

REFLECTION ON THE ATOMIC BOMB

They asked me what I thought of the atomic bomb. I said I had not been able to take any interest in it.

I like to read detective and mystery stories, I never get enough of them but whenever one of them is or was about death rays and atomic bombs I never could read them. What is the use, if they are really as destructive as all that there is nothing left and if there is nothing there nobody to be interested and nothing to be interested about. If they are not as destructive as all that then they are just a little more or less destructive than other things and that means that in spite of all destruction there are always lots left on this earth to be interested or to be willing and the thing that destroys is just one of the things that concerns the people inventing it or the people starting it off, but really nobody else can do anything about it so you have to just live along like always, so you see the atomic [bomb] is not at all interesting, not any more interesting than any other machine, and machines are only interesting in being invented or in what they do, so why be interested. I never could take any interest in the atomic bomb, I just couldn't any more than in everybody's secret weapon. That it has to be secret makes it dull and meaningless. Sure it will destroy a lot and kill a lot, but it's the living that are interesting not the way of killing them, because if there were not a lot left living how could there be any interest in destruction. Alright, that is the way I feel about it. And really way down that is the way everybody feels about it. They think they are interested about the atomic bomb but they really are not any more than I am. Really not. They may be a little scared, I am not so scared, there is so much to be scared of so what is the use of bothering to be scared, and if you are not scared the atomic bomb is not interesting.

Everybody gets so much information all day long that they lose their common sense. They listen so much that they forget to be natural. This is a nice story.

1946

WHY I LIKE DETECTIVE STORIES

Life said Edgar is neither long nor short, and anybody knows that the only detective stories that anybody can read are written by Edgar. When Gerald Berners was here and his chauffeur William they both wanted detective stories, I gave William Edgar Wallace, he wanted Edgar Wallace, I cannot say that Gerald Berners did, but then he might have, anyway I had them to give them and I always find a new one by him, you might think other people wrote them but finally you know better, you finally do know that all the Edgar Wallace stories are written by him.

What are detective stories, well detective stories are what I can read. You are always finding a new author and each one makes you very enthusiastic, and then you get used to it and on the whole like to read them over again, there are the Coles and Farjeon. Farjeon is very good, he tries to be as good as Edgar Wallace but in a kind of a way it is always a mistake to try. On the whole I think English ones better than American ones, they are more long winded which is better and money is more real in them which is very much better.

Here is a little conversation about them. It is called *Money Is Not Money*.

Money is not money said Edgar to Edgar. What do you mean by that said Edgar, I mean by that said Edgar that money is not money if you do not owe money to another. Oh yes yes said Edgar. But you always do you do always owe money to another, no said Edgar. No.

It was Thursday and they said this to each other on Thursday. On Friday they said it again. Edgar said that money is not money if you do not have to give money to somebody else. Suppose said Edgar you owe yourself money then it is not money, oh yes it is said Edgar. Edgar did not listen to Edgar because he know better than Edgar.

So then Saturday came and then Sunday. Edgar went out in the evening, he had been out in the afternoon and he went out in the evening. So did Edgar. They met and they talked together and they talked about it, Edgar said I tell you money is not money if you do not owe it to another, now he said listen, a father of course

if he has children he is a father, a father if he stops the allowance of his children the children if they have to spend it have to get it and so they get it from their father. You see said Edgar children cannot steal from their father that is french law, a father cannot accuse his children of stealing from him not according to french law so if the father does not give the money to his children then the children can take it from the father and it is not money until they pay it to someone else. That is what Edgar said to Edgar and after that Edgar said that they need hours to think about that and then they settled to go away. Edgar went and after that Edgar went away. It made them go one at a time.

You see that is the reason why money has to be, otherwise a detective story could not be interesting. Edgar Wallace makes it mysterious but it is always money, it is a disappointment when it is drugs or an international conspiracy, you always have the feeling that all the struggle is not worth while because by the time the real war comes all that diplomacy will have been forgotten and so what is the use and drugs that is the same, just about the same quantity of drugs get in anyway, but money that is different, twenty guineas is different, money is different and English people do feel that money is more real than Americans feel it is and that is why their detective stories are so much more soothing.

I used to think that a detective story was soothing because the hero being dead, you begin with the corpse you did not have to take him on and so your mind was free to enjoy yourself, of course there is the detection but nobody really believes in detection, that is what makes the detection so soothing, they try to make you believe in the detection by trying to make you fond of the character that does the detecting, they know if you do not get fond of him you will not believe in the detection, naturally not and you have to believe in it a little or else it will not be soothing. I like detecting there are so many things to detect, why did somebody say what they said, why did somebody cut out a paragraph in the proof I was correcting, why did the young man we were to meet at the station and whom we have never seen before not turn up and why did they telephone to somebody else that he was still at the station waiting for us and why when we got there could nobody find him neither the fat porter nor the thin one and certainly it was a very small station and finally why when we had all given him up and we were starting for home did I find him on the other side of the station and where had he been. He never did tell us but I detected the reason it was because he resembled some one else who might

have done it although the other one never had.

Really why Edgar Wallace is so good is that there is no detection. He makes it ordinary and the ordinary because he is genuinely romantic has an extraordinary charm. The girl will always be caught by the villain just before the end and the chase is to end only in one way that is in the rescue and sometime he has to cudgel his brains to find some reason for this capture of the heroine but captured she is and it is a charm. Moreover and of course that is the important moreover there can be in any of his books lots of them lots of everybody but there does not ever have to be a dead one it is like a good play of Shakespeare, have them dead but if they are dead then the place is strewn with corpses, but and that is the real reason why Edgar Wallace holds is because his books are strewn with people with plans with everything as well as with corpses there is a genuine abundance and the thing that can be said is characteristic of the twentieth century is that it is lavish but niggardly. Oppenheim is that but Edgar Wallace never, from the first *People of the River* to the last chase for the girl there is abundance, of course incidentally he writes awfully well he has the gift of writing as Walter Scott had it and that too makes for abundance. I like Edgar Wallace. For many years his sadism put me off as Dickens' sadism put me off but finally you have to conclude that English abundance has to have that and alright I like abundance.

They say that there are an awful lot of detective stories written but really there are not really not, if you want to read one a day well not one a day but one every other day, say three a week and if you are willing to read over and over a lot of them even then there are not enough to go around if you include English and American ones, really there are not I can say in all sincerity that there are not.

I tried to write one well not exactly write one because to try is to cry but I did try to write one.

It had a good name it was *Blood on the Dining-Room Floor* and it all had to do with that but there was no corpse and the detecting was general, it was all very clear in my head but it did not get natural the trouble was that if it all happened and it all had happened then you had to mix it up with other things that had happened and after all a novel even if it is a detective story ought not to mix up what happened with what has happened, anything that has happened is exciting exciting enough without any writing, tell it as often as you like but do not write it not as a story.

However I did write it, it was such a good detective story but no-

There are also the detective stories of Fletcher, there it all depends not upon the criminal not upon the detecting but upon the crime, and the crime is money money is there sometimes as diamonds mostly uncut sometimes cut but it all depends entirely upon the crime, crime and ancient history which explains the crime, here there is neither hero nor villain and certainly not a heroine there is only the crime.

It is funny that crime is soothing but it is, stories of adventure criminals, the kind they used to write about Australian bushrangers were more likely to frighten you than crimes of criminals, I do not know why but this is so. Criminal crimes are soothing, adventure crimes are frightening. I suppose because criminal crimes take place where there are lots of people and adventure crimes take place where there are none. Anyway I do like detective stories and will there please will there be more of them.

1937

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everybody
period. And
what you like
raries." They
are contained
is the question
has to live
knows what
know where

Each generation
life: and now
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knows what
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That is the
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