Thirty years ago, when I was a schoolboy, we played a game called 'The Poor Horse.' A boy would lean against a wall, supporting himself against it with his hands, and another boy would climb on to his back. Another boy would climb on to that boy's back, and another on his back, and so on. The idea was to see how many boys could climb on before the boy underneath collapsed. If he didn't collapse, and could walk a step or two with three or four boys on his back he was called a Bold Horse. If he couldn't move with only two boys on his back he was called a Poor Horse, and the two boys on his shoulders were each allowed one smack each at his backside. Not being very strong myself, I soon learned the value of a couple of copies of The Magnet stuffed into the seat of my trousers.

They don't seem to play this street game in London any more, but the other day I watched two very young children playing a game that was quite new to me. One of them, a girl, slumped down and lay full out on the pavement. I was walking along the other side of the road, and crossed over to pick her up. Before I could get to her a boy came trotting along, going 'Puff, puff, puff,' like a train, stepped on her tummy, went on a few paces, turned round, stepped on her tummy again, and off, puff-puffing, down the pavement.

'Get up, dear,' I said to the girl. 'You'll get a real cold lying on that pavement.'

'Can't. We're playing a game,' she said.

'Funny sort of a game,' I said, 'when you lie on the cold stones and let a boy walk over you!' Just then the boy comes back and asks, 'What's the matter, mister?'

'Nothing's the matter,' I said, 'except that this is a silly game. What do you think you're doing?'

'We're playing "Suicide",' he answered, 'You see, she's been let down by the man she loves, so she's having a suicide just like what they do on the pictures. I'm the train that comes along and kills her. It's a lovely game.'

I was a bit relieved to hear that the game was even lovelier when they had a third child to join in. Then it was called 'Rescue,' because the third child would stand by the railway lines (yes, they had proper railways lines chalked out on the pavement) and just as the train was coming he would snatch the girl from the jaws of death, to be rewarded with a kiss if a boy, or a sweet if a girl.

NOEL COWARD'S GUEST
So you want to know how I became Noel Coward's guest at the Café de Paris during his Coronation engagement there? Very simple—I invited myself. You see, Noel happens to be one of my readers and I have it from his own lips that he enjoyed both my Diaries.

I had never been to the Café de Paris nor heard Noel sing to a posh supper audience. I went in a dinner suit which cost me 12s. 6d. jacket, 2s. 6d. waistcoat, and 44s. 6d. trousers. Although I had to get these three essentials in three different shops they all matched and all fitted me perfectly. Noel said I looked as though I'd been 'poured into them.' Anyway, they didn't seem to leak.

We had ten minutes off-the-record chat and then he sang for a full hour to the audience, and a nice time was had by all. Noel's pianist is Norman Hackforth (Yes, the same man who was the voice in the Basement in Radio's 'Twenty Questions' programme). Mr Hackforth specially brought his wife to the Café that evening to sit beside me so that I would not be lonely whilst Noel was doing his act. Now that was thoughtful, wasn't it? And she was able to tell me who was who in the audience.

Sir Bernard and Lady Docker were there, sitting not so far from me. When I reached home at three in the morning I had to tell Lizzie, my Landlady, all about everything. I mentioned that I had seen the famous Lady Docker. 'No,' said Lizzie, 'you can't kid me! They don't have Lady Dockers: it's all men at the Docks.'

CUPID BASON
On November 15th, 1953, I had a lovely fan mail letter from a lady in Liverpool, age 27, who said she had read practically all my writings, and adored them. She went on to say she felt she could easily love me and was willing to try! Now I've become careful since I went to see a woman who said much the same thing fifteen years ago and I found when I met her that she had only one tooth and a beard. So I wrote to a bookseller friend in Liverpool and asked him to go and see what this willing lady looked like. I wrote to him November 18th. On December 31st I got his reply—"She's delightful." So delightful that he had got engaged to marry her and they both wished me a Happy New Year.

HOW I SLAYED ARNOLD BENNETT
On page 27 of my second Diary there is a line which has brought me more letters than anything I've written for three years. I wrote: 'Arnold Bennett gave me a present tonight in exchange for a hot joke.' (By 'hot,' I may say, I do not refer to the temperature of the joke but its up-to-dateness—like 'red-hot news.') Hundreds of people all over the world have written to ask me what the joke was. To save anyone else writing I will now put it into print for the first time.

A lady goes to her doctor and says, 'I'm not feeling very well. I'm rather constipated.' The doctor says: 'Well, don't you take anything?' And she replies: 'Oh, yes, doctor, I always take my knitting.'

This joke slayed Bennett.

MY HERO
Who are the people you most wish you had met? One of mine is General Rafael de Nogales. Do you remember him? He was born in Venezuela, searched for gold in Alaska in its toughest days, was a cattle rancher in Mexico, became President of Venezuela, painted Paris red and was the talk of the town for years, was the first Christian general in the Turkish army, had a chesful of honourably won medals, and wrote a very good book called Silk Hat and Spurs.

But it isn't for any of these reasons that I'd like to have met him. I'd like to have met him so that I could have asked him to sign his autograph—twice: once forwards, and once backwards. For he was able to write his name backwards so perfectly that when it was held up to a mirror you couldn't tell the difference. What a man!

VODKA, CAVIARE AND BEDS
Lizzie, my landlady, had been reading in the papers about this crack American liner that had won the Blue Riband of the Atlantic.

'I see in the paper they have over two thousand beds on board,' said Liz. 'I wonder if they are all comfortable beds,' she added in a sarcastic sort of voice.

'You'd better write to the Commander and find out,' I said, also in a sarcastic manner.

'What with washing up and things,' says Lizzie, 'I haven't really got the time. But you've got plenty of time, and you're a bed lover, and no mistake!' Then she goes quite serious and says: 'Just think, Fred, of honeymoon couples going on that there boat, and finding after they've spent all that amount of money
as how the beds ain’t comfortable. What
a start to a marriage, to be sure!"
So I sat down right away and wrote
a letter to the manager of the United
States Line, in Pall Mall, and the
letter ran—best of my recollection—like
this: Dear Sir, of course you know about me
(I usually start my letters that way).
Well, I want, please, to find out something.
I am at present single, but someday I shall find
a woman who really loves me and we shall need
and go on a honeymoon. Now I want a
honey on a real crack liner, so it will be
the ‘United States.’ I understand there
are thousands of beds on that liner. But are they
comfortable? Yours sincerely, Fred Bason.
A few days later I get a beautifully
glazed engraved invitation card, with real gilt
glaze, saying the United States Line
requests the pleasure of the company of
Mr Fred Bason at luncheon aboard the
S.S. United States at Southampton,
R.S.V.P.
So I R.S.V.P’d by return and made a
date of it. They sent me a reserved seat
in a first-class Pullman, with the
company’s compliments. And aboard the
S.S. United States I had the finest lunch
of all my life. I had vodka and caviare
for the first time ever, and each of the
eight courses had a different drink with
it. The meal—ended with a rare and
wonderful brandy, and I got up from the
table with a rare and wonderful feeling
of being at peace with the world. ‘Walk
around,’ they said. ‘See the ship for yourself.’ So I walked around until
I found a first-class cabin, and inside it
was a first-class bed on which I had a
first-class sleep. Was it comfortable? I
was able to tell Lizzie that it was.

THE STORY OF A STEAK
Well, that was that, I thought, when I
went back to London. But that wasn’t
entirely that. There was a sequel. As I
came off the United States an officer gave
me as a souvenir a beautifully printed set
of menu cards and some literature about
the United States and her sister ship, the
S.S. America. I passed this all over to
Lizzie. Four days later we were having
kippers for our Sunday night tea when
Lizzie says to me, out of the blue: ‘They
do it from the inside outwards on the
America.’
I put down my kipper and looked at
her.
‘What did you say?’ I asked.
‘They do it from the inside outwards.
By Radar,’ she added.
I went back to me kipper and chewed
over this statement for a little while. I
knew she wanted me to say ‘Do what?’
and then she’d embark on a long
explanation, and both our kippers would
be cold. So I held meself in check,
and finished me kipper. Indeed, I finished
me tea, and Liz had washed up, before I
said, casual-like: ‘What do they do
from the inside outwards?’
‘Steaks!’ exclaims Liz, glad to get
it off her chest at last. ‘By Radar, from
the inside outwards. Ain’t them
Americans marvellous!’
I agreed that some Americans were
marvellous, such as Miss Marilyn
Monroe, but I told Liz that Radar was
something they used to guide ships up the
Thames on foggy nights, and it was
nothing to do with cooking steaks.
‘Well,’ says Lizzie, ‘I’ve read all about
it in one of those pamphlets you brought
home, and it says that S.S. America is
the first ship in the world to cook steaks by
Radar.’
She then showed me the very words.
It seemed that electro-magnetic energy
was beamed through a high frequency
magnetron oscillator and the molecular
disturbance of the food by the rays
generated friction heat within the steak
itself.
‘What is a magnetron oscillator?’
asks Liz.
I said it was probably a lemon (though
even I knew it was not a lemon), and I
set me down right away to write to the
management to ask if I could see with
me own eyes and eat with me own mouth
steak cooked by Radar, because I just
didn’t believe it.
A week later comes another gilt-edged
invitation card, this time to luncheon
aboard the S.S. America. Again I got a
first-class reserved seat in a Pullman to
Southampton Docks, but this time,
instead of being immediately given a
slap-up lunch, I was taken along to the
kitchens. There I saw mountains of
marvellous grub, I saw machines that
made washing-up a pleasure, and I saw
with me own eyes a machine called a
‘Radaranger.’
The performance of the ‘Radaranger’
properly made me blink. Steaks cooked
to a turn in 2 minutes. Potatoes baked
in 1½ minutes, and chops that just
melted in your mouth after just 50
seconds. A whole chicken was cooked in
4 minutes.
This wonderful invention, which looks
like a coffin and is 6 feet high, employs
as its heat-generating mechanism the
same sort of unit which is actually the
heart of all Radar sets. You just set the
track to the desired cooking time, push a
button, and by the time you’ve washed
your hands the unit shuts off and the
food is ready for serving. What really
made me speechless was that when
they opened the oven the food was
sizzling hot, but the container was still
stone cold!
Then I was escorted to a lounge, and
given lovely cocktails, followed by
another lovely lunch. I had another hush
at the vodka, and some glasses of
champagne, but I didn’t sample all the
drinks this time, and I took the precau-
tion of eating several slices of bread first,
to serve as blotting paper.
There are certainly no half measures
with American hospitality. As I was
about to go down the gangway an
official handed me a parcel which he
asked me to present to my landlady with
the compliments of the United States
Lines.
As I went back in the train I kept
wondering what on earth this rich
concern was sending to my landlady.

How did they know I had a landlady
anyway? As the train went through
Winchester curiosity got the better of
me and I opened the package. It
contained a five-pound steak, cooked to a ‘T’
by Radar, and a box of chocolates home-
made on the liner.

That steak lasted us two days, and
the chocolates for one month, as Lizzie
rationed us strictly to one a day.

SOMETHING WORTH KNOWING
1953 was one of the most hectic years of
my life, and after 92 public speeches, plus
9 B.B.C. engagements (including being
discovered by Wilfred Pickles, who
couldn’t get a word in edgeways when
he came to interview me), I had the
worst bout of ill-health since I was
injured in the Blitz. I had what the
doctor at St. Thomas’s Hospital called
‘Anxiety Neuroses.’ The doctors and
nurses were wonderfully kind to me, and
one of them told me something that I bet
not many of my readers know, but it may
be useful to them one day, so I’ll pass it
on.
If you are walking across a room where
someone is sleeping you should take a
step when the sleeper breathes out and
remain quite still while he breathes in.
If you do that you can move anywhere in
the room without waking even the
lightest sleeper—always provided he
doesn’t snore. Snorers often wake them-
theselves up with their own snores. And as
they sleep with their mouths open the
pressure on their ears is less and they
hear uncommonly well.

HAPPY XMAS
Christmas, 1953, I went to my first
Xmas party in twenty years! Yes, I was
invited out by one of my readers, Mrs.
Rice of Pimlico, and I stayed with
the family both Xmas and Boxing Day
and had a wonderful time. Funny, ain’t it,
that although thousands of people know
of me and I have hundreds of friendly
acquaintances, it took twenty lonely
Christmases before someone thought of
inviting me to be their guest!
GOOD FOR MY EGO

Here are a few items that are good for my ego, and not uninteresting for me fans, I fancy.

(1) I have been made an honorary member of the Mark Twain Society of America. There are only three other honorary members in Europe. They are A. E. Coppard, John Masefield, and Sir Winston Churchill. Now they add me—'in recognition of my efforts towards Anglo-American goodwill'—that is, via my Diaries and The Saturday Book, plus the fact that I answer all U.S.A. mail even when no S.A.E. is enclosed.

(2) I have endorsed my first commodity. Unasked, I wrote a slogan—"Swallow Raincoats never get the "bird"." It was my honest opinion. In return I got a Swallow raincoat, 3,000 postcards with the slogan printed above my name, the friendship of the Managing Director, and six handsome photographs of myself in my new raincoat taken by the noted photographer Howard Coster.

(3) Both of my Diaries and all the issues of The Saturday Book containing my writings are in the Staff Library of the Bank of England. Nice place to be!

(4) I have at last received my first fan letter from a local. After twenty-five years of authorship I have had an appreciative letter from someone in my own S.E. London. I cried with delight.

COCKNEY TALE

Two little London boys were at the seaside for the first time and were gazing at the sea.

'Cor,' said one boy to the other, "ain't that a lot of water!"

'You ain't seen nuffink yet,' said the other, 'There's more water underneath.'

COUNTING THE PENCE

I remember reading that Dr. Robert Bridges, the Poet Laureate, left £6,928 os. 2d. when he died. I couldn't think why that figure stuck in my mind until one day I suddenly remembered that two years before his death I wrote and asked him for his autograph and enclosed a stamped addressed envelope. He didn't reply. That's where the 2d. came from, of course!

FAIR EXCHANGE

Some years ago I wrote an article for The Writer's Method and Market Magazine, published in Hollywood. At the end of the article I wrote: S.O.S. I wonder if anyone would care to exchange four good American books for four good English ones—just a friendly swap. A few weeks later I got a letter from a lady living in Pasadena saying 'By "good books" you are of course referring to the Bible. Therefore I am, at your suggestion, posting to you today 4 second-hand Bibles. On receipt of same please send me 4 copies of Panny by Gaslight, which I understand to be quite good in its way.'

I returned the good lady's Bibles to her when they came, but I wrote and told Michael Sadleir about it and he said it gave him his best laugh in years. As a result, we became friends, and Michael Sadleir is editing my third Diary, which will be published in 1955. The very first copy I get from the publishers I shall autograph and send to that lady in Pasadena.

FAME AT LAST

Dear old Arnold Bennett told me that he considered he had reached the pinnacle of fame when Manetta, the maître-d'hôtel at the Savoy, named an omelette after him—Manetta's Omelette Arnold Bennett. I asked Bennett if he enjoyed eating it. He said he felt a bit of a cannibal. I consider I shall have reached the pinnacle of fame when Reader's Digest digests me. I am sure I shall be every bit as digestible as Arnold Bennett's omelette.

Meanwhile the address remains the same, 152, Westmoreland Road, London, S.E.17, and I'll still answer anyone who writes to me with S.A.E. (No need for S.A.E. if you're an American.)