ALIVE—ALIVE OH!

IT has long been apparent to the discerning that in this country to be a poet—or, at any rate, a good one—is a rash, a hazardous, activity. It may be that there are critics who will object to this doctrine, who will urge that, for example, Byron, Keats and Shelley were not driven from their native land, but quitted it of their own accord, gladly even. Nevertheless it cannot be disputed that these three most remarkable Englishmen of their day preferred to spend their last years, or months, in a foreign country. Whether hounded out to die or themselves eager to go, they went: that is sufficient. Nor will it be disputed, one imagines, that since their passing weak health has come to be demanded as first token, an early death as final guarantee, of poetic genius.

Historically, the death of the three poets I have mentioned was divided by no very great interval of years from that of Nelson, who had first framed in burning words the national conception: "England expects that every man will do his duty." Once this doctrine had been formulated, the part of the poet in the community immediately became defined and acknowledged: it was to die young. Surely, too, he must be, not only willing, but anxious to aid

those critics who spend so much of their time in helping him? A post-mortem is always more certain than diagnosis (vivisection, though it would be a more complete solving of the difficulty, is at present forbidden on human beings, even on artists), and it is inevitably easier to spot a dead poet than one alive and kicking. Moreover, once the man is removed, the critics, like so many calamaries, can surround the body of his work with such a cloud of ink that it soon becomes impossible to distinguish its essential features. Thus it must be admitted that more has been written about Shakespeare since his death than ever in his lifetime, albeit his plays are more seldom performed: and that the mass of critical footnotes that, much as parasites cling to an animal, encrust the text of every classic does not make it any the easier to read.

Yet when all these arguments have been stated, there are still to be found those willing—or, if not willing, obliged—to pay the penalty of genius. Perhaps, just as the great whales have, during the last century, transformed their tactics with the object of making the hunting of them the more perilous, so the poet may have become better, if more difficult, sport. I know not. But surely some facts of this kind can be deduced from the story of Joseph Bundle, the Georgian poet, and of his untimely death; that true though tragic narrative, which, never before told in full, I now propose to relate.

There must, of course, be others who have survived these long years: there must be others who recall, as I do, the aureole of fame which once emanated

from those four inspiring syllables—Joseph Bundle. It was some fifty years ago toward the end of the First European War, and in the lustrum following its conclusion, that they reached their fullest effulgence. Yet even before that splendid culmination to diplomacy —one, of course, to which no Englishman can ever look back without experiencing a physical tingle of pride at the magnitude of the national efforts and its resultant losses—had been reached, the name Bundle was one of a growing celebrity, a sound seldom off the lisping lips of the more cultured. Nor was it difficult to comprehend why such a coruscation issued from the very music of these syllables. Everything about Bundle, everything that concerned him, was romantic, mysterious. Apart from his altogether exceptional knowledge of bird-life (the only other qualification, besides ill-health and its latent promise of an early decease, that is demanded by the public as essential in an English poet), it was understood from the very beginning that in some peculiar, almost mystic, way he was not only connected, but positively identified with the soil of Sussex, whether chalk or clay: that, like Venus arising from her shell, borne in by the racing, foam-flecked horses of the tides, so had Bundle been discovered by Mattie Dean* and other *literati* —though, of course, fully dressed and more conventionally educated—cradled in some half-hidden juniper-bush on the Downs.

And this impression of secret contact with Mother Earth that he induced was not misleading, for he was

* For full description of Mattie, though when he is some years older, see the name-story in "Triple Fugue."

in reality—and he kept it skilfully concealed—the son of a prosperous doctor in Shoreham, and though he had been, as it were, born with a silver thermometer in his mouth, this was indeed due to the united action of the Sussex soil, and its faithful ally, Winter, upon the tubes, livers and lungs of wealthy old ladies in the neighbourhood. This same rich hibernal harvest it was that had supported the expense of his excellent education, and that had finally enabled him to study for a year at that Dramatic Academy where he had acquired the pleasant, rustic burr of his speech—a burr which never deserted him and much enhanced his popularity with those crowds of nature-lovers immured in cities—though I have heard a cavilling native purist denounce it as more Somerset than Sussex

His appearance, too, fitted him admirably for the part he had so judiciously chosen. Its chief attribute, and that most responsible for his early success, was a perhaps deceptive effect of extreme physical delicacy. And then, hollow-cheeked and hollow-chested though he was, yet with the deepset brightness of his eyes, the curve of nose and chin, the long body and rather anomalous legs, he suggested—and what could be more appropriate?—a bird—the Bird of Wisdom, the Athenian Owl. At this period the old-fashioned poetic preciosity he exhibited was comparatively little. He to a greater degree cultivated, on the other hand, a you - don't - mind - if - I - slap - you - on - the - back - though - I've - just - been - cleaning - my - Ford - car heartiness of manner that must have been somewhat disconcerting at first to those esthetes accustomed to

a more lilied artificiality. But this soon earned him a reputation for being simple, and unaffected. He encouraged his intimates, too, to call him "Joe" rather than Joseph, Joe Bundle, so that his name might link up with those of Will Shakespeare, Ben Jonson and Kit Marlowe, and was wont to drink ale in almost too Mermaidenly a manner. In all he said or did there was a smack of the soil—a smack so pronounced as almost to constitute a "knock-out." Yet though at the beginning of his career he valiantly upheld what he conceived to be the Elizabethan ideals of beer, sweet and rich, full-mouthed, full-blooded, English—a girl, for example, was always to him a wench—yet he was capable of modifying his affectation to his environment. Thus, were one to inquire of those who remember him, one would be given many varying and apparently contradictory accounts of him. For the Mermaid Tavern rôle was only the chief of the several he could play: indeed, his appearance of ill-health tugged in an exactly contrary direction, never allowed him entirely to forget Keats, or Shelley either as for that: and often even in those days, working as it might be on a sort of spiritual second gear, he would open his collar romantically for a day or two and dart liquid fire out of his eyes: while in after years, when clamorous critics had so obviously given him his cue, and when he had at last come to realize the full significance of his destiny, he was seldom seen except in this other part.

Bundle's first volume of verse, which was published some time in the year preceding the war, had won for him a swift and gratifying recognition, for the poems

combined many familiar and therefore delightful ingredients; a sound bottom of Cowper and Wordsworth (Clare was to come later), a little Marlowe, a hint of Shelley, a dash of Marvell, with Keats's beaded bubbles winking at the brim, all shaken together by the local village idiot and served up very cold with a plate of bird-seed to accompany it. The slight foaming which resulted was Bundle's own contribution. Yet in all this there was nothing to startle or affright, everything was soothing and of the kind to which one was accustomed. Indeed, the most sensational feature of the first book was its success. "The critics," quoted the publishers, "are unanimous in hailing an English poet not unworthy of his forbears." And Mattie Dean, who, since he did their reading for them by some process of substituted service, had long been the arbiter of things poetic in a thousand drawing-rooms, became so excited and overwrought by the book that he read two poems from it aloud after dinner to three Cabinet Ministers (two of whom had never heard a poem before); their wives, whose quarrelling was so suddenly stilled by this shrill, sweet piping that they even forgot, for a moment, how the score of the evening stood; a young priest singular for his journalistic wit—one, that is to say, the existence of which only journalists could perceive; an old lady who in her young days had been painted by Burne-Jones and had never since allowed anyone to forget it; a middle-aged woman who had sat to Sargent for her portrait thirteen times and had since been able to remember nothing else; two celebrated, serious-minded

but dreadfully bad actresses of musical comedy, who said "sweet-sweet" and "I call that clever" throughout the recitation; an esthetic general with very white antennæ; a mad, canary-coloured hostess from Paris, the only possible explanation of whose appearance must have been that she had, by some obvious mistake, been interned in a home for lunatic children and had escaped with one of their dresses as her only wear; the literary editor of a literary weekly, very mousey, with the furtive eyes of the school-sneak and hair which had just greyed in time to impart an almost distinguished expression to his rather mean features; the actual editor, who more resembled another public-school type, the fat-boy-bully; two young artists, naïve and surprised; and the Burne-Jones's lady's athletic granddaughter, rather large and "out-of-it-all," and whose only interest was in breeding dachshunds. "Eckthquithite," pronounced Mattie, "thucth marvellouth understhanding of birdth." And, indeed, his delicious twittering of the two poems had been so soft and feeling that it had sounded like a flight of young starlings. Everyone was glad to accept Mattie's judgment.

The heralds went forth, and Bundle's name was securely established in nature-loving Mayfair. For Mattie, as we have had occasion to point out before, when genuinely enthusiastic would spare himself—and others—no pains.

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Then the War came, and to the recipe which he had already invented, Bundle now added a very personal

brand of pseudo-maternity—as if there were not in the world at that moment already enough suffering mothers. He seemed to have appointed himself as a sort of literary *Maraine*, a synthetic Mother, not only to the men under him (he was a lieutenant now) but to all the troops everywhere. Oh, the hidden, the haunting, sob of Motherhood which convulses every line in these new poems! A few simple onomatopoeic devices were introduced, in addition, to produce an impression of the "real thing." The old gentlemen of literature—and all the old ladies too—went wild about his work. He became the Head Boy of the Younger School. Old women read his poems aloud to one another at sock-knitting parties, young ladies edited anthologies solely so as to have an excuse for writing to him, in various schools the masters made their pupils learn them by heart, and all of them were set to music, and sung whenever possible at every charity concert. And each time they were read, sung, or recited there was a glow at the heart. For Bundle was at the front. There was something glorious, wasn't there, in giving of our best?

It can be imagined, then, that it was not without apprehension that the elders received tidings that their new favourite had been invalided back to England. There was almost a slump—but soon a firmer tone established itself. For he was in a bad way, it was said, a really bad way. Not only was he suffering from shell-shock, but he had broken his leg for the cause. Well—well—well. It was an inspiring example. "Always knew the boy would do us credit." But there was a certain vagueness as to

the particulars of the valiant act responsible for this physical and mental damage.

Quite by chance, however, I was to learn the details. And here I should like to confess that from the very beginning I always felt about everything connected with the poet a singular curiosity, as though his career was in some way very specially my own affair. It was as if some prophetic instinct had warned me that alone of his contemporaries I should see this life, and see it whole. And as though he in his turn felt some responding chord he would, when I was present, often address to myself his remarks on life and literature.

One day, then, I was standing up at the bar, drinking a cocktail, when I noticed next to me an officer leaning with an air of negligent elegance across it, occasionally emitting a loud laugh, and jerking back his out-turned, angular arms with a marked effect of dalliance, as he flashed his eye-glass over the polished wood barrier that divided them at the rotund and purple lady, much powdered so that she seemed built in layers of white and purple Turkish delight, who served the drinks. She, in her turn, was semaphoring back her pleasure at his sallies with a flashing, golden tooth. In spite of the no doubt numerous years she had spent behind the bar, heavy curls of farmyard laughter hung about her in the smoke-stained air, and struck answering notes out of the thousand bottles (each one stuck with an allied flag) behind her, while from above the fat golden cupids of the 'nineties peered curiously down. "Well, you are a one," she was pronouncing, "but still I always say that all you boys are like that

naow It's the war 'as done it." Watching them, as he began to speak I recognized in the jaunty figure at my side an officer whom I had known slightly in France, and who had belonged to that very unit to which Bundle had been attached as artillery-observer. Thus it was very resolutely that I broke in on this gallant conversation, and after a few preliminary greetings, inquired 'about the poet. Those were heroic days, in which men had forged for themselves a language in keeping with their deeds. I therefore transcribe in his own words this eye-witness's narrative, otherwise it may seem as though a certain savour had been allowed to evaporate from it. Moreover, though looked back on, it seems a queer, stern, concentrated tongue, it yet gives the atmosphere of reality more than can any words of mine. "I hear Bundle's got shell-shock," I said. "I'm so sorry." "Doncher believe it, old bean," my friend replied. "If he ever had, it must have been before the war—must have brought it with him. But I don't mind telling you how he broke that damned-lower-limb of his. We were billeted in an old farmhouse, a mile or two behind the lines. It was just before luncheon on Christmas Eve, about one pip-emma; Bundle was on the roof observing. All the rest of us were having sherry inside. The Colonel, not a bad old bird, had been having one or two lately: but that day he was quite cheery. He was just saying: 'Well, boys, there'll be no Father Christmas down the chimney this year to fill our stockings,' when there was a blasted crash down the bloody chimney, and out of a blinking cloud of soot came

that mingy blighter Bundle. My word, the Old Man was upset! Thought he'd got 'em again, he did. Knocked the blooming glass straight out of his funny old hand. My word, that was Tootaloo for Bundle—a fair tinkety-tonk, I assure you. What had happened was that the poor boy had seen one of those ruddy birds he pretends to be so fond of, and had stepped back suddenly and down the chimney without looking. We did have a Christmas-and-a-half, I can tell you. Well, chin-chin, cheerio, so long, old boy"—and delicately selecting a clove, he continued his interrupted conversation across the bar.

After this adventure, Bundle's war-poems became more tenderly blood-thirsty than ever. A new volume soon made its appearance, for which it was claimed by the publishers in their advertisements—and rightly—"This little book of poems has swept the critics clean off their critical feet." Nor were eye and brain for a moment allowed to enter in. They had been eagerly scanning the bloodshot horizon for a Great War Poet (only he must be after a certain model) and now they had found him. Just as, though Generals are always prepared for war, it is never the next, but always, alas! the last, one for which they are ready, so are critics invariably prepared for the reception of a great poet. In the days of Keats they had looked earnestly out from their high watch-towers, anxious to acclaim another Dryden: similarly, in 1917, they were determined not to allow Keats or Shelley to escape them. And now they had captured him. The sensitive feet grew weaker and weaker from enthusiasm. A week before they had proclaimed

Bundle only as an embryonic Milton: to-day he was a full-fledged Keats.

Yet even now the young poet was as far as ever from seeing whither the path he trod, so blithely yet yearningly, would lead him. Milton, it is true, had lived out his span before the rule that immortal singers must die young had been established. Blindness was all that had been required of him. But when, amid the universal acclamations, Joe Bundle was compared to Keats, he ought to have searched diligently for the cause of such exceptional popularity: he ought, then, surely, to have understood the fate immanent in it. Had he read "The Golden Bough" all would have been plain to him. For in those pages we read much of a custom, a common custom more usual among the primitive races, but which was to be studied in its most extravagant development in the ancient civilization of Mexico. In that world of remote and fantastic beauty, where the great cities stood on lakes in the craters of the high mountains, and the white-clothed walkers in the streets, instead of leading dogs behind them on a chain are said to have been accompanied by brilliantly-plumaged song-birds that fluttered and leapt and sang above, attached to the outstretched hand by a coloured ribbon; where the flowering was so intense that one blossom when it opened exploded with such violence that it even shattered the houses that gave it shelter; in that civilization so strange yet so pronounced, there were many features which strike us as revoltingly barbaric because we cannot at first find for them any parallel. Thus it is with a feeling of horror that we discover

that one man, picked for his type of looks and for his talent, was chosen by the priests and elders each year for the purpose of human sacrifice: but first, for twelve long, golden months, he was Emperor and Dictator, was invested with powers of life and death, not merely over the nobles and the people, but also over the priests, those very persons who had appointed him to his fate. Unimaginable wealth, countless wives, were at his disposal, every whim of his must be obeyed, every wish gratified. But always underlying the beauty and power was the ineluctable condition—Death. Every morning that he rode out with falcons and a retinue to the chase, while the snowy summits of the mountain towered above to temper for him with their ice the heat of the crystal-clear days, every night that, wearing a golden or jade crown from which whirled the dyed plumes of Mexico, he feasted among the flowers, brought his terrible end so many hours the nearer. The gods were inexorable: and soon his young, red blood would spout into the blue air, stain the vast and garlanded stone altar, and drip down to the terraces below, while the crowds who now cheered his progress, would shout their joy to the heaven and struggle to dip a corner of their garments in his blood. So, too, it was to be for Joseph Bundle.

The priests of literature had selected him and now with varying degrees of patience awaited the end. Yet not for a moment did he feel the thorns clasping his brow under the very mutable roses with which he appeared to be crowned. He sometimes, it is true, had a queer lurking impression that something was

expected of him: but what was it? He reached no conclusion. Meanwhile he still existed in the full glory of his brief reign, the full tide of his temporary infallibility.

Yet it would not be correct to think that the priests were entirely displeased at his return. Theirs was a far, far higher standard of culture and kindliness than that of their prototypes in ancient Mexico. From their point of view an early death from tuberculosis ranked higher than a mere name in the Roll of Honour (for that was a very common fate just then): while, if peace were not too long delayed, a peace-time death would be more effective, and much more creditable to those who had sponsored him. Certainly if he could not die then he should have sought his end at the War. But luck favoured him: his appearance of frailty had accentuated itself, and now won for him a job in the Ministry of Propaganda. And here, too, the results were very satisfactory. As a casualty, he could, after all, only have been one in a million: but now his name was worked-up into that mysterious thing, a "clarion-call," and through his hysterical advocacy thousands of boys of eighteen were induced to look on a war as a virtue and thus to meet their deaths happily.

His most famous poem (which was not only recited on every possible occasion in England, but was even read aloud to neutrals, whenever they could be induced to listen, in Sweden, Holland, and Denmark, as propaganda to impress them with our genius, to show them "what England is doing") was that one—is it forgotten now?—in which a fortunately imaginary Mother

carries on a quiet imaginary conversation with her dying son.

MOTHER:

Even such gentle things as birds and mice
Must pay the fair, the final sacrifice,
And, though the way be hard, you'll see it through
Remembering that Mother follows you.

SON:

But did I love you, Mother, had I love
Ever but that for brothers now above?
I have forgotten—ooh—ah—It is done.
(Rat-tat-tat of rifles—A bullet spun.
Rattery-tat-rattety-tat-tat of machine gun.)
Oh, Captain Donkyns—good-bye, Sir—the sun
Declines . . . I must away—is that a swallow
That blithely (chirrup) leaps and I must follow?

Such poems further endeared him to the great-big-baby-heart of the public. They sold by the thousand. He, though still ambitious, was content: while the literary hierarchs had what seemed the certainty of his death to look forward to at no very distant date. (Then, what junketings beside the tomb, what jubilant trumpetings through the Press, what perfumed bouquets to those who had discovered him!)

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The War ended, and it was now that Bundle really proved his cleverness. Within a month or two of its conclusion, he had converted the large munition works over which his Muse had so long presided to peace-time service. He succeeded, as it were, in beating his literary sword back into a rusty ploughshare. Sussex came into its own again. He offered a special line in birds, fresh-water fish, and saying good-bye to bull-dogs. Now that he was by circumstance com-

pelled to abandon that maternal note toward the troops which he had adopted, his innate humanity directed itself instead toward the old people in alehouse and workhouse. In fact, he skipped a generation, and became a spiritual and synthetic grandmother. At times, too, the *vox humana* of sexual frenzy dying down to a deep roll of Byronic disappointment was allowed to make itself heard, but never *too* often or *too* obtrusively. The factory must have been working all hands and twenty-four hours a day. It issued continually new books of poems, received everywhere with the usual ecstasy. Then was announced the news that Mr. Joseph Bundle was at work on his FIRST PROSE BOOK. "For that England which cares for literature," the paragraph added, "it is an event for which to wait with bated breath." Critical feet must have been in a state of presumably almost painful suspended animation. The day came, the book appeared and was, just as I had expected, extremely, beautifully simple, though full of whimsey and rising, indeed, at the end to a climax of tragedy.

The story concerned Shelley. In it he was represented not, as in reality, drowning at sea (that was merely a ruse of his to escape from the world), but, instead, as going home to Sussex to become a shepherd on the downs. He lived, it appeared, to a ripe old age, but eventually was made to lose his teeth. Anxious to preserve his looks, and not altogether to lose his power of conversation (he was always talking with the other shepherds, and had, as time passed, instinctively adopted the Sussex dialect), yet nervous, naturally enough, at having to face a local dentist

after shunning the world for so long, he decided to contrive a false set for himself: thus, after k.lling a sheep, he took its jaws and adapted them to his own. But since sheep have some forty odd teeth to the human thirty-two, they were an ugly failure. Here the book ended.

As to the merits of this novel, the priests of literature were divided. Some critics were so enraged at the nasty idea of Shelley evading his fate—it was really tactless of Bundle—that, quite unmoved by poetic fantasy, they hinted that, judging by his conversations with his fellow-shepherds, the mind of the great poet had scarcely been improved by the new, free, open-air life of the downs. Some, again, accused him of plagiarizing a story by Miss Sheila Kaye-Smith, while others found the discussions entrancing, and voted the book "a classic and a gem." Yet it certainly did not achieve the success, measured by sales, that had been expected of it.

The hierarchs in private were much more disquieted at his behaviour, though they could not afford to let him down yet awhile. . . . It was nearly a year after the War—but, if anything, he looked stronger. But Bundle, though he noticed in their eyes an increased brightness of querying expectancy, still had no notion of what it was they awaited from him. Not for a moment did he notice the earnest examination of his features to which the literary elders subjected him, nor the quiet prods, even, with which they sought to gauge the date of his impending doom. He had blundered through instinct, and with none of that intention of revolt which they imputed to him.

Fortunately, and again without intention, he followed up "Nameless Shepherd" with a book entitled "Dialogues on Parnassus," which consisted of a series of discussions on life and literature between himself and the soul of Keats. In it the spirit continually dwells on the beauty and advantages of an early death for a poet. And in a moment Bundle had recovered his lost prestige and was once more Head Boy.

"It is," wrote one of the high priests, "a singularly happy coincidence which has inspired Bundle to write a book of conversation with one with whom he has so much in common, both in mind, and, as many think—and have not been afraid to say—in outward appearance. A book crammed with insight and teeming with beauty, it is a book for which we have long been waiting."*

It was soon after the publication of his dialogues, when the halo of success blazed once again, and, more radiantly, round his pale features, that I met Bundle for the first time since the War. The occasion was one of those artistic yet "chic" little parties

* This passage, subsequently quoted on the jacket of the second edition by the publisher, earned for poor Bundle his only bad review. So quickly had the first edition been sold out that this sentence caught the eye of Mr. Shins (another Georgian poet) before that gentle young man had finished his review of the book for a leading morning paper. For some years Mr. Shins had made a practice of sitting directly under the portrait of Keats—at the Poetry Bookshop, in his own room, or in any other place where he could find one—with his profile at a similar angle to emphasize what he believed to be a quite extraordinary resemblance: when, therefore, he saw the pretensions of his rival so boldly stated, he tore up his favourable review on which he had been at work, and made of it the full, furious use which the opportunity afforded him.

given by Mr. and Mrs. St. Maur Murry in their charming small house in Chelsea. Anne Murry particularly cultivated those artists, poets, and musicians who were very advanced—so advanced, indeed, as to be out of sight altogether. By certain painters of this school she was much admired, and often served as their model: and, indeed, with her little, whitened face, smoothed back hair, lashless green eyes peering out from above her trim figure, rather as a snail from its shell, she had something essentially of the age about her. With these friends she would giggle feverishly at the dull ordinary lives of those other artists who occasionally do a little work: "Too queer and absurd," she would titter attractively, and the loose, grey lip and chin, the batik kerchief that half-strangled a stringy neck, would ripple with delicious laughter. Yet the tracks were there for one to examine, and if her inclination appeared to be toward advanced artists, she yet could never resist the famous ones. But this must not for a moment be known, so, when successful in kidnapping them to her parties, it was always to be assumed by her intimates that she had no idea of the identity of such guests (how like Anne, so unworldly, so artistic), but had taken a fancy to them for some obscure, capricious reason—a mole near the eye or a way of walking.

Meanwhile her method worked in smoothly with that of her husband: for St. Maur Murry, a wizened little man, always convulsed with a boisterous laughter which in itself passed for wit, aimed at fashion. Thus a party organized by his wife had all the mystery and attraction of a first-rate circus for *his* friends—who

were, therefore, for the evening, civil to *hers*—while *her* friends in their turn regarded the "beau monde," as Anne called it, with a charming affectation of eighteenth-century *cliché*, in precisely the same light. "Simply too extraordinary," they would murmur in corners to one another. Meanwhile each menagerie, completely unconscious of its own tricks and mannerisms, stared with that blinking which is born of intelligence, or with the perfect assurance that lurks under plucked eyebrows, at the other, while the two trainers bravely cracked their whips.

This gave to the parties an atmosphere, at once stilted and over-familiar, that was all their own. As we have said, Bundle's celebrity was at this time at its height, and it was now that Anne, who had known him for many years, of a sudden took a fancy to his "funny little smile." She had contrived, withal, to make him feel that his own and her notion of his importance coincided.

She led me up to him. Bundle, I soon decided, had somewhat modified his style. The eighteen-twenties had gained at the expense of the Mermaid Tavern. He was in the highest degree affable, but his voice had taken on that bitter, broken cackle so widely recognized as one of the stigmata of greatness, while each time he looked at you, he now slightly opened his eyes, thereby just for a second revealing a flashing white under and above the iris, as though attempting some subtle species of hypnotism or one of the snake-with-rabbit tricks developed by Rasputin.

This new grimace served with most people to enhance the original impression of genius. He also

limped a good deal. Yet the distant, almost tragic look of the eyes, when not thus in action, made me wonder afterwards, whether he was not already beginning to guess that which lay ahead of him. In any case it must be admitted that he made full use of the plenary powers which the irrevocability of his fate for so short a time bestowed on him. For the party was "going" beautifully, the preliminary surprised snigger of introduction had swelled into successful fits of tittering and giggling, when, without any invitation, Joe Bundle suddenly advanced into the centre of the room, and announced that he would read his poems aloud.

This, first heralding it with a little address on the principles of true poetry and what the War had taught him, he proceeded to do with immense effect until two o'clock. The two circuses, even the two trainers, were disgusted, resenting this rival one-man-show that had usurped their place; but nothing could be done, and no one even dared move, such was the compelling force of that poetic eye.

The only diversions were a maid, who obtained a sudden but violent popularity by upsetting a tray of plates outside just at the most effective passage in a poem, and an old lady who woke up with a start and began crying like a baby.

* * * * * *

If the months that ensued were the greatest in his career, it is true that tragedy now ever mingled with his triumph. Even if Keats and Shelley found themselves every day more and more attached to the name

of Bundle, on platforms, at prize-givings, in every literary column, and above all in the woolly pages of the *London Hermes*, bound captive, as it were, to the progress of his chariot; even if I heard, as I did, Professor Criscross say, as Bundle left the room, to Mr. Lympe: "There, Lympe, goes, perhaps, the most remarkable and gifted young man since the death of Keats," yet into the volume of this praise had crept so general, so unmistakable a note of macabresque but pretended apprehension, that Bundle could no longer misunderstand, pretend to misunderstand, or in any way resist the decrees of those who had made him. At last he comprehended fully the brutal determination that lay buried everywhere under the sweetness of the bedside manner, at long last he perceived the empty, the waiting coffin, under the piles of laurels, bays, and roses. And since he had delayed, sales were falling. Now he understood the anxious looks with which the elder *literati* scanned his face—not, as he had thought, to reassure themselves as to his health—but eagerly, to welcome the first sign of ailing lung or heart. (Sales were falling.)

The priests were impatient for their sacrifice, began to feel that his fame had been obtained on false pretences. Even Mattie, dear, mild Mattie Dean—he noticed—allowed his bird-like eye, incubated behind its monocle, to wander over him cruelly in search of symptoms. (Would he never be able to publish all those letters? Mattie was thinking.) Nor was it a happy time for the priests. After all, they reflected, he was nearly twenty-eight. But, and herein it seemed to the hierarchs lay the essential unfairness of their

situation, it was difficult for them now to rend him. The trumps of praise must blare on, though the hollow, owl-like hooting of expectancy might be more emphasized.

Yet they possessed one mighty ally on whom they had not enough counted. Sales were falling, falling: and Joe Bundle knew it. For if the English public is thwarted of its rightful poetic prey by a strong constitution it soon turns nasty, demands its pound of flesh, endeavours to starve him in a garret. Nevertheless this great-big-baby-hearted public is a treacherous one, for if too long disappointed and kept waiting, it will turn even on those who feed it, the priests themselves, and devour them, just because they have misled it as to its feeding-time.

The elders were in danger, and therefore would soon be dangerous. Bundle saw it (and sales were falling, falling!).

It was true that he still had the good luck to look fairly delicate (this a little appeased them). But it was all very well for the high priests to say continually within his hearing that he was too good, too clever, too sensitive, to live. Himself was not so sure of it. The nature of his quandary, enough to crush a lesser man, was only too clear to him now. Something must be done, he knew. But to die is not necessarily an easy matter. Suicide was, as it were, a breach of rules. It made winning too easy. Even the death of Shelley, for example, was hardly playing fair (Keats's end was, from the critical point of view, the perfect score). Moreover, Bundle was young: possessed, despite his appearance, of much natural health. What

was he to do? (Sales were falling.) And as he pondered, fretted and worried, fortune favoured him again; for so intense was his genuine love of life, that the prospect of the early death demanded of him nearly brought it about. Visibly he began to wilt and wither. No sooner had this process become noticeable than a glad shout arose from the watching priests. Every day the trumpets trumpeted more bravely, and jubilant whispers puffed out the grey moustaches of the hierarchs in their literary clubs. Bundle was all right; Bundle was "doing his bit." Once more they had backed a winner for the Parnassus Stakes. Always put your money on "Skull and Crossbones." In the smoking-room of the Lumley Club, old Sir Wardle Diddlum, Joe's publisher, dispensed a veritable fountain of port wine. A winner again. (Sales were mounting, mounting!)

Alas, Bundle could not bring himself to it. Again he held on a little too long. (Sales were falling, falling!) Through the notices of his last book of poems crept a horrid, malicious, menacing note. A chill wind enwrapped him, who so long had been tenderly treated in the literary nursery. When he showed himself at "the Lumley," where of old he had been eagerly welcomed, the hierarchs would hide behind their newspapers, or even put on a pair of black spectacles, presumably as a hint of that mourning which it was now their due to wear. This they would follow up by coughing in a death-like way, in intimation of what England expected from him. "How is your health, Bundle? We hear very favourable reports of it," they would say in the most

mordacious manner. (Sales were falling.) One or two early turncoats began openly to announce in paragraphs that Mr. Bundle's later works had disappointed his many admirers, and poor old Sir Wardle, who was made to feel that the whole thing was his fault, had to adopt, by doctor's orders, a special diet to reduce his blood-pressure.

But now Bundle executed a really amazing piece of strategy, not unworthy of Fabius Cunctator, and by it succeeded in delaying his enemy. He realized undoubtedly, I think, at this point, that which was expected of him. He was aware, too, that the conditions of his past success were irrevocable, that he could not repudiate his bargain without bringing disaster on himself. But for a little while longer he was able, by his own cleverness, to remain dallying in the world he loved, his fame and repute ever increasing. For, all this time he had been preparing in secret a new book of poems. This was the moment to publish it. It was called "Farewell to Poesy"; each line was permeated with a wistful note of unmistakable self-elegy. The sob had deepened into a death-rattle. Pegasus had donned bat-like wings and was flying through these pages, decked out in considerable funereal pomp, for the last time. In this book Bundle boldly proclaimed who were his equals, for at this solemn moment who was to say him nay?

And how warmly Bundle was now taken back to the fold! Songs of sad, glad rapture echoed and re-echoed through the press. The undertakers of literature dusted their top-hats, cleared their throats,

allowed a tear to fall on their black-bordered handkerchiefs, while they measured the body with a practised eye and prepared for it their articles of obsequy. In the offices of every newspaper the obituarists nonchalantly whetted their nibs. (Sales were soaring, soaring!) It was the climax of Bundle's career. The chorus of praise never faltered, except that the mousey little literary-editor described in an earlier page wrote, probably with unintentional ambiguity: "This book is one which you will want to give away," a phrase rather unfortunately quoted at once in every advertisement by Diddlum & Co. Nevertheless it obtained the greatest sale that any book of poems had achieved since the early days of Alfred Austin.

Yet, he realized it only too well, either himself or his sales must sink—they could no longer, soaring together, keep company, and herein, as Bundle must have reflected, lay the most cruel part of the poet's lot. For, should he die, his triumph would be more than ever broadcast through the press: those who had first detected his talent would see to that. Money would, consequently, pour in—but he would not be there to receive it; indeed in this instance, unless he made a will, old Dr. Bundle, who had never for years been anything but unpleasant to him, who was already rich and whose very existence he had managed to disguise, would reap the benefit.

It was after the publication of "Farewell to Poesy," after his ill-health had become more accentuated, that I met Bundle for the last time *before* his death. The occasion was a memorable one. And it seems to me that, for my young readers apparently eager to collect

anecdotes that belong to the period as much as its paintings and furniture, a description of this party may convey a sense of the advanced scene of those days as vividly as would any picture of the old *London Group*, or the finding of a forgotten poem by some such author as Mr. Conrad Aitken or Mr. Maxwell Bodenheim delved for in the pages of a now dusty but then very up-to-date American journal; but to appreciate it, it must be remembered that at the time of which I write the great religious revival of the early 'thirties was as yet undreamed of, and that, for the intelligentsia, psycho-analysis had usurped the place of religion, and was treated with an awe and deference accorded to nothing else in this world or any other.

The setting was for Bundle in any case a new one, and, as a habitat, rather unsuitable. Spiritually, it was many thousands of miles removed from Sussex; in its style nearer to the jungles of Africa, with their zebra-striped flashes of light and darkness; nearer to the hot, moist, scented and voluptuous airs of the Brazilian forests, resonant with the xylophone-tongued cries of tropical birds—forests where even the sleek, snarling pumas that glide and sway stealthily through the undergrowth are too languorous to be of very much danger to man kind—than to his beloved downs, forever swept by the steel-billed breezes of the northern seas.

But then this constant, though always unexpected, mingling of sects that proceeded in the London of my youth must be regarded as one of the chief delights the age afforded, for it imparted to life a great variety.

Just as it was the first epoch in which it was possible to be comfortably nomadic, ever in luxurious flight from Cairo to Rio, from Rio to New York, from New York to Morocco, from Morocco to London, each journey taking up the space of but a few days, so in any great city was it possible mentally to traverse whole continents and centuries, to move from this to that civilization in as many seconds.

But in this perpetual migration Bundle took little part: he was one the boundaries of whose temporary kingdom were so defined by the tastes of his subjects that it made his appearance here a singularly gracious act. It is true that he would have told you—as would every other person in the room—that his predilections in art were all for the primitive: but lovers of the primitive, since they are apt to pride themselves on their sincerity, are thus wont to quarrel among themselves more than any other tribe, and between the rival lovers of the African kraal and of the Sussex cottage (however alike in their simplicity these may seem to outsiders) is fixed a deep chasm over which no rope-bridge may be thrown. In art it was not so much that Bundle knew what he liked, as that he liked what he knew. After the manner of all English-village-life-enthusiasts, he was as ignorant of everything outside his own county as he was misinformed about the village itself. Every architectural system devised seemed to him a decadence from the high art of thatching a cottage—of which he had read, though he had never seen it. Oast-houses, like comfortable red brewers sporting an incongruous witch's hat, and the flinty tower of any local village church, were also agreeable

to him. In painting there was Cotman and Crome, but even these were a little beyond his taste in their range; in music, an old folk-tune, scratched out on what he would be careful to term a "fiddle," to which accompaniment a few whiskered and toothless octogenarian gaffers first carefully excavated and coached in their steps by horn-rimmed-spectacled young Jews from Oxford and Cambridge, would gaily foot a measure.

One did not, therefore, expect to encounter him among people who worshipped strange gods: gods among whom he was not numbered. The party was given by an acquaintance of mine, in conjunction with three or four other men, in a large room up in Hampstead. I had never been to the house before, and found it crammed with guests, their arms pinned to their sides, unable, perhaps fortunately, even to reach the little cup of dark green, searing coffee that was so hospitably provided for each of them. Gazing over the sea of heads, a whole new world was exhibited to me. Alas! myself in evening clothes, I felt rather uncomfortable, for most of the men present were dressed in the loose, floppy esthetic manner of the time, corduroys and bandanas, tweeds and pipes, while the only people attired in the conventional men's evening clothes of the period, black coat and starched white shirt, were a few heavily-shod, self-conscious but determined-looking middle-aged women, most of them with an eye-glass clinking against the buttons of their white waistcoats. It was obvious that, except for them, anyone in evening dress was regarded as an unpleasant anachronism. Luckily, the packing of our

bodies was so close, that what I now began to regard as my shameful nudity might pass almost unnoticed. Wedged in as I was, my face only a few inches from other and unknown faces, I began to feel lonely, except that from time to time a shaggy head would drift up and—with some difficulty, for it was like trying to maintain one's place and balance in the middle of a football scrum—inquire, politely yet intimidatingly, if I had visited Dash's or Blank's last exhibition. Rather priding myself on my acquaintance with modern art, they mentioned—or, rather, for the noise was great, roared—these names with such reverence that I could not but be profoundly chagrined at my ignorance in being unaware of them. After confessing, then, one was left to stare this close-up of curious heads directly in the eye, always a rather confusing experience. My gaze wandered in search of rescue, over the jostling waves of faces. Who was there? Not far from me, rising up out of them like a jaunty if rather angular boulder, I observed a well-known lady novelist, the end of her long ear-rings swinging down in the crowd. Who else was there? Did I see a glossy white shirt flashing its kindred signal to mine? Was it—it was—Bundle!

At first, then, I was astonished to find him in a room painted with yellow, scarlet, and purple stripes, and further embellished with such innocent, unsophisticated ornaments as totem-poles from New Zealand, fetishes from Dahomey and the Congo, blood-bowls from the South Seas, and two or three wizened, black and dried human heads, hung up on the wall and swinging above us from their nails by

a few remaining locks of coarse, lank hair. The explanation of his presence in these surroundings was to be found, I take it, more in the fact that he realized only too acutely how numbered were the weeks that now stretched in front of him, in which to play his kingly part, than it lay rooted in the essential eclecticism of the age. It was bold of him, too, one reflected, to venture thus far afield, for the immunity and infallibility bestowed upon him by his approaching fate was not, as a rule, recognized here among the grinning ogre-masks and phallic symbols of a different and alien superstition. Doubtless, though, he had been inducted hither by Mrs. St. Maur Murry, whom I now saw smiling subtly in a corner to a few very civilized devotees. The subtle smile was intensified soon into a shrill, frenetic giggle. He could here have found no more influential sponsor.

At this moment and as I thus studied the scene, a sudden, a very positive and ominous silence—all the more menacing in this tropical room—fell down upon it. It resembled that instant of dreadful calm that precedes an equatorial hurricane. The only person who did not immediately respond to this magic and infectious cessation of effort was the lady novelist, whose barking, busy, inquisitive voice hung dramatically in the air. Resolutely she finished her sentence to the little group of heads clustered round her shoulders. "I know it's *true*," she was saying, "for *he* told me *in confidence*." After this little effort, she, too, became mute. And now the threat inherent in this silence materialized itself. The floor was cleared. "Something must be going to happen,"

everyone said as they scurried away to the sides of the room, where those who could find them sprawled on cushions. Some went out, while others leant upon the mantelpiece, draped themselves limply round the doorway, or sat, even, in a bowl from the South Seas. Chatter subsided again. Somebody, wisely hidden behind it, struck up on a piano, and, into the centre of the floor, minced a very young but tousled and dishevelled zany of a young girl, with a tangled mop of flaxen hair hanging over a freckled, earnest, though at the minute smiling and rather damp, face. Her feet were bare, and she was dressed in a classical, night-gown-like toga. Obviously, if only on account of her pretended timidity, she must be a favourite, one felt. Sure enough, after a preliminary rattle of starched cuffs, as the women in men's evening dress adjusted their monocles to see and applaud, there was a regular burst of enthusiasm. Now the piano broke into a regular rhythm, and the dancer began to caper, peer and prance round the room to the immense, if solemn and scientific, appreciation of the audience. Rather puzzled by the significance of some of her gestures, I turned to my shaggy, long-haired terrier type of neighbour, and asked: "Could you tell me exactly what she is dancing?" and he replied lightly: "Oh, just two rather jolly little things out of Kraft Ebbing."* From these she passed on to interpret one of Freud's instances of the "Œdipus Rex Complex," which was generally held to be her finest achievement, both in conception and execution.

These dances were much encored. The artiste slunk

* Author of "Psychopathia Sexualis."

out deprecatingly amid cheers and calls. Then, again, there seeped into the room the silence of expectation. One of our hosts came in with a reading-desk and announced that Mr. Joseph Bundle had kindly consented (alas! a euphemism, I fancied, for "insisted") to read some of his new poems, if his health would permit him to do so, from "Farewell to Poesy." The guests at once began talking and looking angrily round. However, Bundle was not to be thwarted. He began by asking his audience to forgive and understand, should he be forced to break off during a poem. He was not, he said, very strong (as they might have heard) just now. And after this he put up such a good act of coughing, finding the place, and clearing his throat, that even this gathering of modernists was in spite of itself impressed. Anne Murry could be heard in a corner, saying hopefully: "Now, didn't I tell you—there is something in his odd little smile—it's like Blake."

He read on. It was the first time I had heard these poems, and one detected the invention of several new and poignant devices. In several of the verses Keats and Shelley are addressed personally, directly by name, as though they were boys in the sixth form and Bundle was the popular master in charge ("an awfully decent chap, and talks to the Pater about Footer"). The tone was one of "Smith Major, it's your turn now. What do you say?" I remember a couplet or two:

> Shelley and Keats! By your example borne
> I quaff the potion from the bitter horn.

> My heaven wil be where the sheep still bleats
> Of Sussex: there I'll meet you, Shelley, Keats!

In others he would direct the boys, knowing his influence over them. This sentiment, for example, was beautifully contained in the little poem he wrote to his friend, and contemporary poet, Mr. Edward Shanks. It ran:

> And when you go to brighten Heaven, Shanks,
> Shelley and Keats will offer you their thanks.

However, to return to our party, his health permitted him to read to the end, though the lilt and dying fall, alternating with the bitter, broken cackle, of his voice took on a note that was a little wearied.

In spite of the original prejudice of his audience, Bundle achieved almost a triumph. At the end there was loud applause, and my neighbour said to me: "I must own I'm agreeably surprised. There's something positively Polynesian in their starkness."

After he had finished, Bundle came up to me, bringing a friend with him, and suggested that he should take us in his car to "the Lumley" for a drink. Much flattered, I consented. We sat in a large, empty room, red, with vast chandeliers. I examined the poet carefully. Though still sure of himself, he was certainly much changed. There were distressing signs of the internal conflict through which he must have been passing. In his eye there shone, too, the light of an heroic resolution. Looking back upon that night, I can see now that to him we were posterity. Much time he spent, almost as though he wished us to hand on his banner, in telling of his work and its aims, of early life on the downs and of the message, of which he was, all too unworthily, as he said, the

medium. Birds, birds, and again birds, he conveyed to us authoritatively, was the Message of Life. And after them, bulldogs, and again bulldogs. And, of course, sheep. He spoke to us, too, of the names of poets: of how the very sound of them "smacked of the earth." "Let the words loll on the tongue, so that you get the full flavour of them," he advised us. "Drinkwater, Keats, Shanks, Noyes (pronounced, I then discovered for the first time, in no equivocal, facing-both-ways manner, but, boldly, to rhyme with "cloys") and a hundred more." . . . "(Think, too, on the names of the great double-barrelled women of fiction . . . Sackville-West . . . Kaye-Smith . . . Kean-Seymour.)" . . . "Even my own name, Joe Bundle," he said, "has something, perhaps, of Sussex in it." Now, again, the talk veered in its direction, and the Christian names of famous figures—though sometimes in an unusual and abbreviated style, which served both to cause you to ask whom it was he meant and to prove his intimacy with them—would trip easily off his lips. We were made the repository, perhaps owing to our appearance of health, of many little stories of the great, of which, years afterward, we were doubtless to inform the young: "I remember Bundle telling me in '23." A sigh of wonder, a new light in young eyes, and an awed voice, trembling out: "Do you mean to say that *you* knew Bundle?"

Now we had to leave him. He accompanied us to the door of the Club. Love, he confided on the way, had treated him as it always treats a poet. "It's the penalty we poets pay," he announced with amiable condescension. He coughed once or twice, a hollow,

dramatic cough, put out his hand and shook mine in a marked and morbid fashion, looked into my eyes, blinked his eyelids several times very widely, as though this was the last occasion on which the snake would fascinate the rabbit. The door swung to, and he was swallowed up in its blaze of light.

* * * * * * *

Rumour spread, evil rumour, that Bundle was ill, very ill indeed. The literary world was intent, waiting. Then came the news. Bundle was a dying man. He had been ordered to Italy, under the care of a nurse—gone thither, like those with whom he had so often been compared—gone there to die. The eyes of the elders glistened fondly as they thought of that other corpse so soon to rest under the wistaria in the little English cemetery at Rome —stretched out there by the side of his peers. The obituarists even went so far as to get ready their captions and to turn down the corner of the page of Rupert Brooke's "There is a corner of a foreign field," for they must not be behindhand with appropriate quotation.

The dark horses could be heard taking a preliminary canter through the press. The mutes chattered shrilly while they might.

"Lovers of English poetry," we read in *Gleanings*, "will hear with regret mingled with anxiety, that Mr. Joseph Bundle, perhaps better known as 'Bundle of Sussex,' and assuredly the leader of that striving young England that found itself in the War, has

suffered a complete breakdown in health. Always of a rather frail physique that was the counterpart of a fiery spirit and a rare poetic intelligence, he never spared himself in Beauty's cause. It has long been an open secret that our leading critics and literary men, who had hailed him as heir and successor to Keats, were fearful of the strain that his genius—for such they deem it—might place upon his health, which must, indeed, in these days be regarded as a national asset." Or, again, the paragraph might be couched in language yet more grave: "There is always something singularly tragic," it would run, "in the delicacy of men of genius, and were it to force Bundle to relinquish his work at an early age, our literature would undergo a loss only comparable to that it sustained by the deaths of Marlowe, Keats, Shelley, Byron, and Rupert Brooke. . . . Bundle comes, of course, of Sussex stock, and is peculiarly identified in the minds of all lovers of poetry with the soil of London's favourite county. Nor is he the only Bundle to have attained national fame—for many will be interested to discover that he is a cousin of P. T. Bundle—'P. T. B.' as he is affectionately known to thousands in the football-world—England's foremost dribbler. Some readers may infer that the relationship between poet and athlete is no casual one. Both of them stand rooted in English earth. The famous poet is now far from the country he loves, for the doctors have ordered him to Italy—where in earlier days other English poets have sought solace—and many will be the good wishes he will take on his way with him." The paragraph ended "God

speed!" though it did not enter into details of what, exactly, the writer wished sped.

These little notices—who knows but that perhaps they may not have been breathed into the ears of the paragraphists by a confiding publisher?—ran round the press, and inspired, indeed, one regrettable error. The literary editor of the *Sunday Depress* had latterly been very much overworked. The owner of the paper had told him to praise, the editor to abuse, the same book. In addition, while reviewing a novel, he had mistaken a rather unfortunate passage quoted in it from the Bible for the work of the writer before him, and had called loudly on the Home Secretary for its suppression, and for the prosecution of the author. The Home Secretary had eagerly responded, but had inadvertently omitted to read the book: the publishers had kept their secret; and consequently, when it leaked out in court that the author of the passage in question was no less or younger a person than Moses, the prosecution had broken down. After it was over, the proprietor, himself a particular authority on the Holy Book, had sent for the literary editor and had reprimanded him. This had much shaken his nerve, and, soon after, since things never go wrong singly, he, owing to some slight confusion, published an article on Bundle, in which he treated Bundle as though he were already dead. After the inevitable comparison to Keats and Shelley, and congratulations to him on what was captioned as his "Sane Sex Viewpoint," he had hailed him as "Lord of Lyric Verse," and had proceeded to demand his interment in Westminster Abbey, "the National

Valhalla." Moreover, he insisted violently that the Peers and Peeresses should be made to attend the service in their robes, for, he added, with one of his most picturesque touches, "only with passionate purple and screaming ermine can they do justice to the immortal singer now no more." This article had induced his chief to purchase a story by Bundle, to be run as a serial, under the idea that, now he was dead, people would stand it, however good it might be. It can be imagined, therefore, what were the feelings of proprietor and editor, when they discovered that Bundle still survived. They relapsed once more into insurance talk, their trump card. But meanwhile the rival journals were immensely enjoying themselves with talk of "a lamentable error of taste," and "ill-informed and wicked gossip."

Yet the impression was rife that the end could not be long delayed. All the old gentlemen of literature joined in the death-bed revels. The consequent rush on Bundle was immense. First editions soared to a price which only ghouls could afford to pay. So it was with the familiar waving of flags, beating of drums, and blare of trumpets that Bundle faded out into the azure horizon of Italy.

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What was the precise nature of the drama enacted there, I know not. But it was a year or more before the awaited obituary notice actually materialized. Few details of the end were given. It ran, as he would have liked it, simply: "On October 27th, 1924, in Italy, Joseph Bundle, of Sussex, Poet, in

his twenty-ninth year. Nursed through a long illness by his devoted wife." It was obvious, then, that Bundle had married his nurse; and this was all that could be deduced until the next day, when the more fully inspired, appreciatory notices began to appear.

Now even the most august papers thundered England's loss. We were treated to charming little stories of the death-bed ceremony, when Bundle was married to his nurse. Not one romantic detail was spared us. The literary editor of the *Sunday Depress*, spying an opportunity for rehabilitation, repeated his former obituary, clamoured for a burial in the Abbey, so that All should Take a Part. Other critics even went so far in their enthusiasm, and perhaps in the need they felt for a day's outing in good country air, as to demand that Bundle's ashes should be brought home and scattered over the Sussex Downs by the Prime Minister. But the inconsolable widow intimated that such junketings were not at all what her husband would have desired for himself. She communicated to one or two papers an intimate, but no doubt highly-paid, account of his wishes. One day, she had left him for a few minutes, it appeared, and when she returned, he sat up suddenly in bed, and with the utmost clarity of diction, so that there could be no mistake of his meaning or of his being fully conscious at the time, had said: "I remembered England in Her Need. She will remember me. Let no one meddle with my bones. Let me be laid down by the Man Keats. I shall be content. Where I am, there shall a smaller Sussex be." And though

he had never reverted to the topic again in the few days which he had still to live, it was generally felt that in this touching idea there was much that was appropriate.

* * * * * *

Many critics have pointed out how in "Frankenstein" it seems as if Shelley had been able to transfer some of his sombre genius to his wife's pen. It is as though, while he was with her, he had been able to infuse into her at least a little of his overwhelming power: yet even he had not been able to bestow enough genius for her to continue writing at this level after his death. But with Mrs. Bundle it was otherwise: it was as though some portion of her husband's magic mantle had descended on to the shoulders of his forlorn widow. In the numerous articles about him which she now contributed to every paper, there were whole phrases and turns of speech that, it seemed to me, bore his imprint. Yet though the stories of him, the diminutive tales and touches, were typical of the man, the mystery which had ever surrounded all he did still attended on him, even in death: for little was told us of its actual circumstances. Yet that description of him in his last moments, how true it rang, and how the actual writing of it reminded me of the deep, compassionate instinct of motherhood manifested, for example, in his war-poems!

"There he lay," Mrs. Bundle wrote, "ashen and listless under the plexes, with the rich Italian sunlight drifting down to him through the branches and a

wistful smile ever touching the pallor of his features. How poignant was the sight of that white bed upon the burnt-up grass! But never for a moment did he repine: never, never for an instant, did he allow himself in his suffering to forget or upbraid Nature. Always, racked and tormented though he might be, did he gladly suffer little birds to come unto him.

"There are some moments in life so peculiarly tender, so mystical, that they cannot be revealed. It may be, even, that there are those who will consider that it is not strictly the duty of a wife to reveal them. But Bundle belonged to England, and I shall tell, for only England (and, of course, the United States of America) could appreciate such a memory. Right up to the last, then, right up to the final, bitter hours, he would commune with the birds. It was pretty to see them together, for they, too, seemed to understand. Well, one day I heard a sound of twittering, and stealing up on tiptoe, so as not to disturb Joseph, found that he had, without telling me, sprinkled his moustache with hemp-seed, and that the tiny, feathered things were chirping and tweet-tweeting at his mouth. It was a sacred moment: one of such a kind that nobody who has experienced it would ever be able to forget.

"After this, it became a regular practice with him. And, one day, as thus he fed them, the end approached. Came a time when he was delirious, racing again over those downs from which he had sprung, his boots, his clothes, all covered with the good earth of Sussex. He called the birds that still fluttered round him, addressed them by name, under

the impression that they were his favourites of fifteen years before. His speech became once more the musical speech of the countryside. Again, again he was running merrily over the downs, or climbing a juniper bush to help some little bird in travail. Now came the great events of his life: once more he was performing that valiant deed that won him honour in the War; once more he was batting for the *London Hermes* Eleven; and then, turning over on his side like a child in bed, gently sighing, he was at rest. . . ."

Bundle, I reflected on reading this account of him, had been very fortunate in finding birds in Italy, where they are more often to be found on a plate in front of you than singing in the bushes. The only bird one ever sees there is, in the mountains, an occasional eagle, and that, from the angle of the English bird-lover, scarcely counts as a bird at all.

Mrs. Bundle, of course, inherited all the dead poet's property and effects, and was also found to be his sole literary executor. In most ways she was, however, very easy to deal with. She appointed Mattie Dean to edit his letters and write his biography, only retaining a final veto as to what was or was not to be included. The letters had a great sale. The reviews transcended even expectation. The only critical exception came from Lady Richard Cressy, who in a letter to one paper stated that Mattie had cut out, in the letters from Bundle she had lent him for publication, several passages in which her poems had been warmly approved and commended and

had substituted for them instead paragraphs, presumably written by himself, in praise of his own critical insight. In one of these, indeed, Bundle was made to hail him as first patron and discoverer. This allegation on the part of Lady Richard was never definitely either proved or disproved. But a certain amount of unpleasant bickering broke out in the press from the hierarchy, each of whom was now publicly claiming to have singled out Bundle originally. All this, however, only served to heighten interest in all that pertained to him.

Mrs. Bundle continued to live in Italy. She was, it appeared, so overcome by the tragedy, of which she had been so close and intimate a witness, that only once after the death of her husband was she able to summon up the courage necessary to meet his friends. (Memories of him were both too dear and too painful.) It was for the opening of the "Bundle Bird Fountain," erected in Kensington Gardens to the memory of the dead poet some eighteen months or two years after his decease, that she made her sole, brief public appearance in England. Even then she was, it seemed, nervous and ill at ease, anxious to return, to be alone, to bear the burden of her recollections by herself: a phenomenon very sad in one still young.

The ceremony of inauguration was singularly simple, and gained much interest from the presence of the widow. The elders had thought it advisable to capture a lay-figure for the chair, and had successfully contrived to entice old General Sir Blundell Bullough-Bloodworthy to occupy it for the occasion.

As a speaker, he was effective and thoroughly in keeping with the proceedings, while he possessed in addition an undoubted talent for anecdote. First of all he blew out his red cheeks and white moustache as though inflating an invisible air-balloon, and then suddenly addressed his audience of bishops, old ladies, venerable critics, publishers and esthetes, as though he had them before him on the parade-ground. "Not much of a poet-chap myself," he roared at us, "but I do know a bit about birds. Love 'em, I do. Know more about birds than poets. Positively love 'em. Never so happy as when shootin' 'em. (Birds, I mean, doncherno, what, what!) Shot thousands of 'em myself in my time. But getting old now, ha-ha" (and here he was convulsed with laughter for a minute or two). "Spent a great part of my life in India. Not many birds there—Vultures, of course, and plenty of 'em. After one of my victories, battlefield used to be a perfect sight. Bird-lovers would come for miles to see it, so my aide-de-camp told me. Tell you an extraordinary thing. Forget if I tolger: Lady Bloodworthy, doncherno, decided to give a tea-party at Government House. I was always against it—ha-ha! Well, there we were, all sitting in the garden in our topees—might have been in an English garden. Tea with silver kettles and scones and all that, when (would you believe it?) crash in the middle of it all fell a human leg and arm, ha-ha! What it was was a vulture was flying over from where a Tower of Silence was, doncherno, where a poor devil of a Parsee was, donckersee. Devilish clever bird, what! Wonderful

things, birds' intelligence. Extraordinary, I said at the time, extraordinary, quite extraordinary it was. But nothing in India except vultures—and parrots: and minahs, cunning little devils they are, too, I tell you! Had a minah that imitated the Missus so as you simply couldn't tell. Used to answer it myself. Why, that minah can make a fool of *me*, I used to say to my aide-de-camp: remember it quite well, doncherno. Still, nothing comes up, in my opinion, to a good English bird. And I'll tell you another thing about birds. Some of 'em sing beautifully, by gad, what, what! Wouldn't have believed it till I heard 'em, ha-ha! Well, what I mean to say is, doncher-see, is that poor fellow—Mumble—Trumble—Stumble (Thankee, Sir, thankee)—Bundle, knew about birds, too, I should say." And the General sat down amid prolonged cheering. After strength, came sweetness. Mr. Mattie Dean was called upon, rose, adjusted his monocle inquiringly, and, mildly beaming, said: "All thothe, I think, who love Thuthekth, all thothe who love poemth, will realithe only too thurely, that in Jotheph Bundle—'Joe,' ath thome of uth were privileged to call him—we have lotht a mathter. The thoughth of thome, it may be, will, like mythelf, turn to Keath and Thelley: two other gentle poeths loth to uth." The speech continued for some time. The old lady who had been painted by Burne-Jones fainted from excitement and had to be helped out of the crowd; while her rival with the vacant eyes, who had sat thirteen times to Sargent, could be heard saying in a loud voice: "How true—So true! Just what Mr. Sargent used

to tell me." At the end of it, an old gentleman like a foolish verger stood up and said: "La—dies and Gentle—men, I have now a lee—tle treat for you—Mrs. Bundle."

Amid tremendous applause the widow of the great man stood up. She was nice-looking, dressed in very fashionable black, but, to my mind, rather inappropriately covered with every possible assortment of dried fin, dead fur and dyed feather. She was a perfect riot of shark-skin bags and shagreen purses, sealskin coats and ermine trimmings, osprey feathers, tortoise-shell umbrella handles, and animal-skin gloves. Owing to nervousness, her speech was quite inaudible, but the gestures with her hands, her playing with a rope of false pearls, were all that could be desired. The silent opening and shutting of her mouth, as by a goldfish, the whole galaxy of tricks she displayed, was singularly moving: so much so, indeed, that at the close of the proceedings, the Committee of the Pecksniff Prize for English Literature, anxious not to omit so novel a turn from their platform, waited on her to inquire whether she would not present it for them at the Æolian Hall in a few days' time. It was always difficult to find something new, they said: though whether they referred to the book which would incur their prize, or to the stage debut of Mrs. Bundle, remained uncertain. But she refused, and left for Italy the next morning.

A few days later it was announced that Mrs. Bundle had been awarded, on account of the services of her dead husband to literature, a Civil List Pension of three times the customary amount. This served

to mark definitely the apotheosis of Bundle. The Prime Minister of the day referred to him at a Guildhall banquet as one of the Future Glories of the English Heritage. Sir Wardle Diddlum was advanced from a knighthood to a baronetcy. Mattie was given a "K.C.B." It was rumoured that a Great Personage had bought 2,000 copies of "Farewell to Poesy" (Sir Wardle said that he had made a wonderful bargain, too) for distribution to his friends next winter in place of a Christmas card. The Archbishop quoted two touching lines about a robin in one of his sermons. A Bundle Society was formed, the members of which were to dine together twice a year —and once every summer must meet for a picnic luncheon on the downs. Now the boom spread to America: a branch of the Bundle Society was formed there, and it was arranged that the American section should entertain the English one the following year. Yet there now entered into the cult that touch of exaggeration which many of our fellow-countrymen are apt to associate with the States: for example, several enterprising journalists started a "story" that the great poet was not dead at all, had been seen walking, apparently under the spell of some unbearable sorrow, by lonely stretches of the Italian coast. Soon, the English papers retorted, the American press would announce that Bundle's poems had been written by Bacon! Such discussions, however, served but further to increase the enormous sales of his works: for the dead man's books now sold by their tens of thousands. Money poured in, and he no longer there to receive it! Such always

is the way of the world. Still, it was a comfort to think that poor Mrs. Bundle would not now be entirely dependent on her pension. But gradually, very gradually, the interest died down. Even his widow's essays and articles on his work became less frequent, and then ceased altogether. As a topic at lunch or dinner Bundle was dead.

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Little, I think, has been heard of Bundle for the past forty years. Yet during a recent visit—alas! it will probably prove to have been my last—to Rome, my thoughts wandered back to early days. I thought of Bundle as an old man thinks of those he has met in his youth. It seemed to me sad and pitiful that one who had been so sure of immortality, and indeed so famous in his day, should now be held, even by students of poetry, in so little esteem, and be by the world forgotten. Would it not be kind, I wondered, to visit his tomb in the English Cemetery? There, hemmed in by the dark blades of the cypresses, under those small bushes of pagan roses—not the big-headed darlings of the horticulturist, but loose-petalled pink roses with that faint and ancient smell which no visitor to Rome in May can ever forget—under the mauve rain of the wistaria (the only rain which, it seemed that spring, ever fell to cool the dry earth), while high up above them the bare branches of the paulovnias held their mauve torches toward the blue sky—lay those whom he had definitely adjudged his august compeers. But where, I wondered, was the grave of poor Joe Bundle? The

sacristan disclaimed all knowledge. I could not find a tablet. To me this seemed to make his fate all the more tragic. A man famous in his generation; and now no stone, even, to mark his grave. And was Mrs. Bundle still alive? I could not remember.

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Some weeks later I visited a little town on the southern coast of Calabria. Even now its exceptional beauty attracts no tourists. In these days of flying, people like, I suppose, to go farther away, to India, China, Africa; and though the great airplanes continually hum like a horde of wasps over this walled rock, clustered with white houses and set in so transparent a sea, not one stops here for its passengers to admire such miniature and intimate loveliness. It seemed to have been overlooked by the world since the time that, a thriving fortified town, it had defied first the enemies of the Hohenstaufens, and then the Turkish slave-raiders, or even since, many centuries before, it had been one of the great cities of Magna Graecia.

I had been here as a boy, and really it seemed to have changed not at all. The crumbling walls were yet as they had been in my youth, further guarded by an outer fortification of Indian fig-trees, some of the stalks thick as an olive-trunk, such as one might see growing round an African kraal. The golden, slender towers still rose like minarets above a town of dazzling whiteness—so white, that the sun glowing down on it threw up dancing lights like those given back by a mirror to play on the walls opposite. The

kilted giant of a Roman Emperor still smiled cynically in the piazza, which rested heavily above the Roman theatre, while the harbour had yet lingering in its shelter one or two large sailing-boats. Out of the enormous cellars, natural caves deep in the rock, issued the heavy, acrid smell of southern wine. Over the cliffs still fell in formal swags the trailing, fleshy, green leaves of the mesembryanthemum (that flower the name of which has the sound of an extinct animal), sprinkled with magenta tinsel stars. The olive groves seemed no older—some of the trees were, it was said, above a thousand years of age—and the drifts of spring flowers still surged over the edges of the roads. Only one new feature did I notice in the landscape, a very large, white villa: modern, though it had been probably built within ten years of my previous visit. It looked well-kept, comfortable, and incongruous. Though created in a muddled southern style (Spanish-Italian-American), it lacked the flimsiness and squalor of modern construction in this neighbourhood. All round the garden, a large one, was a very high, solidly-built wall. It seemed, I thought, an odd place to choose for building. Though the town was enchanting enough to make anyone wish to live in it, the country outside was flat, and, in spite of the beauty of its groves, dull to live in, one would have supposed. There was, I reflected, a great deal to be said, after all, for English landscape (think of the Hog's Back, or the rolling Sussex Downs, with their delicious air). Probably, though, it was some emigrant to South America, at last returned to his native place, to which he was devoted as only an

Italian can be, who had built this rather palatial dwelling, thereby also ridding himself of the inferiority-complex which early poverty begets. However, the whole matter intrigued me, challenged my curiosity to a degree that is rare when concerned with a matter so essentially unimportant and unconnected with oneself. It was very singular how interested I felt in it.

I decided, therefore, to make inquiries from the *padrone* of the inn in which I was staying. In spite of his numerous activities, talking, cooking, taking orders, bustling from one room to another with a plate of succulent soup in which little octopuses floated all too realistically, waving the napkin held in his other hand imperiously at the knock-kneed waiter who assisted him, and moving his vast bulk about with surprising ease considering the limited space, he had yet found time to pile up an amazing store of knowledge relating to local life.

Yes, he said, the villa had been built some thirty or forty years ago. The man who lived in it was a great English milord. Enormously rich. Lived in great style, with clean sheets every week, they said, and everything he wanted to eat. A great English milord, in disgrace, it was supposed. People knew very little about him—he was just known as "Il Milord Inglese," though his letters were addressed "Smithson." But there were very few of them. Nobody ever came to stay with him, and he never went outside the grounds. What the scandal could be, he did not know. Milord was respectably married. His wife was a very nice lady, and sometimes came

into the town. But neither of them ever stayed a night away. He was, of course, eccentric, like all Englishmen. Not a soul was admitted into the house, and the servants were forbidden to answer any questions. (Still, they must like him, or they would not have stayed so long.) Very eccentric. For example, he had a curious dislike, more than dislike, a horror, of birds. And while all round in the countryside they were now trying to preserve them, prevent their extermination, any bird on his property was shot at sight—and he employed several men specially to guard him from them. And it was not that he liked to eat them. Never a thrush was put to his table, not one. No, it must be connected with this story—with the scandal. They reminded him of something he wished to forget, or else it was his wife, perhaps, who thought them bad companions for him. What it was, the *padrone* had never been able to make out.

How odd it was, I thought, this continual tradition of the eccentric Englishman living in some small Italian town, and how well justified one always found it to be. (I remembered the English hermit I had once seen living in a cave near Ancona.) But what kind of sad story was it which had been responsible for making these two people, now old, and obviously, by their surroundings, very prosperous, stay here all these long thirty summers or more, never to go away, never to see anyone of their own kind? Even in that comfortable villa, the summer heats must have been very severe and trying to the health (think of this flat countryside under the blazing sun of July

or August). Perhaps they had lived a long time in India. But, surely, then they would have been more frightened of snakes than of birds! Indeed, the bird-phobia was the most unusual, the most individual, feature of the entire story. How, I wondered, did it link up with the reasons which had forced them to come here to live? The whole thing was inexplicable, and the only answer possible to the queries one framed to oneself was to be found in the simple reply that he was just an "eccentric Englishman." That was probably all there was in it.

However, my interest did not in the least fade during the few remaining days I stayed there. Involuntarily, my mind would play about the facts, and try to find some solution. Several times, many times even, my feet led me past the smartly-painted and handsome iron gates, with their high spikes, past the stout, tall walls, their tops glittering with the varying angles of the broken glass that crowned them. And one evening, the last evening, my curiosity was rewarded. As I walked, screened from view by the shelter of the walls, towards the gates, I heard voices —English voices speaking. Somehow, I knew the tone (unconnected as I was with the whole affair, my heart was yet beating with excitement).—Surely I knew it—a hollow, rather impressive, but now very irate voice. I heard it ejaculate: "There, there! another beastly bullfinch! Why hasn't it been shot? What can the men be thinking of?" And the answering female cry: "Don't worry yourself, dear. Don't let it upset you. After all, the poor little thing can't do you any harm now." Carefully, soundlessly

approaching, I looked round the corner at the gate. There, pressed close up against the bars, stood an old lady, with white hair, an old man, very carefully dressed, with a trim beard trained to mask rather cavernous cheeks. He saw me. A terrified glance of recognition darted out at me from his rather inspired eyes, that, as they gazed into mine, mechanically opened wider, and then narrowed, to give an effect of radiance. Hurriedly he turned away and shuffled behind the wall; but not before I had, in my turn, been able to identify the body of the dead poet, Joseph Bundle.