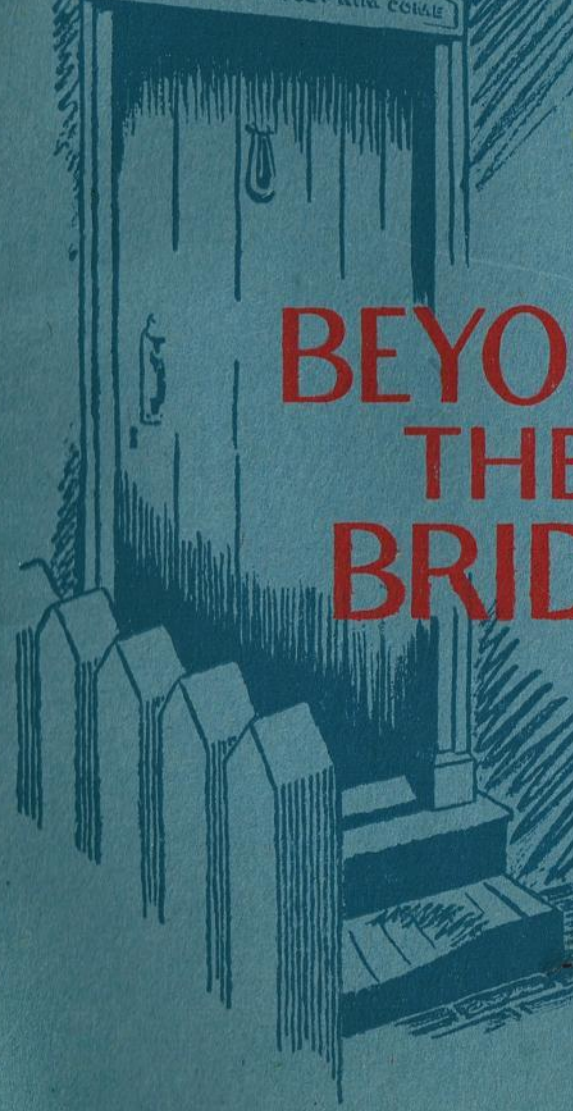


WHOEVER WILL, LET HIM COME



BEYOND THE BRIDGE

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MCMXLVI

The story of the Halifax Cottages is here set down exactly as it was told by KATHLEEN M. CAULFEILD in the Bishop's Chapel, Ipswich, before the late Bishop of St. Edmundsbury and Ipswich (The Right Rev. W. G. Whittingham, D.D.) and the Members of the Diocesan Evangelistic Council, probably in 1924. The MS. is undated.

MY LORD,

I feel no diffidence in what I am about to say, but I know you will realize that I feel very great diffidence indeed in speaking to such men and women as are here today. I set that on one side to speak to you straight from my heart.

The pictures that I wish to show you are of events—extremely simple events—that took place six years ago, and during these intervening years I have been searching for their true significance, and for the reason why God showed me these things. How did He come—if I may put it so—to show them to me? This is the only answer I can find. For some years before they took place there had been within me a thirst for the Holy Spirit, which must have been God moving within me. Bound up with this was the vision that if any heart could be completely surrendered to the Spirit, the Spirit must flow over the cup to others. For He who gives the Spirit gives it not by measure. Of that seeking, and the means, I need not speak here. Whatever words I may have to use to make my meaning clear, I ask you to see only the Spirit in answer to prayer flowing to the people and love rising in response. If you think of me at all think of me as one whom God permitted to be where those two streams met.

During the War Canon Woodard* asked me to take over a district in his parish. I was reluctant, but finally when I consented and began to set towards fresh work, the thirst for the Spirit returned.

* Canon A. L. Woodard, then Rector of St. Mary Stoke, Ipswich.

The district began at Bourne Bridge. That railway arch spanning the road always seemed to me to be a door. On this side of it was St. Etheldreda's, a little iron mission church where one could pray, but I usually prayed going down in the tram. My hope was that I might leave the dust of my own life on the hither side of the bridge; my desire, to be supple to the slightest breathings of the Spirit. The inspiration I received that despite all the poverty and misery, money must never be allowed to touch the work because the *Power* of the Almighty is vested in His *Love*, I believe *was* the Spirit in my heart.

It was Spring. The children of Tuddenham had helped me to make dozens of posies to be my visiting cards. The thought was that when I had passed from a house, those lovely little blossoms would remain. I had them all in a big basket as I passed under the bridge, and as my hand lifted at the door of the first house I heard a voice about me saying:

Behold, I stand at the door and knock.

Down the street, behind more modern buildings, lie two ancient courts, the inner only to be reached by an alley way from the first. In the furthest of these an old man stood on his doorstep. He looked with favour on the flowers, and asked their price. In the dank earth of the little court he himself had grown a rose from a penny cutting; it struggled up against black iron. He said that his wife who was ill upstairs loved flowers.

"Take two bunches, then."

"Yes, I will. How much did you say they were?"

When I told him they had no price but were just for love, he took them slowly in silence, but as I went away down the court he leant out of his doorway:

"The Lord love *you*," he said.

That old man made his living by rags and bones, chiefly collected from the stagnant shores when the Orwell went out with the tide. A year later, when his wife was dying, I stopped the tram on the way to the district and bought a penny bunch of violets. It was a bitterly cold March day. As much of the sky as I could see over the roofs of the little tenements was heavy with snow to fall that night. There was no door in her bedroom; the stairs just came up into it, and the old man, who had followed me up, sat on the top step which was the floor of the room, crying. She was too far gone to see the flowers. I put them in a little potted meat jar by the bed. Then I knelt down. Speaking as clearly as I could, I said:

"Jesus has sent me to hold your hand."

Her lips moved, and her eyelids just quivered.

The next day when I reached the cottage she was dead. They took the covering from the coffin to let me look on her again, and I saw then that someone had placed the penny bunch of violets upon her breast.

The two courts ran parallel to each other from the road down to the water. Standing in the opening you looked down the first with a pump in the middle to a low wall at the end. Halfway down was a narrow passage linking the two courts. The second was

similar but more enclosed, with rough drainage in the uneven flagging into which it was easy to stumble on a dark night. The view from the end was: to the right, towards the sea; to the left, along the Orwell to the dockyards. The houses had once been part of a smuggler's village. They were very old, and as they became vacant were not occupied again.

The last cottage in the inner court was derelict when I first went there. I was told it had an evil history. The door opened into the court, but the single window of each of the two little rooms one above the other, looked out over the water, the cottage being part of the sea-wall. The story is that the smugglers used to put lights in the windows as signals to boats coming up the river. I longed for a place where the people could come to me in their need and in hours of their own choosing, but for some months I did not see what could be done. And then one day a voice said:

Go now.

I turned from what I was doing and went immediately to find the foreman of the firm that owned the property. I found him in the works yard and I asked for the cottage for Christ. Impossible. Filthy, and not fit for pigs. But afterwards when I was going away he couldn't let me go.

"Wait. I'll come with you."

That old Scotsman took the request to the firm. Again: Impossible. Yet in the heart of a man highly placed in the firm a flame was lit. He paid for the cottage, and gave it. Rotting floors and ceilings were

repaired, and the walls of the poor little rooms papered in yellow to draw in the sunshine. A wood-carver was found, and above the door he carved:

WHOSOEVER WILL, LET HIM COME.

He wished to do it without charge. Such is the eternal music.

Now see the cottage nearly finished. In the quiet little room upstairs the most beautiful pictures that could be found of scenes in our Lord's life, and facing the window, a crucifix. No furniture except a camp stool on which rested a bible, and a praying-chair—a gift—on the ledge of which was carved: WHEN YE PRAY SAY OUR FATHER. Downstairs there were pictures of general interest which might occasion questioning, simple arrangements for feeding, a table and some chairs. Hanging on the door where all must see it when they passed out was Hole's picture of our Lord healing the sick and the maimed in a crowded Palestine street.

Beyond the window when the tide was out the calm river reflected the wheeling sea birds, and as the tide returned, waves flapped against the wall in never-ending rhythm. My son, a child at the time, had etched for me on a piece of paper which he pinned up within the room the words from Isaiah:

O THAT THOU HADST HEARKENED TO MY
COMMANDMENTS! THEN HAD THY PEACE BEEN AS
A RIVER, AND THY RIGHTEOUSNESS AS THE WAVES
OF THE SEA.

Over the mantel hung a board of dark wood on which was carved in gold: THAT BLESSED HOPE.

When first I came to the district the people in the Courts had said to me:

"We're down. No one will ever help us to rise."

They were bitter about it. I had been told they were untouchable. A friend of mine once met one of the women from the Court in Wherstead Road, and seeing her hand bound up she asked what had happened. The answer, as if she had been speaking of a dog: "Mr. — bit it."

They were often cruel. A woman in travail banged upon her wall for help, and because there had been a quarrel no one went to her; yet often they were wonderful to each other, more wonderful than you or I. The Courts did not get up early; quite late in the day I have seen a woman walk down their length in her petticoat, with her hair still hanging about her. Battling with dirt, rotten walls, sickness and stench from the shore, they were just down. They spoke the truth.

The Spirit said:

To these people you shall be a neighbour. You shall not preach to them, nor teach, unless they ask you. You shall never let your love fail them; into the smallest matter you shall put all your strength; and if they hurt you, you shall not flinch.

When he heard that the cottage was nearly ready Canon Woodard asked if he should come down and consecrate it. I said:

"No. The people would not understand."

It was somewhere about this date that a man stopped me rather roughly one day in the passage between the two courts.

"Look here," he said, signing in the direction of the cottage. "I want to know what all this means?"

"That is quite easy. It means love."

"Oh, does it," he said, mollified. "It can go on, then. We all want more of that."

The next morning he brought two bricks to keep the gas ring off the floor. Another man put up the hooks for the china. A third stained the bare floor. A man who had been wandering on the shore, and whom I invited in, cleaned the windows. He was a long time upstairs looking at the pictures, and I can see him now in his corduroys tied below the knee with string, his rough cap in his hand, standing before the picture of St. Anthony tenderly holding in his arms the infant Christ. His first remark, when it came, was unexpected.

"To think that is how I shall be, just after Christmas!"

In the cottage it nearly always proved unnecessary for me to talk.

Coming out into the Court one day I found children on the wall trying to read the words over the door. The next day a little flock of them came and I brought down strawberries. As yet we had no cups or chairs, so they were served on cabbage leaves on the floor. Suddenly Wherstead Road, angry that it had not been asked, appeared in a body

on the shore and booed. From within there was an immediate stampede to the window and vituperation and spitting, but in their excitement the children were equally ready to swing to my suggestion that we should take our picnic and share it with the others on the shore. From that moment they seemed to see what the cottage stood for, and ever afterwards were the first to leap to admit a stranger. If there was a cup of hot tea to go out to someone who was sick or to some old man without a wife, they were messengers. On this day when they were tired of games and laughter one of them asked:

"What is that book over there? Fairy stories?"

"No, it is a Bible."

"Well, read it to us."

It was a big family Bible that had been given to the cottage. One of them staggered over with it. Sitting in a ring on the floor we read of the Child in Bethlehem.

Work began to centre round the cottage. In quite the early days I decided to go down for a little time and live there. To this end I brought down a camp bed and placed it in the upper room. When I opened the door the next morning to sweep out the house, my friend of the bricks was outside.

"What does it mean *this* time?" he asked rather anxiously. "The Guv'nor hasn't turned you out, has he?"

It was while I was living there that some children came upstairs one night. I had placed the tin candlestick on the mantelpiece and the light fell on the crucifix. The children stood in a group. They nudged each other.

"That's Jesus. See His wounds. He's looking down."

"As I lie there at night He seems to look at me."

"Seems as if He told you to put your bed there," one of them said.

My coming to live in the cottage had an extraordinary effect on the people. It seemed to astound them. At first I saw one or two laughing, pointing me out in the street. But when they saw me going with my pail to get water from the outer Court they suddenly sobered, and the roughest men became civil. To me it was such a little thing to go and live amongst them, but to them it seemed incredible. One of the women in the Court said:

"I never knew before that religion is what Mrs. Caulfeild says it is."

I had never said what it was. Obedient to the voice of the Spirit I had offered no remarks about it at all.

At the end of a fortnight, a fortnight into which years seemed to have been concentrated, so much had happened, a man came into the cottage. His face was quivering, and I expected the flow of some great grief. He said:

"Look here, I've come to say this. If ever you want anyone to work for you out there in the country where you live, I will come and work for you for nothing."

We stood speechless—looking at one another.

The day before I left off actually living amongst them was a Sunday, and I got up early to go to Church. Someone had heard I was going, and a man rose up earlier still and made a cup of hot tea and laid it on my doorstep. When I returned from the

service, a woman, still not dressed, was standing at her door.

"When I saw you go by I wished that I was with you."

I had not asked anyone to go with me to church, but when she said that a flame shot up in my heart, and that day I went to the other houses and told them what she had said. I said to them:

"We have learned together the meaning of Love, and this is the Feast of Love."

The next morning there was a service at St. Etheldreda's, and they nearly all came with me. A man with his bag of working tools; a woman who had not made her communion for twelve years; rough men and women, some only just to be present, because they said they knew that their sins made them unfit to touch the Body and Blood of Christ; and two women who had not been confirmed. A stranger priest was celebrating that day, but Mr. Vaizey* was in Church, and during the service I got up and went to him.

"It is love that has brought these women here; may they receive the Holy Communion?"

He took my request to the altar and the priest came down and spoke to them, and they went up. He told me afterwards that as they took the cup they were crying. The next morning I went to the house where he was staying to take the blame for the interruption in the service. He said that he was very glad I had spoken, but that we also had to be careful to protect our Lord. I give you these words because I have thought about them so often. The idea is not

* Rev. R. B. Vaizey.

new; it constantly recurs. Yet these women were babes in Christ:

Suffer little children . . .

The cottage was a radiant, joyous place. As the red-sailed barges went by to Ipswich, dipping to the waves, it used to be our fancy that they saluted us. You may think this far-fetched, but it is one of the foolish fancies of joy to believe it is at one with all the world. The cottage was filled also with a great peace. The people began to notice it.

"Why is this place so different from any other we have known?"

In the dinner hour lads and girls who worked at the factories would slip in and out. In the early afternoon, women who needed rest. After their tea, the children, who often would just sit down quietly as if it was their own home. Some natural courtesy kept them from entering the cottage if I was not there, but often and often when I returned a child would be on the doorstep, a toy trailing down to the flags beside it. Whenever I saw that sight, framed by *WHOSOEVER WILL*, I had the same impression—that they were leaning against Christ.

One day the children had been dancing. I remember it clearly because a soldier's wife had come down from the other end of Ipswich to see me, and she sat there in a kind of stupor gazing at them all tattered and joyous and lovely, and was sitting there still when they all melted away like so many fairies to make room for the older people who came at

night. I was not sleeping there at the time, and it was very late—about eleven—when at last I went out into the dark Court. One door was ajar. A man came out and dragged me into his house. His wife was in hospital. We were alone. He seemed in a frenzy, shaking his arms above his head.

“I have no friends here. Enemies, all enemies!”

He told me about something that had happened. When that story was over, leaning towards me, his face distorted, he said:

“And of course they have told you about me? You have heard all about last week?”

“No one has told me.”

“They haven’t?”—a pause—“Well, then I’ll tell you!”

He flung himself upon a chair when his confession was over.

“How can a man live here? Why, the very place you work in used to be a brothel!”

“Yes . . . What is it now?”

He wrung his hands.

“Oh, I *know!*”

As he was speaking I saw that ring of children, full of light and laughter, dancing, dancing round.

“Shall we say the Lord’s prayer?”

We knelt together, our elbows on the table. After the Lord’s prayer he prayed aloud. Then I went out.

They asked me to have evening meetings. They brought their own chairs, and when there was no more room for chairs the younger ones sat on the floor or wherever they could squeeze in between the men and women. The men smoked and I talked. They talked, too. Once when I was speaking of

Galilee an old woman who had been brought up on a barge told us all about storms at sea. One evening is especially before me as I speak. Only women were there because it was early, though being winter, already dark. I brought down a beautiful coloured print of the Last Supper from the room above and put it on the mantel, and they shifted their positions so as to be able to gaze at it. In the room there was only candle light and the glow of the fire. I talked to them about the disciples and about Judas, and our own betrayals. When I had finished there was absolute stillness in the room. I looked round and saw that some were crying, slow tears that fell almost unheeded as they sat there, still, so still, and then I could not speak myself, so we just sat there looking at the fire. At last I rose up and made a little coffee, and as much as there was of it we passed round because they were going out into the night and it was bitterly cold.

We learnt our greatest lessons—both they and I—by the things which happened. One night there were terrible scenes in the Court. Women had fought there, men and women had come home drunk, and no one had paid much attention; but now at last they were roused. I had occasion the next morning to go round to the little shop in Wherstead Road for some matches. The woman in the shop said:

“Oh, I am so glad you have come. We have decided that you are the one to go.”

“Go where?”

“Up and down the street we have been talking about it. We are all being dragged down. You must go and see these people.”

"Perhaps you are making a mistake. I am not here to correct or condemn. I offer love. If they will bring their sorrow to me I will do all that is in my power, or if they send for me I will go to them at once."

She looked at me over her bag of flour.

"Oh, I see."

She turned, looking out across the loaves to the traffic in Wherstead Road. She said nothing more, but just stood there, and I think she did see something for the first time. I went back again, past the leper cottage. After a few minutes someone came in—frowsy and down-at-heel, a woman who had seen better days, but the circumstances of whose home were appalling. She began at once:

"We must draw the line somewhere."

"Is that so?"

"Down we may be, right in the dregs, but there's a limit. I've come to say we've all decided not to come to the meeting tonight if there is any woman from that house. My husband thinks so too."

"I will come and see him when I have cleaned the house."

Presently I went in and sat on a stool by his fire. He was a cripple, who could only move by dragging his body along the floor. The place was always littered with the canes of his basket work; the conditions were indescribable. When they thought I was tired sometimes these people would make me a little cocoa, and it always required all my courage to drink it. But the man had the cripple's big brain. Stuffed away under his canes was tattered literature,

bits of old papers, borrowed books. He repeated what his wife had said.

"If everyone were to go away and leave me," I said, "It would give me great pain. But it would not make any difference. I could never shut out any of God's children. You see it is written over the door."

His great eyes grew fixed. They seemed to look through the blackened walls of the miserable room into some far distant space.

"Yes," he said at last, with a heavy sigh. "It's written over the door."

That night everyone came as usual.

Just one more story, and then I will give you my thought of the people, and I have done.

One day Canon Woodard was with me in the upper room. He hardly ever came to the cottage, as it was thought best I should work alone. On this day however he was there, and we had been talking. Suddenly his longing to consecrate the place returned. He raised his hand praying for God's mercy on every soul that crossed the threshold. We went down. He was going out to work and I offered to make him some tea. As I bent over the gas ring there came a rap on the door and when it had been opened I heard a whining voice offering boot laces. The Canon put his hand in his pocket.

"Ask him in."

The man put his pack on the floor. His clothes were ragged, his toes were through his boots, his speech was thick. He sat down and I made the tea. I had brought down with me that day two little cakes in paper cups, and we gave him one. His

sight was blurred and he couldn't see the paper, so I took it off for him. He said two or three times:

"You're the nicest Missus I have ever met."

He said other things, but he mumbled and I could not hear what they were. Presently Canon Woodard rose to go. He came over to the man, and leant close to him. I do not know if it was because he had just been in the upper room with his eyes on the chair on which was carved WHEN YE PRAY SAY OUR FATHER; it would of course have been natural to him in any case to use those words. Very slowly, leaning close to the old man, he said the Lord's prayer. Then he went out. When he was gone the man said something about my husband.

"Not my husband. The Rector of this parish."

He said quite sharply:

"But this is your house, isn't it?"

"No. This house belongs to Jesus Christ. I am the servant."

I wondered if I had used the wrong words. Somehow I guessed that it had meant everything to the man to be welcomed into a home. I went on washing up the cups and after a long time I saw his head just moving.

"So that's it, is it?"

Still I was silent, for how could I tell what God was doing in this man? Presently he rose to go. I took his hand then and said:

"God bless you."

Suddenly his grip tightened and he clung to me as a drowning man might cling. His lips moved, but

no words came. I felt he was searching for words of a language that had been overlaid. At last he muttered brokenly:

"The same to you."

I did not see him go. Something held me quite still, looking at the hollyhock against the wash-house wall. I had that strange feeling which comes to us at times of something having happened before and was searching for the reason. There came to me:

With the same measure that ye mete to others it shall be measured to you again.

Months afterwards when I had left the district and an old lady who had been homeless was living in the cottage, that man came back. He stood there decently clothed, and he asked for me. "She blessed me," he said, "and I was blessed. That night I wrote to my brother in Canada, and he has sent me money to come to him. I thought she would like to know." If you had seen the man as he was that day you would have thought this incredible.

What shall I say to you about the people? How shall I speak to you of their love? You must understand that I gave them nothing but myself. In the cottage there was never more than a little cruse, so to speak, of meal and oil; never any stores—just what I brought down for my own support, and perhaps a little over. So little that if someone broke bread with me unexpectedly the people themselves would lend me a little tea and sugar. When I was living there and had no time to cook my food, they

would come in and find me eating bread and cheese. And they would say:

"We thought you might be doing that. Will you come and share our dinner?"

These people were desperately poor. I could not bear to eat their food, and yet I learnt about that too; we should not refuse a sacrament. There was an old woman who was my neighbour. She lived on her pension of ten shillings a week, and she had to pay for rent and coal. I used to try and creep past her house in the twilight that she might not know when I came home. Always she was preparing hot coffee or tea or a little pudding, but if she guessed I had gone in she would bring it to the door. So one day I went to her and I said:

"Dear, I cannot take your food. See, it is like this. You have so little, but away somewhere in the back-ground I have plenty if I cared to bother with it."

"You must take it."

I argued.

"You must take it."

I knelt down beside her, searching her face.

"What would Jesus say, I wonder?" I hardly knew I was speaking aloud.

She gazed quietly over my shoulder.

"I think he would just say 'Thank you'."

I rose from my knees.

"Thank you, I will always take what love gives."

I saw that in the Kingdom of God there are no rich or poor, there is only service. I was learning all the time.

See then their most precious love focussed upon me as if they kissed the feet of Christ. An old woman

near to death saw me always in vision moving round her bed. A child with sunstroke cried for me day and night in her delirium. A woman leaves her wash tub, and crossing the room kisses me and goes back to her work without a word. A girl in the passage catches my passing hand, her kisses falling on the old glove that I always took off even to shake hands. Afterwards when I had gone away a woman wrote: "You still come down our alley in sweet memory."

It is not necessary for me to tell you that this love was never mine; common sense can detect that. But I had more than that to guide me. One night straight down the outer court a girl rushed into my arms. She said a man was after her. Her heart was weak, and as my arms closed round her, she shut her eyes. Standing there gazing down on her white face, I felt as if my body was dissolved. Where I was I could not tell, nor can I convey to you the deep and intimate conviction that the child thus blown against my heart lay upon the breast of Christ.

When the time came for me to leave them it was Spring. I took down snowdrops.

"These are my tokens that I will never really leave you."

For six months after that I did not go to them. Then as I approached the familiar ways I thought, "Will they understand? Can they know anything of my life? Will they turn away?"

When I reached the Courts it so happened that it was the time of day when every door was closed, and I went first to the cottage as had always been my

habit. The old lady threw up her arms when she saw me, then she folded them about my neck and laid her head upon my shoulder. News down there quickly flies about. When I came out from seeing her, every door in the two Courts stood ajar.

I believe it is all *simply* this. Christ's poor must see Him first and hear Him afterwards. Perhaps that is why He came to us a little babe. In the description of the thunderings on Sinai, there is a mysterious verse which in the correct translation reads:

And all the people saw the Voice.

NOTE ADDED IN MAY, 1946.

At the end of my life to look back to these events is like opening a door and seeing a golden light beyond. To pass through a railway arch leaving the dust of one's own life behind in order to be free to devote one's entire strength to a single idea is easier than to go back under the arch into a world where troubles and difficulties are not merely those of others to whom one would minister, but intimately woven into the very fibre of one's own life by heritage, passion, and creative fanciful ambitions, and where the conventional life in which all men are not brothers and sisters erects everywhere walls and barricades. These things have a grip, often unrecognized, upon one's life, which it takes long to

break. Indeed each one of us can only advance a little way from his own starting point. The secret seems to be simplification—a slow gathering of the whole creative impulse with which we are endowed around the one supreme desire to communicate the love of God.

Reality is what we make *real* to ourselves, either of good or evil, and it may well be fantasy. But *Actuality*, accomplished through action informed by the Divine Will is part of the One continuously Creative Act of God outside of Whom nothing can eternally survive.

* * *

The cottages, which had been condemned before the Great War, at its conclusion were all taken down. The only sign which remains is a break in other buildings, leading down to the water-wall. To the left, having survived the second great cataclysm of the World War, are the Ipswich Docks, the smoke of factories, and the light striking the gently-rising town. To the right the wide stretches of the Orwell still open out in lovely curves towards the sea, the salt breath of which in the past enabled children to live despite wretched conditions.

Upon the waters, sometimes so still and sometimes running in with the tide, to those who keep His Commandments there still lies the message of peace as a river and righteousness as the waves of the sea.

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