

## CHAPTER II

### A ROYALTY BASIS

A SNOWSTORM on December 30th turned Pilgrim Cottage into a Christmas-card scene. I was aware of the snowfall by the unusual brightness of the bedroom ceiling, and that curious white light which makes everything seem photographic. Peering out of the dormer window, I saw that a cat had walked across my lawn, leaving clear paw prints in the spotless snow. The sparrows seemed singularly dirty in contrast with their bright surroundings. The whole countryside lay hushed under the muffling snow.

I drank my morning tea, read my letters, and decided to have breakfast in bed, a thing that gave emphasis to the comfort of one's bed. At least one asset of my uncertain profession is that one has not to go to an office, or even to a desk. Architects need drawing-boards, musicians need keyboards, or must drag about violins or 'cellos and play them standing or sitting. Painters must have canvases on easels, and north lights, and brushes and tubes of paint, but a writer is blessed with an independence of all cumbersome paraphernalia. He needs only a fountain-pen, a writing-pad, and ideas. He has been known to succeed without the last of those requisites. He can work at any time, anywhere. He can work equally well in bed. For myself, I had long ago discovered I could work better in bed, since it prevented

my going out into the garden and discovering the job that was always a welcome excuse for not doing my real job.

So this morning, conscious that a fall of snow and a cold world outside gave me an additional justification for staying in bed, I picked up the telephone, asked for my breakfast, my fountain-pen, the French exercise books to which I am addicted, and my portable desk, which is the three-ply top of a Tate's sugar box. And before breakfast arrived, and the few necessities of my craft with it, I slipped out of bed and crossed to the wardrobe, inquisitively feeling the radiator, in passing, to make sure that all was well with the kitchen boiler. From the wardrobe I took out my writing jacket, slipped it on, and got back into bed. The jacket was necessary to my comfort, but an important part of the pleasure of staying in bed lies in getting out of it, knowing well you can get into it again.

As for the bed-jacket, I linger over so trivial a thing because it is a jacket as singular as it is useful. Ever since I had the experience of being received by a most beautiful French lady in her bedroom, I have remembered the importance of looking well in bed. Even if one cannot be attractive standing up, one has a chance of being attractive lying down.

When, a very young man, and a very timid guest in a French chateau, I was summoned, towards noon, to the boudoir of Madame la Duchesse, my hostess, I had not expected to find her in bed, but the moment I was ushered into the large, flower-decorated boudoir I realised at once that this was how a great lady should receive a morning call. The canopied bed had a backcloth of tapestry, and on it hung a Fra Lippo Lippi painting of *Madonna and Child*. By the bedside sat the household priest, a silver-haired old

Abbé, who painted charming water-colours, spoke excellent English, Spanish, and Italian, and who, so he informed me, had made only one journey to England—long, long ago as a page to a Cardinal.

On the other side of the great bed, between it and the long windows looking over the gardens and the silver lake with its black swans, was a lapis lazuli round table, with a lamp, a bowl of gladioluses, a small jewelled clock in a jade frame, a bottle of scent, and half a dozen paper-bound volumes with deckled edges and intriguing French titles.

But the most memorable thing of my youthful experience of *la grande dame* was the kimono. It had nothing Japanese in character, as the name suggests. It was a jacket made of white *peau d'ange* (skin of an angel) frogged with light-blue silk braid, and with the sleeves fluted at the shoulders to give the impression of epaulettes. It suggested the jacket of a Russian cavalry officer, and yet it remained exquisitely feminine, suiting to perfection the wearer, with its banded collar on the delicate throat, and its gathered sleeves at the wrists, emphasising the loveliness of its wearer's hands. The bed-jacket harmonised completely with the black soutane of the Abbé, the tapestry and the painting, the gladioluses, the jade clock, and the whole character of this luxurious but tasteful boudoir. I have many memories of beautiful women seen in different settings, but the most vivid and lovely memory remains that of my hostess greeting me from her canopied bed.

But let me get back from the chateau to the cottage, and into my own bed, in my own bed-jacket. It is at least singular, for its proper name is a *stepp-jacke*. It is made of chintz, and quilted, has ornamental buttons, and a lining of plaid design. It is cut like an Eton jacket, and is actually a



Tyrolean summer coat, with a small floral pattern in red, blue, yellow, and green. You can see the gay young bloods of Innsbruck walking and cycling through the streets, in summer, wearing these jackets in conjunction with leather shorts and white stockings. They are extremely gay and worthy of the fancy-costume of the Tyrol. They give one, even in bed, a Franz Schubert appearance, and when wearing mine I always have a suppressed feeling that I should be finishing *The Unfinished Symphony* instead of starting a new chapter.

If I belonged to the solemn-owl school of authorship, I should not confess to this gaiety in bed. The writers of significant and solemn prose cannot afford to be gaily clad. Obfuscation and psychological introspection could not masquerade as profundity of thought if it were known that the Master was not in heavy birth-throes but in a gay bed-jacket.

We will maintain that one may be a stylist in bed and a stylist in prose at the same time.

But let us leave this aside on the importance of being comfortable and cheerful in bed. My quilted jacket tucked around me, the board on my knees, the book on the board, the pen in my hand, I was just about to run my yacht on the rocks when the telephone rang.

The telephone exerts a monstrous tyranny over us. It is irresistible since it stands for the unknown. Every telephone receiver postulates the power of curiosity to the  $n$ th degree. Who is it, what is it? Even with all my characters in peril of drowning, I instantly hurried from the yacht in the Ægean Sea home to my cottage and the bedside table.

"Yes? Yes?" I queried.

It was the voice of my literary agent in London speaking.

He was glad to inform me that he had just paid into my bank the sum of one hundred and fifty pounds, accrued royalties on the Finished Edition of my novels.

"On what?" I exclaimed, startled.

"The Finished Edition."

"The Finished Edition!" I repeated, irritably. "Whatever do you mean?—I hope to go on writing a long time yet."

He had touched the weak spot in every author's soul. After the last book we are always finished for ever—until the idea comes for the next.

My agent laughed. He always laughed. Literary agents learn to do that as a profession, since they deal with a nervous and depressed clientele.

"Finnish—not Finished," he said, in his confident, big-royalty voice. "A very nice edition which I'm sending on."

"But they can't read English in Finland!" I exclaimed.

"Oh, yes, they can—but this edition's in Finnish."

"I've heard nothing of this before."

"No, I've kept it as a surprise—it's meant a lot of work, but they came over at last. You'll like the books."

I had a vision of the Finns, clad in sealskins, breaking into my agent's office overlooking the Covent Garden fruit market, the snow still on them after the trek from Finland.

"But I can't read Finnish," I complained.

"No—but it's nice to think you're read in Finland. They're great readers."

My agent is always enthusiastic. As he spoke I saw a thousand Finns, all sitting on sledges, neglecting their reindeer as they read my books. It was the land of the Aurora Borealis, so they could read late.

"Anyhow—prestige apart—the money's useful," went on my agent.

"Prestigious and prodigious to get a hundred and fifty pounds from Finland," I answered, gratefully.

He laughed. I heard a typewriter clatter, and a van draw out of Covent Garden. Then he rang off.

I put down the receiver and glanced out of the window. It was snowing, it looked quite Finnish out of doors. Then my housekeeper entered to collect the breakfast tray and bring me *The Times*. Her visit was opportune—one must share surprising news.

"I've just had over a hundred pounds' worth of royalties," I said.

"Royalties!" she repeated, gripping the tray. "You don't mean real Royalties, sir?"

"Very real. They're in the bank already." Then, not wishing to mystify her, "Royalties for my books," I explained. Her good honest face beamed with delight.

"I'm not a bit surprised. They're only human, and I expect they enjoy a good read."

I interrupted the loyal soul.

"Royalties is the term given to profits made by authors on their books. It's money, not people. I've just heard I've a hundred and fifty pounds from Finland, for my books."

Her face fell. She was disappointed, but she made the right reply.

"That's very nice. You work very hard, sir."

She left the room, and my silent blessing followed her. It was nice to know she thought I worked hard, even though I stayed in bed and I was mixed up with Royalties. I ruminated on the singular word royalties. Doctors, solicitors, and architects received fees for their work, authors, composers, and coal-owners received royalties. "My royalties." How plutocratic it sounded. "My foreign royalties." That was



even more impressive, though actually they were always less substantial.

I was really excited when first translated into Japanese. But my Japanese readers would scarcely support me. The publisher paid ten pounds for his rights; the Japanese agent took fifteen per cent.; the Japanese Government ten per cent. income tax, my English agent ten per cent., and the British Government twenty-five per cent. of the remainder, the lion's share in British lion fashion. The balance was less than five pounds. Nevertheless, I could preen myself on the thought that I had emerged on rice paper in Tokio. But Finland had far surpassed Japan. I possessed a windfall of one hundred and fifty pounds. That was, with tax paid, say, one hundred pounds.

I began to think what I might do with these Finnish royalties. It occurred to me, as I sat there in bed, with the interrupted story on my knees, that royalties were an admirable institution. They had not always existed for the benefit of authors. The term came originally from the King's claim to all profits from mines. In 1568 a fight between an individual landowner and the Crown established the King's exclusive right only to mines of gold and silver; from all other mines the landowner could claim the royalties. Royalties for authors were established later, unfortunately for Shakespeare.

Until the seventeenth century the highest price ever paid for a play was some eleven pounds, and this was the most Shakespeare ever received for the nineteen plays he wrote between 1591 and 1599. He made an income for ten years, writing two plays a year, of about twenty pounds per annum, which at current values is only one hundred pounds. True, he did better later—he averaged some twenty-five

pounds for each of his subsequent seventeen plays, owing to his great popularity! Yet he managed to retire, which is what only a few modern authors achieve. But if only the royalty system of payment had existed in his day, and he had received five per cent. of the gross daily receipts, to which the poorest dramatist is entitled these days!

Milton did better. It is commonly believed that he received ten pounds for *Paradise Lost*, a statement frequently repeated to young poets about to leave the bank or insurance office for the hazards of the literary life. But Milton would have received only five pounds had he not wisely demanded a royalty of Mr. Samuel Simmonds, his publisher. He received five pounds down, and the promise of a further five pounds at the end of the sale of each of the first three impressions, which were of 1,300 copies a time. It is true Milton parted with his copyright for five pounds, but he had a royalty basis thereafter up to 3,900 copies, which was as many as he or the publisher ever dreamed of selling. They must have rubbed their hands when the first edition was sold out in eight months. So we know for certain Milton received ten pounds, the equivalent of fifty to-day, thanks to a royalty basis.

And here was Finland paying me fifteen times what Milton had received for his great work. Moreover, I had never written a line with the thought of its being read in Finland. It was all a very pleasant surprise, and I resolved that if ever I met a Finn I would shake him warmly by the hand. I felt rather like emulating a friend of mine who, on receiving a copy of the French translation of his novel, sent it with his compliments, in the middle of a bouquet of roses, to the French Ambassador in London. Authors are touchy creatures, but they are easily touched. Stirred by that



hundred and fifty pounds to a sense of reciprocity, I was happy to think that the music of Sibelius, a Finnish composer, was well received in England, and that the immense popularity of his macabre *Valse Triste* must have brought him in substantial English royalties.

The knowledge that one will never be a rich man, or that one can never employ others to make one rich, the common reward of business, causes an author to regard an unexpected hundred pounds or so as the opportunity for a flight of the imagination beyond anything in his own books. One might do something really unnecessary, such as giving a lunch to a hundred people, buying a fitted, leather dressing-case that looks like a surgeon's operating outfit, or taking a box for the opera. One could well employ a hundred pounds by giving it to a hospital. But I have a feeling that gifts to excellent causes should pinch one a little to increase the sense of virtue. The present from Finland was so unexpected that it justified the fulfilment of a whim. But at the moment I was somewhat destitute of whims.

And all this was not fulfilling the purpose of keeping in bed, to work. I glanced again out of the window, pleased to find it snowing harder, thus emphasising my comfort. I picked up my pen, and straightened the manuscript book before me. I must really get back to my yachting party.

At this moment my eye fell on *The Times* lying unopened on the eiderdown. Europe was in such a terrible muddle that I sprang at *The Times* each morning to discover which new country we had offended or guaranteed to defend. This time a brief survey satisfied me that, as usual, a committee had been appointed, to postpone the making of any decision.

Folding up the paper, a wide-angle operation that always reminds me of preposterous chest exercises performed with

wooden dumbbells in the school gymnasium under the eye of a waxed-moustached ex-sergeant, my eye caught the shipping advertisements. There were cruises to India, to Java, to South Africa. There were world cruises to everywhere. Cruises, said a glowing advertisement, to suit all purses, all tastes. Why endure the long winter at home when sunny strands where the blue waters . . .

I wondered what kind of a cruise one could get for a hundred pounds; not that any cruise could ever lure me. My dislike of the sea, its cruelty to me, the thought of a gangway and a shuddering floating palace, with breathing-holes called portholes, rendered null all these alluring advertisements. But I was curious to learn where my Finnish royalties would take me.

The choice that lay before me was bewildering. With the Mediterranean Sea so near, the European has a playground of infinite variety accessible at little cost. But I had been almost everywhere on its shores, and I knew, from experience, that one cannot really escape winter anywhere around the Mediterranean.

A winter on the French Riviera is not necessarily removed from the snow, sleet, and storm zone. All along the Riviera there is that sudden fall of the temperature about four o'clock when the English begin to crowd into the Old England tea-rooms, where an elderly spinster, with a number of imported maidens as assistants, serves tea and muffins, scones and homemade cakes. The hot little café buzzes with gossip, the colonel's terrier flies at the café cat, the customers look out on a wilting palm tree in the falling dusk, or wait for their turn with the dog-eared illustrated papers. On emerging there is a treacherous fall in the temperature which breeds Riviera throat. There are some lovely days of



sunshine, and all the beauty of the Corniche d'Or—but there is a gamble with the weather. And treachery of this kind awaited one even in North Africa.

Now, Bermuda, or Jamaica, or even—at that moment the word Miami caught my eye. For nearly two months that name had been forcing itself upon my notice. What boat was going to Miami? I looked again and found that Miami was only a February port of call in the Duchess of Bedford's world cruise. Well, if a boat had been going to Miami direct, and very soon, I might have considered the question of spending my windfall in seeking Florida sunshine, of which there is no possible doubt whatever. I had been there in winter, and I knew.

With care one could go in first-class comfort to Florida and back for one hundred and twenty pounds. One could go for less, but I am so constituted that I would rather stay at home than travel in less than the maximum comfort on the sea. It is an ordeal anyhow, something that has to be gone through to get somewhere.

Perhaps I am spoilt, or vain and full of pride, but I still recall the humiliation I felt on the one occasion when I did not travel first-class by sea. I went up the wrong gangway and was shooed down again as if I had been a sheep with foot-and-mouth disease. I seemed to have been given a berth in the very bowels of the ship, directly over the propeller shaft. As soon as we put to sea I knew it was loose. It had a habit of coming up above the water and wagging the ship before submerging again with a terrific plonk. I felt ill at once, and sought a chair on the deck. But second-class passengers were not entitled to any kind of shelter, and to impress them with their inferiority they had to sit in the rain, if they must sit on deck at all. I went down, very much



down, to my cabin and joined a dreadfully sick young man who had told me, as we left harbour, that he was greatly looking forward to his first trip.

I fled from his distress, and boldly ignored the forbidding sign *First Class Passengers Only* at the top of a companion way. Somehow I got as far as the deck-chairs, well sheltered, seized one, sat in it and commanded the steward to bring me a rug and a pillow. I was so peremptory that he never doubted I was first class. He asked me my name and wrote it down in his little pocket book. I was one of his clients. Two hours later I knew I could never go down to my propeller-ridden cabin. I again called the steward and asked him to send someone from the Purser's office with a plan of the ship and a list of empty cabins.

"I want a cabin," I said, seeing he was a little dazed.

"Don't you like your cabin, sir?"

"I do not. I hate it. I will never go in it again."

A few minutes later the Purser himself appeared, to attend to the rich eccentric. He was very apologetic and distressed because I did not like my cabin. The Company desired, etc. etc. He conveyed an impression, as he opened the plan, that the whole ship was mine. I put my finger at once on a cabin in the dead centre of the ship. I was feeling so ill that I did not ask the price. It was vacant.

"I will have that one," I said. "Will you please have all my things moved into it at once?"

"Most certainly, Mr. ——"

I gave him my name.

"Let me see, your present cabin is——?"

"278, in the Second Class."

He stared at me and then immediately became a policeman.

"But you can't change your cabin! You shouldn't be here. This is the promenade deck, for first-class passengers only."

He had been seated attentively at my side, and now he rose, a figure of outraged dignity.

"But I am here!" I said, enjoying the situation, ill as I was.

"I am sorry, but you must go. The steward should not have allowed you to sit here," protested the Purser.

"Then the steward must carry me away—I'm too sick to walk," I answered.

He made an impatient noise, and looked at the other passengers in their chairs, as though he feared they might catch something from me. There was no steward in sight.

"I must ask you to go," repeated the Purser.

"I will, to Cabin 84, when you have it ready."

"If you like to pay——"

I gave a laugh, and he caught a twinkle in my eye.

"I'm sorry, sir, I didn't understand. Of course——" he began.

"Of course," I echoed.

"The second class is quite good," he said, reassuringly, "but restricted somewhat."

"And bumpy, and hemmed in with notices saying you can't go here and you can't go there. Never again."

Thus ended my first and only attempt at economy at sea. I have slept in a German youth hostel for sixpence a night, and in Austrian beds that have cost me a schilling, with a magnificent view, but when I go to sea I must have the best in order to endure the worst, even though the pitching bed costs ten pounds a night.

If I were going away at all, I would go comfortably, I resolved, looking down the shipping announcements. But

was I going anywhere at all? I feared I was. These Finnish royalties had made me restless. In my mind the word Florida kept recurring. I was pining for sunshine.

Annoyed by my weakness, I put down *The Times*, to begin my work. But as I did so I saw another announcement: *The Princess of Connaught* was sailing on January 10th for New York, and, unlike all other boats sailing there, she was going via Madeira. This unusual course took her through southern waters. For most of the journey to the United States she would escape that dreadful North Atlantic in winter. Within four days she would be at Madeira and in sunshine, and until within a few miles off America she would keep in the Gulf Stream. New York was only twenty-eight hours by train from Florida.

I picked up *The Times* again. The idea was rapidly growing. Madeira in four days—I had never seen Madeira—and then New York in six. If I sailed on January 10th I could be driving through orange groves with my friend Howard Phillips twelve days later. He had begged me to go and I had been churlish about it.

Why not? Yes, indeed, why not? Unluckily I am one of those people who are always going to do what they want, to satisfy wishes, realise dreams, next year or the year after. I envy those bright, unforeseeing, carefree creatures who firmly seize the present hour and wring all the happiness they can out of it. Next year I will spend more, or earn more, or will not write a new book, and be free, or get away from self-imposed slavery in my garden, or not worry about the impending fall in the stock market, or the impending war. "Why," asked a charming but empty-headed friend of mine, "do you read newspapers? They're only full of accidents, or warnings of a financial collapse, or quarrels that



may lead to war. Whatever happens, happens, so why worry over what can't be helped?"

There is an answer to such indifference to affairs; someone must think about things, but one can be too anxious, too well-informed, and die of intelligent anticipation. My friend will never worry, for he has never known the tyranny of to-morrow. Looking back on the years of our acquaintanceship, I find that I have avoided little that he has not avoided by merely not thinking; which is contrary to all that the copybooks teach us. Providence seems to have provided people who take no care for themselves with people like myself, who will step in, either from kindness or vanity or a chance to demonstrate our rightness, and carry them over their difficulties. As I get older I am trying to take life more lightly. I began my writing career, early, as a poet preoccupied with death; perhaps I shall learn to grow old in gaiety, preoccupied with life.

In some such mood as this it is not hard to justify enjoying oneself. Even now, with a book being written as I sat in bed in my bright Tyrolean jacket, with winter symbolised in the falling snow that hid my lawn, I began to calculate how soon my present task would be finished. Could I sail on January 10th? Should I sail on January 10th?

Preposterous, I said to myself, putting down the paper and picking up the pen yet again. I glanced at my watch to see how much time I had lost. It was nearly twelve o'clock, but my watch sometimes gained. I turned on the radio to get the midday time signal.

". . . and while it is unsafe to prophesy, and particularly in such a variable matter as our weather, I do not think I take an undue risk, all these signs in the countryside considered, in prophesying a somewhat severe winter. I may

be wrong, but the considerations I have just outlined give me the data for the opinion I hold."

The voice ended. Another voice added—

"You have just heard Mr. Thomas Whiteman, speaking on 'Weather Signs and Seasonal Changes.' In a few moments there will be the Time Signal, and the rest of our programme will follow."

Surely I had heard a prophetic voice! A severe winter. I had received one more reason for going sunwards. This was the very voice of Fate.

I heard the time signal, switched off the radio, and, in sudden determination, picked up the telephone.

"I want the London office of the Transatlantic Shipping Company. Will you please find the number and ring me," I said, and replaced the receiver.

I read the shipping notices again, and waited for the call. In a few minutes I was talking to the Transatlantic Shipping Company. Yes, I could have a single cabin in the very centre of the ship for thirty-six pounds. The price sounded so moderate for crossing the Atlantic on a southern course, with a call at Madeira, that I asked if there was something wrong with the cabin. Was it over the kitchen or near to the lavatories? No, replied the voice, it was a perfect cabin in a perfect ship. I asked them to reserve it for me provisionally. I would call in in a couple of days.

I put down the receiver. I had done it. I had been reckless. Finland and the weather prophet had set my course. I was going sunwards, to Florida. And I was leaving in ten days. The thought both elated and dismayed me. How I must work in the intervening days! Almost in desperation I picked up my pen once more and arranged the writing-board.

But I was fated to be interrupted this morning. It was my housekeeper this time, with four letters that had come in the second post. I glanced at the envelopes before putting them aside. They must wait. The chapter must really be finished before I rose and dressed. Then, as I glanced at them I made an exclamation. What a preposterous coincidence, as the critics would say were such a thing in a book, for one of the envelopes bore the postmark 'Miami, Florida.'

This letter had to be read. It was from my old American friends at Leafy Way, Coconut Grove, Miami, who invited me to visit them every year. They had received my own letter declaring I could not come to them. By common consent it was a decision they could not accept. Six years had elapsed since I had seen them—they had bought a winter home in Florida, with special thought of a room for me. This winter I could not be let off again. I was to get on to the next boat.

And if they only knew, I was getting on the next boat! I read the letter twice, and saw in it the hand of Fate. I felt no further misgivings. In an instant I saw my plan complete. Sometime since I had been invited to deliver a lecture in Chicago, which I had declined. If they still wanted me they should have me, at the end of March. One month at Coconut Grove, one month at Orlando, one lecture at Chicago, and England again in the first green flush of Easter-tide. Chicago would help to finish what Finland had begun.

Elated, I burst into song, and was horrified to find that, instinctively, I was singing *Moon over Miami*.