

# CLARION CALL

E. D. P.  
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"TIME," wrote Shakespeare, "doth transfix the flourish set on youth." That it doth. But there is also a "flourish of trumpets." "In the midst of the trumpets he saith 'ha, ha, ha'; the horse does: so do I. Whenever I hear a trumpet, like the cry of a wild bird that never was, my guts cry 'ha, ha.'" It is a clarion call.

Lately I have seen a community news-sheet and monthly journal called the "Clarion" ("Waveney Clarion"). I harked back in a flash to the "Clarion" of Robert Blatchford, a crusader journalist of his day. The Clarion (1891-1910) preached socialism and cycling. The "safety bicycle" had lately been invented. A population immured in our grimy cities could for the first time get out of them for a day. Clarion cycling clubs went swooping out into the countryside on Sundays, breathed the sweet air, had tea and buns at wayside inns and dreamed of the Just Society.

That was a revolution we have forgotten in our days of effortless speeding in hot glass boxes. Remember that the wind was sweet, brother, to our escapist forbears.

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Surely Blatchford would have been interested in this Clarion of Waveney that is encouraged by the East Anglian Arts Trust. Copies have been sent to me. I study them and try to get my bearings. What is it in favour of? Of wind and water, for power and beauty. What is it against? Faceless functionaries: it chases the buck in its devious passage through offices, committees and councils. It exists to further the arts, to champion the unfortunate, and to

entertain children creatively and counter the adman's dulcet spells of passivity and stupor.

In my fishmonger's I found a sheet proclaiming a frolic in Beccles Public Hall in aid of the Clarion. Attractions offered were "Bar and Lights"; also "Half Dead Live Band," also "Global Village Trucking Company." What's in a name? A rose by any other... Names enchant me, especially such as pose the problem; whence conjured, redolent of what? Trucking? Caravanning? I've felt an urge of late to have iron-shod wheels under me again, or just my boot soles. I wished to witness this harmonious firm of Barkis in action.

On the evening advertised I nosed tentatively round the portals of the Public Hall. I recalled there Mayors' banquets, and me in a boiled shirt having to propose the Borough or reply for the Guests. Just to think of it, I having dropped out of the race for success at 19 in favour of harnessing two horses to a wooden plough, finding myself when grey-haired rising to a stentorian "Pray silence for Mr. Adrian Bell!" Oh, Mr. Adrian, whatever had got hold of you?

Tonight something very different was afoot there. Sartorially, my first impression of the clientele was, "Honest labour bears a lovely face." Lads straight off the plough? From the wheelwright's shop? From before the mast of H.M.S. Pinafore? Lasses from their pantries and spinning wheels? I hesitated; then out came Sandra Allen, whom I had complimented on her reporting in the "E.D.P." of the Bulcamp House Arts Trust meeting. "Hallo, Mr. Bell." She was on duty again.

In no time I was inside among the throng. "We don't believe in age," another Sandra had told me. I climbed to the gallery, where the bar was, as advertised. Behind the bar was the same charming young man doing his own private dance (between serving drinks) as he had been doing at the Bulcamp Arts Trust party — the same dance which had stimulated me to do my own private dance next morning to the last movement of the Dvorak concerto. Next I found myself clasping a crumpled cardboard beaker of red wine and in earnest discussion with a "Clarion" contributor on the plight of the houseless and helpless; but impelled willy-nilly to a rhythmic spasm of the torso by the Trucking Company in tingling top gear. My subconscious even began echoing Dowson: "I have flung roses, roses, riotously with the throng..." But no. It's just that something reckless easily gets into me. And what a

relief it was not to be in a dinner jacket rising stickily to that "Pray silence!"

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There seemed about the stage a blue glitter, as if a peacock's spread tail were shaking all its "eyes." Under this berserk moonlight the beat was something between a butter-and-eggs trot and a steam train doing a steady 60. Young people were travelling the stairs as if dancing hornpipes, while I discussed galvanically with another Clarionite the lore of the Maypole.

"Click-clack": a camera shot a multi-racial group of teenagers posed on the stairs. Three of these had knocked on our door in the dark the night before, having lost their way on a hike round the "Saints": London boys, two white, one brown. My wife gave them a lift: they were very polite, grateful. They come to Suffolk for a week's holiday in a country house dedicated to that purpose. Old Blatchford would have approved, seeing that group on the stairs as a

portent of the Just Society.

It was late when I got home. My wife was not waiting behind the door with a rolling-pin; not exactly. She was looking at 19th century photographs sitting on a 19th century sofa.

"It sounded something between a butter-and-eggs trot and the beat of the Flying Scot," I told her, "and in a peacock-coloured moonlight."

"Untypical of you," she suggested.

"Can anything be untypical of a writer?" I asked. "In a way it was like any of those Chelsea parties when the song of the day was 'Alleluia': not Handel's but something about 'blow them clouds away...'"

"I remember 'Alleluia': she began to hum it. "And the Thames flooded at 1 a.m. and the wooden paving blocks of the Embankment were afloat and jiggling on the tide, and the police playing Canute to the water and us sightseers..."

"Yes, that was the song." I took it up. But we did not try to foxtrot.