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目录

- Lesson1 A puma at large
- Lesson 2 Thirteen equals one
- Lesson 3 An unknown goddess
- Lesson4 The double life of Alfred Bloggs
- Lesson 5 The facts
- Lesson 6 Smash and grab
- Lesson 7 Crazy
- Lesson8 A famous monastery
- Lesson9 A trip to Mars
- Lesson10 The loss of the 'Titanic'
- Lesson11 Not guilty
- Lesson12 Life on a desert island
- Lesson13 'It's only me'
- Lesson14 A noble gangster
- Lesson15 Sixpence worth of trouble
- Lesson16 Mary had a little lamb
- Lesson17 The Greatest bridge in the world
- Lesson18 Electric currents in modern art
- Lesson19 A very dear cat
- Lesson20 Pioneer pilots
- Lesson21 Daniel Mendoza
- Lesson22 By heart
- Lesson23 One man's meat is another man's poison
- Lesson24 A skeleton in the cupboard
- Lesson25 The 'Cutty Sark'
- Lesson26 Wanted: a large biscuit tin
- Lesson27 Nothing to sell and nothing to buy
- Lesson28 A pound too dear
- Lesson29 Funny or not?
- Lesson30 The death of a ghost
- Lesson31 A lovable eccentric
- Lesson32 A lost ship
- Lesson33 A day to remember
- Lesson34 A happy discovery
- Lesson35 Justice was done
- Lesson36 A chance in a million
- Lesson37 The Westhaven Express
- Lesson38 The first calendar
- Lesson39 Nothing to worry about
- Lesson40 Who's who
- Lesson41 Illusions of pastoral peace
- Lesson42 Modern cavemen
- Lesson43 Fully insured

Lesson44 Speed and comfort
Lesson45 The power of the Press
Lesson46 Do it yourself
Lesson47 Through the earth's crust
Lesson48 The silent village
Lesson49 The ideal servant
Lesson50 New Year resolutions
Lesson51 Automation
Lesson52 Mud is mud
Lesson53 In the public interest
Lesson54 Instinct or cleverness?
Lesson55 From the earth: greetings
Lesson56 The river beside our farm
Lesson57 The return of the native
Lesson58 A little spot of bother
Lesson59 Possession amassing and collecting
Lesson60 The importance of punctuality

Lesson 1 A puma at large

Pumas are large, cat-like animals which are found in America. When reports came into London Zoo that a wild puma had been spotted forty-five miles south of London, they were not taken seriously. However, as the evidence began to accumulate, experts from the Zoo felt obliged to investigate, for the descriptions given by people who claimed to have seen the puma were extraordinarily similar.

The hunt for the puma began in a small village where a woman picking blackberries saw 'a large cat' only five yards away from her. It immediately ran away when she saw it, and experts confirmed that a puma will not attack a human being unless it is cornered. The search proved difficult, for the puma was often observed at one place in the morning and at another place twenty miles away in the evening. Wherever it went, it left behind it a trail of dead deer and small animals like rabbits. Paw prints were seen in a number of places and puma fur was found clinging to bushes. Several people complained of 'cat-like noises' at night and a businessman on a fishing trip saw the puma up a tree. The experts were now fully convinced that the animal was a puma, but where had it come from? As no pumas had been reported missing from any zoo in the country, this one must have been in the possession of a private collector and somehow managed to escape. The hunt went on for several weeks, but the puma was not caught. It is disturbing to think that a dangerous wild animal is still at large in the quiet countryside.

Lesson 2 Thirteen equals one

Our vicar is always raising money for one cause or another, but he has never managed to get enough money to have the church clock repaired. The big clock which used to strike the hours day and night was damaged during the war and has been silent ever since.

One night, however, our vicar woke up with a start: the clock was striking the hours! Looking at his watch, he saw that it was one o'clock, but the bell struck thirteen times before it stopped. Armed with a torch, the vicar went up into the clock tower to see what was going on. In the torchlight, he caught sight of a figure whom he immediately recognized as Bill Wilkins, our local grocer.

'Whatever are you doing up here Bill?' asked the vicar in surprise.

'I'm trying to repair the bell,' answered Bill. 'I've been coming up here night after night for weeks now. You see, I was hoping to give you a surprise.'

'You certainly did give me a surprise!' said the vicar. 'You've probably woken up everyone in the village as well. Still, I'm glad the bell is working again.'

'That's the trouble, vicar,' answered Bill. 'It's working all right, but I'm afraid that at one o'clock it will strike thirteen times and there's nothing I can do about it.'

'We'll get used to that Bill,' said the vicar. 'Thirteen is not as good as one, but it's better than nothing. Now let's go downstairs and have a cup of tea.'

Lesson 3 An unknown goddess

Some time ago an interesting discovery was made by archaeologists on the Aegean island of Kea. An American team explored a temple which stands in an ancient city on the promontory of Ayia Irini. The city at one time must have been prosperous for it enjoyed a high level of civilization. Houses--often three storeys high--were built of stone. They had large rooms with beautifully decorated walls. The city was even equipped with a drainage system for a great many clay pipes were found beneath the narrow

streetsf®

The temple which the archaeologists explored was used as a place of worship from the fifteenth century B.C. until Roman times. In the most sacred room of the temple, clay fragments of fifteen statues were found. Each of these represented a goddess and had, at one time, been painted. The body of one statue was found among remains dating from the fifteenth century B.C. Its missing head happened to be among remains of the fifth century B.C. This head must have been found in Classical times and carefully preserved. It was very old and precious even then. When the archaeologists reconstructed the fragments, they were amazed to find that the goddess turned out to be a very modern-looking woman. She stood three feet high and her hands rested on her hips. She was wearing a full-length skirt which swept the ground. Despite her great age, she was very graceful indeed, but, so far, the archaeologists have been unable to discover her identity.

Lesson4 The double life of Alfred Bloggs

These days, people who do manual work often receive far more money than clerks who work in offices. People who work in offices are frequently referred to as 'white collar workers' for the simple reason that they usually wear a collar and tie to go to work. Such is human nature, that a great many people are often willing to sacrifice higher pay for the privilege of becoming white collar workers. This can give rise to curious situations, as it did in the case of Alfred Bloggs who worked as a dustman for the Ellesmere Corporation.

When he got married, Alf was too embarrassed to say anything to his wife about his job. He simply told her that he worked for the Corporation. Every morning, he left home dressed in a fine black suit. He then changed into overalls and spent the next eight hours as a dustman. Before returning home at night, he took a shower and changed back into his suit. Alf did this for over two years and his fellow dustmen kept his secret. Alf's wife has never discovered that she married a dustman and she never will, for Alf has just found another job. He will soon be working in an office as a junior clerk. He will be earning only half as much as he used to, but he feels that his rise in status is well worth the loss of money. From now on, he will wear a suit all day and others will call him 'Mr Bloggs', not 'Alf'.

Lesson 5 The facts

Editors of newspapers and magazines often go to extremes to provide their readers with unimportant facts and statistics. Last year a journalist had been instructed by a well-known magazine to write an article on the president's palace in a new African republic. When the article arrived, the editor read the first sentence and then refused to publish it. The article began: 'Hundreds of steps lead to the high wall which surrounds the president's palace.' The editor at once sent the journalist a telegram instructing him to find out the exact number of steps and the height of the wall.

The journalist immediately set out to obtain these important facts, but he took a long time to send them. Meanwhile, the editor was getting impatient, for the magazine would soon go to press. He sent the journalist two urgent telegrams, but received no reply. He sent yet another telegram informing the journalist that if he did not reply soon he would be fired. When the journalist again failed to reply, the editor reluctantly published the article as it had originally been written. A week later, the editor at last received a telegram from the journalist. Not only had the poor man been arrested, but he had been sent to prison as well. However,

he had at last been allowed to send a cable in which he informed the editor that he had been arrested while counting the 1084 steps leading to the 15-foot wall which surrounded the president's palace.

Lesson 6 Smash and grab

The expensive shops in a famous arcade near Piccadilly were just opening. At this time of the morning, the arcade was almost empty. Mr Taylor, the owner of a jewellery shop was admiring a new window display. Two of his assistants had been working busily since 8 o'clock and had only just finished. Diamond necklaces and rings had been beautifully arranged on a background of black velvet. After gazing at the display for several minutes, Mr Taylor went back into his shop.

The silence was suddenly broken when a large car, with its headlights on and its horn blaring, roared down the arcade. It came to a stop outside the jeweler's. One man stayed at the wheel while two others with black stockings over their faces jumped out and smashed the window of the shop with iron bars. While this was going on, Mr Taylor was upstairs. He and his staff began throwing furniture out of the window. Chairs and tables went flying into the arcade. One of the thieves was struck by a heavy statue, but he was too busy helping himself to diamonds to notice any pain. The raid was all over in three minutes, for the men scrambled back into the car and it moved off at a fantastic speed. Just as it was leaving, Mr Taylor rushed out and ran after it throwing ashtrays and vases, but it was impossible to stop the thieves. They had got away with thousands of pounds worth of diamonds.

Lesson 7 Crazy

Children often have far more sense than their elders. This simple truth was demonstrated rather dramatically during a civil defence exercise in a small town in Canada. Most of the inhabitants were asked to take part in the exercise during which they had to pretend that their city had been bombed. Air-raid warnings were sounded and thousands of people went into special air-raid shelters. Doctors and nurses remained above ground while police patrolled the streets in case anyone tried to leave the shelters too soon.

The police did not have much to do because the citizens took the exercise seriously. They stayed underground for twenty minutes and waited for the siren to sound again. On leaving the air-raid shelters, they saw that doctors and nurses were busy. A great many people had volunteered to act as casualties. Theatrical make-up and artificial blood had been used to make the injuries look realistic. A lot of people were lying 'dead' in the streets. The living helped to carry the dead and wounded to special stations. A child of six was brought in by two adults. The child was supposed to be dead. With theatrical make-up on his face, he looked as if he had died of shock. Some people were so moved by the sight that they began to cry. However, the child suddenly sat up and a doctor asked him to comment on his death. The child looked around for a moment and said, 'I think they're all crazy!'

Lesson 8 A famous monastery

The Great St Bernard Pass connects Switzerland to Italy. At 2470 metres, it is the highest mountain pass in Europe. The famous monastery of St Bernard, which was founded in the eleventh century, lies about a mile away. For hundreds of years, St Bernard dogs have saved the lives of travellers crossing the dangerous Pass. These friendly dogs, which were first brought from Asia, were used as watch-dogs even in Roman times. Now that a tunnel has been built through the mountains, the Pass is less

dangerous, but each year, the dogs are still sent out into the snow whenever a traveller is in difficulty. Despite the new tunnel, there are still a few people who rashly attempt to cross the Pass on foot. During the summer months, the monastery is very busy, for it is visited by thousands of people who cross the Pass in cars. As there are so many people about, the dogs have to be kept in a special enclosure. In winter, however, life at the monastery is quite different. The temperature drops to -30 and very few people attempt to cross the Pass. The monks prefer winter to summer for they have more privacy. The dogs have greater freedom, too, for they are allowed to wander outside their enclosure. The only regular visitors to the monastery in winter are parties of skiers who go there at Christmas and Easter. These young people, who love the peace of the mountains, always receive a warm welcome at St Bernard's monastery.

Lesson9 A trip to Mars

By now, a rocket will have set off on its 35 million mile trip to Mars and scientists must be waiting anxiously for the results. The rocket will be travelling for six months before it reaches the planet. It contains a number of scientific instruments, including a television camera. Any pictures that are taken will have to travel for three minutes before they reach the earth. If the pictures are successful, they may solve a number of problems about Mars and provide information about the markings on its surface which, nearly 100 years ago, the astronomer, Schiaparelli, thought to be canals.

It will be a long time before any landing on Mars can be attempted. This will only be possible when scientists have learnt a lot more about the atmosphere that surrounds the planet. If a satellite can one day be put into orbit round Mars, scientists will be able to find out a great deal. An interesting suggestion for measuring the atmosphere around Mars has been put forward. A rubber ball containing a radio transmitter could be dropped from a satellite so that it would fall towards the surface of the planet. The radio would signal the rate at which the ball was slowed down and scientists would be able to calculate how dense the atmosphere is. It may even be possible to drop a capsule containing scientific instruments on to the planet's surface. Only when a great deal more information has been obtained, will it be possible to plan a manned trip to Mars.

Lesson10 The loss of the 'Titanic'

The great ship, Titanic, sailed for New York from Southampton on April 10th, 1912. She was carrying 1316 passengers and a crew of 891. Even by modern standards, the 46,000 ton Titanic was a colossal ship. At that time, however, she was not only the largest ship that had ever been built, but was regarded as unsinkable, for she had sixteen water-tight compartments. Even if two of these were flooded, she would still be able to float. The tragic sinking of this great liner will always be remembered, for she went down on her first voyage with heavy loss of life. Four days after setting out, while the Titanic was sailing across the icy waters of the North Atlantic, a huge iceberg was suddenly spotted by a look-out. After the alarm had been given, the great ship turned sharply to avoid a direct collision. The Titanic turned just in time, narrowly missing the immense wall of ice which rose over 100 feet out of the water beside her. Suddenly, there was a slight trembling sound from below, and the captain went down to see what had happened. The noise had been so faint that no one thought that the ship had been damaged. Below, the captain realized to his horror that the Titanic was sinking rapidly, for five of her sixteen water-tight compartments had already been flooded! The order to abandon ship was given and hundreds of people plunged into the

icy water. As there were not enough life-boats for everybody, 1500 lives were lost.

Lesson11 Not guilty

Going through the Customs is a tiresome business. The strangest thing about it is that really honest people are often made to feel guilty. The hardened professional smuggler, on the other hand, is never troubled by such feelings, even if he has five hundred gold watches hidden in his suitcase. When I returned from abroad recently, a particularly officious young Customs Officer clearly regarded me as a smuggler.

'Have you anything to declare?' he asked, looking me in the eye.

'No,' I answered confidently.

'Would you mind unlocking this suitcase please?'

'Not at all,' I answered.

The Officer went through the case with great care. All the things I had packed so carefully were soon in a dreadful mess. I felt sure I would never be able to close the case again. Suddenly, I saw the Officer's face light up. He had spotted a tiny bottle at the bottom of my case and he pounced on it with delight.

'Perfume, eh?' he asked sarcastically. 'You should have declared that. Perfume is not exempt from import duty.'

'But it isn't perfume,' I said. 'It's hair-oil.' Then I added with a smile, 'It's a strange mixture I make myself.'

As I expected, he did not believe me.

'Try it!' I said encouragingly.

The Officer unscrewed the cap and put the bottle to his nostrils. He was greeted by an unpleasant smell which convinced him that I was telling the truth. A few minutes later, I was able to hurry away with precious chalk-marks on my baggage.

Lesson12 Life on a desert island

Most of us have formed an unrealistic picture of life on a desert island. We sometimes imagine a desert island to be a sort of paradise where the sun always shines. Life there is simple and good. Ripe fruit falls from the trees and you never have to work. The other side of the picture is quite the opposite. Life on a desert island is wretched. You either starve to death or live like Robinson Crusoe, waiting for a boat which never comes. Perhaps there is an element of truth in both these pictures, but few of us have had the opportunity to find out.

Two men who recently spent five days on a coral island wished they had stayed there longer. They were taking a badly damaged boat from the Virgin Islands to Miami to have it repaired. During the journey, their boat began to sink. They quickly loaded a small rubber dinghy with food, matches, and tins of beer and rowed for a few miles across the Caribbean until they arrived at a tiny coral island. There were hardly any trees on the island and there was no water, but this did not prove to be a problem. The men collected rain-water in the rubber dinghy. As they had brought a spear gun with them, they had plenty to eat. They caught lobster and fish every day, and, as one of them put it 'ate like kings'. When a passing tanker rescued them five days later, both men were genuinely sorry that they had to leave.

Lesson13 'It's only me'

After her husband had gone to work, Mrs Richards sent her children to school and went upstairs to her bedroom. She was too excited to do any housework that morning, for in the evening she would be going to a fancy dress party with her husband. She intended to dress up as a ghost and as she had made her costume the night before, she was impatient to try it on.

Though the costume consisted only of a sheet, it was very effective. After putting it on, Mrs Richards went downstairs. She wanted to find out whether it would be comfortable to wear.

Just as Mrs Richards was entering the dining-room, there was a knock on the front door. She knew that it must be the baker. She had told him to come straight in if ever she failed to open the door and to leave the bread on the kitchen table. Not wanting to frighten the poor man, Mrs Richards quickly hid in the small store-room under the stairs. She heard the front door open and heavy footsteps in the hall. Suddenly the door of the store-room was opened and a man entered. Mrs Richards realized that it must be the man from the Electricity Board who had come to read the meter. She tried to explain the situation, saying 'It's only me', but it was too late. The man let out a cry and jumped back several paces. When Mrs Richards walked towards him, he fled, slamming the door behind him.

Lesson14 A noble gangster

There was a time when the owners of shops and businesses in Chicago had to pay large sums of money to gangsters in return for 'protection'. If the money was not paid promptly, the gangsters would quickly put a man out of business by destroying his shop. Obtaining 'protection money' is not a modern crime. As long ago as the fourteenth century, an Englishman, Sir John Hawkwood, made the remarkable discovery that people would rather pay large sums of money than have their life work destroyed by gangsters. Six hundred years ago, Sir John Hawkwood arrived in Italy with a band of soldiers and settled near Florence. He soon made a name for himself and came to be known to the Italians as Giovanni Acuto. Whenever the Italian city-states were at war with each other, Hawkwood used to hire his soldiers to princes who were willing to pay the high price he demanded. In times of peace, when business was bad, Hawkwood and his men would march into a city-state and, after burning down a few farms, would offer to go away if protection money was paid to them. Hawkwood made large sums of money in this way. In spite of this, the Italians regarded him as a sort of hero. When he died at the age of eighty, the Florentines gave him a state funeral and had a picture painted which was dedicated to the memory of 'the most valiant soldier and most notable leader, Signor Giovanni Hawkodue'.

Lesson15 Sixpence worth of trouble

Children always appreciate small gifts of money. Father, of course, provides a regular supply of pocket-money, but uncles and aunts are always a source of extra income. With some children, small sums go a long way. If sixpences are not exchanged for sweets, they rattle for months inside money-boxes. Only very thrifty children manage to fill up a money-box. For most of them, sixpence is a small price to pay for a satisfying bar of chocolate.

My nephew, George, has a money-box but it is always empty. Very few of the sixpences I have given him have found their way there. I gave him sixpence yesterday and advised him to save it. Instead, he bought himself sixpence worth of trouble. On his way to the sweet shop, he dropped his sixpence and it rolled along the pavement and then disappeared down a drain. George took off his jacket, rolled up his sleeves and pushed his right arm through the drain cover. He could not find his sixpence anywhere, and what is more, he could not get his arm out. A crowd of people gathered round him and a lady rubbed his arm with soap and butter, but George was firmly stuck. The fire-brigade was called and two firemen freed George using a special type of grease. George was not too upset by his experience because the lady who owns the sweet shop heard about his troubles and rewarded him

with a large box of chocolates.

Lesson16 Mary had a little lamb

Mary and her husband Dimitri lived in the tiny village of Perachora in southern Greece. One of Mary's prize possessions was a little white lamb which her husband had given her. She kept it tied to a tree in a field during the day and went to fetch it every evening. One evening, however, the lamb was missing. The rope had been cut, so it was obvious that the lamb had been stolen.

When Dimitri came in from the fields, his wife told him what had happened. Dimitri at once set out to find the thief. He knew it would not prove difficult in such a small village. After telling several of his friends about the theft, Dimitri found out that his neighbour, Aleko, had suddenly acquired a new lamb. Dimitri immediately went to Aleko's house and angrily accused him of stealing the lamb. He told him he had better return it or he would call the police. Aleko denied taking it and led Dimitri into his back-yard. It was true that he had just bought a lamb, he explained, but his lamb was black. Ashamed of having acted so rashly, Dimitri apologized to Aleko for having accused him. While they were talking it began to rain and Dimitri stayed in Aleko's house until the rain stopped. When he went outside half an hour later, he was astonished to find that the little black lamb was almost white. Its wool, which had been dyed black, had been washed clean by the rain!

Lesson17 The Greatest bridge in the world

Verrazano, an Italian about whom little is known, sailed into New York Harbour in 1524 and named it Angouleme. He described it as 'a very agreeable situation located within two small hills in the midst of which flowed a great river.' Though Verrazano is by no means considered to be a great explorer, his name will probably remain immortal, for on November 21st, 1964, the greatest bridge in the world was named after him.

The Verrazano Bridge, which was designed by Othmar Ammann, joins Brooklyn to Staten Island. It has a span of 4260 feet. The bridge is so long that the shape of the earth had to be taken into account by its designer. Two great towers support four huge cables. The towers are built on immense underwater platforms made of steel and concrete. The platforms extend to a depth of over 100 feet under the sea. These alone took sixteen months to build. Above the surface of the water, the towers rise to a height of nearly 700 feet. They support the cables from which the bridge has been suspended. Each of the four cables contains 26,108 lengths of wire. It has been estimated that if the bridge were packed with cars, it would still only be carrying a third of its total capacity. However, size and strength are not the only important things about this bridge. Despite its immensity, it is both simple and elegant, fulfilling its designer's dream to create 'an enormous object drawn as faintly as possible'.

Lesson18 Electric currents in modern art

Modern sculpture rarely surprises us any more. The idea that modern art can only be seen in museums is mistaken. Even people who take no interest in art cannot have failed to notice examples of modern sculpture on display in public places. Strange forms stand in gardens, and outside buildings and shops. We have got quite used to them. Some so-called 'modern' pieces have been on display for nearly fifty years.

In spite of this, some people--including myself--were surprised by a recent exhibition of modern sculpture. The first thing I saw when I entered the art gallery was a notice which said: 'Do not touch the exhibits. Some of them are dangerous!' The objects on display were pieces

of moving sculpture. Oddly shaped forms that are suspended from the ceiling and move in response to a gust of wind are quite familiar to everybody. These objects, however, were different. Lined up against the wall, there were long thin wires attached to metal spheres. The spheres had been magnetized and attracted or repelled each other all the time. In the centre of the hall, there were a number of tall structures which contained coloured lights. These lights flickered continuously like traffic lights which have gone mad. Sparks were emitted from small black boxes and red lamps flashed on and off angrily. It was rather like an exhibition of prehistoric electronic equipment. These peculiar forms not only seemed designed to shock people emotionally, but to give them electric shocks as well!

Lesson19 A very dear cat

Kidnappers are rarely interested in Animals, but they recently took considerable interest in Mrs Eleanor Ramsay's cat. Mrs Eleanor Ramsay, a very wealthy old lady, has shared a flat with her cat, Rastus, for a great many years. Rastus leads an orderly life. He usually takes a short walk in the evenings and is always home by seven o'clock. One evening, however, he failed to arrive. Mrs Ramsay got very worried. She looked everywhere for him but could not find him.

Three day after Rastus' disappearance, Mrs Ramsay received an anonymous letter. The writer stated that Rastus was in safe hands and would be returned immediately if Mrs Ramsay paid a ransom of &1000. Mrs Ramsay was instructed to place the money in a cardboard box and to leave it outside her door. At first, she decided to go to the police, but fearing that she would never see Rastus again--the letter had made that quite clear--she changed her mind. She drew &1000 from her bank and followed the kidnapper's instructions. The next morning, the box had disappeared but Mrs Ramsay was sure that the kidnapper would keep his word. Sure enough, Rastus arrived punctually at seven o'clock that evening. He looked very well, though he was rather thirsty, for he drank half a bottle of milk. The police were astounded when Mrs Ramsay told them what she had done. She explained that Rastus was very dear to her. Considering the amount she paid, he was dear in more ways than one!

Lesson20 Pioneer pilots

In 1908 Lord Northcliffe offered a prize of &1000 to the first man who would fly across the English Channel. Over a year passed before the first attempt was made. On July 19th, 1909, in the early morning, Hubert Latham took off from the French coast in his plane the 'Antoinette IV'. He had travelled only seven miles across the Channel when his engine failed and he was forced to land on the sea. The 'Antoinette' floated on the water until Latham was picked up by a ship.

Two days later, Louis Bleriot arrived near Calais with a plane called 'No. XI'. Bleriot had been making planes since 1905 and this was his latest model. A week before, he had completed a successful overland flight during which he covered twenty-six miles. Latham, however did not give up easily. He, too, arrived near Calais on the same day with a new 'Antoinette'. It looks as if there would be an exciting race across the Channel. Both planes were going to take off on July 25th, but Latham failed to get up early enough. After making a short test flight at 4.15 a.m., Bleriot set off half an hour later. His great flight lasted thirty seven minutes. When he landed near Dover, the first person to greet him was a local policeman. Latham made another attempt a week later and got within half a mile of Dover, but he was unlucky again. His engine failed and he landed on the sea for the second time.

Lesson21 Daniel Mendoza

Boxing matches were very popular in England two hundred years ago. In those days, boxers fought with bare fists for prize money. Because of this, they were known as 'prize-fighters'. However, boxing was very crude, for there were no rules and a prize-fighter could be seriously injured or even killed during a match.

One of the most colourful figures in boxing history was Daniel Mendoza who was born in 1764. The use of gloves was not introduced until 1860 when the Marquis of Queensberry drew up the first set of rules. Though he was technically a prize-fighter, Mendoza did much to change crude prize-fighting into a sport, for he brought science to the game. In his day, Mendoza enjoyed tremendous popularity. He was adored by rich and poor alike.

Mendoza rose to fame swiftly after a boxing-match when he was only fourteen years old. This attracted the attention of Richard Humphries who was then the most eminent boxer in England. He offered to train Mendoza and his young pupil was quick to learn. In fact, Mendoza soon became so successful that Humphries turned against him. The two men quarrelled bitterly and it was clear that the argument could only be settled by a fight. A match was held at Stilton where both men fought for an hour. The public bet a great deal of money on Mendoza, but he was defeated. Mendoza met Humphries in the ring on a later occasion and he lost for a second time. It was not until his third match in 1790 that he finally beat Humphries and became Champion of England. Meanwhile, he founded a highly successful Academy and even Lord Byron became one of his pupils. He earned enormous sums of money and was paid as much as £100 for a single appearance. Despite this, he was so extravagant that he was always in debt. After he was defeated by a boxer called Gentleman Jackson, he was quickly forgotten. He was sent to prison for failing to pay his debts and died in poverty in 1836.

Lesson22 By heart

Some plays are so successful that they run for years on end. In many ways, this is unfortunate for the poor actors who are required to go on repeating the same lines night after night. One would expect them to know their parts by heart and never have cause to falter. Yet this is not always the case.

A famous actor in a highly successful play was once cast in the role of an aristocrat who had been imprisoned in the Bastille for twenty years. In the last act, a gaoler would always come on to the stage with a letter which he would hand to the prisoner. Even though the noble was expected to read the letter at each performance, he always insisted that it should be written out in full.

One night, the gaoler decided to play a joke on his colleague to find out if, after so many performances, he had managed to learn the contents of the letter by heart. The curtain went up on the final act of the play and revealed the aristocrat sitting alone behind bars in his dark cell. Just then, the gaoler appeared with the precious letter in his hands. He entered the cell and presented the letter to the aristocrat. But the copy he gave him had not been written out in full as usual. It was simply a blank sheet of paper. The gaoler looked on eagerly, anxious to see if his fellow-actor had at last learnt his lines. The noble stared at the blank sheet of paper for a few seconds. Then, squinting his eyes, he said: 'The light is dim. Read the letter to me.' And he promptly handed the sheet of paper to the gaoler. Finding that he could not remember a word of the letter either, the gaoler replied: 'The light is indeed dim, sire. I must get my glasses.' With this, he hurried off the stage. Much to the

aristocrat's amusement, the gaoler returned a few moments later with a pair of glasses and the usual copy of the letter which he proceeded to read to the prisoner.

Lesson23 One man's meat is another man's poison

People become quite illogical when they try to decide what can be eaten and what cannot be eaten. If you lived in the Mediterranean, for instance, you would consider octopus a great delicacy. You would not be able to understand why some people find it repulsive. On the other hand, your stomach would turn at the idea of frying potatoes in animal fat--the normally accepted practice in many northern countries. The sad truth is that most of us have been brought up to eat certain foods and we stick to them all our lives.

No creature has received more praise and abuse than the common garden snail. Cooked in wine, snails are a great luxury in various parts of the world. There are countless people who, ever since their early years, have learned to associate snails with food. My friend, Robert, lives in a country where snails are despised. As his flat is in a large town, he has no garden of his own. For years he has been asking me to collect snails from my garden and take them to him. The idea never appealed to me very much, but one day, after a heavy shower, I happened to be walking in my garden when I noticed a huge number of snails taking a stroll on some of my prize plants. Acting on a sudden impulse, I collected several dozen, put them in a paper bag, and took them to Robert. Robert was delighted to see me and equally pleased with my little gift. I left the bag in the hall and Robert and I went into the living-room where we talked for a couple of hours. I had forgotten all about the snails when Robert suddenly said that I must stay to dinner. Snails would, of course, be the main dish. I did not fancy the idea and I reluctantly followed Robert out of the room. To our dismay, we saw that there were snails everywhere: they had escaped from the paper bag and had taken complete possession of the hall! I have never been able to look at a snail since then.

Lesson24 A skeleton in the cupboard

We often read in novels how a seemingly respectable person or family has some terrible secret which has been concealed from strangers for years. The English language possesses a vivid saying to describe this sort of situation. The terrible secret is called 'a skeleton in the cupboard'. At some dramatic moment in the story the terrible secret becomes known and a reputation is ruined. The reader's hair stands on end when he reads in the final pages of the novel that the heroine, a dear old lady who had always been so kind to everybody, had, in her youth, poisoned every one of her five husbands.

It is all very well for such things to occur in fiction. To varying degrees, we all have secrets which we do not want even our closest friends to learn, but few of us have skeletons in the cupboard. The only person I know who has a skeleton in the cupboard is George Carlton, and he is very proud of the fact. George studied medicine in his youth. Instead of becoming a doctor, however, he became a successful writer of detective stories. I once spent an uncomfortable week-end which I shall never forget at his house. George showed me to the guest-room which, he said, was rarely used. He told me to unpack my things and then come down to dinner. After I had stacked my shirts and underclothes in two empty drawers, I decided to hang in the cupboard one of the two suits I had brought with me. I opened the cupboard door and then stood in front of it petrified. A skeleton was dangling before my eyes. The sudden movement of the door made it sway slightly and it gave me the impression that it was about to leap

out at me. Dropping my suit, I dashed downstairs to tell George. This was worse than 'a terrible secret'; this was a <i>real</i> skeleton! But George was unsympathetic. 'Oh, that,' he said with a smile as if he were talking about an old friend. 'That's Sebastian. You forget that I was a medical student once upon a time.'

Lesson25 The 'Cutty Sark'

One of the most famous sailing ships of the nineteenth century, the Cutty Sark, can still be seen at Greenwich. She stands on dry land and is visited by thousands of people each year. She serves as an impressive reminder of the great ships of the past. Before they were replaced by steam-ships, sailing vessels like the Cutty Sark were used to carry tea from China and wool from Australia. The Cutty Sark was one of the fastest sailing ships that has ever been built. The only other ship to match her was the Thermopylae. Both these ships set out from Shanghai on June 18th, 1872 on an exciting race to England. This race, which went on for exactly four months, was the last of its kind. It marked the end of the great tradition of ships with sails and the beginning of a new era. The first of the two ships to reach Java after the race had begun was the Thermopylae, but on the Indian Ocean, the Cutty Sark took the lead. It seemed certain that she would be the first ship home, but during the race she had a lot of bad luck. In August, she was struck by a very heavy storm during which her rudder was torn away. The Cutty Sark rolled from side to side and it became impossible to steer her. A temporary rudder was made on board from spare planks and it was fitted with great difficulty. This greatly reduced the speed of the ship, for there was danger that if she travelled too quickly, this rudder would be torn away as well. Because of this, the Cutty Sark lost her lead. After crossing the equator, the captain called in at a port to have a new rudder fitted, but by now the Thermopylae was over five hundred miles ahead. Though the new rudder was fitted at tremendous speed, it was impossible for the Cutty Sark to win. She arrived in England a week after the Thermopylae. Even this was remarkable, considering that she had had so many delays. There is no doubt that if she had not lost her rudder she would have won the race easily.

Lesson26 Wanted: a large biscuit tin

No one can avoid being influenced by advertisements. Much as we may pride ourselves on our good taste, we are no longer free to choose the things we want, for advertising exerts a subtle influence on us. In their efforts to persuade us to buy this or that product, advertisers have made a close study of human nature and have classified all our little weaknesses. Advertisers discovered years ago that all of us love to get something for nothing. An advertisement which begins with the magic word FREE can rarely go wrong. These days, advertisers not only offer free samples, but free cars, free houses, and free trips round the world as well. They devise hundreds of competitions which will enable us to win huge sums of money. Radio and television have made it possible for advertisers to capture the attention of millions of people in this way. During a radio programme, a company of biscuit manufacturers once asked listeners to bake biscuits and send them to their factory. They offered to pay \$2 a pound for the biggest biscuit baked by a listener. The response to this competition was tremendous. Before long, biscuits of all shapes and sizes began arriving at the factory. One lady brought in a biscuit on a wheelbarrow. It weighed nearly 500 pounds. A little later, a man came along with a biscuit which occupied the whole boot of his car. All the biscuits that were sent were carefully weighed. The largest was 713 pounds. It seemed certain that this would win the prize. But just before

the competition closed, a lorry arrived at the factory with a truly colossal biscuit which weighed 2400 pounds. It had been baked by a college student who had used over 1000 pounds of flour, 800 pounds of sugar, 200 pounds of fat, and 400 pounds of various other ingredients. It was so heavy that a crane had to be used to remove it from the lorry. The manufacturers had to pay more money than they had anticipated, for they bought the biscuit from the student for \$4800.

Lesson 27 Nothing to sell and nothing to buy

It has been said that everyone lives by selling something. In the light of this statement, teachers live by selling knowledge, philosophers by selling wisdom and priests by selling spiritual comfort. Though it may be possible to measure the value of material goods in terms of money, it is extremely difficult to estimate the true value of the services which people perform for us. There are times when we would willingly give everything we possess to save our lives, yet we might grudge paying a surgeon a high fee for offering us precisely this service. The conditions of society are such that skills have to be paid for in the same way that goods are paid for at a shop. Everyone has something to sell.

Tramps seem to be the only exception to this general rule. Beggars almost sell themselves as human beings to arouse the pity of passers-by. But real tramps are not beggars. They have nothing to sell and require nothing from others. In seeking independence, they do not sacrifice their human dignity. A tramp may ask you for money, but he will never ask you to feel sorry for him. He has deliberately chosen to lead the life he leads and is fully aware of the consequences. He may never be sure where the next meal is coming from, but he is free from the thousands of anxieties which afflict other people. His few material possessions make it possible for him to move from place to place with ease. By having to sleep in the open, he gets far closer to the world of nature than most of us ever do. He may hunt, beg, or steal occasionally to keep himself alive; he may even, in times of real need, do a little work; but he will never sacrifice his freedom. We often speak of tramps with contempt and put them in the same class as beggars, but how many of us can honestly say that we have not felt a little envious of their simple way of life and their freedom from care?

Lesson 28 A pound too dear

Small boats loaded with wares sped to the great liner as she was entering the harbour. Before she had anchored, the men from the boats had climbed on board and the decks were soon covered with colourful rugs from Persia, silks from India, copper coffee pots, and beautiful hand-made silver-ware. It was difficult not to be tempted. Many of the tourists on board had begun bargaining with the tradesmen, but I decided not to buy anything until I had disembarked.

I had no sooner got off the ship than I was assailed by a man who wanted to sell me a diamond ring. I had no intention of buying one, but I could not conceal the fact that I was impressed by the size of the diamonds. Some of them were as big as marbles. The man went to great lengths to prove that the diamonds were real. As we were walking past a shop, he held a diamond firmly against the window and made a deep impression in the glass. It took me over half an hour to get rid of him.

The next man to approach me was selling expensive pens and watches. I examined one of the pens closely. It certainly looked genuine. At the base of the gold cap, the words 'made in the U.S.A.' had been neatly inscribed. The man said that the pen was worth £10, but as a special favour, he would let me have it for £8. I shook my head and held up a finger indicating

that I was willing to pay a pound. Gesticulating wildly, the man acted as if he found my offer outrageous, but he eventually reduced the price to £3. Shrugging my shoulders, I began to walk away when, a moment later, he ran after me and thrust the pen into my hands. Though he kept throwing up his arms in despair, he readily accepted the pound I gave him. I felt especially pleased with my wonderful bargain--until I got back to the ship. No matter how hard I tried, it was impossible to fill this beautiful pen with ink and to this day it has never written a single word!

Lesson29 Funny or not?

Whether we find a joke funny or not largely depends on where we have been brought up. The sense of humour is mysteriously bound up with national characteristics. A Frenchman, for instance, might find it hard to laugh at a Russian joke. In the same way, a Russian might fail to see anything amusing in a joke which would make an Englishman laugh to tears.

Most funny stories are based on comic situations. In spite of national differences, certain funny situations have a universal appeal. No matter where you live, you would find it difficult not to laugh at, say, Charlie Chaplin's early films. However, a new type of humour, which stems largely from America, has recently come into fashion. It is called 'sick humour'. Comedians base their jokes on tragic situations like violent death or serious accidents. Many people find this sort of joke distasteful. The following example of 'sick humour' will enable you to judge for yourself. A man who had broken his right leg was taken to hospital a few weeks before Christmas. From the moment he arrived there, he kept on pestering his doctor to tell him when he would be able to go home. He dreaded having to spend Christmas in hospital. Though the doctor did his best, the patient's recovery was slow. On Christmas day, the man still had his right leg in plaster. He spent a miserable day in bed thinking of all the fun he was missing. The following day, however, the doctor consoled him by telling him that his chances of being able to leave hospital in time for New Year celebrations were good. The man took heart and, sure enough, on New Year's Eve he was able to hobble along to a party. To compensate for his unpleasant experiences in hospital, the man drank a little more than was good for him. In the process, he enjoyed himself thoroughly and kept telling everybody how much he hated hospitals. He was still mumbling something about hospitals at the end of the party when he slipped on a piece of ice and broke his left leg.

Lesson30 The death of a ghost

For years, villagers believed that Endley farm was haunted. The farm was owned by two brothers, Joe and Bert Cox. They employed a few farm hands, but no one was willing to work there long. Every time a worker gave up his job, he told the same story. Farm labourers said that they always woke up to find that work had been done overnight. Hay had been cut and cow sheds had been cleaned. A farm worker, who stayed up all night, claimed to have seen a figure cutting corn in the moonlight. In time, it became an accepted fact that the Cox brothers employed a conscientious ghost that did most of their work for them.

No one suspected that there might be someone else on the farm who had never been seen. This was indeed the case. A short time ago, villagers were astonished to learn that the ghost of Endley had died. Everyone went to the funeral, for the 'ghost' was none other than Eric Cox, a third brother who was supposed to have died as a young man. After the funeral, Joe and Bert revealed a secret which they had kept for over forty years. Eric had been the eldest son of the family. He had been obliged to join the army during the first World War. As he hated army life, he decided to

desert his regiment. When he learnt that he would be sent abroad, he returned to the farm and his father hid him until the end of the war. Fearing the authorities, Eric remained in hiding after the war as well. His father told everybody that Eric had been killed in action. The only other people who knew the secret were Joe and Bert. They did not even tell their wives. When their father died, they thought it their duty to keep Eric in hiding. All these years, Eric had lived as a recluse. He used to sleep during the day and work at night, quite unaware of the fact that he had become the ghost of Endley. When he died, however, his brothers found it impossible to keep the secret any longer.

Lesson31 A lovable eccentric

True eccentrics never deliberately set out to draw attention to themselves. They disregard social conventions without being conscious that they are doing anything extraordinary. This invariably wins them the love and respect of others, for they add colour to the dull routine of everyday life.

Up to the time of his death, Richard Colson was one of the most notable figures in our town. He was a shrewd and wealthy business-man, but the ordinary town-folk hardly knew anything about this side of his life. He was known to us all as Dickie and his eccentricity had become legendary long before he died.

Dickie disliked snobs intensely. Though he owned a large car, he hardly ever used it, preferring always to go on foot. Even when it was raining heavily, he refused to carry an umbrella. One day, he walked into an expensive shop after having been caught in a particularly heavy shower. He wanted to buy a £300 fur coat for his wife, but he was in such a bedraggled condition that an assistant refused to serve him. Dickie left the shop without a word and returned carrying a large cloth bag. As it was extremely heavy, he dumped it on the counter. The assistant asked him to leave, but Dickie paid no attention to him and requested to see the manager. Recognizing who the customer was, the manager was most apologetic and reprimanded the assistant severely. When Dickie was given the fur coat, he presented the assistant with the cloth bag. It contained £300 in pennies. He insisted on the assistant's counting the money before he left --72,000 pennies in all! On another occasion, he invited a number of important critics to see his private collection of modern paintings. This exhibition received a great deal of attention in the press, for though the pictures were supposed to be the work of famous artists, they had in fact been painted by Dickie. It took him four years to stage this elaborate joke simply to prove that critics do not always know what they are talking about.

Lesson32 A lost ship

The salvage operation had been a complete failure. The small ship, Elkor, which had been searching the Barents Sea for weeks, was on its way home. A radio message from the mainland had been received by the ship's captain instructing him to give up the search. The captain knew that another attempt would be made later, for the sunken ship he was trying to find had been carrying a precious cargo of gold bullion.

Despite the message, the captain of the Elkor decided to try once more. The sea-bed was scoured with powerful nets and there was tremendous excitement on board when a chest was raised from the bottom. Though the crew were at first under the impression that the lost ship had been found, the contents of the sea-chest proved them wrong. What they had in fact found was a ship which had been sunk many years before.

The chest contained the personal belongings of a seaman, Alan Fielding.

There were books, clothing and photographs, together with letters which the seaman had once received from his wife. The captain of the Elkor ordered his men to salvage as much as possible from the wreck. Nothing of value was found, but the numerous items which were brought to the surface proved to be of great interest. From a heavy gun that was raised, the captain realized that the ship must have been a cruiser. In another sea-chest, which contained the belongings of a ship's officer, there was an unfinished letter which had been written on March 14th, 1943. The captain learnt from the letter that the name of the lost ship was the Karen. The most valuable find of all was the ship's log book, parts of which it was still possible to read. From this the captain was able to piece together all the information that had come to light. The Karen had been sailing in a convoy to Russia when she was torpedoed by an enemy submarine. This was later confirmed by a naval official at the Ministry of Defence after the Elkor had returned home. All the items that were found were sent to the War Museum.

Lesson33 A day to remember

We have all experienced days when everything goes wrong. A day may begin well enough, but suddenly everything seems to get out of control. What invariably happens is that a great number of things choose to go wrong at precisely the same moment. It is as if a single unimportant event set up a chain of reactions. Let us suppose that you are preparing a meal and keeping an eye on the baby at the same time. The telephone rings and this marks the prelude to an unforeseen series of catastrophes. While you are on the phone, the baby pulls the table-cloth off the table, smashing half your best crockery and cutting himself in the process. You hang up hurriedly and attend to baby, crockery, etc. Meanwhile, the meal gets burnt. As if this were not enough to reduce you to tears, your husband arrives, unexpectedly bringing three guests to dinner.

Things can go wrong on a big scale as a number of people recently discovered in Parramatta, a suburb of Sydney. During the rush hour one evening two cars collided and both drivers began to argue. The woman immediately behind the two cars happened to be a learner. She suddenly got into a panic and stopped her car. This made the driver following her brake hard. His wife was sitting beside him holding a large cake. As she was thrown forward, the cake went right through the windscreen and landed on the road. Seeing a cake flying through the air, a lorry-driver who was drawing up alongside the car, pulled up all of a sudden. The lorry was loaded with empty beer bottles and hundreds of them slid off the back of the vehicle and on to the road. This led to yet another angry argument. Meanwhile, the traffic piled up behind. It took the police nearly an hour to get the traffic on the move again. In the meantime, the lorry-driver had to sweep up hundreds of broken bottles. Only two stray dogs benefited from all this confusion, for they greedily devoured what was left of the cake. It was just one of those days!

Lesson34 A happy discovery

Antique shops exert a peculiar fascination on a great many people. The more expensive kind of antique shop where rare objects are beautifully displayed in glass cases to keep them free from dust is usually a forbidding place. But no one has to muster up courage to enter a less pretentious antique shop. There is always hope that in its labyrinth of musty, dark, disordered rooms a real rarity will be found amongst the piles of assorted junk that litter the floors. No one discovers a rarity by chance. A truly dedicated searcher for art treasures must have patience, and above all, the ability to recognize the

worth of something when he sees it. To do this, he must be at least as knowledgeable as the dealer. Like a scientist bent on making a discovery, he must cherish the hope that one day he will be amply rewarded. My old friend, Frank Halliday, is just such a person. He has often described to me how he picked up a masterpiece for a mere £5. One Saturday morning, Frank visited an antique shop in my neighbourhood. As he had never been there before, he found a great deal to interest him. The morning passed rapidly and Frank was about to leave when he noticed a large packing-case lying on the floor. The dealer told him that it had just come in, but that he could not be bothered to open it. Frank begged him to do so and the dealer reluctantly prised it open. The contents were disappointing. Apart from an interesting-looking carved dagger, the box was full of crockery, much of it broken. Frank gently lifted the crockery out of the box and suddenly noticed a miniature painting at the bottom of the packing-case. As its composition and line reminded him of an Italian painting he knew well, he decided to buy it. Glancing at it briefly, the dealer told him that it was worth £5. Frank could hardly conceal his excitement, for he knew that he had made a real discovery. The tiny painting proved to be an unknown masterpiece by Correggio and was worth thousands of pounds.

Lesson 35 Justice was done

The word justice is usually associated with courts of law. We might say that justice has been done when a man's innocence or guilt has been proved beyond doubt. Justice is part of the complex machinery of the law. Those who seek it, undertake an arduous journey and can never be sure that they will find it. Judges, however wise or eminent, are human and can make mistakes.

There are rare instances when justice almost ceases to be an abstract conception. Reward or punishment are meted out quite independent of human interference. At such times, justice acts like a living force. When we use a phrase like 'it serves him right', we are, in part, admitting that a certain set of circumstances has enabled justice to act of its own accord. When a thief was caught on the premises of a large fur store one morning, the shop assistants must have found it impossible to resist the temptation to say 'it serves him right'. The shop was an old-fashioned one with many large, disused fireplaces and tall, narrow chimneys. Towards midday, a girl heard a muffled cry coming from behind one of the walls. As the cry was repeated several times, she ran to tell the manager who promptly rang up the fire-brigade. The cry had certainly come from one of the chimneys, but as there were so many of them, the firemen could not be certain which one it was. They located the right chimney by tapping at the walls and listening for the man's cries. After chipping through a wall which was eighteen inches thick, they found that a man had been trapped in the chimney. As it was extremely narrow, the man was unable to move, but the firemen were eventually able to free him by cutting a huge hole in the wall. The sorry-looking, blackened figure that emerged, at once admitted that he had tried to break into the shop during the night but had got stuck in the chimney. He had been there for nearly ten hours. Justice had been done even before the man was handed over to the police.

Lesson 36 A chance in a million

We are less credulous than we used to be. In the nineteenth century, a novelist would bring his story to a conclusion by presenting his readers with a series of coincidences--most of them wildly improbable. Readers happily accepted the fact that an obscure maid-servant was really the hero's mother. A long-lost brother, who was presumed dead, was really

alive all the time and wickedly plotting to bring about the hero's downfall. And so on. Modern readers would find such naive solutions totally unacceptable. Yet, in real life, circumstances do sometimes conspire to bring about coincidences which anyone but a nineteenth century novelist would find incredible.

A German taxi-driver, Franz Bussman, recently found a brother who was thought to have been killed twenty years before. While on a walking tour with his wife, he stopped to talk to a workman. After they had gone on, Mrs Bussman commented on the workman's close resemblance to her husband and even suggested that he might be his brother. Franz poured scorn on the idea, pointing out that his brother had been killed in action during the war. Though Mrs Bussman was fully acquainted with this story, she thought that there was a chance in a million that she might be right. A few days later, she sent a boy to the workman to ask him if his name was Hans Bussman. Needless to say, the man's name was Hans Bussman and he really was Franz's long-lost brother. When the brothers were re-united, Hans explained how it was that he was still alive. After having been wounded towards the end of the war, he had been sent to hospital and was separated from his unit. The hospital had been bombed and Hans had made his way back into Western Germany on foot. Meanwhile, his unit was lost and all records of him had been destroyed. Hans returned to his family home, but the house had been bombed and no one in the neighbourhood knew what had become of the inhabitants. Assuming that his family had been killed during an air-raid, Hans settled down in a village fifty miles away where he had remained ever since.

Lesson 37 The Westhaven Express

We have learnt to expect that trains will be punctual. After years of pre-conditioning, most of us have developed an unshakable faith in railway time-tables. Ships may be delayed by storms; air flights may be cancelled because of bad weather; but trains must be on time. Only an exceptionally heavy snow fall might temporarily dislocate railway services. It is all too easy to blame the railway authorities when something does go wrong. The truth is that when mistakes occur, they are more likely to be *ours* than *theirs*.

After consulting my railway time-table, I noted with satisfaction that there was an express train to Westhaven. It went direct from my local station and the journey lasted a mere hour and seventeen minutes. When I boarded the train, I could not help noticing that a great many local people got on as well. At the time, this did not strike me as odd. I reflected that there must be a great many people besides myself who wished to take advantage of this excellent service. Neither was I surprised when the train stopped at Widley, a tiny station a few miles along the line. Even a mighty express train can be held up by signals. But when the train dawdled at station after station, I began to wonder. It suddenly dawned on me that this express was not roaring down the line at ninety miles an hour, but barely chugging along at thirty. One hour and seventeen minutes passed and we had not even covered half the distance. I asked a passenger if this was the Westhaven Express, but he had not even heard of it. I determined to lodge a complaint as soon as we arrived. Two hours later, I was talking angrily to the station-master at Westhaven. When he denied the train's existence, I borrowed his copy of the time-table. There was a note of triumph in my voice when I told him that it was there in black and white. Glancing at it briefly, he told me to look again. A tiny asterisk conducted me to a footnote at the bottom of the page. It said: 'This service has been suspended.'

Lesson38 The first calendar

Future historians will be in a unique position when they come to record the history of our own times. They will hardly know which facts to select from the great mass of evidence that steadily accumulates. What is more, they will not have to rely solely on the written word. Films, gramophone records, and magnetic tapes will provide them with a bewildering amount of information. They will be able, as it were, to see and hear us in action. But the historian attempting to reconstruct the distant past is always faced with a difficult task. He has to deduce what he can from the few scanty clues available. Even seemingly insignificant remains can shed interesting light on the history of early man.

Up to now, historians have assumed that calendars came into being with the advent of agriculture, for then man was faced with a real need to understand something about the seasons. Recent scientific evidence seems to indicate that this assumption is incorrect.

Historians have long been puzzled by dots, lines and symbols which have been engraved on walls, bones, and the ivory tusks of mammoths. The nomads who made these markings lived by hunting and fishing during the last Ice Age which began about 35,000 B.C. and ended about 10,000 B.C. By correlating markings made in various parts of the world, historians have been able to read this difficult code. They have found that it is connected with the passage of days and the phases of the moon. It is, in fact, a primitive type of calendar. It has long been known that the hunting scenes depicted on walls were not simply a form of artistic expression. They had a definite meaning, for they were as near as early man could get to writing. It is possible that there is a definite relation between these paintings and the markings that sometimes accompany them. It seems that man was making a real effort to understand the seasons 20,000 years earlier than has been supposed.

Lesson39 Nothing to worry about

The rough road across the plain soon became so bad that we tried to get Bruce to drive back to the village we had come from. Even though the road was littered with boulders and pitted with holes, Bruce was not in the least perturbed. Glancing at his map, he informed us that the next village was a mere twenty miles away. It was not that Bruce always underestimated difficulties. He simply had no sense of danger at all. No matter what the conditions were, he believed that a car should be driven as fast as it could possibly go.

As we bumped over the dusty track, we swerved to avoid large boulders. The wheels scooped up stones which hammered ominously under the car. We felt sure that sooner or later a stone would rip a hole in our petrol tank or damage the engine. Because of this, we kept looking back, wondering if we were leaving a trail of oil and petrol behind us.

What a relief it was when the boulders suddenly disappeared, giving way to a stretch of plain where the only obstacles were clumps of bushes. But there was worse to come. Just ahead of us there was a huge fissure. In response to renewed pleadings, Bruce stopped. Though we all got out to examine the fissure, he remained in the car. We informed him that the fissure extended for fifty yards and was two feet wide and four feet deep. Even this had no effect. Bruce engaged low gear and drove at a terrifying speed, keeping the front wheels astride the crack as he followed its zig-zag course. Before we had time to worry about what might happen, we were back on the plain again. Bruce consulted the map once more and told us that the village was now only fifteen miles away. Our next obstacle was a shallow pool of water about half a mile across. Bruce charged at it, but in the middle, the car came to a grinding halt. A yellow light on the

dashboard flashed angrily and Bruce cheerfully announced that there was no oil in the engine!

Lesson40 Who's who

It has never been explained why university students seem to enjoy practical jokes more than anyone else. Students specialize in a particular type of practical joke: the hoax. Inviting the fire-brigade to put out a non-existent fire is a crude form of deception which no self-respecting student would ever indulge in. Students often create amusing situations which are funny to everyone except the victims.

When a student recently saw two workmen using a pneumatic drill outside his university, he immediately telephoned the police and informed them that two students dressed up as workmen were tearing up the road with a pneumatic drill. As soon as he had hung up, he went over to the workmen and told them that if a policeman ordered them to go away, they were not to take him seriously. He added that a student had dressed up as a policeman and was playing all sorts of silly jokes on people. Both the police and the workmen were grateful to the student for this piece of advance information.

The student hid in an archway nearby where he could watch and hear everything that went on. Sure enough, a policeman arrived on the scene and politely asked the workmen to go away. When he received a very rude reply from one of the workmen, he threatened to remove them by force. The workmen told him to do as he pleased and the policeman telephoned for help. Shortly afterwards, four more policemen arrived and remonstrated with the workmen. As the men refused to stop working, the police attempted to seize the pneumatic drill. The workmen struggled fiercely and one of them lost his temper. He threatened to call the police. At this, the police pointed out ironically that this would hardly be necessary as the men were already under arrest. Pretending to speak seriously, one of the workmen asked if he might make a telephone call before being taken to the station. Permission was granted and a policeman accompanied him to a call-box. Only when he saw that the man was actually telephoning the police did he realize that they had all been the victims of a hoax.

Lesson41 Illusions of pastoral peace

The quiet life of the country has never appealed to me. City born and city bred, I have always regarded the country as something you look at through a train window, or something you occasionally visit during the week-end. Most of my friends live in the city, yet they always go into raptures at the mere mention of the country. Though they extol the virtues of the peaceful life, only one of them has ever gone to live in the country and he was back in town within six months. Even he still lives under the illusion that country life is somehow superior to town life. He is forever talking about the friendly people, the clean atmosphere, the closeness to nature and the gentle pace of living. Nothing can be compared, he maintains, with the first cock crow, the twittering of birds at dawn, the sight of the rising sun glinting on the trees and pastures. This idyllic pastoral scene is only part of the picture. My friend fails to mention the long and friendless winter evenings which are interrupted only by an occasional visit to the local cinema--virtually the only form of entertainment. He says nothing about the poor selection of goods in the shops, or about those unfortunate people who have to travel from the country to the city every day to get to work. Why people are prepared to tolerate a four hour journey each day for the dubious privilege of living in the country is beyond my ken. They could be saved so much misery and expense if they chose to live in the city where they rightly belong.

If you can do without the few pastoral pleasures of the country, you will find the city can provide you with the best that life can offer. You never have to travel miles to see your friends. They invariably live nearby and are always available for an informal chat or an evening's entertainment. Some of my acquaintances in the country come up to town once or twice a year to visit the theatre as a special treat. For them this is a major operation which involves considerable planning. As the play draws to its close, they wonder whether they will ever catch that last train home. The city dweller never experiences anxieties of this sort. The latest exhibitions, films, or plays are only a short bus ride away. Shopping, too, is always a pleasure. There is so much variety that you never have to make do with second best. Country people run wild when they go shopping in the city and stagger home loaded with as many of the necessities of life as they can carry. Nor is the city without its moments of beauty. There is something comforting about the warm glow shed by advertisements on cold wet winter nights. Few things could be more impressive than the peace that descends on deserted city streets at week-ends when the thousands that travel to work every day are tucked away in their homes in the country. It has always been a mystery to me why city dwellers, who appreciate all these things, obstinately pretend that they would prefer to live in the country.

Lesson 42 Modern cavemen

Cave exploration, or potholing, as it has come to be known, is a relatively new sport. Perhaps it is the desire for solitude or the chance of making an unexpected discovery that lures men down to the depths of the earth. It is impossible to give a satisfactory explanation for a potholer's motives. For him, caves have the same peculiar fascination which high mountains have for the climber. They arouse instincts which can only be dimly understood.

Exploring really deep caves is not a task for the Sunday afternoon Rambler. Such undertakings require the precise planning and foresight of military operations. It can take as long as eight days to rig up rope ladders and to establish supply bases before a descent can be made into a very deep cave. Precautions of this sort are necessary, for it is impossible to foretell the exact nature of the difficulties which will confront the potholer. The deepest known cave in the world is the Gouffre Berger near Grenoble. It extends to a depth of 3723 feet. This immense chasm has been formed by an underground stream which has tunnelled a course through a flaw in the rocks. The entrance to the cave is on a plateau in the Dauphine Alps. As it is only six feet across, it is barely noticeable. The cave might never have been discovered had not the entrance been spotted by the distinguished French potholer, Berger. Since its discovery, it has become a sort of potholers' Everest. Though a number of descents have been made, much of it still remains to be explored.

A team of potholers recently went down the Gouffre Berger. After entering the narrow gap on the plateau, they climbed down the steep sides of the cave until they came to a narrow corridor. They had to edge their way along this, sometimes wading across shallow streams, or swimming across deep pools. Suddenly they came to a waterfall which dropped into an underground lake at the bottom of the cave. They plunged into the lake, and after loading their gear on an inflatable rubber dinghy, let the current carry them to the other side. To protect themselves from the icy water, they had to wear special rubber suits. At the far end of the lake, they came to huge piles of rubble which had been washed up by the water. In this part of the cave, they could hear an insistent booming sound which they found was caused by a small water-spout shooting down into a pool

from the roof of the cave. Squeezing through a cleft in the rocks, the potholers arrived at an enormous cavern, the size of a huge concert hall. After switching on powerful arc lights, they saw great stalagmites; some of them over forty feet high--rising up like tree-trunks to meet the stalactites suspended from the roof. Round about, piles of lime-stone glistened in all the colours of the rainbow. In the eerie silence of the cavern, the only sound that could be heard was made by water which dripped continuously from the high dome above them.

Lesson43 Fully insured

Insurance companies are normally willing to insure anything. Insuring public or private property is a standard practice in most countries in the world. If, however, you were holding an open air garden party or a fete it would be equally possible to insure yourself in the event of bad weather. Needless to say, the bigger the risk an insurance company takes, the higher the premium you will have to pay. It is not uncommon to hear that a shipping company has made a claim for the cost of salvaging a sunken ship. But the claim made by a local authority to recover the cost of salvaging a sunken pie dish must surely be unique.

Admittedly it was an unusual pie dish, for it was eighteen feet long and six feet wide. It had been purchased by a local authority so that an enormous pie could be baked for an annual fair. The pie committee decided that the best way to transport the dish would be by canal, so they insured it for the trip. Shortly after it was launched, the pie committee went to a local inn to celebrate. At the same time, a number of teenagers climbed on to the dish and held a little party of their own. Modern dances proved to be more than the dish could bear, for during the party it capsized and sank in seven feet of water.

The pie committee telephoned a local garage owner who arrived in a recovery truck to salvage the pie dish. Shivering in their wet clothes, the teenagers looked on while three men dived repeatedly into the water to locate the dish. They had little difficulty in finding it, but hauling it out of the water proved to be a serious problem. The sides of the dish were so smooth that it was almost impossible to attach hawsers and chains to the rim without damaging it. Eventually chains were fixed to one end of the dish and a powerful winch was put into operation. The dish rose to the surface and was gently drawn towards the canal bank. For one agonizing moment, the dish was perched precariously on the bank of the canal, but it suddenly overbalanced and slid back into the water. The men were now obliged to try once more. This time they fixed heavy metal clamps to both sides of the dish so that they could fasten the chains. The dish now had to be lifted vertically because one edge was resting against the side of the canal. The winch was again put into operation and one of the men started up the truck. Several minutes later, the dish was successfully hauled above the surface of the water. Water streamed in torrents over its sides with such force that it set up a huge wave in the canal. There was danger that the wave would rebound off the other side of the bank and send the dish plunging into the water again. By working at tremendous speed, the men managed to get the dish on to dry land before the wave returned.

Lesson44 Speed and comfort

People travelling long distances frequently have to decide whether they would prefer to go by land, sea, or air. Hardly anyone can positively enjoy sitting in a train for more than a few hours. Train compartments soon get cramped and stuffy. It is almost impossible to take your mind off the journey. Reading is only a partial solution, for the monotonous rhythm of the wheels clicking on the rails soon lulls you to sleep. During the

day, sleep comes in snatches. At night, when you really wish to go to sleep, you rarely manage to do so. If you are lucky enough to get a couchette, you spend half the night staring at the small blue light in the ceiling, or fumbling to find your passport when you cross a frontier. Inevitably you arrive at your destination almost exhausted. Long car journeys are even less pleasant, for it is quite impossible even to read. On motor-ways you can, at least, travel fairly safely at high speeds, but more often than not, the greater part of the journey is spent on narrow, bumpy roads which are crowded with traffic. By comparison, trips by sea offer a great variety of civilized comforts. You can stretch your legs on the spacious decks, play games, swim, meet interesting people and enjoy good food--always assuming, of course, that the sea is calm. If it is not, and you are likely to get sea-sick, no form of transport could be worse. Even if you travel in ideal weather, sea journeys take a long time. Relatively few people are prepared to sacrifice up to a third of their holidays for the pleasure of travelling on a ship.

Aeroplanes have the reputation of being dangerous and even hardened travellers are intimidated by them. They also have the grave disadvantage of being the most expensive form of transport. But nothing can match them for speed and comfort. Travelling at a height of 30,000 feet, far above the clouds, and at over 500 miles an hour is an exhilarating experience. You do not have to devise ways of taking your mind off the journey, for an aeroplane gets you to your destination rapidly. For a few hours, you settle back in a deep armchair to enjoy the flight. The real escapist can watch a free film show and sip champagne on some services. But even when such refinements are not available, there is plenty to keep you occupied. An aeroplane offers you an unusual and breathtaking view of the world. You soar effortlessly over high mountains and deep valleys. You really see the shape of the land. If the landscape is hidden from view, you can enjoy the extraordinary sight of unbroken cloud plains that stretch out for miles before you, while the sun shines brilliantly in a clear sky. The journey is so smooth that there is nothing to prevent you from reading or sleeping. However you decide to spend your time, one thing is certain: you will arrive at your destination fresh and uncrumpled. You will not have to spend the next few days recovering from a long and arduous journey.

Lesson45 The power of the Press

In democratic countries any efforts to restrict the freedom of the Press are rightly condemned. However, this freedom can easily be abused. Stories about people often attract far more public attention than political events. Though we may enjoy reading about the lives of others, it is extremely doubtful whether we would equally enjoy reading about ourselves. Acting on the contention that facts are sacred, reporters can cause untold suffering to individuals by publishing details about their private lives. Newspapers exert such tremendous influence that they can not only bring about major changes to the lives of ordinary people but can even overthrow a government.

The story of a poor family that acquired fame and fortune overnight, dramatically illustrates the power of the press. The family lived in Aberdeen, a small town of 23,000 inhabitants in South Dakota. As the parents had five children, life was a perpetual struggle against poverty. They were expecting their sixth child and were faced with even more pressing economic problems. If they had only had one more child, the fact would have passed unnoticed. They would have continued to struggle against economic odds and would have lived in obscurity. But they suddenly became the parents of quintuplets, four girls and a boy, an event which radically changed their lives. The day after the birth of the five children, an

aeroplane arrived in Aberdeen bringing sixty reporters and photographers. The news was of national importance, for the poor couple had become the parents of the only quintuplets in America. The rise to fame was swift. Television cameras and newspapers carried the news to everyone in the country. Newspapers and magazines offered the family huge sums for the exclusive rights to publish stories and photographs. Gifts poured in not only from unknown people, but from baby food and soap manufacturers who wished to advertise their products. The old farmhouse the family lived in was to be replaced by a new \$100,000 home. Reporters kept pressing for interviews so lawyers had to be employed to act as spokesmen for the family at press conferences. The event brought serious changes to the town itself. Plans were announced to build a huge new highway, as Aberdeen was now likely to attract thousands of tourists. Signposts erected on the outskirts of the town directed tourists not to Aberdeen, but to 'Quint-City U.S.A.' The local authorities discussed the possibility of erecting a 'quint museum' to satisfy the curiosity of the public and to protect the family from inquisitive tourists. While the five babies were still quietly sleeping in oxygen tents in a hospital nursery, their parents were paying the price for fame. It would never again be possible for them to lead normal lives. They had become the victims of commercialization, for their names had acquired a market value. The town itself received so much attention that almost *every one* of the inhabitants was affected to a greater or less degree.

Lesson46 Do it yourself

So great is our passion for doing things for ourselves, that we are becoming increasingly less dependent on specialized labour. No one can plead ignorance of a subject any longer, for there are countless do-it-yourself publications. Armed with the right tools and materials, newly-weds gaily embark on the task of decorating their own homes. Men of all ages spend hours of their leisure time installing their own fireplaces, laying-out their own gardens; building garages and making furniture. Some really keen enthusiasts go so far as to build their own record players and radio transmitters. Shops cater for the do-it-yourself craze not only by running special advisory services for novices, but by offering consumers bits and pieces which they can assemble at home. Such things provide an excellent outlet for pent-up creative energy, but unfortunately not all of us are born handymen.

Wives tend to believe that their husbands are infinitely resourceful and versatile. Even husbands who can hardly drive a nail in straight are supposed to be born electricians, carpenters, plumbers and mechanics. When lights fuse, furniture gets rickety, pipes get clogged, or vacuum cleaners fail to operate, wives automatically assume that their husbands will somehow put things right. The worst thing about the do-it-yourself game is that sometimes husbands live under the delusion that they can do anything even when they have been repeatedly proved wrong. It is a question of pride as much as anything else.

Last spring my wife suggested that I call in a man to look at our lawn-mower. It had broken down the previous summer, and though I promised to repair it, I had never got round to it. I would not hear of the suggestion and said that I would fix it myself. One Saturday afternoon, I hauled the machine into the garden and had a close look at it. As far as I could see, it only needed a minor adjustment: a turn of a screw here, a little tightening up there, a drop of oil and it would be as good as new. Inevitably the repair job was not quite so simple. The mower firmly refused to mow, so I decided to dismantle it. The garden was soon littered with chunks of metal which had once made up a lawn-mower. But I was

extremely pleased with myself. I had traced the cause of the trouble. One of the links in the chain that drives the wheels had snapped. After buying a new chain I was faced with the insurmountable task of putting the confusing jigsaw puzzle together again. I was not surprised to find that the machine still refused to work after I had reassembled it, for the simple reason that I was left with several curiously shaped bits of metal which did not seem to fit anywhere. I gave up in despair. The weeks passed and the grass grew. When my wife nagged me to do something about it, I told her that either I would have to buy a new mower or let the grass grow. Needless to say our house is now surrounded by a jungle. Buried somewhere in deep grass there is a rusting lawn-mower which I have promised to repair one day.

Lesson47 Through the earth's crust

Satellites orbiting round the earth have provided scientists with a vast amount of information about conditions in outer space. By comparison, relatively little is known about the internal structure of the earth. It has proved easier to go up than to go down. The deepest hole ever to be bored on land went down 25,340 feet--considerably less than the height of Mount Everest. Drilling a hole under the sea has proved to be even more difficult. The deepest hole bored under sea has been about 20,000 feet. Until recently, scientists have been unable to devise a drill which would be capable of cutting through hard rock at great depths. This problem has now been solved. Scientists have developed a method which sounds surprisingly simple. A new drill which is being tested at Leona Valley Ranch in Texas is driven by a turbine engine which is propelled by liquid mud pumped into it from the surface. As the diamond tip of the drill revolves, it is lubricated by mud. Scientists have been amazed to find that it can cut through the hardest rock with great ease. The drill has been designed to bore through the earth to a depth of 35,000 feet. It will enable scientists to obtain samples of the mysterious layer which lies immediately below the earth's crust. This layer is known as the Mohorovicic Discontinuity, but is commonly referred to as 'the Moho'. Before it is possible to drill this deep hole, scientists will have to overcome a number of problems. Geological tests will be carried out to find the point at which the earth's crust is thinnest. The three possible sites which are being considered are all at sea: two in the Atlantic Ocean and one in the Pacific. Once they have determined on a site, they will have to erect a drilling vessel which will not be swept away by ocean currents. The vessel will consist of an immense platform which will rise to 70 feet above the water. It will be supported by six hollow columns which will descend to a depth of 60 feet below the ocean surface where they will be fixed to a huge float. A tall steel tower rising to a height of nearly 200 feet will rest on the platform. The drill will be stored in the tower and will have to be lowered through about 15,000 feet of water before operations can begin. Within the tower, there will be a laboratory, living accommodation and a helicopter landing station. Keeping the platform in position at sea will give rise to further problems. To do this, scientists will have to devise methods using radar and underwater television. If, during the operations the drill has to be withdrawn, it must be possible to re-insert it. Great care will therefore have to be taken to keep the platform steady and make it strong enough to withstand hurricanes. If the project is successful, scientists will not only learn a great deal about the earth, but possibly about the nature of the universe itself.

Lesson48 The silent village

In this much-travelled world, there are still thousands of places which are inaccessible to tourists. We always assume that villagers in remote places are friendly and hospitable. But people who are cut off not only from foreign tourists, but even from their own countrymen can be hostile to travellers. Visits to really remote villages are seldom enjoyable--as my wife and I discovered during a tour through the Balkans.

We had spent several days in a small town and visited a number of old churches in the vicinity. These attracted many visitors for they were not only of great architectural interest, but contained a large number of beautifully preserved frescoes as well. On the day before our departure, several bus loads of tourists descended on the town. This was more than we could bear, so we decided to spend our last day exploring the countryside. Taking a path which led out of the town, we crossed a few fields until we came to a dense wood. We expected the path to end abruptly, but we found that it traced its way through the trees. We tramped through the wood for over two hours until we arrived at a deep stream. We could see that the path continued on the other side, but we had no idea how we could get across the stream. Suddenly my wife spotted a boat moored to the bank. In it there was a boatman fast asleep. We gently woke him up and asked him to ferry us to the other side. Though he was reluctant to do so at first, we eventually persuaded him to take us.

The path led to a tiny village perched on the steep sides of a mountain. The place consisted of a straggling unmade road which was lined on either side by small houses. Even under a clear blue sky, the village looked forbidding, as all the houses were built of grey mud bricks. The village seemed deserted, the only sign of life being an ugly-looking black goat tied to a tree on a short length of rope in a field nearby. Sitting down on a dilapidated wooden fence near the field, we opened a couple of tins of sardines and had a picnic lunch. All at once, I noticed that my wife seemed to be filled with alarm. Looking up I saw that we were surrounded by children in rags who were looking at us silently as we ate. We offered them food and spoke to them kindly, but they remained motionless. I concluded that they were simply shy of strangers. When we later walked down the main street of the village, we were followed by a silent procession of children. The village which had seemed deserted, immediately came to life. Faces appeared at windows. Men in shirt sleeves stood outside their houses and glared at us. Old women in black shawls peered at us from door-ways. The most frightening thing of all was that not a sound could be heard. There was no doubt that we were unwelcome visitors. We needed no further warning. Turning back down the main street, we quickened our pace and made our way rapidly towards the stream where we hoped the boatman was waiting.

Lesson49 The ideal servant

It is a good thing my aunt Harriet died years ago. If she were alive today she would not be able to air her views on her favourite topic of conversation: domestic servants. Aunt Harriet lived in that leisurely age when servants were employed to do housework. She had a huge, rambling country house called 'The Gables'. She was sentimentally attached to this house, for even though it was far too big for her needs, she persisted in living there long after her husband's death. Before she grew old, aunt Harriet used to entertain lavishly. I often visited The Gables when I was a boy. No matter how many guests were present, the great house was always immaculate. The parquet floors shone like mirrors; highly polished silver was displayed in gleaming glass cabinets; even my uncle's huge collection of books was kept miraculously free from dust. Aunt Harriet presided over an invisible army of servants that continuously scrubbed, cleaned, and

polished. She always referred to them as 'the shifting population', for they came and went with such frequency that I never even got a chance to learn their names. Though my aunt pursued what was, in those days, an enlightened policy in that she never allowed her domestic staff to work more than eight hours a day, she was extremely difficult to please. While she always decried the fickleness of human nature, she carried on an unrelenting search for the ideal servant to the end of her days, even after she had been sadly disillusioned by Bessie.

Bessie worked for aunt Harriet for three years. During that time she so gained my aunt's confidence, that she was put in charge of the domestic staff. Aunt Harriet could not find words to praise Bessie's industry and efficiency. In addition to all her other qualifications, Bessie was an expert cook. She acted the role of the perfect servant for three years before aunt Harriet discovered her 'little weakness'. After being absent from The Gables for a week, my aunt unexpectedly returned one afternoon with a party of guests and instructed Bessie to prepare dinner. Not only was the meal well below the usual standard, but Bessie seemed unable to walk steadily. She bumped into the furniture and kept mumbling about the guests. When she came in with the last course--a huge pudding--she tripped on the carpet and the pudding went flying through the air, narrowly missed my aunt, and crashed on the dining table with considerable force. Though this occasioned great mirth among the guests, aunt Harriet was horrified. She reluctantly came to the conclusion that Bessie was drunk. The guests had, of course, realized this from the moment Bessie opened the door for them and, long before the final catastrophe, had had a difficult time trying to conceal their amusement. The poor girl was dismissed instantly. After her departure, aunt Harriet discovered that there were piles of empty wine bottles of all shapes and sizes neatly stacked in what had once been Bessie's wardrobe. They had mysteriously found their way there from the wine-cellar!

Lesson50 New Year resolutions

The New Year is a time for resolutions. Mentally, at least, most of us could compile formidable lists of 'do's' and 'don'ts'. The same old favourites recur year in year out with monotonous regularity. We resolve to get up earlier each morning, eat less, find more time to play with the children, do a thousand and one jobs about the house, be nice to people we don't like, drive carefully, and take the dog for a walk every day. Past experience has taught us that certain accomplishments are beyond attainment. If we remain inveterate smokers, it is only because we have so often experienced the frustration that results from failure. Most of us fail in our efforts at self-improvement because our schemes are too ambitious and we never have time to carry them out. We also make the fundamental error of announcing our resolutions to everybody so that we look even more foolish when we slip back into our bad old ways. Aware of these pitfalls, this year I attempted to keep my resolutions to myself. I limited myself to twomodest ambitions: to do physical exercises every morning and to read more of an evening. An all-night party on New Year's Eve provided me with a good excuse for not carrying out either of these new resolutions on the first day of the year, but on the second, I applied myself assiduously to the task.

The daily exercises lasted only eleven minutes and I proposed to do them early in the morning before anyone had got up. The self-discipline required to drag myself out of bed eleven minutes earlier than usual was considerable. Nevertheless, I managed to creep down into the living-room for two days before anyone found me out. After jumping about on the carpet and twisting the human frame into uncomfortable positions, I sat down at

the breakfast table in an exhausted condition. It was this that betrayed me. The next morning the whole family trooped in to watch the performance. That was really unsettling but I fended off the taunts and jibes of the family good-humouredly and soon everybody got used to the idea. However, my enthusiasm waned. The time I spent at exercises gradually diminished. Little by little the eleven minutes fell to zero. By January 10th, I was back to where I had started from. I argued that if I spent less time exhausting myself at exercises in the morning I would keep my mind fresh for reading when I got home from work. Resisting the hypnotizing effect of television, I sat in my room for a few evenings with my eyes glued to a book. One night, however, feeling cold and lonely, I went downstairs and sat in front of the television pretending to read. That proved to be my undoing, for I soon got back to my old bad habit of dozing off in front of the screen. I still haven't given up my resolution to do more reading. In fact, I have just bought a book entitled 'How to Read a Thousand Words a Minute'. Perhaps it will solve my problem, but I just haven't had time to read it!

Lesson51 Automation

One of the greatest advances in modern technology has been the invention of computers. They are already widely used in industry and in universities and the time may come when it will be possible for ordinary people to use them as well. Computers are capable of doing extremely complicated work in all branches of learning. They can solve the most complex mathematical problems or put thousands of unrelated facts in order. These machines can be put to varied uses. For instance, they can provide information on the best way to prevent traffic accidents, or they can count the number of times the word 'and' has been used in the Bible. Because they work accurately and at high speeds, they save research workers years of hard work. This whole process by which machines can be used to work for us has been called automation. In the future, automation may enable human beings to enjoy far more leisure than they do today. The coming of automation is bound to have important social consequences.

Some time ago an expert on automation, Sir Leon Bagrit, pointed out that it was a mistake to believe that these machines could 'think'. There is no possibility that human beings will be 'controlled by machines'. Though computers are capable of learning from their mistakes and improving on their performance, they need detailed instructions from human beings in order to be able to operate. They can never, as it were, lead independent lives, or 'rule the world' by making decisions of their own.

Sir Leon said that in the future, computers would be developed which would be small enough to carry in the pocket. Ordinary people would then be able to use them to obtain valuable information. Computers could be plugged into a national network and be used like radios. For instance, people going on holiday could be informed about weather conditions; car drivers could be given alternative routes when there are traffic jams. It will also be possible to make tiny translating machines. This will enable people who do not share a common language to talk to each other without any difficulty or to read foreign publications. It is impossible to assess the importance of a machine of this sort, for many international misunderstandings are caused simply through our failure to understand each other. Computers will also be used in hospitals. By providing a machine with a patient's symptoms, a doctor will be able to diagnose the nature of his illness. Similarly, machines could be used to keep a check on a patient's health record and bring it up to date. Doctors will therefore have immediate access to a great many facts which will help them in their work. Book-keepers and accountants, too, could be relieved of dull

clerical work, for the tedious task of compiling and checking lists of figures could be done entirely by machines. Computers are the most efficient servants man has ever had and there is no limit to the way they can be used to improve our lives.

Lesson52 Mud is mud

My cousin, Harry, keeps a large curiously shaped bottle on permanent display in his study. Despite the fact that the bottle is tinted a delicate shade of green, an observant visitor would soon notice that it is filled with what looks like a thick, greyish substance. If you were to ask Harry what was in the bottle, he would tell you that it contained perfumed mud. If you expressed doubt or surprise, he would immediately invite you to smell it and then to rub some into your skin. This brief experiment would dispel any further doubts you might entertain. The bottle really does contain perfumed mud. How Harry came into the possession of this outlandish stuff makes an interesting story which he is fond of relating. Further-more, the acquisition of this bottle cured him of a bad habit he had been developing for years.

Harry used to consider it a great joke to go into expensive cosmetic shops and make outrageous requests for goods that do not exist. He would invent fanciful names on the spot. On entering a shop, he would ask for a new perfume called 'Scented Shadow' or for 'insoluble bath cubes'. If a shop girl told him she had not heard of it, he would pretend to be considerably put out. He loved to be told that one of his imaginary products was temporarily out of stock and he would faithfully promise to call again at some future date, but of course he never did. How Harry managed to keep a straight face during these performances is quite beyond me.

Harry does not need to be prompted to explain how he bought his precious bottle of mud. One day, he went to an exclusive shop in London and asked for 'Myrolite'. The shop assistant looked puzzled and Harry repeated the word, slowly stressing each syllable. When the girl shook her head in bewilderment, Harry went on to explain that 'myrolite' was a hard, amber-like substance which could be used to remove freckles. This explanation evidently conveyed something to the girl who searched shelf after shelf. She produced all sorts of weird concoctions, but none of them met with Harry's requirements. When Harry put on his act of being mildly annoyed, the girl promised to order some for him. Intoxicated by his success, Harry then asked for perfumed mud. He expected the girl to look at him in blank astonishment. However, it was his turn to be surprised, for the girl's eyes immediately lit up and she fetched several bottles which she placed on the counter for Harry to inspect. For once, Harry had to admit defeat. He picked up what seemed to be the smallest bottle and discreetly asked the price. He was glad to get away with a mere five guineas and he beat a hasty retreat, clutching the precious bottle under his arm. From then on, Harry decided that this little game he had invented might prove to be expensive. The curious bottle which now adorns the bookcase in his study was his first and last purchase of rare cosmetics.

Lesson53 In the public interest

The Scandinavian countries are much admired all over the world for their enlightened social policies. Sweden has evolved an excellent system for protecting the individual citizen from high-handed or incompetent public officers. The system has worked so well, that it has been adopted in other countries like Denmark, Norway, Finland, and New Zealand. Even countries with large populations like Britain and the United States are seriously considering imitating the Swedes.

The Swedes were the first to recognize that public officials like civil

servants, police officers, health inspectors or taxcollectors can make mistakes or act over-zealously in the belief that they are serving the public. As long ago as 1809, the Swedish Parliament introduced a scheme to safeguard the interest of the individual. A parliamentary committee representing all political parties appoints a person who is suitably qualified to investigate private grievances against the State. The official title of the person is 'Justiteombudsman', but the Swedes commonly refer to him as the 'J.O.' or 'Ombudsman'. The Ombudsman is not subject to political pressure. He investigates complaints large and small that come to him from all levels of society. As complaints must be made in writing, the Ombudsman receives an average of 1200 letters a year. He has eight lawyer assistants to help him and he examines every single letter in detail. There is nothing secretive about the Ombudsman's work, for his correspondence is open to public inspection. If a citizen's complaint is justified, the Ombudsman will act on his behalf. The action he takes varies according to the nature of the complaint. He may gently reprimand an official or even suggest to parliament that a law be altered. The following case is a typical example of the Ombudsman's work.

A foreigner living in a Swedish village wrote to the Ombudsman complaining that he had been ill-treated by the police, simply because he was a foreigner. The Ombudsman immediately wrote to the Chief of Police in the district asking him to send a record of the case. There was nothing in the record to show that the foreigner's complaint was justified and the Chief of Police stoutly denied the accusation. It was impossible for the Ombudsman to take action, but when he received a similar complaint from another foreigner in the same village, he immediately sent one of his lawyers to investigate the matter. The lawyer ascertained that a policeman had indeed dealt roughly with foreigners on several occasions. The fact that the policeman was prejudiced against foreigners could not be recorded in his official files. It was only possible for the Ombudsman to find this out by sending one of his representatives to check the facts. The policeman in question was severely reprimanded and was informed that if any further complaints were lodged against him, he would be prosecuted. The Ombudsman's prompt action at once put an end to an unpleasant practice which might have gone unnoticed.

Lesson 54 Instinct or cleverness?

We have been brought up to fear insects. We regard them as unnecessary creatures that do more harm than good. Man continually wages war on them, for they contaminate his food, carry diseases, or devour his crops. They sting or bite without provocation; they fly uninvited into our rooms on summer nights, or beat against our lighted windows. We live in dread not only of unpleasant insects like spiders or wasps, but of quite harmless ones like moths. Reading about them increases our understanding without dispelling our fears. Knowing that the industrious ant lives in a highly organized society does nothing to prevent us from being filled with revulsion when we find hordes of them crawling over a carefully prepared picnic lunch. No matter how much we like honey, or how much we have read about the uncanny sense of direction which bees possess, we have a horror of being stung. Most of our fears are unreasonable, but they are impossible to erase. At the same time, however, insects are strangely fascinating. We enjoy reading about them, especially when we find that, like the praying mantis, they lead perfectly horrible lives. We enjoy staring at them, entranced as they go about their business, unaware (we hope) of our presence. Who has not stood in awe at the sight of a spider pouncing on a fly, or a column of ants triumphantly bearing home an enormous dead beetle?

Last summer I spent days in the garden watching thousands of ants crawling up the trunk of my prize peach tree. The tree has grown against a warm wall on a sheltered side of the house. I am especially proud of it, not only because it has survived several severe winters, but because it occasionally produces luscious peaches. During the summer, I noticed that the leaves of the tree were beginning to wither. Clusters of tiny insects called aphides were to be found on the underside of the leaves. They were visited by a large colony of ants which obtained a sort of honey from them. I immediately embarked on an experiment which, even though it failed to get rid of the ants, kept me fascinated for twenty-four hours. I bound the base of the tree with sticky tape, making it impossible for the ants to reach the aphides. The tape was so sticky that they did not dare to cross it. For a long time, I watched them scurrying around the base of the tree in bewilderment. I even went out at midnight with a torch and noted with satisfaction (and surprise) that the ants were still swarming around the sticky tape without being able to do anything about it. I got up early next morning hoping to find that the ants had given up in despair. Instead, I saw that they had discovered a new route. They were climbing up the wall of the house and then on to the leaves of the tree. I realized sadly that I had been completely defeated by their ingenuity. The ants had been quick to find an answer to my thoroughly unscientific methods!

Lesson55 From the earth: greetings

Radio astronomy has greatly increased our understanding of the universe. Radio telescopes have one big advantage over conventional telescopes in that they can operate in all weather conditions and can pick up signals coming from very distant stars. These signals are produced by colliding stars or nuclear reactions in outer space. The most powerful signals that have been received have been emitted by what seem to be truly colossal stars which scientists have named 'quasars'. A better understanding of these phenomena may completely alter our conception of the nature of the universe. The radio telescope at Jodrell Bank in England was for many years the largest in the world. A new telescope, over twice the size, was recently built at Sugar Grove in West Virginia.

Astronomers no longer regard as fanciful the idea that they may one day pick up signals which have been sent by intelligent beings on other worlds. This possibility gives rise to interesting speculations. Highly advanced civilizations may have existed on other planets long before intelligent forms of life evolved on the earth. Conversely, intelligent beings which are just beginning to develop on remote worlds may be ready to pick up our signals in thousands of years' time, or when life on earth has become extinct. Such speculations no longer belong to the realm of science fiction, for astronomers are now exploring the chances of communicating with living creatures (if they exist) on distant planets. This undertaking which has been named Project Ozma was begun in 1960, but it may take a great many years before results are obtained.

Aware of the fact that it would be impossible to wait thousands or millions of years to receive an answer from a distant planet, scientists engaged in Project Ozma are concentrating their attention on stars which are relatively close. One of the most likely stars is Tau Ceti which is eleven light years away. If signals from the earth were received by intelligent creatures on a planet circling this star, we would have to wait twenty-two years for an answer. The Green Bank telescope in West Virginia has been specially designed to distinguish between random signals and signals which might be in code. Even if contact were eventually established, astronomers would not be able to rely on language to communicate with other beings. They would use mathematics as this is the

only truly universal language. Numbers have the same value anywhere. For this reason, intelligent creatures in any part of the universe would be able to understand a simple arithmetical sequence. They would be able to reply to our signals using similar methods. The next step would be to try to develop means for sending television pictures. A single picture would tell us more than thousands of words. In an age when anything seems to be possible, it would be narrow-minded in the extreme to ridicule these attempts to find out if there is life in other parts of the universe.

Lesson56 The river beside our farm

The river which forms the eastern boundary of our farm has always played an important part in our lives. Without it we could not make a living. There is only enough spring water to supply the needs of the house, so we have to pump from the river for farm use. We tell the river all our secrets. We know instinctively, just as beekeepers with their bees, that misfortune might overtake us if the important events of our lives were not related to it.

We have special river birthday parties in the summer. Sometimes we go upstream to a favourite backwater, sometimes we have our party at the boathouse, which a predecessor of ours at the farm built in the meadow hard by the deepest pool for swimming and diving. In a heat-wave we choose a midnight birthday party and that is the most exciting of all. We welcome the seasons by the river-side, crowning the youngest girl with flowers in the spring, holding a summer festival on Midsummer Eve, giving thanks for the harvest in the autumn, and throwing a holly wreath into the current in the winter.

After a long period of rain the river may overflow its banks. This is a rare occurrence as our climate seldom goes to extremes. We are lucky in that only the lower fields, which make up a very small proportion of our farm, are affected by flooding, but other farms are less favourably sited, and flooding can sometimes spell disaster for their owners.

One bad winter we watched the river creep up the lower meadows. All the cattle had been moved into stalls and we stood to lose little. We were, however, worried about our nearest neighbours, whose farm was low lying and who were newcomers to the district. As the floods had put the telephone out of order, we could not find out how they were managing. From an attic window we could get a sweeping view of the river where their land joined ours, and at the most critical juncture we took turns in watching that point. The first sign of disaster was a dead sheep floating down. Next came a horse, swimming bravely, but we were afraid that the strength of the current would prevent its landing anywhere before it became exhausted. Suddenly a raft appeared, looking rather like Noah's ark, carrying the whole family, a few hens, the dogs, a cat, and a bird in a cage. We realized that they must have become unduly frightened by the rising flood, for their house, which had sound foundations, would have stood stoutly even if it had been almost submerged. The men of our family waded down through our flooded meadows with boathooks, in the hope of being able to grapple a corner of the raft and pull it out of the current towards our bank. We still think it a miracle that they were able to do so.

Lesson57 The return of the native

I stopped to let the car cool off and to study the map. I had expected to be near my objective by now, but everything still seemed alien to me. I was only five when my father had taken me abroad, and that was eighteen years ago. When my mother had died after a tragic accident, he did not quickly recover from the shock and loneliness. Everything around him was

full of her presence, continually re-opening the wound. So he decided to emigrate. In the new country he became absorbed in making a new life for the two of us, so that he gradually ceased to grieve. He did not marry again and I was brought up without a woman's care; but I lacked for nothing, for he was both father and mother to me. He always meant to go back one day, but not to stay. His roots and mine had become too firmly embedded in the new land. But he wanted to see the old folk again and to visit my mother's grave. He became mortally ill a few months before we had planned to go and, when he knew that he was dying, he made me promise to go on my own.

I hired a car the day after landing and bought a comprehensive book of maps, which I found most helpful on the cross country journey, but which I did not think I should need on the last stage. It was not that I actually remembered anything at all. But my father had described over and over again what we should see at every milestone, after leaving the nearest town, so that I was positive I should recognize it as familiar territory. Well, I had been wrong, for I was now lost.

I looked at the map and then at the milometer. I had come ten miles since leaving the town, and at this point, according to my father, I should be looking at farms and cottages in a valley, with the spire of the church of our village showing in the far distance. I could see no valley, no farms, no cottages and no church spire--only a lake. I decided that I must have taken a wrong turning somewhere. So I drove back to the town and began to retrace the route, taking frequent glances at the map. I landed up at the same corner. The curious thing was that the lake was not marked on the map. I felt as if I had stumbled into a nightmare country, as you sometimes do in dreams. And, as in a nightmare, there was nobody in sight to help me. Fortunately for me, as I was wondering what to do next, there appeared on the horizon a man on horseback, riding in my direction. I waited till he came near, then I asked him the way to our old village. He said that there was now no village. I thought he must have misunderstood me, so I repeated its name. This time he pointed to the lake. The village no longer existed because it had been submerged, and all the valley too. The lake was not a natural one, but a man made reservoir.

Lesson58 A little spot of bother

The old lady was glad to be back at the block of flats where she lived. Her shopping had tired her and her basket had grown heavier with every step of the way home. In the lift her thoughts were on lunch and a good rest; but when she got out at her own floor, both were forgotten in her sudden discovery that her front door was open. She was thinking that she must reprimand her daily maid the next morning for such a monstrous piece of negligence, when she remembered that she had gone shopping after the maid had left and she knew that she had turned both keys in their locks. She walked slowly into the hall and at once noticed that all the room doors were open, yet following her regular practice she had shut them before going out. Looking into the drawing room, she saw a scene of confusion over by her writing desk. It was as clear as daylight then that burglars had forced an entry during her absence. Her first impulse was to go round all the rooms looking for the thieves, but then she decided that at her age it might be more prudent to have someone with her, so she went to fetch the porter from his basement. By this time her legs were beginning to tremble, so she sat down and accepted a cup of very strong tea, while he telephoned the police. Then, her composure regained, she was ready to set off with the porter's assistance to search for any intruders who might still be lurking in her flat. They went through the rooms, being careful to touch nothing, as they did

not want to hinder the police in their search for fingerprints. The chaos was inconceivable. She had lived in the flat for thirty years and was a veritable magpie at hoarding; and it seemed as though everything she possessed had been tossed out and turned over and over. At least sorting out the things she should have discarded years ago was now being made easier for her. Then a police inspector arrived with a constable and she told them of her discovery of the ransacked flat. The inspector began to look for fingerprints, while the constable checked that the front door locks had not been forced, thereby proving that the burglars had either used skeleton keys or entered over the balcony. There was no trace of fingerprints, but the inspector found a dirty red bundle that contained jewellery which the old lady said was not hers. So their entry into this flat was apparently not the burglars' first job that day and they must have been disturbed. The inspector then asked the old lady to try to check what was missing by the next day and advised her not to stay alone in the flat for a few nights. The old lady thought he was a fussy creature, but since the porter agreed with him, she rang up her daughter and asked for her help in what she described as a little spot of bother.

Lesson59 Possession amassing and collecting

People tend to amass possessions, sometimes without being aware of doing so. Indeed they can have a delightful surprise when they find something useful which they did not know they owned. Those who never have to change house become indiscriminate collectors of what can only be described as clutter. They leave unwanted objects in drawers, cupboards and attics for years, in the belief that they may one day need just those very things. As they grow old, people also accumulate belongings for two other reasons, lack of physical and mental energy, both of which are essential in turning out and throwing away, and sentiment. Things owned for a long time are full of associations with the past, perhaps with relatives who are dead, and so they gradually acquire a value beyond their true worth. Some things are collected deliberately in the home in an attempt to avoid waste. Among these I would list string and brown paper, kept by thrifty people when a parcel has been opened, to save buying these two requisites. Collecting small items can easily become a mania. I know someone who always cuts out from newspapers sketches of model clothes that she would like to buy, if she had the money. As she is not rich, the chances that she will ever be able to afford such purchases are remote; but she is never sufficiently strongminded to be able to stop the practice. It is a harmless habit, but it litters up her desk to such an extent that every time she opens it, loose bits of paper fall out in every direction. Collecting as a serious hobby is quite different and has many advantages. It provides relaxation for leisure hours, as just looking at one's treasures is always a joy. One does not have to go outside for amusement, since the collection is housed at home. Whatever it consists of, stamps, records, first editions of books, china, glass, antique furniture, pictures, model cars, stuffed birds, toy animals, there is always something to do in connection with it, from finding the right place for the latest addition to verifying facts in reference books. This hobby educates one not only in the chosen subject, but also in general matters which have some bearing on it. There are also other benefits. One wants to meet like-minded collectors, to get advice, to compare notes, to exchange articles, to show off the latest find. So one's circle of friends grows. Soon the hobby leads to travel, perhaps to a meeting in another town, possibly a trip abroad in search of a rare specimen, for collectors are not confined to any onecountry. Over the years one may well become an authority on one's hobby and will very probably be asked to give informal

talks to little gatherings and then, if successful, to larger audiences. In this way self-confidence grows, first from mastering a subject, then from being able to talk about it. Collecting, by occupying spare time so constructively, makes a person contented, with no time for boredom.

Lesson60 The importance of punctuality

Punctuality is a necessary habit in all public affairs of a civilized society. Without it, nothing could ever be brought to a conclusion; everything would be in a state of chaos. Only in a sparsely-populated rural community is it possible to disregard it. In ordinary living there can be some tolerance of unpunctuality. The intellectual, who is working on some abstruse problem, has everything coordinated and organized for the matter in hand. He is therefore forgiven, if late for a dinner party. But people are often reproached for unpunctuality when their only fault is cutting things fine. It is hard for energetic, quick-minded people to waste time, so they are often tempted to finish a job before setting out to keep an appointment. If no accidents occur on the way, like punctured tyres, diversions of traffic, sudden descent of fog, they will be on time. They are often more industrious, useful citizens than those who are never late. The over-punctual can be as much a trial to others as the unpunctual. The guest who arrives half an hour too soon is the greatest nuisance. Some friends of my family had this irritating habit. The only thing to do was ask them to come half an hour later than the other guests. Then they arrived just when we wanted them.

If you are catching a train, it is always better to be comfortably early than even a fraction of a minute too late. Although being early may mean wasting a little time, this will be less than if you miss the train and have to wait an hour or more for the next one; and you avoid the frustration of arriving at the very moment when the train is drawing out of the station and being unable to get on it. An even harder situation is to be on the platform in good time for a train and still to see it go off without you. Such an experience befell a certain young girl the first time she was travelling alone.

She entered the station twenty minutes before the train was due, since her parents had impressed upon her that it would be unforgivable to miss it and cause the friends with whom she was going to stay to make two journeys to meet her. She gave her luggage to a porter and showed him her ticket. To her horror he said that she was two hours too soon. She felt in her handbag for the piece of paper on which her father had written down all the details of the journey and gave it to the porter. He agreed that a train did come into the station at the time on the paper and that it did stop, but only to take on water, not passengers. The girl asked to see a timetable, feeling sure that her father could not have made such a mistake. The porter went to fetch one and arrived back with the stationmaster, who produced it with a flourish and pointed out a microscopic 'o' beside the time of the arrival of the train at his station; this little 'o' indicated that the train only stopped for water. Just as that moment the train came into the station. The girl, tears streaming down her face, begged to be allowed to slip into the guard's van. But the stationmaster was adamant: rules could not be broken. And she had to watch that train disappear towards her destination while she was left behind.