

## A Bicycle Built for Two

a story by Nigel Dennis

“The problem to be faced by a Siamese twin,” Arthur would say in his lectures, “is not, as is commonly supposed, his *adherence* to his brother, but his *separateness* from him—a point to which I return again and again.” Then, after Arthur, resting one hand on his and Gino’s hip, had given examples of how far apart they were: “I think,” he would add to his audience (professional men, mostly: doctors, sociologists, an advanced canon or two), “I think this awareness of our separateness came at the very moment when my brother and I became aware of our jointure—which is to say, our recognition of infeasible bond was simultaneous with that of insuperable apartness.”

Now, here we have a statement on which somebody has spent a lot of effort and which sounds not only true, but profoundly true. Yet should we not carry it to the window and examine it carefully, to see if it is not rubbish? We shall never be the sort of philosopher that insists on every word meaning something, because our heart is without the sentimental and religious sweetness necessary to so passionately a faith in the promise of mere words. But we do ask of true statements, and particularly of profoundly-true ones, that they be not more than about 49 per cent inaccurate—and it is with this in mind that we raise the following objections to Arthur’s words:

1. Gino and Arthur realised they were joined at the hip when they were three (or, *at most*, four) years old. Could boys of that age have had sufficient intellectual training to conclude that their misfortune was necessarily the opposite of what it was?

2. When Gino and Arthur were three (or, *at most*, four), nobody was talking about “the isolation of the individual” and “the breakdown of communication,” etc., etc. Consequently, if each did, in fact, recognise his solitariness at that time, he was thinking what we are thinking now, but doing so nearly twenty-five years before we did. Is this likely?

3. Gino could see, feel, and hear as well as the next man, but he was never “aware” of anything. Even as a grown man, when he heard Arthur mention “isolation” he associated it with measles, while “breakdown of communication” brought to his mind only telegraph wires under snow and confusion in a post-office. If so limited as an adult, what must he have been when three (or, *at most*, four)?

If these arguments stand up, it means that Arthur repeatedly made a misleading statement about his and Gino’s condition, and that he did so because he based his conclusions on what was current in the thinking of his maturity, instead of on what had been clearly apparent even in his infancy. And yet, the doctors and sociologists always used to note down that part of his lecture as if it were gospel, coming, as it did, from one who was *in a position to know*. Well, it will be one of our aims here to show that whatever position Arthur was in, he inclined to fancy himself in quite another one. Lucky man! If, for general purposes, there is any *more-rewarding* inclination, we shall be grateful to have its address.

Any discomfort in the situation, really, arose from Arthur’s being joined to a person like Gino. For there is no doubt at all that Gino was not a thinker’s twin. His ruling passions—golf and gambling—turned him into a man of the world and completely stunted his thoughtful side. On a radio programme, yes: Gino could recount correctly, hole for hole, every leading game of golf since 1900; but one knows a dozen historians and haberdashers who can reel off lists like that. Arthur, on the other hand, had rather a short memory: like most thinkers, he identified himself with whatever he happened to be

thinking at the moment, supposing it to be an advance on whatever he may have thought before. Other differences between the twins were that Gino, like most sportsmen, had a good eye, a short temper, and a cheery heart, while Arthur was short-sighted and could cope with the problem of being joined at the hip only by bringing his mind heavily to bear on it and acquiring patience by long study of the proper literature. Gino, moreover, did his best to ignore his tie to Arthur; he tried to go through life as if he were exactly the same as any other golfer or gambler. Arthur, however, quite doted on their tie and made it his centre of interest—not in a morbid way, not even in a pleased way, but simply as the platform from which all his trains pulled out. The best way to illustrate the general condition these differences made is to give absurdly exaggerated examples and suppose Leopardi attached permanently to W. G. Grace, or Jung to P. G. Wodehouse. Now, imagine the sharp edges of these bondsmen's characters being rubbed away, yet gently cemented, by years of un-sparing propinquity, and the actual situation of Gino and Arthur emerges in rough outline, like bumping ships on a radar screen.

There is no doubt at all that the more *likeable* characteristics were Gino's—as can be proved simply by pointing to his numberless hon. memberships in sporting clubs and gaming societies. But this should not prejudice us when judging Arthur. If our culture is to bed down comfortably, then studious patience, painfully developed in libraries, *must* be respected as much as the spontaneous warm-heartedness of the club-house. Intense self-interest (in the scholarly sense) *must* be saluted by as many cannons as thoughtless self-forgetfulness, and the arts of the brain, however misused, *must* rate as many salaams as games of skill. If anyone doubts this argument, let him pause to compare the respective burdens of Gino and Arthur. Good-natured Gino must traipse willy-nilly from one lecture-hall to another and let Arthur bore the pants off him with dreary variations on the theme of

personal isolation. He must get used to hearing incessant references to the very nuisance he tries hardest to forget; he must attend Lady Beaune's literary "Wednesdays" and learn to go to sleep while Arthur reads with the light on. But patient Arthur must follow Gino into the bunkers and roughs of the world's golf-courses; he must stand in wet paddocks wearing a grey hat, stomach the conversation of club-bars, sit patiently at baccarat tables and tolerate the filling-up of the home mantelpiece with row upon row of silver-plated tournament cups. Personally, we cannot feel so much as a cigarette paper of difference between the respective Crosses listed above, and we believe that if the rest of the world could be as just as we are in such matters, communication would not keep on breaking down.

Now, since we are on the subject of credit, and trying to apportion it in a magnanimous way, let us pitchfork some in the direction of the English people. Let us say that their attitude to Gino and Arthur was extraordinarily nice and sensible, and goes to show that the English way of dealing with what is out of the ordinary is in no way as stringent and churlish as many people complain it is. The twins' courage was recognised long before they came of age: all through their law-suit, as minors, to free themselves from Gammon's Circus, public opinion was on their side and Mr. Gammon was booed, and almost pelted, in the Strand. The ambitiousness of their characters—their near-Scots determination to go far in London—was acclaimed immediately as English: indeed, they got along so well that they soon reached the stage where there was a sort of pause in public enthusiasm—as if responsible heads of families were asking each other: "But will they be *modest*, too?" And once Gino and Arthur had shown modesty—Gino, by attributing his first big golfing victory to favourable winds; Arthur, by adopting in his first book a manner so quiet as to be nearly mute—they received unfailingly the treatment that suited them best—which is to say, people shook hands with them, and argued with them, and joked, and offered to

stand the next round, etc., etc., precisely as if the two were any separate Britons. Indeed, to drive home the general niceness of English behaviour, let us again exaggerate absurdly and instance the decency of the newspapers. It was not only the excellent *Times* photographers and their matter-of-fact caption writers (“Mr. Gino Fawcett, the holder, playing himself out of a tricky position in the first round of the Tweesdale Cup”) that were commendable, but also the papers you find in barbers’ shops: these were so self-restrained about the brothers as to be in the position, once a year or so, to write a short editorial eloquently saluting their own silence. This may not seem much of a feat to the man in the street; but to anyone who has been close to the Press and knows that a newspaper proprietor’s first ambition is to sell astonishing facts and photographs to the public in order to buy bread for the men and women on his staff, the decency shown to Gino and Arthur must seem so unbusinesslike as to be nearly defective in professional loyalty. But this is a tricky point that always arises when a cultural Prince, forgetting his immediate responsibilities, becomes over-sensitive to the suffering and *deformity* of persons who are not on his pay-roll.

## II

So, take it all in all, and here is a very happy situation indeed. Two people with one serious disadvantage have won a difficult struggle to fit in and feel a great deal of pride (modest pride) at having done so. The English traffic which, instead of squeezing up has halted and waved the twins in from their curious little secondary road, also feels a great deal of pride (modest pride) at having reached a certain stage of civilised behaviour. We shall now give individual examples of this modest pride; but to save ourselves the trouble of writing “modest” each time, we ask the reader to do the job for us by exciting modest emotions in himself whenever our text makes a reference to pride.

The judge who directed the jury to find against Mr. Gammon

still recalls with pride how careful he was to leave them no loophole to the contrary—and, of course, the jurymen will proudly remember forever how readily they swung into line. The National Health authorities take pride in giving Gino and Arthur separate cards for stamping at the self-employed rate; the Marylebone Council is as proud to renew Gino's driving licence (Arthur does not drive) as is the Vestments Insurance Company to renew the annual cover and allow the 30 per cent, no-claim premium bonus. The Press lord can say to himself proudly at night: "Well, even if it has meant giving poor old Joe the sack, my restraint has saved those two stout chaps from pain;" and the good-hearted rozzer who shouts "Good luck, Mr. Fawcett!" as Gino speeds down the Dover Road to the links at Sandwich, feels better and luckier himself, as if he had turned over a sixpence when the young moon rose. There is pride for the brothers' bank manager, who watches their separate balances climb year by year and can claim to have guided these two brave and famous men ever since they left Mr. Gammon. There is the profoundest sort of pride (to which the depth of modesty must be proportionate) for Gino's and Arthur's different *sets* of friends—the sporting ones, who tolerantly overlook Gino's peculiar connection with pedantry, and the intellectual ones, who forgive, as purely circumstantial, Arthur's tie-up with a Surrey sort of man. Finally, there is pride for the local tax-collector, who demands just as much from each brother as he does from ordinary brothers—and here lies the key to civilised tact and help for the disabled: they must not be favoured too much, or they will become self-conscious, and then by degrees indignant, and all the good undone. So Arthur and Gino are dunned for bills just like everyone else; no club ever gives Gino one inch of privilege in the rules of the game; and the editor who has scribbled a note to "*My Dear Arthur*" asking him to review a new book about communication by some Anglican or Zen man, will always tell him if the review is too long. It is hard to think of any other country that could

balance help and self-help so neatly—and perhaps we may remark here, without meaning to be at all insular or patriotic, that had Gino and Arthur grown up in California or Manhattan, they would have been sadly retarded by excessive kindness. More and more young people in America are entering monasteries nowadays, and it seems that they are doing so precisely to find just that lick of roughage which we, in our harsher culture, can enjoy without ever resorting to faith or celibacy.

### III

Gino and Arthur are in their late thirties and a situation of remarkable balance has been achieved. Each is at one with the oddness of the other, and the English are at one with the oddness of both: three clumsy facts have formed one handsome dream. Nor is it our intention to send the dream-ship to the bottom by overloading it with heavy sentimentalities—*of course*, the situation is not perfect, *of course* there are spats and difficulties and moments of bad temper and resentment; and there are times when tact breaks down and some one of the three parties puts a foot wrong, or over-reaches. But such defects are trifles, for modest pride is carrying the threesome along with remarkable sturdiness and none of them, one would think, is going to go too far wrong if only for fear of losing face—a motive usually attributed to the Japanese. Gino and Arthur have not reached the ultimate state of loving their fate, nor have the English so scoured away their brutishness as not to feel, every now and then, that they are crying “*Ciao!*” to a pair of monsters. On this point we shall only remark impatiently that if the situation, on all sides, *were* that much better, it would be a sign that all three parties were ripe either for sanctity or certification. It is sentimental enough, as we remarked earlier, to expect people always to use the right words; but to expect them always to enjoy the right sentiments is pedantry of the wettest sort.

Instead, the proudly-pitched situation continues through the years, and one can see no reason why it should not see Gino and Arthur safely into their grave, complete with Olympic medals and a Fellowship of All Souls. Unfortunately, one forgets that a well-balanced condition is an awful breeder of sheer boredom and that even the proudest person can become fed-up with his own modesty. The brothers' bank manager, for instance, really does, after so many years, become sated with his own happiness at his own goodness; the Press lord wearies of his magnanimity and even stops running his annual announcement of it. Bar-tenders and policemen actually do reach the stage of hardly noticing the brothers, and the few funny stories that have been invented about them by catty wits have gone the rounds so often that they could not bear repeating even at a large banquet. Now, this sort of boredom is a consequence of highly-civilised behaviour, and it is our personal conviction that people who suffer from it should try their best not to turn disruptive and ugly: if sufferance of boredom is not the *very test* of civilisation, what is? So we lay it down that a boring banquet is a sign of far greater excellence than is an excitable missionary, and, like any savage, we think the latter should be made into the former whenever the peace of the long, dull days is threatened by agitation.

In the present case, it is Arthur, unfortunately, who begins to resent the boredom most. The disease starts slowly and, like hallucinations, is at first dismissed by Arthur as silly, extraneous, and dyspeptic. Then it starts coming back for more. It informs Arthur that his life is dull, partly because he has made it orderly and benevolent, and partly because people don't *notice* him very much. Where once, for example, his lecture-audiences sat bolt upright, drinking Arthur in, they now doodle, and even doze, as if Arthur, even with Gino attached, were just another *one* of the many people who make a career out of addressing other people. When he speaks on the radio, no letters pour in: there is only one, from a kindly old lady who has taken

twenty years to discover how handicapped Arthur is. When this starts happening, a man knows that society really has opened all its doors to him, and, staring glumly through the empty frames at the drowsy figures beyond, he pines for some heavy obstruction that will take hammer and nails and a manifesto or two.

Unfortunately, this appreciation of the situation—which is a quite ordinary, common one—does not reach Arthur in the clear and meaningful language we have used above. It arrives in code, and when Arthur has unscrambled it, the intelligence reads very differently. “Are you pursuing life with Integrity?” it asks, “and if so, why are you not suffering more?” The message implies that Arthur is a shirker who, having overcome a serious handicap, should now be pursuing a worse one. But this implication is too garbled to be read plainly: Integrity is the only whisper that is always easy to catch, and Arthur wakes up with it in the morning and feels ashamed when the misty London sun shines through the window on to all the good furniture and silver cups. Somewhere in Pimlico, he knows, a young hop-picker is putting on a play named *Integrity*, with a black baby and real hop-poles in it, for two nights and a matinee.

Beside Arthur, Gino sleeps on deeply, his hairy, muscular arms outside the bed-clothes, his barrel-chest rising and falling like an efficient buoy. His game is not what it used to be, and a bit of a problem is going to come up over the application he has made to become the resident pro of a Kent club. Gino is at an age when he would enjoy the security of a regular salary; but how can he get the job, with Arthur in tow? So Gino is worried, but not too much, because he knows how decent English committees are and how ready to fix up some compromise when they see that one is necessary. He also takes for granted that one’s game falls off as the years pile up; that there is more fat and double-whiskies and a bluer red to the nose. This is such a truthful view of life that integrity has no place in it.

But it is Gino who, quite innocently, gets Arthur started on the new quick-step. Arthur's worry about the growing emptiness of things has been piling up for months; all he needs to get him going is some sort of sign-post, as he has no idea where to find a fuller life. He has been reading books which contain information on this subject and has underlined a good many passages which contain the gist of fullness. But by next morning they have all seemed disappointing: sanctity, it seems, can ring hollow just as quickly as success can. What Arthur needs is a suggestion that will catch his particular imagination: integrity and suffering will follow without much trouble.

The moment comes when they are driving home from one of Gino's tournaments. Gino, rather smelling of whisky, is enjoying himself, as always, with the gear-box of the A.C. and playing the whole tournament over, hole by hole, out loud. The radio is on. Arthur is sitting with the new cup in his lap, bearing with the awful music on the radio and giving a proper grunt every fifteen seconds as Gino rattles on; but of course his brain-box is entirely elsewhere, playing backgammon with integrity. "I often think," says Gino suddenly, laughing, "that my game owes everything to you. An extra body and two more legs—the stability's absolutely terrific, you know."

Arthur grins as well as grunts, but Gino's words trickle into his body and begin to work like fury. His first thought is: Why didn't I think of this myself? In fact, he has thought of things like this for very many years: for instance, he has known for ages that handicaps can be turned into advantages and that his wide reading and almost courtly patience have been built out of the dreadful limitations imposed on him by Nature. But this is the first time that a piece of his theory has had practical Gino to support it, and it is as if what had been a mere thought, rattling about with many others in Arthur's skull, like bolts in a cardboard box, had suddenly been hammered into an arrow, all ready to be fired at the lofty target of Integrity. We,

ourselves, of course, can think of a dozen targets that are closer to the ground and easier to hit, but that is because we lack the parabolic vision that inspires bowmen of Arthur's sort.

That night, after Gino is asleep, Arthur starts shooting. He decides, to begin with, that the lack of integrity in his life is due to the fact that although he has known the truth, he has refused to follow it. He has coasted along, taking things the easy way, making himself popular, helping society to preen its civilised feathers. He has not told the truth for fear of being thought boastful—and the truth, as he has always known, is that most human beings are a thoroughly ugly and deformed lot. They are to be pitied for this, not punished, because their deformity is not of their making; they were so born into the world, completely detached from one another and quite without what Gino has called “the terrific stability” of Siamese twins. The world of health is thus a world of illusion—and Arthur, who should have been the first to say so, has instead only helped to magnify the illusion. The world of civilised decency, too, is nothing but a corrupt nonsense—just a long, long lie—and one outstanding example comes instantly to Arthur's mind: the dishonest decision against Mr. Gammon. The judge who directed it, sketched the lie; the jury painted it in; the public applauded the finished picture and gave it their varnish. Arthur and Gino have always known that their victory was dishonourable—and they have always thanked the society that gave it to them. Indeed, the grosser the lie, the more thanks they have given. They have thanked the authorities who have pretended that they were separate persons. They have thanked the friends who pretended not to notice. They have reached the stage where they scarcely notice themselves. No wonder civilisation looks like a whopping white lie; no wonder the progressive dramatists are hitting back with black babies.

Arthur sees immediately that he must make contact with reality (this is the way he phrases it) without the least delay. He must an-

nounce: “I am what I am—and you are what you are” without fear of pain or unpopularity. He must be brave enough to pull the house down, and, if it lands on his head, this can only bring out the best in him.

The only nuisance here, is his wretched attachment to Gino. Men who live for the casino and the links detest dismantling operations of any kind: in their way, they are as daring as any thinker, but they like to jump off from a steady position and to recognise old faces and places as they race out and home again. By now, Gino is used to Arthur’s intellectual friends; he has even grown to like two or three of them. The thought of lecture-halls still makes him groan, and yet, he has learnt to like some lecture-halls better than others—and even to like some lectures better than others. Being tied to Arthur has given him even more stability than he realises; he has even caught, in a curious way, a certain reflected reputation from his brainy twin. Arthur knows this and realises how enormously difficult it will be to carry Gino into paths of deeper integrity. Indeed, as he is fond of his brother, he decides that rather than hurt him, he had better just suffer from boredom and emptiness after all, leaving the set-up just as it is.

This is a kind, generous decision; but Arthur soon starts making a hash of it. He turns to reading painful books, written by damned people who have been born with no legs, or only grown to a few feet, or with hermaphrodite parts. He has read these books before out of a fellow-feeling for other monstrosities and interest in the ways they have coped with their peculiarities; but now he does so with a feeling—that grows stronger all the time—that these creatures were on to a good thing, that they had something extra, that they knew what integrity was, that their deformity was the truest sort of beauty.

The trouble is that these monstrous predecessors have all reached the same conclusions as Arthur. The health of tuberculosis,

the mobilities of paralysis, the radiance of having no eyes, the harmonies of total deafness, the fertility of impotence—all these are very old saws by now, and Arthur is not going to increase his integrity much by sawing them again. Is there, then, no way in which he can improve on the earlier tragedians?

Most of the above not only arrives in code, but stays in it. Arthur gets nothing but attractive impulses, which drag him slowly towards a solution. This arrives quite miraculously and *en clair* one evening, when he and Gino are cleaning their teeth. It states:

**YOUR TRAGEDY IS UNIQUE. BEING BOUND TO GINO HAS GIVEN YOU SPECIAL ADVANTAGES OF INSIGHT AND WISDOM. BUT YOU CAN NEVER USE THESE ADVANTAGES—BECAUSE YOU ARE BOUND TO GINO.**

This is an extraordinary bit of news, and far more exciting than anything Arthur had expected. But as he is still resolved not to hurt Gino's feelings—which would also spoil the whole tragedy—he cannot go feverishly to work and express it all in book form. But he does have one or two close friends to whom he is able to unburden privately, and here are extracts from a couple of letters he writes to them:

*My Dear Lady Beaune,*

Alas! I fear I can't accept your charming offer of Folly Cottage for September—too far from Deal, where Gino is playing in both the singles and the mixed foursomes. Or, should I say, in strict truth, where *I* am playing in both the singles and the mixed foursomes? Tell me, Boney dear, did any monster ever have so curious a destiny? I long to be a fortress of Bohemia, but must remain a villa, semi-detached. I am beckoned to the solitude of

Alps—and must drive to Deal! Ah! What your understanding means ... *etc.*

*Dear Renfrew,*

Of course, you are quite right, but consider my side of the question. Here I have spent all my adult life (ever since we got away from Gammon, in fact) stressing my utter *apartness*. Now, I find that this was an illusion. *I am joined to Gino*—and in ways that would never occur to someone who wasn't. For instance, if I shot a policeman, *I could not be hanged*, because *Gino* would be innocent—could anything be more degrading? And the same injustice applies to martyrdom—I must always be denied the grid-iron and the Cross, because nobody in his right mind would dream of crucifying the bourgeois Gino. In brief, the norm must always cling to my side—I *cannot* be an *outsider*. To make things worse, I can't make up my mind whether my dilemma is almost unique, or whether destiny has chosen me to symbolise the predicament of *all* thinkers. I mean, is Gino, to me, what the dead weight of public ignorance is to intellectuals in general? And, if so, how can we escape? Suicide, you answer courageously. But there is no suicide for a Siamese twin. If I kill myself, I murder my brother—whose only crime is a preference for golf. . . .

Renfrew, of course, writes a profoundly true letter back, saying that he has often been in much the same sort of pickle himself: if his reply is a bit off-hand, this is only because there is always a little jealousy among tragedians. But Arthur, who knows that his particular wound is deeper than Renfrew's (which is *why* there is always a little jealousy among tragedians) has reached the point where he must do something to break step with normalcy and has decided, as tragedians always do, that his closest friends must be the first to suffer from

it. He writes curtly to Lady Beaune, saying that he won't come to her "Wednesdays" any more because he finds the atmosphere of her *salon* "moneyed, insincere, and stifling." In a book-review, he makes a brutally clear reference to poor Renfrew's distressing sexual handicap. Then, widening his field, he suggests in an article that kindnesses shown by civilised people to monstrosities are just a lie invented by these people to hide their own monstrousness. This offends even people who are not his friends.

Gino, of course, knows nothing of the indignation that is provoked by his brother's latest writings: he only knows that instead of going to Beaune House on Wednesday, Arthur takes him to Wapping, and that addicted Chinamen and diseased sailors seem to be taking the place of evenings with Renfrew. Knowing that Arthur's bent has always been rather towards the morbid, good-natured Gino just tags along, drinking a bit more whisky and comforting himself with the thought that this time tomorrow *he* will be dragging *Arthur* to the Players' Annual Dinner at Broadstairs.

But, a few mornings later, a letter comes for Gino. He reads it and says nothing, but his face pales and he twists his big fingers.

Arthur, too, has something on *his* mind, but he, like Gino, says nothing. After breakfast, very silent, the brothers sit down to their desk. Arthur writes letters to a couple of friends, keeping them up-to-date with his wound. Gino studies his racing paper and places a bet or two over the telephone. They rise for lunch. Neither speaks his mind. In the afternoon, Gino finds that none of his horses has come in. Pleading a headache, he opens the whisky bottle. Soon, Gino's whisky gives Arthur courage, and he confesses to Gino that he feels an irresistible impulse to go to a circus that evening.

The brothers have their worst quarrel for years. Both have been patrons of the Free Captive Animals Association ever since they left Mr. Gammon: to many, the mere mention of the name "Fawcett"

suggests the beastliness of the sawdust ring and the whip of the unspeakable tamer. How can poor, stupid Gino understand that his brother has reached the stage where the nastiest thing imaginable seems, after all, to be the most honourable and most beautiful? What's more, Gino has drunk half a bottle of whisky, and Arthur, suddenly observing him closely, realises that his low-brow twin is in a bad way. He asks why—and Gino goes off like a geyser.

He tells Arthur that he is losing his eye. His game is falling off. All his bets have begun to go wrong. He has been drawing on his capital. The letter that came this morning said that the job at the Kent club had been given to someone else. The letter confirms his fears: he is going downhill and can't stop.

Arthur is quite astounded. If there is one thing he had never imagined, it is that brainlessness has its own instabilities and perversities and cannot be relied on to play the part of Plain Jane while better minds are starring in grand tragedy. Now, he looks at the face beside him and wonders how on earth he never noticed the baleful signs of sportsman's puffiness and gamester's eye. He is dreadfully alarmed (how Lady Beaune would laugh!) by Gino's reference to spending capital; he asks for more details, but Gino only pours himself another shot and dries up. Now, Arthur's old patience reappears and he talks sensibly and consolingly to Gino. He says that at forty, things often seem to be going hopelessly wrong. He recites with a show of pride all Gino's recent successes on the links and at the tables, and by the time he has finished they are pretty good friends again. Nothing more is said about going to the circus, of course. Arthur just puts Gino to bed and, to the accompaniment of his drunken wheezing, writes a letter to Renfrew: he has written a whole page before he remembers that Renfrew will never speak to him again.

Three days later, Arthur is addressing a group of Swiss social workers who are visiting London. Suddenly, his words are inter-

rupted by a loud snore. Gino has fallen asleep. He must be woken up, before Arthur can go on. Even the Swiss are embarrassed by this. Afterwards, Arthur is not invited to Zurich.

Next day, Gino is playing in a tournament at Southampton. Because he has a hangover, he fails to turn up on time, disappointing a large crowd. Amid loud boos, Gino marches into the club-house and starts talking in a loud voice. He speaks sarcastically of the Secretary, a non-player. Then he impugns the Treasurer's probity, and finally, starts boasting about his own feats on the course. Arthur is tapped politely on the shoulder and asked to take Gino away.

A week later, much the same thing happens all over again. But this time, Gino makes matters much worse by exceeding the speed-limit all the way home. A constable stops him at Barnes. His breath is smelt. He is booked. The magistrate says: "You were the idol of hundreds of handicapped young people. You have betrayed the trust that society reposed in you. I shall have to disqualify you for six months."

The newspapers, bitter as only betrayed newspapers can be, break silence and report the whole case, twin betrays trust, they say. Photographs are taken, showing Gino and Arthur leaving Barnes Magistrates' Court. After one glance at them, three clubs, two in Lancashire and one in Carmarthenshire, strike Gino off their hon. membership rolls. The judge who freed the twins from Mr. Gammon sets his lips hard and drops his paper on the cat. Renfrew goes about telling people that Arthur is the criminal and Gino perfectly innocent (he has letters to prove it). Lady Beaune tells reporters that she has never seen Arthur in her life. Suddenly, London is full of disappointed policemen, barking at innocent people.

All this results in dreadful quarrels between the brothers. Gino starts shaving sporadically, so Arthur must appear on platforms accompanied by a hairy oaf. His speaking-appointments fall off. One night, Gino gets so drunk that Arthur, who is not strong, has to carry

him home. It is while doing so that Arthur sees clearly what his fate is. Far from being joined inseparably to the norm, he is having to support the sub-norm. When he looks back on his earlier conclusions, they seem contrived, even dishonest. Tragedy—real tragedy—is not a conclusion at all. It is what happens.

The one advantage of this situation is that since Gino is no longer an innocent good fellow, Arthur need not have regard for his feelings and may speak his own mind frankly on the subject of corrupted civilisation, varnished dishonesty, and so on. Unfortunately, they are both becoming so unpopular that Arthur has fewer and fewer opportunities of speaking at all. He has talked for years about “the breakdown of communication.” Now, he realises that this means being unable to talk about it.

At Michaelmas, comes their most terrible quarrel. The matter of rent comes up, and Gino confesses that he hasn't a penny in the bank. It's the old story, of course—the small losses piling up, the growing worry, the sudden attempt to recoup everything-and-more in one stupendous bet. Neither brother has shaved, both are furious; they glare into each other's faces shouting horrible insults. Gino pours out twenty years of hatred for Arthur's diseased, pale-faced, self-centred, stinking, intellectual world; Arthur, more poised and surgical, caricatures acidly Gino's brainless, muscle-bound, pink-faced partners in sport. At this, Gino takes Arthur by the throat and shakes him: Arthur's loud cry is quite drowned by Gino's awful bellowing. The door-bell rings at this moment, but both brothers ignore it: Gino is out to murder Arthur, and Arthur, alive to strangulation's tragical advantages, is only too ready to die. But when the ring is repeated, both brothers become irresolute. Gino slackens his grip. Arthur fights for breath. Then, without a word, they pull their clothes into some sort of order, go to the door, open it, and put their hairy faces to the crack. Who knows? Perhaps some golf-club needs a pro? Perhaps somebody needs a lecture?

#### IV

But it is only Mr. Gammon. The astonished brothers step back two paces—and Mr. Gammon slips inside easily, like a tamer into a cage of beasts. His hair, all golden when he stood in the witness-box, is silver now; but otherwise he is just the same, dressed in a grey suit and wearing socks with clocks. His face is marked with the old quiet, humorous amiability, and yet, it is still the firmish face of one who must deal daily with midgets, trick-cyclists, elephant-boys, sword-swallowers, and conjurers—and as he filters across the room, a low, consoling run of words issues from his mouth in a musical murmur, like a smiling fountain in a little court. Finding himself a chair, and standing up his polished brief-case with well-groomed fingers, Mr. Gammon bubbles on—a shocking intrusion, he knows, but after so long, such a pleasure!—oh, how often he has wanted to tell them how admiringly he has followed their lives—himself, of course, neither a golfer nor a thinker, only a sort of family man with lots of dependents—hence, doubtless, the feeling he has had recently that this might *just* be a time when he could be of help in a very small way to two persons whom he has always remembered with profound affection (all this without pausing for breath). That the world has its ups and downs, Mr. Gammon (continuing) does not doubt; yet *he* has nothing to complain of—these are good times, as good as any he can remember—and who but a fool would complain of good times?—and yet, he has known some to do so, and by no means fools at that, as if good times were somehow deplorable or dangerous—but never mind! is he not digressing, when what he *really* wants to say is *how* right they were to strike out on their own twenty years ago—ah! would that then he had had the better judgment and flexibility which he has since (he hopes) developed!—oh! what suffering and discord are bred by hard-handedness!—well, well, well, those old days are over now, and only the lady-acrobats remain a problem that he will

go to his grave without mastering. Do they remember Sylvia and Cynthia?—why no, why should they?—really, he must not reminisce—he must say *why* he has intruded on his old friends so rudely—and if he may do so in a roundabout way, may he say that the modern circus is changed amazingly from the old-fashioned one they knew? It has a cleanliness, a polish, an ease, a stream-lined look and way-of-life that would have horrified his father but is perfectly in tune with the times. And there, alas! is Mr. Gammon's very problem. He has the advanced, progressive ideas—but where is he to find ladies and gentlemen who can practise them? It is not enough to set a smart top-hat on a tamer's head and a polished whip in his hand—it is the man himself that must exude the elegant, accomplished air—and Mr. Gammon, dropping his white fingers, strokes the clocks of his socks and draws his second breath. Ah! he knows it is useless to ask the brothers if they could put him in the way of one or two up-to-date recruits—and yet, and yet, they are both men of the world, both at the top of the tree, each in his own way—oh! to put it bluntly, which one *must* do eventually, what would Mr. Gammon not give to have the two of them in his troupe again!—and he immediately states how much he would give (it is a lot of money) and then, looking very serious, says what an immense boon to the public the brothers' return would be. For it is not enough, today, Mr. Gammon explains, for people merely to *read* the works of great intellects like Arthur, or even to see and hear them on a professional platform—what they want is to see, in natural surroundings and close up, the very temples of the master-mind, the beats of the feeling heart in its search for compassion, even the pain on the lined forehead when it runs into disaster or disgrace: this is a *personal* age. As for a man like Gino, who has made a glorious name in a glorious sport, oh! could the public ask more than to see that skill displayed close-up—that mature, ineffable skill of the body which the man-in-the-street loves best of all?

At this point, Mr. Gammon suddenly stops speaking and stares deep into Gino's eyes as one absorbed in a vision: this is an old trick of his, with animals. His trance lasts fifteen seconds, and at the end of it, not having been scratched to pieces by either brother, Mr. Gammon opens his brief-case and whips out a glossy folder: it shows a large, modern caravan, resembling a comfortable little house. This would be their home—and now Mr. Gammon starts talking briskly again, repeating the salary he mentioned before, stressing the long vacations and the easy hours—and, by the way, have they a debt or two unpaid?—pray, leave that to me—complete privacy assured them, of course, out of working hours and all refreshments on the house (a most tactful way of saying that Gino will not want for whisky, nor Mr. Gammon for control of the consumption of it). Finally, Mr. Gammon says he simply *won't* pretend that there are *no* disadvantages, *no* embarrassments involved—there *are*, as in every job. The nuisance of this particular job is due simply to the special temper of nowadays, which every circus must take into account. He means, he explains, that in everyday life, the normal person is beginning to feel that he cannot compete with the deformed and the abnormal, and must become more like them if he is to hold his own in the rat-race. Now, says Mr. Gammon (rather triumphantly), a circus already *has* all the abnormality and deformity imaginable—and thus, *its* function is to show monstrosity struggling to behave normally—the very opposite of what is going on outside. To give an example: in his father's day, an unfrocked parson was exhibited naked in a circus barrel: but today, the same unfortunate would be painstakingly dressed-up in his full canonicals and shown conducting a normal "service" in a normal "church" as if there were nothing odd about him at all—and the audience, of course, would become his "congregation." So, the attraction of Gino and Arthur would be, like the parson's, their affectation of ordinariness—the public will see them

dressed very correctly, talking very correctly, doing a little punting or putting very correctly, and lecturing very correctly—all, in fact, as if the two were perfectly ordinary people. Personally, Mr. Gammon would pay a very big bonus indeed for special acts that would drive home this point: for instance, Gino and Arthur might invite Mr. and Mrs. Clump, the midgets, to cocktails with them, and all four would drink and discuss politics as if there were nothing the matter with them. But never mind!—this sort of thing is just a showman's dream—just a perfectionist's fancy (though the bonus is real enough)—what matters is that Mr. Gammon happens to have a provisional contract with him—keep it as long as you like, he insists—and only binding for one year—after that, who knows?

It is Gino, thinking only of the steady salary and the whisky, who signs first. But Arthur, the great tragedian, is not slow to draw his pen.

## V

At the beginning of this story, we gave credit to all the people who seemed to deserve some—largely because the narrative-line needed it, but partly because we wanted to put ourselves in the clear and not be found wanting in the compassion which is so much demanded of authors nowadays, if not of lorry-drivers or Members of Parliament. Now, we should like to end this story in the same mood of generosity, and we can think of no better way of doing so than to hand out another little dole of credit—this time, to Mr. Gammon.

Here is a man who was treated incredibly shabbily twenty years ago by two very important members of his circus, who ruthlessly broke the long-term contract entered into by their parents. When Mr. Gammon stood up for his rights, both judge and jury swung into action against him, while the public howled and screamed at him in the streets. It would mark most of us for life; but it has had no effect on Mr. Gammon at all. Unlike the sporting fraternity, the

bank manager, the Press lord, Lady Beaune, the Barnes magistrate, and numerous policemen and responsible heads of families, Mr. Gammon has never once uttered the word “betrayal,” never so much as suggested that his trust was repaid with ingratitude. Where the so-called civilised world have turned their backs in sulky disappointment, Mr. Gammon, forgiving and forgetting, has returned to the scene when he was most needed, offering the only practical solution to a very ugly problem. And let it not be argued that he himself stands to gain by stepping in: to how many would we be able to apportion a dole of credit, if we were first to demand a means-test?

We are inclined, therefore, to conclude that men like Mr. Gammon really understand the nature of our times much better than the rest of us do and can deal with their more awkward manifestations more patiently and tolerantly than we can. Let us, then, put aside our indignations and prejudices, and give him our hand, as Gammon’s Circus moves off to the north with Gino and Arthur—departing, amusingly enough, on the very evening that *Integrity*, after drawing packed houses in Pimlico, opens to a blaze of jewels in the West End.