



Off The Record

This book was begun in 1929 at the behest of Prof. W.G Fraser. He must have noticed that I had been writing quite a bit of stuff as a student. Now that I had graduated with only part-time work as tutor in English, and oceans of time, I suddenly lost that pen. Estranged from the art of writing, I was fast developing another art: the art of being a young-man-about-town. He must have thoroughly disapproved of it. I could not imagine any other reason for the astonishing step he took. He told me to write an autobiography!

Now, I had disappointed him by running away from the English Honours course in spite of all he had done to encourage me. In character he was not the encouraging type. Extremely perspicacious he was fond of knocking nonsense out of young heads. Extremely energetic himself he was not satisfied with the energy we exhibited. "Educating the unwilling young", he used to complain. Without being stern he could be firm with us. Kind-hearted, yet he could make us suffer if a little dose of suffering was what we needed for the good of our character.

As a professor of English he was the target for young hopefuls with itching pens. He would find on his desk surreptitious offerings of poems, plays and other fond efforts at writing. Guessing whose hand had perpetrated which piece he would drop hints in the appropriate places. "Somebody should tell him that he should be better occupied than writing etc. etc." In my case he seemed to have guessed that I was worse occupied otherwise than writing. Those were my wild days. His guess was pretty near. But he didn't know the worst. When I ran away from his English Honours Class I ran away from home. I eloped with a girl. Here was my opportunity at last. In the form of an autobiography, I could now explain in extenso how I could not avoid disappointing him as I did. So I set to and rapidly completed one chapter after another. "Childhood" "Boyhood" "Youth, parts 1-6." And then full stop. You see, I had reached the end of my explanation. I had carried the story to the point when I had become a part-time tutor in English. I submitted the type-script to him and fled, as far down as Myeik. His letter came. With characteristic candour he pointed out that what he wanted was not a book about me, but about Myanmar. "Turn the microscope away from "K". Your life-time is only the frame work for a book on Myanmar. All that's wanted is the eye on the object which is not really "K" but "K's" horizons beginning with the Yomas and ending with the stratosphere. It is the period you could so well exhibit, about the twenties, when minds were beginning to move; the

old tunes ceasing to be worth collecting and the new notions being found to have been implicit in the Myanmar situation all the time. Certainly there would be friends and figures but they too would have to be in focus: not very important in themselves but very important as supports and milestones."