. This is the way to be a character, but not the way to make money. He was doubtful, however, about their losses. We called on one acquaintance of his, a middle-aged man farming about a hundred acres, and not, according to report, making them pay. He was a shabby and muddy little man, with carrot curls and stubble, and bright blue eyes. He did not look very intelligent and, for all I know to the contrary, may be a very unintelligent farmer; but truth compels me to say that he talked about his farm and his work quite intelligently; and listening to him, you felt that with so much sense and energy he deserved to make a decent living for himself out of his hundred acres. We wandered about, looking at his beasts, which were in good condition, and at his fields, which were scattered about not very conveniently for him. He told us, among other things, that he listened regularly to the agricultural talks on the wireless. He belonged to old farming stock, and a very bewildered look crept into his honest face when he spoke of the difficulty of making his farm pay. It must be difficult for a farmer, and one of generations of farmers, to understand that his slow traffic with the land and the familiar beasts is a business like manufacturing and selling pins or boots and that the strange antics of men in offices, thousands of miles away, and the weather on the other side of the world, and the rumours of wars, the negotiations of diplomats, the suspicions and panics of fantastic foreigners, the mysterious ebb and flow



credit, can all combine quietly to take his living away from him and finally steal the very acres from under his nose. What is so difficult for an urban outsider to understand, on his part, is how farmers work out their budgets. Clearly their position is quite different from that of the townsman, or the ordinary wage-earner anywhere. To begin with, the farm itself is where he and his family live, so that its rent – or purchase price – includes that of his dwelling-house. Then again, unlike the house-monger or the bookseller, he can often make his breakfast and dinner off what he is not selling. A farm that contains within itself cattle, sheep, pigs, poultry, potatoes and vegetables, is nothing less than a vast larder, out of which the farmer and his family are taking liberal supplies. Does he credit himself with the value of these supplies in his budget? The point is, he may not make much, but does he need to spend much? Nobody insists upon a farmer dressing neatly in a black coat, striped trousers, shiny boots and spats. He has not to travel every day. He is not compelled to provide his children with expensive holidays, to give them some fresh air. He has not to do any window-dressing of any kind to attract custom or to keep up appearances. He has, I imagine, nothing like the social and charitable demands on his pocket that an urban employer has. If he is regularly attending to his work, then he need not spend a penny getting exercise, as most sedentary workers have to do. He can be in a bad way of business, but it will be a long time before he and his family go hungry. Ultimately, if things go from bad to worse, he can starve, like other men. But does he starve? I ask out of my ignorance. I have met starving engineers and schoolmasters and casual labourers and clerks and miners and sailors, but I have yet to meet a starving farmer. Is this still my ignorance?

We discussed these and similar topics all the way back from the farm to the outskirts of Norwich, where we stopped to have a look at *Earlham*, the charming old house that appears in Mr Abbot's volume of that name; once the home of a fine old

banking family, and now the proud possession of the city itself. This is an admirable example of the public spirit of the Norwich citizens. An even better example is found in the city's purchase of land all round the edge of the town, which is now enclosed in a green ring about two miles wide. This is what every city should do. It ought to have been done in London years ago. Not only is the open space valuable in itself, but it also sets a boundary to the city. It is time we discouraged this sprawling practice of our cities, which, instead of spoiling more and more of the surrounding countryside, should be compelled to rebuild their worst districts and to make the best of the area they already occupy. They have played the octopus long enough.

Coming away from Earlham, we began to talk about the literary figures of Norwich, chief of whom are Sir Thomas Browne and Borrow. The house once occupied by the delectable Sir Thomas has been marked by a tablet, to the confusion of a certain well-known directory, which in its 1929 edition included Sir Thomas Browne among the medical practitioners of Norwich. (There is a good short story to be written about some innocent who sent for him – not in vain.) On the edge of the city we met an old nursery gardener well known to my companion. He was the true, old-fashioned Dissenting type: cropped whiskers, shaven chin, and a mouth that turned down at each end; black suit and 'a dicky'; a wooden look that suddenly twinkled; a passion for imparting information. I knew plenty of them when I was a boy – stiff, creaking figures they seemed too, these ancients of days, more like mechanisms, to my young mind, than like flesh-and-blood men; but I doubt if any of them are still living. You would, I imagine, find more of them alive and kicking here in Norwich than anywhere else. Our man was certainly alive and he might be said to have been kicking one of his assistants, who had forgotten to carry out some order. 'And just yew go down to Bewts Chemists,' the old man concluded, 'and ask 'em to put yew up one o' their little

bo'l's o' their Memory Mixture – that's what yew go an' dew.' Then he turned to us, with a face made of wood but with a twinkle in his little deep-set eyes. I knew that either he would utter the least possible number of words or, if we found favour in his sight, would immediately impart some information to us and instruct us. We found favour. He began to tell us how to grow roses, and as he, like a superb conjurer, knows the trick of bringing the most extravagantly lovely roses out of the sullen ground, we listened to him with respect. He then told us what sort of winter it would be and from what quarter the prevailing wind would blow. He spoke with far more certainty than the young men who report on the air pressures in Iceland and off the Azores. He knew, he explained, because he had examined the holes made by the tiny shrew-mice, which have information about the coming winter denied to us, and always make their holes away from the direction of what will be the prevailing wind, and dig deep if a hard winter is before them. You cannot, he told us emphatically, just as if we were two small boys he had caught trying to build a planet or two, improve on Nature. And he spoke of Nature – as such people always do – as if he had been a member of the small committee that had first appointed her. He put me back thirty years, into Sunday School. I was delighted to have met him; a good, if narrow man, and a character. How odd that roses, the lovely wantons, should bloom so profusely for him, that he should know far, far more about them than ever the smiling drunken Omar did, and that with him it has been roses, roses all the way!

After lunch – and the dining-room of the *Maid's Head* is the perfect place in which to eat boiled beef, carrots and dumplings – I joined the crowd that was shopping in Queen Street and London Street. It was a fine afternoon; the shops were already stocked for Christmas (which seems to be inalienably associated now, in the commercial mind, with dabs of cotton wool); there were a great many people, both men and women, staring and chattering and popping in and buying; and the city looked

very different from what it had done the day before. It had, in fact, a solidly prosperous appearance; and was at once gay and weighty, not unlike one of those cheeses decorated with coloured paper that were now appearing in the grocers' windows. I went into several of the antique furniture shops – Norwich is filled with them – rather in the hope of picking up a good early water-colour drawing than of finding a piece of furniture I wanted; but I was unlucky this time and there was nothing remarkable on view. In one strange old shop I found a long thin man who specializes in making reproductions of old pieces, which reproductions are honestly sold for what they are. (Though what happens to them afterwards may be a different story.) Some of them had taken a good craftsman a year or eighteen months to make, and the workmanship was often better in the reproduction than in the original piece. The value, of course, was nothing like the same. It seems queer that we should take such pains to copy exactly what our forefathers made. They did not copy what their forefathers made, but preferred their own contemporary styles, which matched the age. We have our own styles, of course; I am writing this on a desk that was made this year to my order, a desk that is just as twentieth century in its style as a Chippendale or a Sheraton is eighteenth century; and, moreover, is twentieth century – or, if you like, nineteen-thirty-three-ish – without looking like a fitting in a cocktail bar. And in this same room are two chairs, a desk chair and an armchair, that are as contemporary in design as a Rolls-Royce. At last we are beginning to achieve our own characteristic furniture, good solid furniture too and not merely stunt pieces made of metal tubing; but so far these things are a tremendous extravagance, and to acquire one or two specimens you have to be determinedly self-indulgent. What happened in the reigns of Queen Anne and George the Third? Had you to be extravagant then to acquire those pieces of furniture we now covet? Or did you merely go out and buy a few chairs, a table and a bureau, and find that, without being self-indulgent, you

had acquired some delightful pieces? The question is not one of the larger problems of our time, but neither is it entirely trivial.

Back in the hotel, after tea, I met a free-lance journalist with whom I had several friends in common. We had the big fireplace in the smoke-room to ourselves, and over a drink we talked about our trade of writing. He had spent some years as a journalist in America, and put forward the view that our law of libel, which is very much stricter than the American one, gagged the enterprising journalist and favoured corruption in public affairs. He declared that you dare not tell the truth about municipal matters in any English provincial newspaper, whereas in America, if you nosed out some corrupt job – and there were always plenty to nose out – you could put your discoveries into print. Many people will say at once, in reply to this, that public life is not so corrupt here as it is in America; and neither is it, but on the other hand, especially in municipal affairs, it is a great deal more corrupt than such people imagine. During my travels this autumn I have heard a good many stories in proof of this. But until the people concerned are actually in the dock nothing gets into print. Our hush-hush atmosphere is perfect for a cool rascal who is pocketing public money. So long as he looks respectable, does not get drunk in broad daylight, lives with his own wife, he is probably safe. There is something to be said for this journalist's argument. We do not want here the gutter-raking that frequently passes in America as the protestations of a reforming spirit. But on the other hand we need a great deal more freedom than we have at present. Editors and publishers in this country are terrified – and rightly terrified – of the crushing law of libel, which works badly now that it is actually creating a new branch of blackmail. And it is an ironical circumstance that there are several books on American public affairs, books containing attacks on various American public figures, that are openly sold and read and commented on over there but that have not been published all in England, because, if the books did appear here, the

persons attacked in them would instantly take advantage of our law of libel. This is not a very serious deprivation. It is much more serious that our Press, especially our provincial Press, should be gagged. What with the necessity of pleasing advertisers and the further necessity of escaping libel actions, our editors hardly dare open their mouths. I should like to be in some of our provincial cities for a day or two if some American methods in journalism were applied, and the truth about Councillor What's-His-Name and Alderman Such-and-Such was splashed in the headlines. It is easy to imagine a quick descent into muck-slinging, if all restrictions were removed; but surely there is a sensible half-way position, between being gagged and gutter-raking, that the Law could allow us to occupy. Please note the ignominy of that last phrase – 'could allow us to occupy'. As if laws were not created for our benefit but were the arbitrary dictates of some capricious monster! How well-drilled we are, and yet how we give ourselves away in these casual phrases!

My Norwich friend dined with me that night at the hotel, where our small table was anchored not far from an enormous one, set out for a fine dinner party. Indeed, it seemed that some local professional man was giving a party there, and just as we were finishing they all came in, splendid in full evening dress but all very jolly. There is no reason why I should mention this, except that to me, obscurely I admit, that solid, civilized and jovial dinner party at the old inn was somehow typical of the city. We left them their dining-room, and went to see *The School for Scandal* at the Maddermarket Theatre. I had heard a lot about this little amateur repertory theatre, with its apron stage and Elizabethan interior. It has done some very good work, especially with miracle plays and the Elizabethan drama; and I knew it was entirely the creation of one enthusiast, Mr Nugent Monck, who made this very charming little theatre out of an old warehouse. It is a lovely toy; not too comfortable, and rather too dimly lit for my taste, but nevertheless a delicious

face. The familiar old comedy was not brilliantly acted, for the company is an amateur one and eighteenth-century comedy needs great polish; but it was pretty to look at, and, by an ingenious use of curtains as scenes, it moved at a great pace; so that one sat there, in that dim little theatre, staring at a flickering dream of brocaded wits and beaux. And how delightful to turn in from dusky old St Andrew Street and St John's Alley and find oneself at Lady Sneerwell's. How delightful when the piece was done and Mr Monck had been congratulated, to wander out again into the ancient streets, where at every corner that held a bit of lamplight you saw a perfect stage set, one after another, with century after century caught and held, in a table, a bit of heavily shadowed timbering, a fat bulging bay window, a fanlight all Georgian elegance, in tiny spaces of yellow light and with a frosty glitter of stars above the sleeping city. Delightful too to have a last drink, sprawling in front of the fire at the *Maid's Head*, and to hear the honest roars of a Norfolk man as he describes to you his bemused adventures in certain artistic quarters of that remote and fantastic fellow capital city, London. If this same friend of mine had been a Manchester or a Newcastle or a Birmingham or a Leeds man, he would have done what hundreds of us have done and removed to London; but he is not, he is a Norwich man, and there he stays, coming to London as a London man might go to Berlin or Rome, and not hesitating to let out a good East Anglian bellow of laughter when he remembers Bloomsbury and Chelsea and the doings there. One of the last things he told me was that he might be compelled, being a dutiful fellow, to stand for the city council. For my part, I hope to see him Mayor before I die; and I promise now to go and see him in the part, peep at him in whatever glorious old mullioned, timbered or bulging bay-windowed parlour the city gives its chief citizen. What a grand, glegly-piggledy, sensible old place Norwich is! May it become once more a literary and publishing centre, the seat of a school of painters, a city in which foreigners exiled by intol-

erance may seek refuge and turn their sons into sturdy and cheerful East Anglians; and may I live to see the senators of the Eastern Province, stout men who take mustard with their beef and beer with their mustard, march through Tomblond to assemble in their capital.