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THROUGH THE VALLEY

Communications of a sort were soon established. Ox-carts bumped along the muddy roads, bringing medicines, and decent clothing and eventually mail. This time I was among the lucky ones. When the G's were called there was a packet of blue envelopes addressed in my father's bold handwriting – just as I had seen them in my dreams many months before. For the first time in four years I learned of what had been happening at home.

But there was something we craved even more than mail – news of our missing comrades – especially news of those who had gone up-country on some work party and had not been heard of again. Were they still alive? How had they fared? The men in the ration parties made it their business to gather all the information they could and pass it on from one camp to the next. The minute they entered camp eager prisoners would surround them and pelt them with questions.

'Have ye heard anything of my mucker? Name of McIntosh. He was a sergeant in the Field Artillery – the 122nd. About middle-sized, he was. With dark-brown hair. Expect he'd be wearing a beard.'

Usually the couriers shook their heads. Occasionally a name would give them a clue. Now and then the news was good; more often it was not. Death was continuing to take its toll. The name uppermost for me was Dusty Miller's. Whenever an ox-cart appeared I was in the front rank of questioners. I was looking

forward to a reunion with Dusty and Dinty Moore. At every opportunity I asked visitors from other camps if they had any word. Time and again I put the same question and gave the descriptions. Repeatedly I received the same reply, 'Sorry chum, I don't remember anyone by that name – or of that description. Could you give me a clue?'

It was from one of the couriers that I learned how Dinty Moore had died. But there was still no word of Dusty. Then at last I met a prisoner who had been on the same work detail with him. 'Yes, I knew him,' he said. 'We were sent to Burma to cut a retreat route for the Japs. He was one of those left behind after the road was built to maintain it during the monsoon.'

'Where is he now?' I asked.

The man was reluctant to speak. He stammered for a minute or two. Then he replied, 'We had a pretty bad time of it. It was a repeat performance of the railway. And those who were left behind had an even harder time – especially after the Japs heard that defeat was possible.'

He stopped.

'But what about Miller?' I asked again.

The man looked away.

'The last news I had of him wasn't good.'

'What was it, then?'

'According to what I heard, he was in trouble.'

'Dusty?'

'He got the Nip warrant officer in charge of his party down on him.'

'What had he done wrong?'

'That was it. He hadn't done anything wrong.' He swallowed hard. 'The Nip hated him because he couldn't break him. You know how he was – a good man if ever there was one. That's why he hated him.'

'What did the Nip do to him?'

'He strung him up to a tree.'

I was aghast. 'You mean . . .'

Then came the simple reply. 'Yes. He crucified him.'

I could hardly speak.

'When?'

'About the beginning of August.'

'Just before the Japs . . .'

' . . . packed up, yes.'

He turned away. He had said as much as he could bear to. I was so stunned that I didn't quite know what to do. I walked out from the group of chattering questioners in a daze.

Dusty dead? Dusty – the man of deep faith and warm heart – the man who was incapable of a mean act, even against a brutal tormentor. His goodness, it is true, had been recognized, not in sympathy, however, but in hate. Condemned by such radiant goodness, the warrant officer must have gone berserk.

There on that tree, like his Master, he died, so far from his homeland, so far from everyone, yet so near to God.

I moved off to a corner of the camp that I might bear my grief alone. Tears clouded my eyes. The surroundings misted so that nothing was clear any more; there was only the reality of suffering, disappointment and sorrow.

As I sat with my back resting against the prison fence, I could see once again the light that had challenged the darkness in the valley of the shadow – light that had been reflected from gentle faces. I could see Dusty kneeling before me, a rag in his hand, a basin in front of him, as he cleaned my ulcers, his smiling face uplifted. I could see Dinty Moore donating the gift of his quick wit and kindly humour as he performed some menial task. I could see Dodger Green as he talked eagerly and wistfully, enquiring about the truth he was beginning to apprehend. I could see Ian Carruthers remembering the days of his boyhood and the yachts that sailed the Clyde. I could see the young lad holding my hand and asking, 'It's all right, isn't it, sir?'

The words of St Paul came to me, 'For God, who commandeth the light to shine out of the darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of knowledge of God in the face of Jesus Christ.'

I could see so many faces shining with God's light. It was that light which had helped me to see in my own darkness.

When we thought of returning home we saw ourselves as ghosts of the past. The Britain most of us had known was the Britain of 1939. Six years had gone by; and six years is a long time when one is in one's twenties. Our families and friends would have changed as well as we. They had known us as boys; we were going back as war-hardened men.

On a night of hammering rain the order came, 'Pack up! You're on your way to Bangkok!' We began the last lap out as we had ended the last lap in, slogging it on foot through that heavy, squelchy mud. But this time trucks were waiting for us at the road end – trucks with respectful Japanese at the wheel. On our way across Bangkok to the airfield we passed by the spot where the guard had struck me with his gun butt for holding up my fingers in the V-sign. It had happened only a short while ago, yet the event seemed of another age.

While we waited in the hangar for our plane to come, we saw our first white woman in three and a half years, a blonde, shapely Norwegian. She had been interned with her husband, and had come to feed the former POWs. She was beautiful. The sight of her reminded us that there were other places and other ways of living and that we were on our way back to them.

The Japanese had given us the backlog of pay due to us for three and a half years. It was in bahts, which had dropped so greatly in value that when four of us who were travelling together pooled our resources we had barely enough to buy a fruit salad. We argued over the amount of vitamins in that

salad, but agreed that it was far tastier than the vitamin pills we were now being given in huge quantities to swallow daily.

Next morning our group boarded a Dakota en route for Rangoon. Our pilot, having heard that I had been a flyer at one time, kindly invited me to join him as co-pilot. He was watching me as I followed closely the trail of the railway etched across the valley of the Kwai.

'I'll bet you're glad to be away from all that,' he said.

'Yes,' I replied. 'That I am.'

'We heard from time to time how you were being treated,' he said. 'Native agents smuggled word through to Intelligence. It must have been tough, all right.'

We were flying up the valley along our railway, past the empty place where the bridge had been across the River Kwai, past Chungkai, Touchan, Kinao, Takanun, places we had known so well – places that were the graveyards of so many of our friends. Our trip, which otherwise was like a holiday outing, was saddened by these memories.

We had not only come through the valley, we were above it. We were on the high road home – a road that had taken me six years to find. I recalled the words of the old Scots song:

For ye'll tak' the high road and I'll tak' the low road,
And I'll be in Scotland afore ye;
For me and my true love will never meet again
On the bonnie, bonnie banks of Loch Lomond.

According to what I had been told as a child, this was a message sent by a Highland chief to his beloved before his execution in Carlisle during Prince Charlie's retreat from the attainment of his hopes and of his kingdom. The low road was the way of death – the way so many of my comrades had taken.

A poignant recollection stirred in my mind. I had been

wounded in the right shoulder in Malaya, and sent back to Singapore to recover. Before I was released to rejoin the remnant of the battalion I learned that my friend Gordon Shiach had been badly hurt and was in another hospital. I had known Gordon when we were schoolboys, and we had been together on a cruise for Scottish secondary schools in the Baltic. I hadn't seen him again until the day I left Stirling Castle as he was entering with a squad of recent recruits. Eventually he had been posted to us in Singapore.

When the battalion was in action in Malaya he had been returning from brigade headquarters with a supply of maps when he was attacked by an enemy tank. Although desperately wounded in the stomach, he had continued to drive his wreck of a car back to the battalion. As soon as I saw him, I knew that the end was not far off. His brown eyes stared at me as I entered his room. He recognized me, smiled as I greeted him, and said, 'I'm glad to see you. You're a breath of home.'

It would have been pointless to bring him any delicacies since he could eat nothing, so I had brought him a little book containing excerpts of prose and poetry about Scotland. I gave it to him and said, 'There, that'll give you a picture of what things are like.'

Thumbing through the book, he stopped at one place, and read.

'Yes, that's home all right.'

He looked up and handed me the book open at the 'Canadian Boat Song'. While I read I could see home through Gordon's eyes. There was the wide Firth stretching out before me as I stood on one of the Cowal hills that watched over it. On the silver-blue, ever-changing waters were the white wings of the yachts bearing their happy crews along on pleasant cruises. The Sleeping Warrior of Arran and the hills of the Atlantic coastline formed a velvet picture-frame for the homeland we knew so well:

Listen to me as when of old our father
Sang songs of other shores,
Listen to me and then in chorus gather
All your deep voices as you pull your oars.

Fair these broad meads, these hoary woods are grand,
But we are exiles from our native land.

From the lone shieling of the misty island
Mountains divide us, and the waste of seas–
Yet still the blood is strong, the heart is Highland,
As we in dreams behold the Hebrides.

A dark shadow stirred in the corner of the ward. The summer breeze of Scottish hills was displaced by the sticky heat of Singapore. Both of us felt the same sharp thrust of homesickness.

Like Gordon, all of us had our dream of home. We had fought for it on the battlefield; it had sustained many of us in the prison camp. But not all of these would ever see home again. Those of us who had survived were on our way back. Others would follow, flying above the River Kwai. This brought to mind the words of Isaiah: 'And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called the Way of Holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein.'

We were far up along the river, nearing the Three Pagodas Pass. A storm struck us, and the pass was wreathed in a veil of swirling clouds and ghost-like shadows. Then for a moment the clouds parted. There was a burst of sunlight. Far below we could see the end of the valley.

It looked so small.

The clouds closed in again. We continued on our way.

EPILOGUE
. . . AND AFTER

The Dakota circled over Rangoon to give us our first view of the city and the first glimpse of our Army in occupation. Tree-fringed lakes and the Great Pagoda contributed to the air of peace and serenity. Immediately we landed we were escorted to a huge marquee staffed by members of the Women's Volunteer Service from Great Britain. The tent was filled with tables set for tea; smiling English ladies in light tropical dresses were in attendance. It is hard to describe the exquisite taste of the freshly-made white bread sandwiches and the freshly-brewed tea. We were able to taste and see things in a new way and to enjoy them so much more than we ever had before.

I was savouring my sixth cup when I looked up to see four men waiting near me as one of the ladies came to their table with tea. They had tears in their eyes and their Adam's apples were working overtime. These men were tough, tougher than most. They had proved that they could stand up to beatings and torture. But to be served with kindness had moved them so deeply that they sat silently, chokingly, in great humility. The Eternal Mercy had touched them and won them as the love of the Father had won the Prodigal on his return from the Far Country. There was a beauty about those four men as, barefoot and sun-blackened, they strove to hide their emotions.

We checked in at the military hospital set up in the

dormitories and buildings of Rangoon University by Lake Victoria. Our rags were taken from us and burned. We were given green jungle shirts and trousers, soap and towel, tooth-brush and tooth-paste. I watched my blanket being tossed on the fire. When they held it up I could see daylight through it. In the centre was a huge round patch of orange canvas which made it look like a darkened Japanese flag.

We could hardly eat. The tea had been more than sufficient for us, and our supper consisted of stew and canned peaches. It was to be a long time before I could eat meat again without feeling a stab of pain in the stomach. That night, as I tucked myself into a real bed with real sheets, I sighed in contentment.

Next morning, when one of the nursing sisters entered the ward, she said, 'I've never had patients like these in all my nursing experience. Every one has made his own bed, and men are competing for the privilege of sweeping the wards.' This expressed the attitude of these POWs. They lived not to be served but to serve.

At the end of October we embarked on a Dutch ship for Blighty. Our feelings were mixed as we waved farewell to Rangoon, the East and our years of captivity. The jungle had been challenging, there had been comradeship of the highest order, and we had found a way of life that proved to be vital, meaningful and beautifully sane. By the deaths of so many of our friends we were tied to those places with invisible cords that could never be broken.

I was musing by the rail when I noticed my friend John Leckie standing next to me. 'Well,' he said, 'it's all over. I wouldn't have missed it for anything. It was rough, all right. But I learned an awful lot that I couldn't have learned at the university or anywhere else. For one, I've learned about the real things of life, and, for another, it's great to be still alive.'

I knew exactly what had made him say this. The experiences we had passed through had deepened our understanding of life

and of each other. We had looked into the heart of the Eternal and found Him to be wonderfully kind.

We made our first contact with the world we had left behind us as we were steaming up the Mersey to our berth in Liverpool. Word went around the ship that the dockers were on the point of striking for higher wages. They agreed, however, to handle our ship before they did so. Our Jocks were worried that people on shore might not get their rations if ships were not permitted to dock, and sent a delegation to see me about it. 'Couldn't we work the docks?' their spokesman asked. 'After all, we've done it before and we can do it again.'

I promised I'd do what I could. As soon as we landed I went to a harbour-master. He heard me out, all the time looking at me as if I were daft. Then he told me that to accept the Jocks' proposal would precipitate a national crisis. The labour unions would oppose it; the Army would forbid it. We thought we had come home to freedom. While we were prisoners we had been free to contribute to the general good, to help create order out of disorder. Here, in a society which paid lip service to freedom, we were prohibited, apparently, from applying the lessons we had learned. Impersonal laws, red tape, regulations in triplicate, were hemming us in like the jungle with invisible walls.

This harsh impression, however, was mellowed by the warm welcome from the friendly citizens who shouted, shook our hands and thrust bottles of beer upon us as our lorries drove through the streets of Liverpool.

An express train took us to Glasgow. My brother was waiting at the station barrier. I went with him to the hotel to cancel the reservation he had made in my name, as I had arrived in time to get home for the night. I thought I was looking fairly respectable in my battle-jacket and kilt, war-stained though it was. But the hall porter thought otherwise.

He told me that filthy luggage such as mine could not be left in the hall. I glanced down at my gear; to my eyes my mud-stained green army pack and kit-bag looked decent enough. I picked up the offending items to take them away before some civilian had his tender sensibilities affronted by a dab or two of mud and blood.

The day of the soldier was over.

A November moon shone brightly over the hills in the early morning hours, its face reflected on the surface of the Firth of Clyde, as I saw again the familiar shape of the home where I had said, 'Goodbye, Mother', 'Goodbye, Dad', six long years before. Lights burned in the windows. My parents were waiting up to welcome me. This meeting was the greatest shock of all. Time had not dealt kindly with them. The years of uncertainty and fears, of waiting, hoping and praying, had taken heavy toll. I had left them in summer; I had returned in winter.

Home again. But for what and to do what?

First we had to cope with the exasperating mechanics of re-adjustment, each experience bringing its own rude revelation. I was far luckier than most, for I was helped through my own readjustment by the sympathy of a girl who met me on my return, Helen McIntosh Robertson of Sandbank. I had known Helen for a long time, although we had had no matrimonial intentions. We renewed our friendship and after seventeen days she was brave enough to marry me.

The soldier-into-civilian troubles began almost as soon as we stepped off the train. On the day before I was to be demobbed I came down with one of my recurrent attacks of malaria. My teeth were chattering and I was shivering as I passed through the demobilization centre. I suggested that perhaps my discharge ought to be deferred until I had proper medical treatment. This put sand in the well-oiled machinery,

and, in fact, caused it to stagger to a standstill. The medical officer told me firmly that nothing could be done. Once on the conveyor belt, I had to stay there until discharged at the other end in a 'civvy' suit.

When I grew stubborn about it someone pressed the panic button. A solemn-looking individual appeared and questioned me with the professional patience of one accustomed to dealing with difficult children or imbeciles. He finally asked me what I thought was wrong.

'Malaria!' I retorted, 'that's what's wrong!'

'M-hmm,' he said, as though disposing of that irrelevancy. Then, fixing me with a standard smile, he asked, 'Is there something worrying you, or are you afraid of anything?'

'Yes, I'm very much afraid that I'm going to have malaria at my own expense – whereas I would rather have it at the Army's.'

'Quite understandable – quite, quite,' he said, nodding sagely. Then, to humour me, he added, 'Now that you're home, you know, you've absolutely nothing to worry about – nothing at all, whatever.'

Conscious that I was up against an immovable object, I smiled as sweetly as I could, and enquired, 'How do you know?' Then I added abruptly, 'Never mind. I've had no medical treatment in the last three and a half years, I expect I can do without it now.'

I stepped back into line; the machine shuddered into action again, and I emerged with my grey flannel suit. It was too short and too wide.

A few weeks later I was admitted as a civilian to a hospital for tropical diseases, and was diagnosed as suffering not only from malaria but also from avitaminosis, hepatitis, enlarged heart, and ulcerated intestines from harbouring unfriendly amoebae. It took eight weeks to straighten me out, but I was to follow a restricted programme for the next two years. This

included swigs of hydrochloric acid with every meal, for the acid buds of my stomach had been destroyed.

I was faced with a clothing problem; all I had to put on my back was the cheap, ill-fitting suit. When I went to the stores I learned no suits were available because of rationing. Then I was told with a sly wink that if I produced someone who could grant a favour for a favour, a transaction might be arranged. So much, it seemed, was done on this basis.

When it came to choosing our life's work we found many forces operating to frustrate our enthusiasms. We had been sent as boys to do men's work on the battlefield. Now that we returned as men we were offered boys' work. Counsellors with grey hair admonished us from behind their desks that we could now begin to live the British way by 'joining the team', 'toeing the line' and 'getting on the ball'. Concerning affairs of state, wiser heads than ours would guide us. The inference was that now we were out of prison camp we could put God away until Sunday. And with Him, our neighbour.

In some respects I could sympathize with this point of view. We weren't easy to live with; we were tense and taut and could not remain long doing nothing. Rather than sit in a chair we would pace the floor; rather than stay at home we would go out and walk for miles. Our sleeps were of short duration. As soon as we awoke we'd be on the prowl again, looking for something to do or someone to meet.

We had enormous reserves of nervous energy to be used. Ideas popped up in our mind with amazing rapidity. Convinced that every one was good, we would rush from place to place, trying to put them into action. Brazenly we told our political friends how the country should be governed; we told our friends in the school system what they ought to do to improve education; we told our friends in the clergy how to bring churches up to date.

It is not surprising that we were moody, restless and irritable.

We felt that at any moment we might be seized and deprived of our freedom. The Japanese were still with us; they entered our dreams. If we dreamed of the day's events in our new environment the guards would be there, walking unnoticed among the people in the street. If we strolled past with a friend they'd reach out and grab us. If we dreamed of open fields or rolling moors our old hosts would be there, advancing, closing in on us from every side. No matter how hard we tried to flee they would always catch us.

We hungered for one another's company and for the comradeship we shared. Our friends must have had the impression that our imprisonment was one huge, rollicking party. We fought off a great loneliness – a loneliness that was increased by the fact that so many of our friends had not returned. Old familiar spots were haunted with their faces.

Whenever we met with other former POWs we loved to talk of the brilliant plans we'd made and the great things we were going to do. We were convinced that we had learned lessons important to mankind and we were eager to implement them. We thought we had come home to a world at peace; instead we found a world already preparing for the next war. Having had as much reason to hate as anybody, we had overcome hatred. Yet we returned to a world divided by hatreds. Communist hated capitalist; capitalist hated communist; Arab hated Jew; Jew hated Arab; labour hated management; management hated labour; politician hated politician.

A moral cynicism was sapping the strength of society. Half-lies were not only condoned but regarded as smart. There were many who had remained untouched by the welter of the holocaust. What had happened on the battlefields, in mass bombings, in concentration camps – the blood, pain, suffering, heart-break and death – remained totally beyond their comprehension. They did not share in the hopes and agonies of mankind; they had no sense of involvement; they had no part

in the universal fellowship of those who bear the mark of pain. Ever so brightly and ever so meanly they prostrated themselves before the Almighty Dollar and the Trembling Pound. We encountered some who were actually sorry to see the war end because they had such a good time and had done so well financially. Nations had survived this war, but few people asked, 'For what?'

The men with dry souls said, 'Let us go back to the good old days.' They wanted to draw the blinds on everything that had happened in between. There were no lessons to be learned, no decisions made, no risks taken, no new pilgrimages started, no adventures in partnership with God begun.

Everyone spoke of seeking security. But what did security mean but animal comfort, anaesthetized souls, closed minds and cold hearts? It meant a return to the cacophonous cocktail party as a substitute for fellowship, where, with glass in hand, men would touch each other but never meet. They would speak, but nothing would be said and nothing heard. They would look at their partners, but would not see them. With glassy eyes they would stare past them into nothingness.

It meant a return to the cheap love made possible by contraceptives, wherein male and female used each other as a thing, taking their share of sex in the same way as they took their cocktails and wondering where was the fulfilment, where was the satisfaction. With the despairing cry of 'I must be loved!' they would return periodically from the psychiatrist's couch to seek new partners and new problems. All the while their ears remained closed to the divine imperative, '*Thou shalt love!*'

It meant a return to the sedative at night and the stimulant in the morning; drugged sleep dulled the pain of existence and perked-up glands helped one face the fears of the day.

It meant a return to the faceless mass; to culture dragged down to the level of advertising media; to education, not as an instrument for enrichment and enlightenment of minds, but as a

tool for mass conditioning. It meant a return to faith in technology and the Big Machine. As their powers were used to unleash yet greater hidden forces in Nature, so men could find themselves more enslaved than ever and ever readier to use those forces to bring about the total destruction of mankind. The contributions of free men seeking to serve the Infinitely Great in honesty, responsibility and love would be denied. Socrates would have to drink his cup of hemlock again, the prophets be stoned afresh. Atheistic materialism would fetter men to a hard, knobbly universe in which humanity was rejected.

In short, it meant flight from God and descent into the hell of loneliness and despair.

And where, in all this, was the vision of the Infinitely Great? Where was the place for those who wished to follow that vision, inspired, sustained and uplifted by it to find the way to serve their neighbour – and through serving their neighbour to serve their God, and so fulfil themselves? The vision of the Infinitely Great had been revealed to us by divine grace in the prison camp by the River Kwai. Now that we were back among the distractions and diversions of a materialistic world, we were determined to follow that vision. In my conversations with other former POWs I found many who were thinking as I was. With tremendous urgency, they were seeking vocations in which they could be of service to others.

As for myself, I thought at first I would return to the Far East, not, as I had envisioned on the *Setia Berganti*, to be Adviser-in-Chief to the Sultan of Somewhere, but to engage in social work or to teach in Japan. These prospects, however, did not work out. I then decided to follow the path along which I had been directed by my experiences in prison camps, and go to study theology in preparation for the ministry.

In many ways it was no easy choice to make, for it necessitated adjustment to an entirely different environment, language and attitude. After my return I had gone to church every

Sunday, but what I saw and heard depressed me. The sermons belonged to a different age. They suggested Victorian parlours, elderly people dressed in black, horsehair chairs and antimacassars. We had seen a vision of far horizons and caught a glimpse of the City of God in all its beauty, and this vision seemed to be part of a different world from that of the pulpit.

Yet I kept to my resolve and went for two years to theological college in Edinburgh. At the end of that time I received a fellowship at Hartford Theological Seminary in Connecticut. For two years I lived there with my wife, pursuing postgraduate studies in history. My choice was not unusual among former POWs. For years I kept hearing of former alumni of the hell camps who had gone into the ministry after having been in some other profession.

Among them was the Rev. Paul Miller, who is the vicar at Conor in Derbyshire. When he invited a Japanese from Hiroshima, the Rev. John Kanoh, to be his curate, his parishioners resented the appointment, remembering the fate that their brothers, sons and friends had suffered at the hands of the enemy. Mr Miller told his irate congregation, 'I want you to accept our newcomer as a member of the family.'

Later on he said to reporters, 'It was grim being a prisoner on the Burma railway, but I don't hold any bitterness for the Japanese. Their way of life is completely different. Japanese soldiers were severely punished by their own NCOs, so one would not expect them to treat prisoners with kindness.

'There are bound to be people in the village who won't like there being a Japanese curate. They will probably gossip about him in the pubs and clubs. I don't expect anyone to come directly to me and complain. The talking will be behind one's back. If any in the parish try to make things difficult for Father Kanoh, I shall visit them privately and give them a scolding – and it won't be mild.'

Many other POWs chose their calling with the objective of

serving their fellow man and contributing to the good of society. To this end they became teachers, welfare officers, research technicians or doctors. Among them was my friend John Leckie, who took up the study of medicine after he was demobbed. The last time I heard from him he was serving a coal-mining community in Wales, dispensing his medicine with a gentle pawky humour and a healing faith. A fellow prisoner, John Perrett, became interested in biology through his experiences in camp where he learned to make medicines from the resources at hand. After the war he went to Cambridge and graduated with honours in science. Recently he demonstrated before the Royal Society a process whereby bacteria can be grown speedily and diluted at the same time as they are multiplying.

George Winston before the war was a sergeant in the regular Artillery. Now, as vice-president of the Chemico Laboratories in Florida, he is working in the field of virus diseases. Recently he introduced a new drug, Reticulose, which he hopes will prove effective against virus-caused infections.

Sir Albert Coates, who did such brilliant work as a medical officer at Nakawm Paton, is today Professor of Surgery at Melbourne University. M. F. A. Woodruff, another MO, is Professor of Surgery at Edinburgh University. Ronald Searle, a famous cartoonist for *Punch, Holiday, Life* and other magazines on both sides of the Atlantic, began his career by sketching both the horrors and the lighter side of life in the South-East Asia prison camps.

Many stories of achievements at humbler levels have come to my attention. At my daily company parade there was an Argyll who used to appear every Thursday morning as regular as clockwork, charged with some offence or other by the Red Caps. His conduct sheet was as long as one's arm. I didn't meet him again until some time later when I was at Paisley. He was looking prosperous and contented. When we shook hands, the

first words he said to me were, 'You'll not believe it – I'm never in trouble now.'

He went on, with great pride, to tell me of his happy marriage, how he had started a small business which was succeeding very well and how he was extremely active in community affairs.

'Do you go to church?' I asked.

'Och, aye,' he answered, to my astonishment. 'And, what's more, my name is up for the next lot of elders.'

Another POW, a fine, handsome man, was engaged to be married. He was the last surviving male of his family, his two brothers having been killed in action and his father in an air raid. He returned home to find his mother a chronic invalid and his sister tubercular from her service in the Auxiliary Territorial Service. The last I heard of him he had given up all thoughts of marriage and was taking his mother and sister out to New Zealand where he would be better able to care for them.

Welfare and other charitable organizations have benefited from the zeal and enthusiasm of men like Stewart E. Bell, an Edinburgh advocate and an elder in St Cuthbert's Church. And there are many others whose zest for good works continues to show in their numerous extra-curricular welfare activities.

Associations of former POWs sprang up all over Britain soon after our return. Now numbering seventy-nine, they have formed themselves into the Federation of Far Eastern Prisoners of War Clubs and Associations of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The general aims of the FEPOWs are:

> To promote the material and spiritual welfare of all FEPOWs and the dependants of those who died in captivity or subsequently, and to represent their interests by all legal means; to preserve the sacred memory of those who died in captivity or subsequently, to perpetuate the

bonds of fellowship forged during captivity and to perpetuate the spirit that kept us all going during the years of imprisonment.

One of the objectives accomplished was to urge the Government to seek compensation from the Japanese for the brutalities inflicted on us. This amounted to fifteen pounds, or forty-two dollars, for each of us. The sum was purely nominal; nevertheless, the principle had been established that never again should helpless POWs be treated as the Japanese military had treated us. When this motion was debated in the House it was opposed by many MPs on the ground that troops were expected to undergo such suffering. It was part of a soldier's pay.

Much more than financial help has been extended by former POWs to one another. They have been unstinting in the giving of their time, energy, service and counsel in every field of endeavour, from housing to educational, religious or family problems.

On the whole, they seem to have made much more of a success of their lives in the difficult post-war period than those who had an easier time of it. This is borne out by a recent survey conducted by Dr E. P. Routley, also a former POW. Dr Routley found that more of them have married than in other comparable groups and that their marriages have been more lasting. But statistics cannot tell us much of fears overcome, of aspirations realized, of the seeds of faith, hope and love which lodged in their hearts to flower later in the lives of others.

I, too, sought an opportunity to put my experience to work. I had seen at first hand the cruelty of a totalitarian regime. I knew something of suffering and what it meant to look death in the face. I knew the depths to which men could sink and the heights to which they could rise. I could speak knowledgeably of despair, but also of hope; of hatred, but also of love; of man

without God, but also of man sustained by God. I knew the power of the demonic, and I knew the greater power of the Holy Spirit.

So many of the prisoners who had died in camp had been so young. I had felt their deaths keenly. I wanted ultimately to minister to the young, to those of college age. But I saw no way that my wish was to be achieved. While I was still in the United States, after I had completed my graduate studies at Hartford Theological Seminary, I told the executive secretary to the Board of Education of the Presbyterian Church about my desire to work with students. He suggested that I keep in touch with him. I returned to Scotland to do further work in history and to serve as assistant minister in the historic Abbey of Paisley. Three years went by, then at the urging of the Education Board secretary I resigned my post at the abbey and returned to the United States.

I landed in New York without any charge or parish or definite prospect of any kind. I had my sympathetic wife, my children and two hundred dollars to my name. Within a week I was invited to supply the Presbyterian churches of Amagansett and Montauk, neighbouring villages at the eastern end of Long Island. Less than a year later I was in sight of the opportunity I had been seeking. I was called to be Presbyterian pastor at Princeton University. The following year I became Dean of the Chapel.

Here I found that although prison camp and campus were poles apart, many of the questions asked me were identical to those I had been called upon to answer in South-East Asia. The miracle I knew in the jungle was being repeated daily on the campus – the miracle of God at work in His world. I recalled that when I was at Paisley I had been told how the old-time weavers, all the while they were making their beautiful and intricate patterns, saw no more than a tangle of coloured threads. They never saw the design until they took the finished

fabric from their looms. The parallel to the mortal lot is plain. Human experience appears to us – as the shawls did to the weavers – to be no more than incomprehensible tangles of coloured threads, whereas in fact life represents the ordered threads in a great design – the design being woven on the loom of eternity. Looking back, in all the chaos and confusion, I could see a splendid purpose being worked out.

In my time of decision, nature and reason were neutral. They did not speak to me of anything that made possible a significant understanding of myself and my fellow man. They did not show me the vision of the Infinitely Great. Jesus, however, had spoken to me, had convinced me of the love of God and had drawn me into a meaningful fellowship with other men as brothers. Because of Him I had come to see the world in a new way as the creation of God – not purposeless but purposeful. He had opened me to life and life to me.

In the prison camp we had discovered nothing new. The grace we had experienced is the same in every generation and must be received afresh in every age. The odyssey of the spirit is eternal: there are many resting-places but no terminals. That is why the Letter to the Hebrews says, 'For here we have no continuing city, but seek one to come.'

As we journey we are all involved in the 'Great Debate' which has for its theme the age-old problems of mankind: human destiny, suffering, good and evil, freedom, sin, salvation, faith and God. Perhaps we were able to enter the debate more wholeheartedly than most, for we went in stripped for action. We were put on our own before our enemy, our neighbour, and our God, without protection from society.

But the degree of intensity with which the Debate continues – for it always has and always will – depends upon the quality of the response we are prepared to make. Being forced to face life in the raw may help one to understand the nature of the Debate, but that isn't necessary. Every person who uses the

talents God gave him so that he is not afraid to live
sensitive human being among the impersonal forces at wo
society is participating and will be conscious of its only p
ible conclusion.

*As I journey with those of the Way I see that the victory c
the impersonal, destructive and enslaving forces at work in*
world has been given *to mankind because of what Jesus*
done. This is the good news for man: God, in Christ, h
shared his suffering; for that is what God is like. He has n
shunned the responsibility of freedom. He shares in the sadd
and most painful experiences of His children, even that expe
ence which seems to defeat us all, namely, death.

He comes into our Death House to lead us through it.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I never seriously considered writing a book about my experience as a prisoner of war of the Japanese until it was suggested that I did so by Clarence W. Hall, senior editor of *The Reader's Digest*. This was the result of an interview he had with me which was published in the June 1960, issue of the magazine as an article entitled 'It Happened on the River Kwai'. The response to the article was sufficient to indicate there might be a place for such a book. My reason for writing it is principally that it deals with the great issues of human experience which are never old, never dated. To live life in the personal dimension is to be involved with such issues. They are inescapable. All of us are on an Odyssey, for we are all wanderers, seeking a way. Those of us who were prisoners of the Japanese were very conscious of this truth.

I am grateful to those who have urged me to write this book: to my good friend Stewart E. Bell of Edinburgh for keeping me up to date on the careers of other former POWs; to Mrs Mathilde E. Finch for her kindness in reading the first draft, and to Edward R. Sammis for his patience and enthusiasm in his work as consulting editor.

E.G.

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When Ernest Gordon was twenty-four he was captured by the Japanese and forced, with other British prisoners, to build the notorious 'Railroad of Death'. Faced with the appalling conditions of the prisoners' camp and the brutality of the captors, he survived to become an inspiring example of the triumph of the human spirit against all odds.

To End All Wars is Ernest Gordon's gripping true story behind both the Academy Award-winning film *The Bridge on the River Kwai* starring Alec Guinness and the new film *To End All Wars* directed by David Cunningham.

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