

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Three stories are put together in this small volume. They may well be some of the best Geoffrey Bingham has written. Author of a number of volumes of short stories, he has selected these three tales to describe how man reacts or responds under heavy stress.

Whilst the stories are set in a Japanese prisoner-of-war camp, yet the same principles of behaviour show themselves wherever human beings are subject to intense stress.

P.O.W. novels such as *King Rat* and *Bridge Over the River Kwai* describe self-centred and altruistic behaviour brilliantly. Bingham digs even deeper and comes up with valuable principles which interpret human beings as they are by nature.

Even so, the rich note of entertainment is not lost. Perhaps it is richer because of the writer's inbuilt analysis.



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Geoffrey C. Bingham

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Geoffrey Bingham

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CONTENTS

FOREWORD	ix
THE RAYMOND CONNECTION	1
THE POWER WITHIN	15
THREE RICE CAKES	33
ANGEL. WINGS	43

FOREWORD

At the End of His Tether

The three stories of this present volume, *At the End of His Tether*, were written with the background of Japanese prisoner—of—war camps. I myself spent two years in Changi Prison Camp, on Singapore Island. This camp was not Changi Gaol, into which prisoners were packed in the last year and a half of incarceration. Changi Prison Camp was the site in which tens of thousands were originally imprisoned. From it, many working parties were distributed around Singapore Island or sent on to the Burma—Thailand Railway construction. Others were sent to Japan. During the last eighteen months, many of us were patients or staff at Kranji Hospital Prison Camp, also situated on Singapore Island. It was later, following World War II, that the very beautiful Kranji War Memorial Cemetery was created, close to the site of this former P.O.W. hospital.

On return from Singapore, I suddenly found myself as an accepted short—story writer. One journal alone—the *Sydney Bulletin*—published thirty—four of my stories consisting of war yarns, tales set in the Australian rural scene, as also stories which had prisoner—of—war plots. It seems that many years have to pass before people can feel free to read war novels and books which describe prison—camp life. At the moment—some forty years after World War II—deep interest is being shown in the strange things which happened in

prisoner—of—war camps throughout the world. Hence the present spate of books, and their popularity.

I think many of these books are valuable because their writers have had time to mature in their thinking, to develop rich and useful insights concerning those terrible—and yet wonderful—days. Men and women who return from wars have generally gained deep insights into the nature of man, and also into their own selves. For this reason, they can be valuable. The human race needs its experienced elders, men and women of acquired wisdom.

My thinking about those days has never been far from the centre of my mind. In the last ten years I have recommenced writing. Having spent many of those forty years dealing with human persons and their problems, I have gathered at least a smidgen of wisdom. I simply find every human per—son a fascinating mixture of nobility and less—than—nobility.

Recently, in sharing an ‘Encounter’ session with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, two of my stories were used, namely ‘Three Rice Cakes’ and ‘The Raymond Connection’. Prior to this, five true stories had been read on the A.B.C. in their ‘By the Way’ sessions. Both sets of recordings drew heart—warming responses—the thing we call ‘feedback’. Whilst recording the session ‘One Thousand Days to Freedom’, I had a sudden visitation—in my mind—of a character called ‘Raymond’, and a story relating to him quickly developed. I am not a person greatly given to visions, but I dare not deny that this was a special vision. So the yarn developed which I have called ‘The Raymond Connection’.

A year prior to this, I had written the story ‘The Power Within’. It has to do with that thing which we sometimes call ‘moral power’. Whatever opinions may exist about the nature and value of hypnosis, its method was used in some quite desperate situations where there was no anaesthetic available for surgical operations. Again, some of us had the

disease ‘beriberi’. The name comes from an Indian language and means ‘I cannot! I cannot!’ At least that was what I was given to understand. When the disease became far advanced we simply could not lift our limbs, for the motory nerve system had been almost destroyed. We knew utter helplessness, yet under hypnosis patients were made to lift their limbs. I wondered how the will of another—expressed in hypnotic commands—could so move a man in his helplessness.

This of course set my mind going on the connection between the human will and its action, a fascinating subject dealt with powerfully by Paul the apostle of Christ in his Letter to the church at Rome. In the seventh chapter of that Epistle he speaks of his desire to do good, and to desist from evil, but finds he has no power to carry out that will. This lack of what we call ‘moral power’ has baffled many great thinkers down through the centuries. They recognise that there are powerful drives for a person to take certain action, but he or she is nevertheless unable to fulfil what one wills.

The story of ‘The Power Within’ is true in all its elements, although the character ‘Scotty’ is really the creation of a person drawn from a number of men I knew, not excluding myself. Scotty’s story relates very closely to ‘Three Rice Cakes’ which, incidentally, has already been published in one of my books entitled *Angel Wings*. The poem from which the book gets its title has also been included in this present volume. ‘The Power Within’ seeks to examine what appears to be man’s amazing moral power. This appears to contradict what I said above, namely, that many great thinkers have been baffled by the apparent lack of moral power in man. Another group of thinkers insists that what man wills he can surely bring into effect. The reason, then, for this present small book, is to examine the thinking of these two different views.

Does man have—of himself—authentic moral power, or

does he not? I believe he does not, but I emphasise the point that he does not—of himself I am sure that when man displays moral power it is either authentic or it is apparent but not real. It is authentic only when man is in personal union with God. It will often be apparent, but nevertheless unreal, when man is not in union with God. In this latter case, man will be motivated—at core—by his own self, and for his own ends. This explains the powerful endeavours of religious persons, and the seeming high levels of moral attainment.

What is often missed in research on this issue is that man is seeking to prove himself, to attain some form of self—justification, and to insist that he can do it without God. This is the drive behind the morality of Scotty. It is, sadly enough, the drive behind the type of Pharisaism that Jesus so roundly exposed and condemned. The curious thing about Judaism and Christianity is that they both call for ‘a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart’, and claim that ‘the poor in spirit’ and ‘they that mourn’ are the truly blessed ones.

In other words: to come to the end of one’s tether is to begin to discover one’s true self, and to become genuine in living. The prodigal son—better called ‘the lost son’—found himself at last in a pigsty. It is recorded of him that in that place, and at the end of his tether, ‘He came to himself’. To ‘come to oneself’ is a salutary—if not wonderful—experience. It seems to me that it is only at that point that genuine life begins.

These three stories are set out together in the hope that some of us will pause long enough in this busy life of entertainment, business, sport, and almost mindless discussion, to face the issue of what man becomes under stress. Any one of us may be broken and shattered, and—should we survive—go on to a life of bitterness and constant recrimination against the elements of heredity, parental upbringing,

environment and circumstances which constantly seem to shape us.

On the other hand, some who come to the end of their tether and form a sane self—estimate, may cast themselves upon the God who created them, in the hope that He will recast their lives. These have no need of anger, bitterness, and resentful memories. They discover true moral power, and find themselves to be persons of destiny and not mere fate. When God justifies man out of His resources, then man has no need to justify himself. This is why Christ’s Cross is so powerful: it helps to recast persons who have come to the end of their tether.

I guess I have spoken more about these stories than is needed. Stories are written for the entertainment of readers, and I trust you will be entertained. I only add this thought—that entertainment can be enjoyed on many different levels. Good entertainment teaches us concerning ourselves, and helps us to gather more reality, and, with reality, wisdom. If coming to the end of our tether is necessary, then it ought not to stave us off from that, but rather hasten the process. So them——‘Good entertainment!’

Geoffrey Bingham
Coromandel East, 1985

THE RAYMOND CONNECTION

Raymond came to me last night like a wraith. He hung there in the back of my mind like some kind of vision. His clothes were fairly tattered, and in a way he was like a tatty doll, but he was human all right, and real. Nothing more real than that happens to me.

I suppose I should have expected Raymond to come. These days I have been doing a bit of delving into the past, and memory is a strange thing—anyone will tell you that. So when Raymond appeared, suspended there against the back—ground of my mind, I wasn't surprised. I took it as it happened, and was not dismayed. Dismay would have been the last thing for me, especially in the mood that I was living at that time.

One of the reasons I partly expected all this was that I had been reading James Clavell's *King Rat*, his brilliant account of Changi prisoner—of—war camp. Having been in that camp for some years, his story rang true and was pretty poignant, to say the least. After that—and as a kind of antidote—I was reading Ernest Gordon's *Miracle on the River Kwai*. I think you need to read both books, rather than one or the other.

So my whole being was in the mood I mentioned, but for

the life of me I can't describe that mood. It was something of sadness, and something of joy, with a lot of inner weeping and a modicum of laughing. Where I stood in it all was what mattered to me, but then it doesn't matter to others. Not a bit.

So I began to talk to Raymond, even before he began to talk to me, although his hanging there was itself a pretty vocal thing. You cannot see a man whom you may not have met before but who is the synthesis of all you saw and knew in your time of imprisonment, and his very presence not talk to you. I talked—there is no doubt about that—but then I wanted answers and I wanted conversation, and today there is no one around like Raymond, because he is both the past and the present. He may even have something of the future in him.

Some who were there in the past just won't talk in the present. Some of them who might have talked are now dead. Many of them who are still alive are too angry: they burn in—side from some slow consuming fire, and the years have just about eaten them up. They've had to build up the outside so that it looks like some authentic exterior. They've had to make it look modern. It's always been modern in its own time—the 50s or the 60s, the 70s or the 80s—and maybe it will become so in the 90s. You know what I mean. It has changed with every decade, and in every decade. It is as though you learned nothing from that critical experience, and what you thought you had gained, you have lost. You just become like the age you are in, but in memory you just can't be that. Memory is a powerful thing. Try to kill or lose memory and you lose yourself. I repeat that so that you will remember it: lose memory and you lose yourself.

Ernest Gordon said something like that. He said that when the Japs had used cruelty and degraded the minds of men, they made them forget the past, and it was then that men forgot themselves. They were just blanks, or empty

holes, or existent nothings. When memory is killed—and who outside us can really kill it?—then you lose identity. I think you may understand this, but you can't if you have never killed your memory. Some are trying to do that and it is suicidal, and like most suicide is without great point.

So I wanted Raymond to talk, and talk he did. I cannot remember all he said. I'm not a good reporter. Every report I've ever given has been flavoured with my own thinking; it isn't objective reporting. But then, I say 'To the devil with objective reporting!' What are we here for but to see life, and we see and then tell about it. That's the job of every artist, every poet, composer and writer. So I listened to Raymond, and when he talked I kept absorbing it and ranging it up against my own mind and life and thought. It kept coming through that way, and it was gathering pace, and something within me was singing in high spirit, whilst some—thing else was sobbing and sobbing. I'll tell you how.

A couple of years ago I went north in Australia to Dar—win. I was on the track going towards Katherine. We stopped at the Adelaide River, and there was a notice saying, 'TO THE WAR CEMETERY'. I went down a narrow road to where there was a grove. It was unusually beautiful, with high coconut palms, other palms and trees, and a lovely stretch of green lawn—quite something in that bit of the Territory. Then we went into the war cemetery. There was a plump girl in shorts who was sweeping away fallen tropical flowers, keeping everything neat. She seemed interested in the flowers on the asphalt. Maybe she was also interested in the graves: I don't know.

When I went in, I saw hundreds—maybe a thousand or more—tombstones. They were in good marble. They had crosses, except for one or two Jewish and Moslem insignia, the Star of David, and the Crescent. All these men had died in the war.

I looked at the stones, the translucent marble headstones,

and I read the names of the men who had died over forty years ago. Most of them were young. Here was I—over forty years later—hale and hearty and living life, and they were dead. They never grew up. They never had the chance to grow up. Some of them had been married, and their wives had had their feelings and wishes inscribed on the headstone of their particular husband. Some of the sayings were sweet, and some sad, and I had no way of knowing how sincere or how insincere were these inscriptions, and how many of those wives had since remarried.

In those moments, I remembered young men—mere boys—I had seen killed or who had died in P.O.W. camps, and suddenly I began to weep. I was with people, so I did not weep outside, but inside a whole stream of tears was flowing, and I was crying for the young men and the sincere wives, and their little children. I just kept weeping, and yet all the time I knew there was something wistfully wonderful about it.

When Raymond came, it was something like that. He was clad, of course, in his unkempt prison garments. I mean, service khaki which has worn down with the years, until it seemed natural, and he, hanging there at the back of my mind, was clearly seen and understood, and he had a touch of quiet joy at being received, at being one with me. It was as though he had been searching out a like mind.

Not that I had ever met Raymond, at least not that I could remember. I have to say that, but then in another way I had met him, for he was a composite of all I had known in past days, even though he was himself, and probably a per—son in his own rights. I just do not know. He was real enough as I stared at him, and as he looked back at me.

I just want to refer again to this thing called ‘memory.’ Our minds are both strange and wonderful. They store every

bit of data they receive, both seen and known from outside our person, or felt, imagined, and thought about within our person. Associations are always there, strong as the day the events happened and the associations began to cluster around their objects. When we let memories meet, there is a curious communication as we expose mind to mind, person to person.

This is what happened. It wasn’t just telepathy, which after all is simply a name we give to mental communication. It was more than that. I’ve always held the view that any two people can have immediate and full communication—if they want it! Some like it for a while but then get scared and draw back, or cut off when they feel they are being exploited. With Raymond and me there was none of this. It was as though we were looking away from ourselves to others, and to a mass of incidents and accumulated information which we felt could help each other to sort out our thinking, as though conclusions about all these things really mattered. Oh, they mattered all right. Down through the years I’ve known they mattered. It was just that I had needed help to sort them out.

You see, you just can’t talk to anyone. Some have self—justification as their driving force in life. They want never to have been wrong. Now how can you discuss anything—especially about a common past—if others have always had to read it the self—justifying way? They never could afford to make mistakes, but then why? Self—justification did not begin in their Y.O.W. days. It must have started before that. Maybe prison conditions intensified it, but they never initiated it. When then did it begin? I think it must have come with their mother’s milk, even if it were not actually in the milk. I mean, every man shapes his own destiny.

Raymond was a wonderful man, a quiet man, and a patient man. He was not on to prove anything, and he seemed too tired to waste time and breath on romantic,

sentimental or patriotic ways of thinking. Nor was he merely a stark realist. Certainly he was not cynical. Like me, he wanted to get behind things and happenings and know what they were all about. That was why we could converse so simply. As I said, I am not quite sure whether we actually and audibly verbalised our questions and our thinking, but I know it was as though we did; as though we surely did.

And what was that discussion, that meditation, that beautiful, sad and wonderful communication? It was about us. If Raymond had not said anything, then Clavell's and Gordon's writing would have been enough, for both came at the same thing from different vantage points, and maybe Raymond was just Clavell and Gordon come together in my mind. Maybe not. There was something about Raymond which was more gentle and understanding than even those other two brilliant writers, but I have to confess I just don't know.

Let me tell you that for years I have had to talk to myself about many of these things. There really hasn't been anyone else to talk about the things I needed to understand. When I meet someone who was in one or other of the camps, I soon gather that he has worked things out his way, just as I worked them out my way. So we either cut off from each other, or we clash, or one or other will not speak. Some men just have painful memories: as I said before, fires of bitterness are burning within them, or fires of anger, or both. They cannot read their years of suffering aright, and I for one have no criticism of them; only pity, and pity that is without patronage. I guess, in my heart, I have been just as dogmatic in my conclusions about those years as they are.

Not that I have not met humble men, and gentle men, men who have forgiven the Japanese and men who have sought the forgiveness of God. I have, plenty of them, but even so I have wanted them to say more, to go beyond forgiveness and vocalise love. It has been like standing in that

cemetery and weeping for lost years, when in fact no years are lost years when they are spent on this earth or beyond it, in eternity.

Now I come to what Raymond and I discussed, but I have to warn you that you may not understand. This is not because we two are brilliant, or your mind dull. It is because you must have had something similar happen in your life before you can have affinity with us. Suffering is the key: suffering is the true connection.

Clavell's *King Rat* I saw many years ago as a film. It was an excellent film, but having seen it I felt no inclination to read the book. I am sorry I didn't. In the film the main character who is 'The King' was portrayed as a self-saving, self-seeking person. He was all of that, but the book shows he was not only that. It also helps us to understand why he was interested only in Number One—himself! Even so, he did some fine things, but then you could not be sure that in the ultimate they were not acts of enlightened self-interest and, that one day they would bring him dividends.

Ernest Gordon in his book goes much further in describing the utter degradation of the prisoners. It is true that he shows this demeaning of the human spirit was a deliberate measure of the Nipponese guards, and that that did not excuse the depravity of the men. I can remember saying to myself, 'If I don't write this down I will never believe how low human beings can sink. I must write it down for later memory.' And so I did, but then later I burned the writings I brought out of the camp, so that I would not keep reminding myself. I had not counted on memory. It is all stored there in our memory data—banks, and will never go away.

Neither Raymond nor I want it to go away. That was why we talked. We wanted to understand why it all happened. That it had happened we well knew, and how it happened

we also knew. There is no point in going endlessly over this kind of thinking as though incessant thinking will bring some explanation. Raymond and I talked so that we might set to rest our minds and hearts on the matter of man. Raymond and I are men. You and I are men, and I mean men, even if we are women.

‘At first,’ said Raymond, ‘I could not believe what I saw. When I saw men cheating, men getting angry and bitter, men dying because they were too crushed to live, and men living because they were too scared to die, then that made me angry and depressed. I felt sick at heart. I wanted to vomit. I wanted to opt out of the human race.’

‘When I saw that,’ I said, ‘I was miserable, but then I had a theology of man. It was stern theology. It told me all men are, at heart, depraved. I thought I believed that, but depravity in the concrete is vastly different from depravity in the abstract. I kept thinking that men couldn’t really be like that, and then it was only some who were. Somehow they were the ultimately unregenerate: they were the lost ones. Then I saw that wasn’t good enough. I saw those whose theology was the same as mine, and they failed too. They were even worse for failing. So I was bereft.’

‘I kept trying not to be like that, like them,’ said Raymond. ‘It was difficult but I stuck it. When I heard about soldiers trying to get away on ships from the Saps, and herding back women and children on to the wharves so that they could find a place on the ships, that horrified me.’

‘When I heard some had raided the hospital rations and drugs, and some of them were officers,’ I said, ‘I felt the good world had ended.’

‘I used always to think it was a fair enough world,’ said Raymond. I thought I saw him shiver, and look cold and thin and

lonely, but that may have been my own inner impression. Raymond, when he spoke to me, was a richly mature person. Perhaps he was momentarily living his past experience. Then I remembered how I used to be swamped with loneliness. I kept thinking, in those days, ‘There mightn’t be one in all the world who is really trustworthy. Not even your closest friend, your parents or your wife.’ I kept thinking what a frightening world it would be— ‘Every man for him—self and the devil take the hindmost. Blow you Jack, I’m all right.’ I shuddered at the memory, and I knew what Raymond might have been thinking.

‘I was always an idealist,’ I said. ‘I expected—in spite of my theology—that man would turn up trumps. I had been reared on men like Kipling and Studdart Kennedy. In them, man always rises to the occasion.’

We cleared those things with each other. ‘One day,’ I said, ‘they brought a Dutchman into our camp. They put him into the mental ward of the hospital. I would hear him day and night—especially at night—crying pitifully that he hadn’t wanted to betray his mates, but he had. Under cruel Kempei Tei torture he had done that. The secret police had wormed the matter out of him. Now—forever—that would be on his mind. He had gone mad.’

‘So scrupulous,’ Raymond murmured. ‘So scrupulous are some of us.’

‘Underneath it all,’ I said, ‘we are all scrupulous. That is where I made my biggest mistake of judgement. I thought some men were only evil: were evil only. So few there were that showed no evil.’

Raymond, quiet and hanging at the back of my mind—wraith of a body in khaki tatters—nodded. ‘My greatest mistake,’ he said, ‘was that I used to think we differed from person to person. I have found that underneath all, we are all scrupulous. It is just that we cannot keep to our standards, our ideals, and our knowledge of the truth that worries

us.'

'Otherwise the Japs would have had no power.'

'No power,' Raymond agreed gently, 'do power at all.' He penetrated my spirit and we both met. 'Men do not give up unless they feel they have failed. They do not become like ravening animals unless they are disappointed in themselves. It is at this point that evil can destroy them, or make them destroy themselves.'

'The madman in that prison—the one who betrayed his mates—was witnessing to his scrupulosity,' I said. 'In his crazed state he was saying, "I have failed. I have failed myself as a person, but I cannot accept this: I must go mad in my mind to evade the reality. I, a man—the highest creature upon the earth—have failed." Maybe all crazed people come to the matter like that.'

'We all failed,' Raymond said simply, 'but we just failed in different ways. Some went straight to self—saving, but then they had always been that way. Others pretended they didn't, but they still did it by stealth. Others suddenly realised they daren't die, and so they clung to life even through cruelty to others.'

I was suddenly remembering the cruelty of 'The King' who fried eggs until the torture of their smell, their desirable fragrance, almost drove the starved men to despair. I remembered Gordon's graphic picture of the rush to the offal—cans of the Japanese guards, and how the guards relished the sight of white men, scabbling creatures who fought like pariah—dogs for the offal slops. I thought about the Japs too, how they had to have the white man degraded, since he had—in his mind and attitude—degraded the coloured peoples of the world. The degradation of one person by another is unforgivable in human eyes. No human being forgets denigration. We can't afford to be inferior. We are all scabbling towards the top, but then we all have some memory of the time when man was all glory! That is

when degradation crushes us.

Raymond said, 'I remember watching men wait for their fellow men to die so they could get the food they were unable to eat.'

I said, 'I remember the men who came back from the Burma—Thailand Railway to Changi and Kranji. They were just skin and bones. Their skin was pellagrous—like that of an elephant—and their eyes were sunken back into their heads. Teeth had fallen out and hair was just weak faint fluff, like that of babies. They couldn't look you in the eyes. They were dead while they were living.'

'Whilst they existed,' Raymond echoed. 'They weren't living.'

'How had they died?' I asked. 'I often used to ask myself that question.'

'You can die anywhere, at any time,' Raymond said. 'You don't have to go to a prison camp for that.' I sensed his sadness. Then he said, from his place in my mind, 'Why in our history do we do a great cover—up of man's vileness? Why don't we face it, and come to terms with it?'

I looked at him. 'Maybe it is because that isn't all that we are. Man isn't all muck. Somewhere he has glory, too. He's a contradiction. He's a puzzle.'

Raymond nodded. I could feel his silence, and his gentleness. 'I think we were crushed by what we could be, the evil we could think and do,' he said. 'But then men did incredible things, suddenly, unexplainably—things that seemed like pure gold.'

'People who seemed utterly dead came alive again,' I said. 'They came to life out of death.'

We were both silent, but it was not from despair. It was because we knew about living again.

'Not everyone knows about living again,' I said. Raymond nodded, and his voice was now sad. 'Through—out the world, we—the human race—keep punishing

ourselves. That is because we have consciences. It is because we have memories. The past is just as vivid to us, today, as it was forty and fifty years ago.'

I nodded. 'Then we both know the same thing,' I said. Raymond nodded almost impatiently, as though, of course, we both knew the ground rules for this discussion. We weren't merely speculating. We were passing information to each other, the information that we needed, all tinged with the wisdom we had gained.

'It's forgiveness that counts,' Raymond said. He went on, 'We fight forgiveness, saying we don't need it. Forgiveness is not needed by those who don't fail. Men persist in saying they didn't fail. They try to cover it up. If only we would come clean and admit it, we would be free. Our memory would not haunt us. It would only encourage us.'

'Admission of guilt seems to humiliate,' I said, thinking of the many people I had counselled over the years.

'Admission is good if it brings humility,' said Raymond, 'but it never humiliates. Humility is beautiful for a human being.'

For some moments we were silent. Somewhere along the line we had had to be forgiven. Not becoming crushed and not being defeated by stresses, circumstances, hunger and fear, had not made us better than others. Not being cruel or bitter or deliberately selfish had not meant we were good. Pharisaic self—righteousness lives always at our elbows, and its stench is greater than the stink of utter degradation.

Raymond said to me, 'I guess I'll be going soon.' He hung there, but I knew he wanted us to come to our point. His stare was patient and gentle. 'It's the matter of love,' he said. 'Love doesn't begin with us. It begins with God: let's be clear about that.'

'They thought He didn't love,' I said. 'That was part of

the thinking they had, and that was why their anger grew.'

Raymond nodded. 'Yet they were really angry because they didn't love. They excused their non—loving. They blamed it on to other things. That is why they were savage with God.' He sighed. 'If only we could admit it all.'

I sighed too. I saw a whole human race gripped in its anger against God, when they would have to receive His love in order to understand; especially to understand suffering. 'The pressures on our brothers were great. They were unusual and terrible, but that wasn't the only thing. The pressures today are great wherever human beings try to go it alone. That isn't man's true thing. He can't know love until he is forgiven, and then he can't love until he knows forgiveness.'

I thought about the whole world. I thought about the revelations that had come to men in Changi and at Chungkai on the River Kwai and some other places. I knew they had happened from time immemorial. I knew that Chungkai was not the first occasion where and when the love miracle had taken place.

'What is so sad,' said Raymond, 'is that many of those men are as bitter today as they were then, and even more. To talk of forgiving their former captors angers them. They are men out for justice, and they despise love.' He hung there, very still. 'Yet they love those close to them, even if they find it difficult sometimes to express that love.'

'We said that dead men can come alive,' I said. 'I believe that. Yet some of them who saw life have sunk back into death. They live as they once did, before the great suffering. It seems it was all for nothing.'

'Grey enough death,' said Raymond, 'bright enough living. They have All they need now. No hunger; no captivity; no lack of food. But they have never resolved the matter.'

'And we have?' I asked him gently. I knew he was going. I could feel the tears flowing again in my heart.

He nodded. ‘Yes,’ he said, ‘we have, really. We know the answer. We know they could all be free. Everyone could be free. We could all love and love all, if we, would. Even if they won’t remember, they know the difference. Deep down in the conscience they know the difference. It can’t all really mean nothing.’

I hung on his words. I thought of mates who did not know they really hated themselves for their failure, and who desperately went on blaming others—and God, of course. They stick grimly to their anger and their hatred, as though they are justified in it, when in a trice they could be free. We all fail: let us all see that failure. Let none judge another. Let us understand the Cross, the place where God suffered with all, for all.

It was as though Raymond knew my thoughts. ‘We battle all the time to believe it,’ he said, ‘but the battle keeps us free. If we give in to accusation we’re done.’ He looked at me squarely. ‘We just have to go on battling,’ he said.

I was thinking about that when his eyes drew away from me, and he was gone. Where he went I did not know, nor do I have to know. I am willing to agree that he may have been the figment of my mind, or even my alter ego (if there be such things), but that he was real—however you count reality—I do not doubt. I only know that at places like Adelaide River, and the great war—grave cemeteries I have seen at Kranji on Singapore Island, in Irian Jaya, Thailand and the Philippines, the same tears keep flowing, and I keep praying that my heart will remain soft and gentle and unjudgemental. I keep praying that the world may see that the cross it places on the headstone of millions of graves, is the one Cross where God Himself suffered, suffered with us all, and suffered for us all.

I hope all of us come to know forgiveness and love.

THE POWER WITHIN

I first met Scotty McLean at Port Dickson, up where the beaches are unbelievably beautiful, edged as they are by coconut palms and the musical casuarinas.

Scotty was on his own, and for that matter so was I. In—credibly idealistic, many of my images were unreal, and yet I clung to them. I guess I enjoyed dreams, nostalgia and images all in a pretty thick mixture, and this day I was scuffing my feet along the beach, having left the fellows in my section who had invited themselves into one of those Chinese mansions just back from the beach. I found that kind of sociality beyond my immature relationships with people. I kept wanting to live in my own world.

Scotty wasn’t like that. He was a man with fixed ideas, strong opinions, and unswerving morality, which was morality without much religion to it.

Scotty was carrying a coconut with a hole in the top of it. He offered me a drink, and although the humidity was about 80%, one kept being thirsty, so I drank gratefully from it. We sat down under the coconut trees and watched the Tamil coolies shinning up the coconut palms, dropping the heavy fruit and gathering it to make copra or something.

Scotty said, ‘I sometimes find it hard to believe they are humans just like us.’

‘Well, in some ways they are not like us, but they are very much humans,’ I replied.

He agreed with that. I knew him to be’ in our Brigade group, and so we needed no introductions. Scotty, because I had already decided that he belonged to a certain type, evoked little interest. I simply put him in the category which Australians have for Scots. Then I discovered he didn’t run according to type. For instance, Scotty was quite poetical. He had been scribbling something, and when I looked at it—expecting it to be doggerel—I was surprised at its quality. It was not only good writing, but also thought with real depth. I looked at him with new respect. I had had the idea that maybe—in all the Brigade group—I would be about the only poetic one.

Scotty was in L.A.D., that is the Light Aid Detachment. It was composed of older men than Army joining age, which was 39. These men had skills which were useful, particularly in mechanical engineering. Scotty, like many another Scot, was a whizz at fixing vehicles. He was skilled in engine repair. So he got to be very much in demand, and, since he had integrity, had made quite a reputation. It was only his contempt for human weakness which got him into trouble from time to time. Some officers thought their rank entitled them to special respect, but Scotty took a man as he found him. He was a private and could have been a sar—major, if not even more, had he played the matter well, which he hadn’t and didn’t.

Often we would make our way to the beach, and lie on the sand and chat. We would see other fellows; they were living life as they saw it their way, and why not? I guess they knew it might not be all that long in time before they would be in action. Maybe they would be called to the Middle East where the action was happening, or suddenly the Japanese

would descend upon the Malayian Peninsula. Even if that seemed a bit far off in those early 1941 days, it was at the back of the mind, just as at present the nuclear threat seems to be at the back of many minds, determining the way people go about life. So, some of these fellows treated it all as a holiday, but most saw it as a time in life and world history when they were called upon for an unusual task. I doubt whether there was any despair in them, other than humans know in the course of life. Maybe they wanted to fit all the joy they could into their existence, for fear that later they would face other things—even death. On the whole, I think there was little of heroics. Just the general army humour about grog and women and the daily things of service life.

Scotty was a deep thinker all right. He had little time for things that the other fellows were out to do. I think he understood why they did them—mainly out of some natural zest for life, but also out of boredom with the hum—drum routine of the Army. At the same time he didn’t approve. In fact he was critical.

He had no time for the brothel crawl, or for things that went on with some of the Chinese women. Some of those women were gracious enough, but things happened that met Scotty’s disapproval. Most of all he disapproved of men who surrendered their virginity to the current views on sex. I remember how savage he was against this sort of thing.

‘You’ll be knowing,’ he said, ‘that some of these fellows think they’re not men unless they go where the women are and do what the other fellows, do. It takes more guts and spunk to stand out from them or against them, than to go with them.’

Looking back, it seems even more strange to me that Scotty should stand for such high morality. So far as I knew, he didn’t have a speck or spark of religion in him, yet he was very strong on the moral score. Since those days I

have learned about the Stoics, and I would say, now, that Scotty was a natural Stoic. He had no time for emotion, for religious enthusiasm, but he had a strict mind for self—control and natural morality. I call it ‘natural morality’, but it always seemed strange to me that he should be so strong on morality when it didn’t seem to connect up with any religious system. It was just ethics, and Scotty had developed the system pretty well. It all made sense to him, and in a way to me also. I was a most moral person. My ethics linked with my faith: they were spiritual ethics. Scotty’s weren’t, but the curious thing was that they were just about identical.

I don’t want to give you the idea that Scotty was a severe or dreary man. To the contrary: he had a rich sense of humour, and of fun. His irony was close to unique. He could say the most outrageous things without blinking an eye. There were some of the fellows who took him on verb—ally and soon regretted that they had. This was especially so if he were in an icy mood. When he was in a warm mood he had us all in stitches. There were few men funnier than Scotty when he was in a warm mood. Words, jokes and riposte would ripple from him. I guess these things endeared him to me. I was glad to have his friendship.

When we went to Mersing on the east coast of the Peninsula, we were busy people. I was busy running a line detail, and our project had us learning lines the British had laid, linking up with the civilian line system, and tapping units in—to both army and civilian cables. We had a line running twenty—four miles to Endau. Brigade wanted to keep in touch with Battalion there. We even had to run company lines within that Battalion, which was not normally our job. I saw little of Scotty because of this, but some nights we would meet in Mersing village, under the white petrol lamps at the drinks stalls. The fraternising with the local popu—

lation that we had known on the west coast was toned down in Mersing. We had an idea that we were not all that loved by the local people and that the coming of the Japanese would not be strongly opposed by some: better the Japanese than the British, many thought. Japanese were at least Asian, and we weren’t.

Even so, Scotty and I had great talks. Scotty kept up his idea that ethics were what would hold the world together. He hated the politics he found in the officers’ ranks, the conniving for place and position, the struggle to prove one—self better than another. To this day I don’t know how much of Scotty’s thinking arose out of fact and how much out of unjustified suspicion. These days I have the notion that humanity as we know it is a pretty varied mixture and we must come to terms with it, being neither gullible nor cynical. When Scotty was around, the issues seemed pretty fearful.

In action, Scotty was superb. At least these are the reports I received, because we were not able to see things first—hand. We were caught up in a busy round of keeping communications going. In the signal office, they were doing this by wireless for the most part, but we had to keep the lines going for Morse Code, fullerphone, and the new scrambled inter—changes. Some nights we didn’t sleep, but then it was fun. Scrounging food other than army food took a little of our time. We had to cook with the flame of the blow—lamps covered. Japanese Zero fighters would spot the slightest light, and they seemed happy enough to use a bomb or two on a person or two. They were tough and demanding days, especially as air coverage was nil, and ack—ack coverage extremely limited.

As I said, Scotty was good in action. He earned the appreciation of his fellow L.A.D. men. For their part, they were courageous and hard—working. They kept the vehicles going, fixing them when they became crippled, substituting

parts whilst the bombing was all around them. I suppose Scotty was sure that the British way of life was the only true way. In those days he was not alone in that kind of thinking. This seemed to add to the assurance that we were fighting for the best. The kind of thinking which came later—rightly or wrongly—at the time of the Vietnam War, was totally absent from our mental concepts.

When we had to go back to Singapore Island, we were stunned. Our fortifications at Mersing—we thought—could have helped us to make another Tobruk. We would have been impregnable. Suddenly we were hauled out of that situation, making our way through Jemulang down the road to Johore, and across the causeway. Blowing away part of that causeway wasn't greatly helpful. After softening things up with a relentless artillery barrage, waves of barges swept towards the northern shores of Singapore Island. The Allied machine—guns yammered ceaselessly at the hordes of Japanese infantry as they climbed on to the shores, but sheer weight of numbers, artillery and small gunfire began to win the night, and then the day, and then the days. We were forced back until there was little land left. Finally we capitulated.

Nobody was more shocked than Scotty. He had acquitted himself well in action, showing little if any fear. The Brigade captain said he had been recommended for a decoration, and that didn't surprise me. Scotty, they told me later, was really dejected over the capitulation to the Japanese. It was galling for him to see some 90,000 of us herded into the newly formed prison camps. He held on to the thought of former British history. When he saw the Gordon Highlanders and Blackwatch regiments march into the camp, his spirits rose a bit, but he was working hard to rationalise such an abject defeat of our forces. The news from further south

seemed to indicate that the Dutch empire in Java and Timor was breaking up. The fearful prophecy was that Australia would soon be swamped.

I missed Scotty because I had been wounded. This had happened some days before the capitulation, and we were separated from the other prisoners. Our own medical units were trying to look after us. The massacre of the troops, patients and medical staff of the Queen Alexandria Army Hospital was still a horror in our minds. We were glad, in a way, that the fighting had ceased. It wasn't until we were taken to the prison camp at Changi that I met Scotty again.

He commiserated with me, noting that I had lost stones in weight. There had been loss of blood, shortage of rations, sudden malaria and terrible dysentery. The story of it has been told too many times to need repetition from my pen. After commiseration, Scotty launched into a diatribe which was aimed at our conquerors and then at some of our troops. He was bitter about the decline in discipline, guts and spunk. He blamed it all on the loss of British character. In those days Aussies were proud enough to be called British, although they refused the term 'English'. British meant 'part of the British Empire.' They had grown up under imperialism. It had been a scheme of thinking, a strong context, the true way of life. That was why there was a sudden change in ways of thinking, a loss of certainty, a change in integrity.

Scotty said, 'It all began in that world Depression. Men lost confidence. Men joined the services to get away from poverty, and to make a place in the sun. But the guts had gone out of many of them.'

He pointed back gloomily to the troops on the Queen Mary as they sailed from Sydney. Previous troop—sailing had all but destroyed the inner beauty of that famous old

liner. Every removable part had been souvenired by the rumbustious troops. Capetown had been done over in the same spirit. Then there were the debacles of Greece, Crete and the Western Desert. Scotty had totted them up in his mind, and he was greatly depressed.

I was naive in those days. What would you expect of a lad of twenty—three? It was true I had been a person of faith, but that was soon to undergo its own test. It wasn't of much help to Scotty. Not, either, that he would have expected that of me, or, for that matter, wanted it. I watched his battle without great interest. I had been wounded badly, and what with short rations, no pain—killers after the first few weeks, and with constant dysentery, malaria and dengue fever, I wasn't really in the mood for discussing Scotty's problems.

Then Scotty went north to the Burma—Thailand railway. He went in one of the enclosed trucks where men suffered the agony of thirst, dysentery, weakness and death. He missed the event which was later called Miracle on the River Kwai. I don't even know how he would have handled that. Possibly it may have meant religion to him, and he may have steered away from it. I just don't know.

What I do know is that he came back with a wasted body, and an ulcerated thigh. It was a small ulcer when I first met him after his return. His face was one which was not that of a zombie, as so many became. I don't know how much human creatures are expected to stand and retain their humanity. I guess, these days, I could say a lot about that sort of thing, but then I was without the knowledge I needed. I had been battling fiercely, as fiercely in my own way as Scotty in his. What saddened me were the zombie faces of so many of the men. They had been worked under

the utmost cruelty, deprived of dignity in living, used as human machines to build the railway line and its many bridges. They had worked under unbelievable conditions. Many of the sick and those with fearsome tropical ulcers had to sit and strain on the ropes and cables that helped to support the growing bridges.

I only tell these things told to me, to show you what Scotty faced, and what confronted him. After only hours of pressures and impossible conditions, men were reduced to animal status. The pressures that came upon them changed their minds, or drew out what had always been there but which hitherto had been unknown to them. The battle and struggle for life raged in a way that had not been seen before, even in the Singapore prison camps. This story is not confined to the hell—holes of Burma and Thailand. Man's cruelty to man has always been, and, for that matter, will always be, until some power beyond himself change him.

I cannot say Scotty was paralysed in his thinking, but something, somewhere and somehow, had stopped abruptly. Probably some inbuilt mechanism had sought to save him from too intense a shock. He had drawn back from the horror that had turned men into zombies. Some stern spirit within him had helped him to face the horror he had witnessed and had not let him be destroyed; but I wondered.

Night after night I wondered as I tried to analyse his situation. For myself, I had gone through hell from the first moment I had sensed the ethical defection of so many. Rations for the sick had been stolen from the stores, cooks had worked rackets with the bare supplies of food, fattening' themselves without mercy on others. It seemed there were few who were not in some racket or another. Some reasoned cynically that if everyone would be in rackets then things would even out. What I did not know in my naivety was that this was nothing new in man's history. Living a fairly protected life, I had been fondly sure that British integrity was

impregnable. I had read history with rose—coloured glasses, if not with applied blinkers. Once I remembered a teacher who had sought to debunk British history, only to be fiercely opposed by our headmaster who was an Anglophile. It had been bewildering to the class, especially as we were deeply attracted to the history master.

So what was Scotty's problem? What was my problem?

I had come to terms with my own problem, but only after a struggle so deep and bitter that over forty years later I still remember it. The principles I learned have never left me for one moment of any day. They condition all my thinking and set the nature and quality of what others call 'ethics', but what I call 'life'.

What was Scotty's problem? It was the same as mine. It was keeping integrity in a world which seemed to have abandoned standards as though they no longer mattered, or had never really mattered. It was seeing the self—delusion of men known as 'righteous', as they rationalised their self—saving acts, making them out to be ethical. It was the triumph of the lie over truth, in the interests of what they called 'reality'.

Scotty never seemed to waver. He watched the corruption about him without emotion. In fact he had driven his emotions down deeply until they no longer seemed to exist. Except, that is, in the anger that often leapt to his face. If ever he seemed pleased, it was when he saw me. I think I must have been the only one, apart from his wife and child at home, for whom he had warmth, yet he could keep a depressed ward of patients in fits of laughter. There was no doubt about it but that he kept himself from bitterness and cynicism on the surface, and still exhibited those qualities of honesty, fairness, and what he called 'truth', in spite of the hunger we suffered, and the pain of his ulcerated thigh.

I was there on two occasions when the surgeon scraped his ulcer. It was done with a spoon whose bowl—edge was sharpened to razor consistency. When they exposed Scotty's thigh ulcer, you could see the greenish—grey diphtheritic slough at the centre of it. The surgeon would have to clear it without giving any anaesthetic, either general or local. Scotty was a Stoic, but sometimes the pain made him whimper. Day by day this diphtheritic ulcer ate away at his emaciated leg. His legs and his arms had already been gripped by beriberi, so that he could not move them without aid.

One day we knew he was paralysed. That is, his body was paralysed. Scotty McLean was not paralysed. He could talk, joke, laugh, share in riposte and repartee. He could go hungry like so many and at the same time enjoy the little food he received. Because he was so far gone, they decided to give him special diet. 'Special diet'—so called—was little more than the ordinary diet except it was better in quality. Scotty took it without joy and without protest.

In regard to Scotty, I was faced with an ethical quandary. I had a great problem which related to him. By this time I had resolved my own personal problem, and without any doubt that difficulty had been ethical in its roots. For some months I had put all forms of religion behind me. I went out into the terrible joyless limbo where there is said to be no God, and man is no longer trusted. It is the most fearful void in all time, place and history. It is Eliot's 'Wasteland', and worse than that trackless country. There, faced with his own mind, and denying his origins or his creaturely orientation to his Creator, man, in a sense, ceases to be man. This experience is the closest to utter dereliction that I know. I have been there, and let no one say I do not know the terror of godlessness.

What then was my quandary? It was this: I had one

possession I could sell, and the only way I could sell it was through the black market. I disliked the black market and had never been connected with it. Scotty loathed the black market: he had never sold anything through it, or received anything from or through it. I knew we were close to the end and that that end would be either death at the hands of our captors, or liberation from them by the Allies. Japanese troops had been pushed back gradually and painfully from island to island, fortress to fortress, and no one doubted the war was nearly over. The tragedy was that men continued to die from sickness and starvation when freedom was almost in sight.

I could see Scotty was finished unless extra food was given to him. I had learned how to cook food from greens, from flour, towgay beans, and fish blachung. Many of us had tried to grow greens in the leached—out soil of that prison camp. We lived in palm—covered huts under the tall rubber trees, and growing vegetables in the shade thrown by the trees was not easy. We shared the nightly accumulation of human urine. Many would be up at dawn, pouring it on their little patches of earth. The pittance we received for the work we did each day bought almost nothing. Many used it on the vitamin—destroying tobacco sold in the canteen. How then could I get nourishing food for Scotty?

I owned one wonderful possession. It was a typewriter. It was a sort of miracle that I should come to own a type—writer. A sar—major in a unit other than ours had looted a dozen of these portable machines from an abandoned retail store. This was in the midst of action. I had no qualms about receiving it from him, promising him I would pay him for it when we returned to Australia. I guess it rated highest in value to me because of the way I could express myself on it and accumulate fact and fiction for the future.

Many a time, when hunger became intolerable, I had been tempted to sell it, but I had not. Now I felt it would help

Scotty. If, however, he were to discover that I had used the black market, he would not eat the food. I had to risk that. No one was going to suffer by my act of selling the machine, so I went ahead and sold it. As usual, the transaction was disappointing. The money fell far short of what I had hoped to get, but I shrugged that off. I set about getting food for Scotty and some others.

Scotty never questioned my gifts of food. He ate them hungrily. I guess he trusted me beyond any other person. He knew I had somehow established integrity. Of course, I am not speaking about perfection. I am only speaking about a man who has tasted the bitterness of human autonomy, the separation from God which destroys his true being. The man who has known this bitterness finds dependence the sweet alternative. Anyway, Scotty trusted me.

I used to find his paralysis a worrying thing. Nothing about Scotty seemed neurotic. It was the unbroken and unbreaking autonomy of the man that I dreaded. He seemed to have a triumph of his own which cut off the rest of the world of humanity, and in some way I was included in that. As the Allied triumphs grew, Scotty seemed to gather strength, and it was that strength which should have delighted me. In fact it deeply disturbed me. On the one hand, I was glad he was not going to die: on the other, I sensed the self—righteousness that drains a man of his basic humanity. Gradually I came to see that Scotty was a Pharisee.

Judgement of one man by another is a fearful and a , dangerous thing: that I have learned. Let no man judge any other man. He does not know what moves human beings in their depths to do the things they do, nor does he under—stand those depths. He cannot even understand his own depths. How then can he know those of another person? I knew these principles, and I was not judging Scotty. Even

so, the truth stared me in the face: Scotty was a godless Pharisee. He believed he had kept his integrity, and that he had kept it by his own resources of character and personhood.

So he had, but the cost was lethal. He was Henley's man of invincibility:

Out of the night that covers me, Black as the Pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance, I have not winced or cried
aloud: Under the bludgeonings of chance My head is bloody, but
unbowed.

The difference between Henley's Stoic and Scotty was that Scotty never thanked any gods for anything. Nor could he see any scroll 'charged with punishments'. He had kept his integrity. That was what mattered.

I was uneasy because I wasn't sure he had kept his integrity. As a moralist and an ethicist, yes, he had kept his integrity; but is that keeping one's integrity as a human being? I had travelled through the sterile land of moralism and found no comfort: only terrible dread. I was not likely to forget that. I know no man keeps his integrity as a man from birth's beginning to death's end. Somewhere—at some time or another, or many times—he fails in the kingdom of his mind, in the hiddenness of his secret heart. I had the sickening sense that Scotty was hiding himself from himself. What made it worse was that I knew Scotty didn't know that he was.

An incident in the camp at that time greatly moved me. A Dutch doctor who regularly used hypnotherapy to anaesthetise patients for surgery, would give commands to paralysed

patients to raise an arm or leg, and they would do it. This seemed uncanny to me, a layman. What power lay in the will of one man that he could command another to do what his own will could not accomplish? 'Could not'—that was the phrase that worried me. I wondered whether the power of action lay in the will of the doctor, or in the patient himself, his will being aided or motivated by the doctor. I did not know. I still do not know. What I knew then was that men who should never have died, died of faintheartedness, and many who were clinically dead, lived to see freedom because of the strength of their will. I was discovering something about the latent power of the soul, the spirit of man working from his own resources. I have also learned the power of the occult in moving human beings to incredible exploits. It is a power man ought to avoid, but the power of Scotty McLean was not godly or occultish. It lay within Scotty himself. That was what troubled me.

In hindsight, I can see what I should have done. I should have tried to penetrate the self—righteousness of my old friend. Self—righteousness isn't a rare thing, of course. Every human being is likely to live in it from time to time, but it does not stand the test of time and human experience. Scotty's case was quite different: I could see that he could

never afford to be wrong: he could never afford to do

wrong. What terrified me was that he had accumulated mountains of guilt, vast wastes of sterility that would shatter him if ever they were revealed. I saw in frightening moments that Scotty's paralysis, whilst physical, was also, somehow, psychical. He had to be paralysed: maybe deeply down it was guilt which had paralysed him, and not the diphtheritic ulcer. What convinced me that I had discerned correctly regarding his guilt was the growth of his self—justification. He would talk to me for hours about his integrity, his acts of

justice, his unswerving adherence to what was right. At the same time, he would be scornfully critical of others. Certainly he tolerated them, but only from his high pinnacle, his lofty eyrie. It seemed no other human being lived in that rare atmosphere.

Often I was close to tears: he was impregnable. As the news grew of Allied success, he became firmer in himself. He was admirably stoical about his pain and physical affliction, but the gleam in his eye showed that nothing could touch him. Remembering my own painful pilgrimage to humility, I ached for him, but his pride defeated us all. We just accepted his self—evaluation, his claimed integrity, his humour in the face of adversity. He was just Scotty McLean.

Then they came, the planes. For months they came in silver splendour, high up in the heavens. They shone silver to our straining eyes; they moved majestically as the impregnable fortresses that they were. They showered death and defeat on the enemy below. They shot the little Zero fighters out of the sky. And on land and sea, the liberating forces crept closer to us. The news from our hidden camp wireless was good. Scotty enthusiastically ate the food I was giving him. Perhaps he was strengthening physically. Anyway, aid was close at hand.

All of a sudden it was ended: that deadly war. had ceased. Japan capitulated. The generals in their various. zones made their particular acts of surrender. Only the Singapore area commander refused to acknowledge the Allied victory. Anxious as we were, we sensed it would only be a matter of days, perhaps hours, until he would do the same. Certainly something was in the wind. Supplies of food were being rushed to the camps. Suddenly we had Quaker Oats and butter. We had supplies of sugar. Rice was plentiful. Even

so, the surrender had not been signed on our island.

Scatty had no doubt it would take place. Every minute was a vindication of his years of integrity. He had lasted the three—and—a—half years without the crushing moral failure so many had known. I saw no gentleness in him for others, but only a steady pride, an invincible belief in himself, and I turned away, sick at heart. I really had a high regard for Scotty, and, of course, pity for him in his suffering. I wanted to make another attempt to talk to him, to tell him what had happened to me, but I knew he couldn't hear me. He had a quiet assurance that he was the one man—perhaps apart from me—who had kept his integrity. I knew that he considered me too soft, and he despised the fact that I needed what he called 'religion' to keep me in the face of the pressures about us.

Then it happened. It happened quite suddenly. Someone rushed into the hut, shouting loudly, 'It's all over! It's all over! The General has capitulated!' The word 'capitulated' had been a bitter one for us, from mid—February 1942. Now, in August 1945, it was sweet, very sweet.

Everyone was shouting and cheering, and weak ones were whimpering and many were weeping. Scatty was shaking one fist in the air: it was a gesture of triumph. He had made it! His eyes shone.

Then there was another cry. 'There's a plane coming! It's coming around the camp! It's low. You can see them!'

Sure enough, that was no rumour. Some of the medical , orderlies rushed outside, peering from under the attap roof on the verandah of the hut. There, with British markings, was a plane. The ack—acks were not shooting at it. This was proof that the news was true. The hatch—door of the plane was wide open and cameramen were taking a film of the camp.

I looked back towards Scotty. I could not believe what my eyes were seeing. Scotty had thrown off the sheet that kept the flies from his wounds. This paralysed man was getting out of bed, without assistance. He was running along the aisle, between the beds. Then he was on the verandah. He was running down the steep steps, and he was out in the open, where rubber trees could not hide the sky, the very blue sky, with its touches of foaming clouds.

He was standing, waving his arms and shouting. I stood on the verandah, the tears coursing down my cheeks, but inwardly I was afraid—scared of, and by, the enormous resources that were in this unbeatable Scot. I watched him waving his arms, shouting and sounding what seemed to be a battle—cry.

I also saw the silence fold over him as he collapsed. It was like watching a slow—motion camera as the power went from him, and he sank to the ground. Then he was a small bundle of limbs, and although his eyes were open and still staring, I knew they were seeing nothing, and would never see any—thing.

THREE RICE CAKES

He lay on his bed, looking up at the attap. At night rats would scurry through the rotting woven palm strands. He thought, dreamily, ‘Three Jap dollars for a fat rat.’ Three dollars would buy a mite of towgay. Towgay was a delicious morsel. He could sense the taste—buds watering in anticipation. He turned a little in his bed to ease his pain.

His thoughts were vagrant, gone from the attap and the price of rats set by the few Yankee prisoners. He was thinking about other things, and not only about food. Whenever his mind moved back to his central problem the line of grey fear returned. He felt a kind of mental nausea. He wanted to evade this kind of thinking, as though his mind would vomit if he pressed the enquiry.

The enquiry! The thought was faintly ironic, quietly mocking him. Who was he to conduct moral investigation? He stirred uneasily as the pictures came to him—each one, as it were, being passed through a magic lantern. They were, pictures which wearied him as they presented themselves to him, endlessly. The procession went on unceasingly, day by day, week by week. He would have liked to shut them all off, but they flickered on, continuing their pressing demands.

When had it all commenced? He thought tiredly about

that. Back in the jungle, then on the Island. Through the streets, back where the rubber plantations grew in their regular rows, drained by ditches, filled with shadows, dappled where the brilliant sunshine flooded the light leaves, breaking through the grey boles and branches, falling across the gashes from which the rubber lactate flowed.

In all these places he had heard the cry in times of desperation: ‘Every man for himself! They’re coming!’

That cry had always troubled him. Why not stay together? Why divide up? Why be single and self—minded? It had puzzled him. Once he had been alone himself—wounded, lying out in the grey dawn, the blood pumping from a large wound in his shattered thigh. The rich red flow had fascinated him. He had watched the life flow away, not daring to move because of the snipers in the trees. One movement and death would have thudded into him. So he had lain, uncaring as death approached in its natural but gentle way. He had not feared death.

He had been alone, but they had come to fetch him. The falling mortars still kicked the grey earth and the mould of dead rubber leaves, but they had not cared. He could still hear the rasping sobs of their breath as they had wept and cursed, holding him in his good and broken parts, taking him away to restoration.

So he had not been alone. He could never remember that without immense joy. Death as it was coming had not troubled him. In a quiet way he would have welcomed it. Yet he had longed for the link with living humanity. He had wanted to feel the warm, fleshly touch, even if only to bid it farewell.

Now he sighed. There had been a silent, unuttered cry in the days of their prison life. It was muted of course, as though men were ashamed to articulate it. It was the same—cry, but whispered only in the mind. It said, ‘It is still every man for himself!’

He knew that men were haunted by men. Each day as they rose and dragged their limbs to the urine bowl, to the places of washing, and to the meagre gruel that helped them begin the day, the spectre of self—preservation haunted them. They tried in their various ways to pretend the hateful thing was not among them. They tried pathetic subterfuges of pretence, small actions of altruism, but their hearts were not in them. Hunger dictated heavily. Death was a sombre spectre, a dark carrion creature glooming about them, confronting them with imminent loss of dignity.

Dignity! How they sought to retain it in the motions of the life they eked out. They tried to hold up the body, to cause the limbs to walk properly, or hang truly. They tried to give a sparkle to the eyes, or to feign an unfelt jauntiness. It was as though the prince in every man was making its tired protest, claiming the ancient royalty of the human race, even as it was bowed down by the indignity of imprisonment and human cruelty. In the moment of its humiliation it was stirred to ancient pride.

Why did he think these thoughts, watch this procession of changing pictures? Why did he hesitate to reach his own conclusions? He knew full well that the conclusions were too apparent to be evaded much longer. The facing of them could mean bitterness, emptiness, a grey and dull future, an endless, hopeless living. That is why he had drawn back from the ultimate thought.

He threw his weak legs over the edge of the bed, staring down at their grey pellagrous skin. The flesh hung, weak and lifeless. The wrinkled texture of them was like the, scabrous hide of an elephant. The feet, however, were tight with edema. The flesh was shining, soft as that of a new babe, preternaturally firm. The ankles too were taut with the excess body fluid.

He placed his feet on the floor, took his walking stick and gripped the haft of the Thomas splint. He raised himself

painfully. Somewhere a gong was sounding. The midday meal was waiting. He fumbled for his tin cup, his chipped enamel plate, and made his way along the verandah, shuffling along with all the shufflers.

Some had a better tread than his. There were the few who had no beriberi. Their bodies had a good look, in some cases a sleek look. That look was envied by some, and hated deeply by others. Some envied and hated in the one motion. The sleek ones, of course, were those deeply in the rackets. Some of them were intrepid black—marketeers. They made their way through the barbed—wire at nights, or bribed the guards, or waited until there was a break in the patrol. Intrepid was the word, and they earned their health and the life they so eagerly preserved. What troubled him and others was their callous disregard for the starving ones, the dying ones, the helpless ones. He wondered vaguely what he himself might have done had he not been wounded. How often he had shuddered at his helplessness.

Sometimes in the night he had wondered what might hap—pen if the Allies were to come and attempt to release them. He could see the flurry of activity, the dreadful mistakes, the horrible confusion. He had imagined the cries of the freshly wounded as the mounted machine—guns stuttered their insistence on much death. There was the returning memory of broken limbs, mangled flesh, tortured bodies.

And him! What would he do? Drag his useless leg into a tree and sit there, hoping the chattering guns would not speak against him or reach him in the branches.

He smiled faintly as he dragged himself to the mess hut. There were apathetic greetings from his fellow sergeants. The troops were lined up at their mess tables, handing out their bowls for the shadow—soup, cups for the black tea, and taking one small rice cake as they passed through.

Inside the hut the sergeants seated themselves. They had filled their cups with tea and received their small ladles of

thin soup. On plates in the centre of each table were the simple rice cakes. One mouthful to one rissole would be a fair estimate, but he knew that each would be savoured. Tiny bites, nibbles really, were what they would take. Slow, lingering mastication would seem to add size and savour to the plain fried ball of rice.

The man beside him was his friend. How often they had talked about it all. Both of them, when captured, had been men of faith—simple, earnest, primary faith. That was long ago. It was too long ago. Much of the joy and assurance of faith had faded. For him it was now the end of faith—or close to it.

Terry was the man who sat beside him. Terry had been like him, hurt by human selfishness, surprised by the vicious spirit of self—preservation, stunned by the cruelty it raised and the callousness it bred. Terry, even more than he, had become scornful, critical, then bitter. Finally he had become cynical.

He had tried to turn Terry from these disasters. Once he had said doggedly, ‘It’s like turning into a Pharisee. It’s just so self—righteous.’

Terry had not seen it that way. ‘No man has the right to live by dealing death to others,’ he had said.

He knew what Terry meant. He meant the racketeers within the camp. The hangers—on around the cook, the buying of favours, the thieving of rations, the filching of medical supplies, the bartering of goods with cruelty, the battering upon fearful unfortunates. All of this had embittered Terry, who otherwise was a man of resilient faith. In a way, , of course, his scorn was healthy. But then his bitterness was deadly to a happy spirit.

He sat staring for a moment at the rice cakes. No matter how depressed he was, he would always sip away at his soup, savouring the faint taste of green vegetables. ‘Shadow—soup,’ they called it, and he smiled faintly at that

thought. The shadow of the vegetables had passed over it! Today the soup lay in his bowl until Terry touched his elbow. 'Drink up,' he said gently. 'You mustn't dream.'

But dream he did, and suddenly the dream was a night—mare. It was the climax he had always dreaded. It was like some dark, sickening horror coming towards him, approaching him to grip and threaten and destroy. Even at the last moment he tried to evade the conclusion to which he had been coming.

His mind was saying, 'There is no law because there is no God. Where there is no law and no God nothing matters.' It was the last phrase which horrified him: 'Nothing matters.' The horror of it sickened him. All these months—was it only months?—these eighteen months he had battled for faith, and in a way incomprehensible had kept integrity even when he had lost faith. He had lost faith all right, faith in men, and faith in God. Man did nothing, and if God existed then He was absent and uncaring. He saw little use for that kind of God.

Terry, too, had lost faith along with him. But then Terry had hardened, had gone bitter inside his shell of callous cynicism, although by some amazing will—power still refusing to join the racketeers and self—preservers. His hatred of them was strong, overt and fierce. He himself was hated in return. Most people detested Terry and felt inferior in his presence. He, as he thought, realised that he was far from Terry. Terry without faith and without God was more frightening than any Pharisee. He was a high priest of cynicism and holy scorn.

He dropped his head to conceal his thoughts. The conclusion had come and it frightened him deeply. His conclusion was plain: in all the universe there was no true law! What others had been doing was neither wrong nor right since there was no law. Where there is no God there is no law. Where laws exist they are made by men. Out of their re—

ligions no doubt, or out of their politics, but in fact no law is valid for man is not an eternal creature. The conscience has lied about that future and about that judgement. There is no judgement.

He felt his hands as they lay on his lap, one in the other. If there was no law then all was finished for him. Cruelty, selfishness, crime—these were all man—made terms intended to discourage the murderers, the rapists, the thieves, the oppressors. They were inventions of the human mind, and cunning inventions at that. If there was no law, no true law, then justice was a man—made thing.

His mind reluctantly came to the obvious conclusion—anything goes! Anything! His mind reeled at that. He could lie, deceive, cheat, murder—anything—and it did not matter! Man—out of his self—protective laws—might seek to punish, but then that did not matter, not essentially.

He looked at the rice cakes on the plate. Every meal—time for months he had gone through the same struggle. Christ had said, 'Greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friend.' Each meal he had sought to do this. He had taken the smallest rice cake so that others would have more. His stomach cried out for the largest. His conscience approved when he took the smallest. Taking a small rice cake was more than merely symbolic of love. It was love in action, for the whole body yearned for the larger cake.

Terry had always taken the smallest cake. This was what worried him. Terry was contemptuous, cynical, giving the impression that there was no love, only a worship of the ethical will which bordered on the demonic. He would rather have seen Terry reduced to babbling hunger and human error than to have him in his deified state.

For himself the end had come. His own moral assets had nigh on given out. He knew all the mores. Take the largest cake and you were avowedly selfish. You gained life—in

principle—by pushing others towards death. To take the smallest because you feared others, or sought approval, was also a form of self—preservation. You coveted their acceptance.

This then was the end. He would take the largest. He would be honest in his self—preservation. He would declare it clearly. Terry would despise him, but then Terry had law without God, ethics without love. He was intensely himself as against all mankind. He was a lone, cruel god. on his own.

So he looked at the cakes. A faint doubt was still there—the doubt cast by the Nazarene. Was he what he claimed to be—Son of God? Did God exist? Last Sunday he had listened to the hymn in the chapel:

Oh, Sabbath rest by Galilee,

Oh, calm of hills above

Where Jesus knelt to share with Thee The silence of eternity

Interpreted by love.

Had this man indeed lived in an Eastern country—Palestine—and had he had humans as disciples, and had he interpreted the seeming silence of God by his physical actions? He doubted it, but the faint thought lingered.

What he knew beyond all possible doubt was that the last of his moral resources was expended. Nothing remained to give him power to take the smallest cake. If there were no law because no God then anything was permissible. If even there were a God, and a law, he was far beyond obeying it. All moral powers were exhausted.

Anarchy lay ahead. He knew that. Beastliness was permissible, admissible without prejudice. What he had always seen as wrong would now be neither right nor wrong but just how things would be. So he would take the largest rissole.

The thought had been gradually invading his mind. ‘If God exists, and His law is true, then man is eternal; the con—science is his assurance of life beyond. Everything in life

then would matter. God would be good: evil, evil. Judgement would be true, justice vindicated, righteousness proved.’

His mind muttered, ‘If God exists—if, if, if..

He decided his course of action: if God exists He must help me. He must prove He is God and I am a man by giving me a new moral power—but a new power of love—to take the smallest cake. This must not be for self—elevation, or out of the desire for man’s approval or because I fear man’s disapproval, but because by doing so I will truly love, for love lays down its life for its friend.

Knowing his utter weakness, his moral exhaustion, his bankruptcy of love, he said, ‘Oh God! If You exist—if You are God and law is truly law, love is truly love—then give me the power to take the smallest out of pure truth. I know truth is love.’

He sensed the miracle. His mind was suddenly clear. His heart was quietly peaceful. His body ceased to cry for its rights. He watched, with some amazement, the hand which was his own, stretching out to take the smallest cake.

No one else sensed the miracle. Terry, aloof, did not see it. The others, intent on the selection of the best, saw him take the smallest, but then they knew he always did that.

For him it was the greatest matter of all his life.

God, law and love, in one beautiful trinity, were suddenly true and the way things really are.

As for him, he could not describe the nature and the power of this new pure peace spreading through him.

Angel wings, beating my face,
Forcing me into grace.

Dear eyes, loving my soul,
Drawing me to the goal.

Strong Word, piercing my brain,
Bringing me holy shame.

Pain's cry, welling within,
Lifting me out of sin.

Red hands, clotted with blood,
Thrusting me up to God.

G. Bingham
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