“That dear little chap.”
WALTER
AN ENGLISHMAN
(Before and since Transition)
BY HIS WIFE
MRS. WALTER TIBBITS
(Author of “The Voice of the Orient,” etc.)

An Englishman indeed in whom there is no guile.
“That dear little chap.”
Small joy was I to thee; oft since we met
Sorrow has left thee all too sad to save.
Useless my love—as vain as this regret
That pours my hopeless life across thy grave."
BEFORE

“England came to me—me who had always ta’en
But never given before—England the giver,
In a vision of three poplar trees that shiver
On still evenings of summer, after rain,
When scarce a ripple moves the upland grain.”

ALTER’S father, like Dick Whittington, was three times Mayor of—Warwick. Thus he was born from the heart of the Rose of England, within sight of the Kingmaker’s Castle, and on soil soaked with the blood of the Roses. English to the core, he embodied supremely the best British traditions. In all my world-wide travels I have always found the British Officer a radiant gentleman and a brother. Walter was not of the most meteoric of these, but one of the very best. I have therefore chosen to write of his exquisite life in the loveliest of all English cities, Salisbury, whose keynote is Supreme Rest.

Near it is the stately Catholic home of our great gipsy prototype, Isabel Arundell (Lady Burton) of Wardour, and the Manor of Clarendon where Hubert de Burgh, forerunner of the great Lord Salisbury of our time, bore the burden and banner of England in the face of a cowardly king. There, blest by the shades of the greatest of English people, I have written of the best of Englishmen. With ever the fairy finger of the spire pointing towards God. My dearest has not passed

“Unwept, unhonoured, nor unsung.”
From friends met in Himalayan fastnesses, from quiet cathedral closes, from royal princes, from peasants have come tributes of homage to my best and brightest.

His life was outwardly uneventful. He had neither the brains nor the inclination to forge to the front of affairs. He had common sense rather than brilliancy. But he bore without flinching, year after year, the hot weathers of the hottest parts of India with such sweetness that his native Indian servant said: “I have served many sahibs but never one like you.” One of his C.O.s., far away in Central Indian jungles, whose own hot temper earned for him from irreverent soldiers the soubriquet of “The Mad Mullah,” said that Walter was the best junior he had ever had. Another, destined to rise high, said: “I am very fond of him. He is such a willing worker. With others I have either to censure or to excuse.”

Early in his Army career he met at the Curragh Camp a young girl from an old Irish castle, recently bereaved of her guardian and home, whose conversation on the Johnston Expedition to the Nyassa Lakes to quell the slave trade charmed him. She had always longed to go to India, so when Walter went there she accompanied him as his wife. At the end of the first year, Walter was sent to Tirah, leaving me to fulfil my craving to go up country and see Benares, etc.

Then came the greatest event in both our lives. In Benares, the Holy City of India, I met members of the Himalayan Brotherhood, who took me as their pupil. This Great Event in my life, the culminating Event of all my past lives, reacted on Walter. My
Guru is a lady of the Brahman caste, of princely family, and of European education. Born in the shadow of the Brahma Somaj, she reverts to the strictest orthodox Hinduism. One day as I bade farewell, after a visit, she said quietly, never having seen Walter in the flesh: “I know your husband on the spiritual plane. Very few English people are as good as he is.” So that our marriage brought to Walter that one supreme boon, though he knew it not in waking hours, the quickening of his evolution to meet the Fount of all Good.

He had, without knowing it, Hindu Ideals.

He had the Hindu ideal of duty. He was an English Bhishma. He “died” because he insisted on attending a board when warned he was unfit to travel by train.

He had the Hindu ideal of marriage. No matter where I may have failed to him in a sometimes overfull life, he never failed to me, to love and cherish and to protect the woman to whom he had given his word.

He had the Hindu ideal of mercy. He said of himself: “I can’t be unkind to anyone.” Men called him “that dear little chap.” Women, “the kindest man they had ever met.” All animals loved him and gravitated to him. He thought it “quaint” to sit on a verandah, parrot and dog on either side, fed with alternate morsels. One day a rascally hawk pounced on the parrot. Walter, hearing shrieks, rushed in the nick of time to avert a tragedy. How he loved the Siamese cats, with kinks in their tails! It is meet that I should write of him in Clarendon Woods, where birds do not trouble to hide their nests and enormous hares and foxes disport almost at my feet.

And he was generous, one of the few who never
think of money. He said, "the object of life was to live, not to amass wealth." The only time he was greedy was self-confessed at Durban. There he saw English greengages after five years of India and mangoes. "I let down the door of my tent so that no one should disturb me, and would have growled had they got at them."

He had a delicate wit, from a child, when his mother asked: "Wally, who made the world?"

"Peter Parley," promptly replied the little boy, who loved to turn taps on the sly.

On our last voyage home from India together we arrived on Guy Fawkes' Day. As I hate fats of all sorts, I said the P. & O. suet pudding was vulgar. Amid shrieks of laughter, the captain, at whose table we sat, sent the steward to see if that scion of a noble house, Captain R. S. (now a royal equerry) was eating it. The gallant officer was much enjoying his treacle duff. "My ideal," said Walter, "is to go down to Margate and eat shrimps upon the pier!"

It is difficult to reproduce wit on paper, but we all laughed till we ached. Long after he wrote me a bike tour, that he "had been down to Margate!"

I told him that Annie Besant had given out at a public lecture that she had visited the planet Mars in the astral body, but declined to tell what she saw there. She ought to be made to tell," he replied; "here's everybody dying to know what's going on in Mars and this old woman says she knows and won't tell. She ought to have hot irons to make her speak!" I did not tell him that no hot irons would make "the re-incarnation of Hypatia and Giordano Bruno" speak.
He loved Dean Hole and his "squearsons!" He said he feared that "after death" I should soar to the "seventh astral" whilst he would be "a wretched spook, frightening people in churchyards."

We attended the great Catholic celebrations in Rome in 1920 for the canonisations of Joan of Arc, the Blessed Margaret Mary, and certain Uganda martyrs, who had been made into human faggots, of whom only one escaped to tell the tale and was then present. My friends at the Vatican gave us seats just behind the diplomatic circle and just above the Holy Father. On Joan's day a shaft of sunlight fell from the dome and lit up in streaming radiance the white lace mantilla of a girl who might have been the Maid of Orleans herself! "Pippin," Walter whispered, "Is that Joan of Arc's Astral?"

One of the last functions we attended together was the fête at Devonshire House, when society dames masqueraded as mannequins to display modes said to date from B.C. 40,000. We found it more amusing to stay in the ante-room and watch the actresses pose for the camera. There Olga Nethersole, the fête's factotum, was warmly disputing with a grave and reverend signor. She appealed to Walter, thinking he also was on the Committee: "Don't you think my plan, that they should pass down the grand staircase, much better than the other way?" "Yes," he promptly replied, "I certainly think so. I think your plan infinitely better than the other plan" (not the least idea of what it was). "Yes," she said, "I shall give orders so," and the duchesses, etc., were marshalled as Walter had directed.
He said that Queen Mary's hats were like wedding cakes!

Walter was democratic in his ideas. Since the war he held that all Englishmen had something in common. The last time I saw him conscious on earth, at Liverpool Street Station, he told me that three friends came into the hotel bar every evening. I told him it was like Baber's "Seat of the Three Friends," and so at the Ipswich military funeral, when commanding officers rose from their sick beds on that bitter day to escort Major Walter Tibbits to his rest, the loveliest wreath with the most delicate inscription came from the townspeople.

When Walter told me we might be sent to Bury St. Edmunds I shivered at the omen. Ouida lies buried there, and there are so many coincidences in the life of the great artist with my own. Then I laughed at myself for a goose, but a goose was walking over my grave. He died there!

I was expecting Walter in London every moment to start for the south of France, when I was told at midnight of the fatal fall from the train. In fifteen minutes I was rushing across England in a motor with two men. Only a few weeks before I had rushed across France to his side, giving up a long hoped-for first meeting with the royal savant of the Abruzzi for his sake. We tore through the East End of London and then into the open country and across snowy wastes at breakneck speed. When the sign posts on the cross-roads failed we stopped at villages to wake up houses wherever we saw a light to ask our way. At last I entered the ghostly hospital ward and found Walter in bed, with his head bound up, pale and
cold as a corpse. Later the circulation revived, and the face grew pink and the beautiful, strong chest warm. But it was false dawn. He died next eve at seven. I called to him at intervals to wake and speak to me, and, in the last hours, to come to me in the astral, as he had always promised, and he did! Though the poor, torn brain could not respond to my calls, I feel sure he knew. How warm and beautiful his chest and body were to the very last when I covered them with kisses. Only a few weeks before the hour his fate was writ we were talking and laughing at lunch, for the hundredth time, of his cremation. “I shall have your urn always with me, and you will come in the astral if you can?” “Of course I will, if I can,” he replied. And he did.

That night, as I slept, wrapped in the clothes he had worn and holding his silver tobacco case to my breast, I woke suddenly and knew he had been there. Clairaudiently I heard his Requiem Music going in the Holy Occultists' Temple.

Next day I took him to Ipswich, where we were met by nice clean English soldiers (how he hated foreigners!). As the coffin was removed from the gun-carriage I curtseyed more deeply than to any European King and kissed it. At our hotel the manager told me, “he was such a gentleman, the nicest I ever knew.” That night I slept in Walter’s pyjamas and bed. It was the most terrible week of my life. But, oh, my comrades! It is at times such as these we should put our theories of happier hours to the test, so I wrote out and lived on the lines learnt long ago in Holy India, “Ramanuja declares that mere knowledge alone cannot accomplish that which may
be achieved by devotion. So he recommends the cleaning of temples and images, the providing of flowers and perfumes, etc.” I splashed about in the cold and wet, with pneumonic lungs, to convert the barracks mortuary into a *Chappelle ardente* filled with lovely blooms and lighted tapers.

After he had lain there a week I took him to town. Eventually we had an Empire cremation with more flowers of a pink rosy as our love, and the ashes were put into a rose alabaster urn.

“Exquisite” is the word for all that concerns Walter, the name by which he was known throughout the British Army. He was small. He said that “Bobs” and all distinguished men were, and he was fastidiously delicate in body and mind. So all that is mortal of him lies in rose alabaster, radiant as our love, and as the small coffin passed into the flame all *joie de vivre* and gaiety in my life shrivelled too.

Little loyal splendid thing! I am glad that you are at rest from petty annoyances and “pussyfoot generals.” With what zest you must be exploring the “astrals.”

Here I ask my busy fellow workers to pause and reflect one moment. One of the best of Englishmen has passed away.

Lady Angela Forbes has asked in the last line of her racy memoirs, “What is worth while?”

To which I reply—

1. To know the White Lodge is worth while.
2. Work is worth while.
3. Love is worth while.

Not the fleeting phantasies of the senses, but the satisfying liaisons of the soul. That which sweetens
and gives savour to all the rest. That which to us Britons, especially, is so dear that a British archbishop has spoken of it before our beloved sovereign as "the steadying influence of his home." It was my husband's simple goodness which triumphed over all obstacles to this last reunion. Life has ceased its savour without him to share the jokes.

His love inspires my work. That work is to leave an account of our gipsy life and a still more lasting memorial to him before I pass to my own rest. I dream of a public park or garden at Benares, the Holy City. This to contain a museum of the artistic odds and ends we collected during our travels for our home, which without him is a home no longer. A rendezvous for Western tourists and Eastern residents, white and brown, might forge a link of the Empire Walter loved.

And then to those who sorrow, alas! that vast army. Learn this comfortable lesson from the transition of Walter. To one who, like myself, has known practically for many years that the body is naught but a glove, a cumbersome, hampering shell shed nightly in sleep, what is this but a happy event for Walter? As the Divine Song puts it, he has only cast off an old "neurasthenic" garment. He has only shed, chrysalis-like, a shattered nervous system, worn by many fevers, to emerge triumphant. He is "dead" and behold he is alive for evermore, and more alive than before.
WALTER passed on January 17th last. When I had closed the beautiful blue eyes with kisses for the last time, they took me away to the woman house surgeon's room, which was filled with the Peace of the White Lodge and with the Eastern Temple Music in Requiem. I wanted to sleep beside the corpse, but they took me to the hotel. After a few hours' sleep I cabled, within eighteen hours of the "death," to my Guru: "Walter killed, please help him." And I sent a list of questions by post for news of Walter. Eastern reticence refused a reply. In my anguish I went, April 9th, incognita to the bureau of the late W. T. Stead. My parents had hobnobbed with him on Exeter Hall platforms, and I knew that any place run by his daughter must be clean. There a slight, pale young man presided over a small "circle." When my turn came, to my amazement, he told me the following five correct details: (1) Someone who had passed within the last six months was called for me. (2) The name was "Walter, Walter, Walter." (3) He had had Eastern conditions. (4) He had died from a wound in the head. (5) He was still sleeping, but would communicate with me later in my room (the urn is there covered with flowers, the incense burnt twice daily).

A few weeks later I bade Mr. G. W. Sharpe come to my river residence for further news. He told me Walter was still unconscious, but "at the time of the falling of the roses" I should come into direct contact with him. I rushed to a florist's shop, for
my appointment with the Crewe Circle was for July 18th.

"When do the roses fade?" I asked.

"The full season is over the fifteenth of July, Madam."

It was the anniversary of our wedding day.

I accepted the omens. I prayed daily, with faith to Mahadeva, who is also Bhuteshvara, the Lord of Ghosts. My poor murdered friend, Lady White, had already been photographed with me, through the mediumship of Mrs. Deane. Meantime I attended a direct voice séance. I conversed with Mr. Stead unconvincing. But later the name of Beauchamp was called. "A stout man in khaki stands before you." Then I knew, before a hearty voice exclaimed, "Don't you remember the Colonel?" Colonel Sir Horace Procter Beauchamp had been an old friend in Mhow, Central India. Walter had accompanied his regiment to the Cape, and they had seen the sea serpent en route. He was last seen in a Turkish village cheering on his men, walking with his cane, arm-in-arm with his nephew, before an overwhelming rush. He said: "I have been trying to get through a long time." Bouleversée, I let him go. But the 18th was drawing nigh.

I was asked to choose a hymn. I selected "Whiter than Snow." Walter and I used to sing it and laugh about it at my mother's house. He would know the tune if anywhere about. The Crewe Circle bade me mark the plates I had bought and slept with for weeks and never let go. I wrote "Pippin" on two and placed them in the camera. The Crewe Circle made
an arch above it. When we fished them out of the bath one had an "extra." A beautiful head large as my own and close to it. I said nothing, though I knew. Two days later came the proof printed here-with. His face was exactly as I last saw it in the hospital ward! Walter has triumphed over death and hell. The gates of Hades have not prevailed against him. "Spiritualism," said Mr. Sharpe, "is only a stepping-stone to something higher." That highest lies at Benares, the vortex of the spiritual life of the planet.

RIVER DEEP,
August, 1922.

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Notes

1. Bhishma was chosen by Shri Krishna to discourse on dharma because he had never failed in duty. This he did lying wounded on a bed of arrows, waiting for the sun to turn into the Southern Course, the most propitious time for him to shed the body.

2. The Third Person of the Trinity.

3. Vide Sketch, July 26th, 1922.

4. Colonel Beauchamp commanded the 20th Hussars in India and the Norfolk Regiment (recruited from the Sandringham Estate) at the Dardanelles. His regiment pushed two miles ahead of the rest of the force in the Turkish woods.

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