

## IN LIGHTER VEIN

### A MIDSUMMER DAY'S DREAM

BY 'BETA'

It was a particularly hot day in May. Tired and done out, I came home from the fuming laboratory, for my mid-day meal. I was hungry and the dishes that my wife set before me were appetizing and I must have taken much more than my usual dose of food. Soon, I was fast asleep in my easy chair where I had reclined for just forty winks and no more.

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I was walking along an avenue, with tall rain trees on either side; the scene seemed very familiar to me. Surely this must be the Lawley Road and yonder building must be the Agricultural College—no—for there was something different in the whole aspect of the building from what I had known it before. And there was some change in me too, I could perceive; I no longer had that firm, erect, and elastic step I was once proud of. I breathed hard and leant heavily on the stout stick I held in my right hand.

Slowly I trudged along, and came to the portals of the building. The whole structure seemed to be made of paper and bamboos, and gaily coloured; there was not a single brick in the edifice. A pompous-looking individual clad in khaddar and green and yellow livery stood on the steps.

'Who are you, old man, and why do you trespass here?' called he. I was wroth at his calling me old and half raised my stick in anger, but then I realized that I was really old, and the flowing white beard on my chin must have dispelled all impressions to the contrary. I cooled down, and ingratiating myself with suave language into his favours, asked him, what that building was and what office he held there.

'Oh, this, this is the Senate House of the Coimbatore University and I was once the peon of the Principal of the Agricultural College. As head of the oldest institution attached to the University, the Principal, Agricultural College is the *ex-officio* Registrar of the University and I am doing the dual function of steward to both the institutions.' 'But what happened to the old building and when was this erected?' cried I in dismay. 'The old College was destroyed by an earthquake,' replied my informant, 'and to prevent any further repetition of the event, this structure has been entirely built with paper and bamboos. As a further precautionary measure, the Principal every evening just manipulates this switch here, and the whole building collapses and packs itself into a small packet; he then puts it in his pocket and walks home, where he can keep it secure for the night.' 'Indeed!' said I quite amazed, 'this is highly interesting. But if things can be done so easily as you say, what is the necessity for you all here, a peon, a watchman and so on?' 'Ha, Ha,' laughed the peon, 'that is *mamool* you know. However can a Principal live without a peon,' and then he added in a whisper, 'the real truth is, that the Legislative Council has sanctioned the expenses for a Steward in the budget of 1960-61 and the

money has got to be spent. Now you see how it is.' 'Quite' said I, and then mused to myself, 'and so this is the year of our Lord 1960 and science has advanced to the extent of enabling men to make buildings collapsible and pocketable; still they are not free from Legislative Councils and 'annual grants'.

Just then a messenger came running into the room 'Please, sir,' said he to the steward, 'the Farm Manager wants field No. 45 to be irrigated at once.' 'Very good' said the mechanic, and forthwith he removed two pieces (they were electrical plugs I understood later) numbered 4 and 5, and made some other adjustments on a switch board near by. After the lapse of about a minute, he turned to the messenger and said to him 'All, right, you can go and tell the Farm Manager that field 45 has been irrigated.'

I was astounded. So fields were being irrigated by the mere manipulation of an electrical switch. But what was the necessity for a messenger to go on errands? It was puzzling; I turned to the steward and ventured to put the question, 'Why you old fool, however can you conceive of a Government Officer, without a peon or messenger?' 'True, true' I admitted and turned out of the room. I enquired after the way to the chemical laboratory. I was a Chemist once and was filled with a longing to see if the laboratory also had undergone any changes.

I was however absolutely unprepared for the spectacle that met my eyes. In place of the old dear laboratory, was a single room, but its structure was very peculiar. It was neither square nor rectangular as all rooms are, but quite polygonal, with I do not know how many walls. Inside were any number of fume cupboards all along the walls, right from the floor level. There was not a single burner as far as I could see; and all the staff were ladies and these were engaged each with a mortar and pestle and a marble slab, compounding some ingredients and turning out pills and tabloids by the hundreds. An elderly lady with a grave-looking face and diamond ear-rings, I gathered to be the chief. To her I turned and put my preliminary questions.

'We are now at the tabloid solution of all problems connected with Agriculture and Humanity. As the result of elaborate investigation in our laboratories, we have been able to formulate specific recipes for definite defects of soil, plant-growth and our work is very easy. Demands for our tabloids are pouring in, and with my limited staff, I do my best to manufacture large quantities.'

'What are your hours of work,' I asked with a look of pity on the tender hard-worked damsels. 'Hours?' the chief queried cynically, 'H'm, we have no hours at all. We work day and night, the enthusiasm of the thing just keeps us going.' 'But what do you do for food and drink,' said I with a feeling of superior wisdom. 'Pangs of hunger trouble us not, and thirst we easily allay. Here Kamala,' she called to one of the girls at the farthest table 'bring me one of those maintenance tabloids.' The chief held up to my view the pill that the girl brought and continued, 'Here you see, this tabloid when taken three times a day, will just keep your body and soul together. The fat, carbohydrates and proteids have been concentrated and so combined in this tabloid, that its nutritive value is 1/12. We have other tabloids with narrower ratios suited for different kinds of work. In fact, we have here a tabloid which is in great demand—which is particularly adapted for people doing a lot of brain work.'

I was very eager to see it and even ask for a dose, but refrained, lest she should think that I was wanting in brains.

'And we have inoculation pills specially prepared, for remedying particular defects of the soil and to ensure greater and heavier yields of crop.' 'But why should you have crops,' asked I, 'if the food problem is going to be so easily solved by these tabloids?' 'Ah, there is the breeder you know,' the lady replied, 'Is all the botany and science he learns in the University to run to waste? And how can he evolve better strains, if there are no crops to breed them from. And then there is the Entomologist and the Mycologist. Without crops, how can insect attacks and diseases prevail? But that is not all. We have not entirely succeeded in our experiment. We have been able to put into these tabloids all those ingredients necessary for growth, but vitamins—these we are unable to fix up. I was entirely feeding on these tabloids last year and developed a sort of colour blindness due to deficiency of vitamins, and then I had to swallow two bottles of Cod liver oil. And moreover we occasionally crave for a hearty meal, prepared from crops grown on the soil—dear Mother Earth.'

'But what about your husbands and children' said I, 'you must be paying a very poor compliment to your families, if as you say, you are here in the laboratory day and night.' 'Oh, that is easily done,' replied she, 'here you see' and she pointed to her diamond ear-rings, 'inside this is a tiny wireless set and my hubby has one in his sleeve links, so I can converse with him all day long, if I choose.'

'And why are there so many cupboards and no burners at all?'

'Oh, Oh,' she laughed, 'they are not fume cupboards but television closets; the room has been specially built, so that these closets point to all possible directions of the compass. We get into them and immediately can have a view of persons whom we want to see. Our radio set helps us to find the direction the person is in, and the closet that we have to enter into.' 'Indeed,' said I elated, 'then will you please help me to see my wife?'

'Wife indeed, you impudent old beard' and she shook me by the shoulder and sent me out of the room—but I was agreeably surprised for it was a sweet voice saying 'get up, dear, it is time for you to go to office'—It was my wife waking me up.