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MY GRANDFATHER’S HOUSE

BY CHARLES RITCHIE

The streets of the town were steep as
ludicrous slides up to the granite
Citadel and down to the harbor
wharves. People were accustomed to
walking on the perpendicular. The
houses clung at odd angles to the spine
of the hill, so that a roof or a protruding
upper window showed out of align-
ment, as in a crooked drawing. The ef-
fect was disturbing to the sense of bal-
ance. The houses were of indeterminate
age — some late 18th century, others Victo-
rian, built of wood or stone beneath
their coating of dun-colored shingle.
They were narrow houses, bigger than
they looked from the front, with an air
of reticence, almost of concealment.
Nothing was for show. One sees such
houses in Scottish towns. The poor
lived in squalor, bug-ridden wooden
boxes, the windows sealed tight, winter
and summer. A charred whirl of ancient
dirt issued from the doorways where the
children thronged.

The Citadel crowned Halifax. It was
flanked by army barracks built from
London War Office blueprints, oblivious
of climate or situation. Top-sized can-
non made a pretense of protection.
Nest paths of painted white stones
spaced with military precision and
planted with a struggle of nasturtiums
led to the officers’ quarters. Barracks
and brothels, the one could not live
without the other. The brothels were at
the foot of the hill near the waterfront
and the naval dockyard. From the
wharves the stink of fish was wafted up.

ILLUSTRATION BY JAMES HILL

CHARLES RITCHIE
"My grandfather's bedroom

I visited
every morning
while he was still in bed
in a flannel nightshirt"

To my grandparents my Uncle Charlie had always been a very proper and a disappointment, shapedless by contrast with his boisterous younger brothers. He was an idler, a dashing soldier, startlingly handsome, a cutter in a fashionable London Establish. He was a man of no great depth, and he paid their debts and lived on for his letters, which came rarely — except for the ones that came in this way. They believed that they had a position to keep up though what that position was, they never told in this way. What made it more difficult to keep up was that my grandfather all his life floundered in bursts of dizziness, when he vanished from his wife and home for a few days at a time. My grandfather covered and I remember that he had a rather strong Russian manner. Sometimes it was not easy. Once, when she was presiding over a dinner party for some local digni
tary, her husband, unfortunately it appears, appeared at the dinning room door in his usual white shirt and tie. She rose from the table and majestically swept him away. She was a small woman, she said, and the thud of her move, you said, her spirit, that the giants could hardly hear, when she resumed the place, that he had expected. Never in the course of nearly a century had my grandfather done a day's work. Although he enjoyed going into jobs and bars in Calgary or Edmonton, he left a trail of legends and stories. He said we were still young, so his fascination

His way were come-by-chance encoun
ters dotted with romantic encounters, for he had the attraction of the underemotional man, earthless and

Ambivalent, he made friends with others, the Irishman, and the Irishman for it caused my grandfather no pain, and it was not the way.

When I went to my grandmother's house as a child all this was long in the past. My grandmother's drawing room was cluttered, its chairs and sofas under dust, but my uncle had cleaned, freshened and disappeared in you, Lilian.

When I came to my grandmother's house as a child all this was long in the past. My grandmother's drawing room was cluttered, its chairs and sofas under dust, but my uncle had cleaned, freshened and disappeared in you, Lilian.

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When I came to my grandmother's house as a child all this was long in the past. My grandmother's drawing room was cluttered, its chairs and sofas under dust, but my uncle had cleaned, freshened and disappeared in you, Lilian.
in extraordinary we have had no rain here only a mile away, but it is no matter. Here you are at last". We went in to a hotel preceded by a very old and smelly Newfoundland dog. Mrs. Lorimer turned to my mother: "How is your father? Always so cheery. I am sorry your brother Charlie should be causing him so much concern. Your dear mother was always so indomitable to him, too much so, I fear." At that moment the dog growled and stirred under the table where he had crept, and on a sharp note of rage my mother cried out "Damn!" There was a pause as if the clock had stopped. "He ripped my ankle," my mother explained. "He has," guffawed Mr. Lorimer, "she said a big dog, she said a big D." Our hostess's laugh was like the rustling of dry leaves. "I am sure she said nothing of the kind, but it turning to my mother, "you had said 'poor doggie' instead of the expression which you did employ, it would have been preferable." In front of my place at the table was a glass of milk. "We had it brought straight from the barn for you as a treat. It is warm from the cow." By the revolution I doowned a swallow of the milk. It had a distastefully intimate taste. My grandfather and his remaining contemporaries belonged to a breed now long extinct. They were Colonials. The word carries a whiff of inferiority, but they were not to know this. They thought of themselves as belonging to the British Empire, as much as they could imagine nothing more glorious. They did not think of themselves as English. Certainly, everything British was best, but they viewed the individual Englishman with a critical eye. If the English patronized the Colonials, the Colonials sat in judgment on the English. The Colonial was an ambivalent creature, half in one element, half in another; British, but not English, cantankerously loyal. These were Nova Scotia Colonials. The earthly subtext of Nova Scotia gave a tang to their personalities and an edge to their tongues. For many years they had those like them who managed the colony under the rule of British governors whom, in turn, they managed. It was a comfortable arrangement as long as it lasted, and not unprofitable. It enjoyed the blessings of the Church—the Church of England, of course. They were men of standing and standards, honorable men within the bounds of their monopoly. They were kind to their poor relations and moderately charitable to the poor who were not their relations and who lived in the slums. They began to think of themselves as an aristocracy, since there was no aristocracy on the spot to tell them differently. But they were small-town people, and they never escaped from the insignia of the small town. They woke to the apprehension of what the neighbors would say; they knew that, as always in Nova Scotia, orientation was made to be undermined. Halifax had been a garrison and a naval base for 150 years. Had not Kipling celebrated it as the "Warden of the honor of the North?" British regiments and sailors of the Royal Navy had come and gone in all those years and had set their stamp upon the town. No ball, picnic, or regimental party was complete without them. They carried off the prettiest girls, and many a local man resented and hated them. They brought with them rumors of wars in the days long," he used to declaim in melodramatic tones. Yet all the sorrow and loss, the drinking, the flogging, the loving and the talking (and he was a great talker) had not worn him out. He had been born in 1817 and was already a middle-aged man when Nova Scotia ceased to be a colony and became a province of Canada, an event that did not seem to have penetrated very far into his consciousness. He had never set foot in "Upper Canada," as he called it. His journeys had been to Prince Edward Island and to the Grand Banks or Sable Island an accepted risk. My grandfather never reached his 100th year; he died 10 days short of it. It was his impatience that killed him. Rather than waiting for help, he seized the heavy copper coal scuttle in his sitting room and, in trying to pour the coal into the grate, he staggered, hit his head against the marble mantelpiece and never recovered consciousness. My mother, my brother and I were staying in the house at the time. It was 1917, and I was 11 years old. To me it was not the same house as it had been on my visits as a small child. I saw it with different and dilapidating eyes. On the day of my grandfather's death I was sent to the local funeral director to get me out of the way. When I went to bed that night I was not thinking of my grandfather. His death did not much moved me. He had come to seem no longer quite real to me, but like an old man on the stage who dies when the curtain falls. At some moment in the night I woke to an intensity of listening, to a signal from the earth. I looked out of bed and stood at the top of the stairs, looking down to the gully where the banisters curved. The dense night silence reverberated around me; then there swept over me the tide of the past rising from the sleeping house below me. A conviction choked my throat. Had I heard a muffled sigh like a warning? What was it? Some signal from the frontier between childhood and old age where my grandfather and I had shared those timeless hours? When I went back to my bed it was to fall into a sleep as deep as to the warm place where the dead children had played. This is an abridged excerpt from My Grandfather's House by Charles Ritchie, which is to be published in October by Macmillan of Canada. In September 1880 the company was officially incorporated. THE SHAREHOLDER AFFAIR Caring for Imperial's shareholders is a major task—especially when they live on every continent but Antarctica. IN THE BEGINNING THERE WERE 14. What brought them together in the southwestern Ontario city of London during the summer of 1880 is now clear, lost in time. Frederick Arden Fitzgerald, who was to become the first president of the company being formed, was in the lumber business and owned a furniture store. Herman Waterman had started as a clothing clerk. Thomas Henry Smallman was a self-taught chemist. William Spencer and his family owned a small oil refinery in Woodstock, Ont. Other names: Carpenter, Godfrey and Minnichuk were lawyers or owned oil-producing properties. They were the founding shareholders of The Imperial Oil Company. Each one of these pledged $1000 in cash and assets for each share taken. Together they subscribed for a rather improbable number of shares—2,500 to be exact. It held until today (assuming all the rights offered over the years to purchase new shares had been exercised in each one of the shares would now be equivalent to more than 10,000 shares). The original handful of 16 shareholders has become an army of more than 28,000 (thousands more if you count all those who hold shares indirectly through The Review, Fall 1987 BY PAUL MILLER
Imperial shares are a family tradition for Caroline Conron of London, Ont., whose grandfather was one of the company's founders.

pension plans and mutual funds). A widely distributed army it is. You can find an Imperial shareholder on every continent except Antarctica. In every Canadian province and territory. In 49 of the 50 states (unfortunately, the company's sole representative in New Mexico disposed of his shares just before this article was written).

The company's most recent comprehensive survey of shareholders, conducted in late 1984, found that more than half of them keep the stock for a combination of two reasons: capital appreciation and income. About a quarter hold it solely for its capital appreciation.

Ten percent hold it mainly for the dividends, while another 10 percent believe the stock provides a safe haven for their capital.

Talk to a random sampling of shareholders, however, and you find a somewhat more idiosyncratic set of reasons than those dry statistics suggest.

For Caroline Conron of London, Ont., ownership of Imperial shares is something of a family tradition. Her great-grandfather, William Spencer, was among the original 16 shareholders, and every subsequent generation of the family, including Caroline's children, have held or currently hold shares.

Kenneth Baldwin of Rock Island, Que., had some spare cash in his pocket back in the 1920s. He used it to buy Imperial shares because he liked the company's gasoline. During intervening years he has added to his holding whenever there was a rights offering. He has made only one mistake in his investment experience with Imperial: "I sold them. I made a mistake and then I bought them right back. I could see I had made a mistake."

A similar mistake was not made by Dr. R.B. McIvor of Toronto, the long-time missionary-surgeon who became, in 1968, the moderator of The United Church of Canada. He has continued to hold his Imperial shares since the early 1900s, when, after a brief interlude at home in Canada, he prepared to return to India to resume his mission service.

"The mission salary was very low, so I wanted the money I left behind in Canada to work as hard as I was going to."

Katherine Berntesen has held her shares since the early 1960s. One of the main benefits of ownership, in her view, is that it entitles her to receive the magazine you are now reading, which is delivered to her door in Hamilton, New Zealand.

Gerald Kemen of Saskatchewan purchased shares of Imperial, as well as those of a number of other companies, as a hedge against inflation during the late 1960s. His investment strategy was straightforward, if somewhat unorthodox. If a company had survived the Great Depression, it was a candidate. "That's about as cautious as you can get," he notes.

Individuals who directly own shares of the company, however, form only a tiny portion of the people who hold an equity interest.

If you work for the City of Ottawa, for example, you have an interest in the company through your pension fund, which holds more than 90,000 Imperial shares. Perhaps you're a Toronto fire-fighter—your pension fund owns more than 50,000 shares. Other major institutional owners include the trustees of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, the Canadian National Institute for the Blind, Queen's University and the Pension fund of Canadian National Railways.

"If you could count up all the people who have an indirect interest in the company, through mutual funds or pension funds, I suspect the resulting number would be colossal—probably in the hundreds of thousands," says Dick Michaud, Imperial's vice-president, public affairs, and general secretary.

To meet the varied needs of the diverse group of shareholders, the company, in 1977, established a separate division specializing in investor relations.

"We do everything—maintain the shareholder records, produce and mail out the dividend cheques, administer the dividend reinvestment program, tabulate the proxy cards that people send in and arrange the annual meeting," says Cathy Heard, administrator of shareholder records, who has worked her way through most of the jobs in the division since joining Imperial seven years ago. "We also act as our own transfer agent, which means we can transfer and amalgamate share certificates for shareholders. The only thing we can't do is sell shares—that has to be done through a bank or stockbroker."

Imperial is one of only a handful of Canadian companies that maintain their own shareholder records and act as their own transfer agents. Most contract the work out to a third party, such as a trust company. One reason why more companies don't maintain their own records is the time and cost involved, which require a fairly large shareholder population to justify.

"Shareholder-record systems are quite complicated," says Jackie Thibault, manager of investor services, "somewhat like payroll systems. Every company has to have a payroll system, however, which means there's a wide choice of computer hardware and software available. But since relatively few companies take care of their own shareholder records, the choice of systems is limited and a considerable amount of expensive customizing is needed."

There are essentially two reasons why Imperial has made the effort to create a customized computer system to manage its shareholder records, explains Lorne French, manager of investor relations.

"First of all," he says, "it's cost effective. We spend less money doing it ourselves than it would cost to contract the work out. Even if the costs were equal, there would be an argument for maintaining our own records. It allows us to ensure that our shareholders receive the kind of service they expect from a company such as Imperial. Moreover it allows us to develop a special relationship—a friendliness—with our shareholders. A trust company would be more impersonal. Besides, if you communicate directly with the company, you should be able to get faster service—and our shareholders do."

Kenneth Baldwin of Rock Island, Que., bought his shares in the 1920s because he liked Imperial's gasoline.
to the growth and development of a business enterprise," says Bill Young, Imperial's executive vice-president and chief financial officer. "Not only is the money contributed by equity holders important in itself, but without equity capital in your business, no bank in the world is going to lend you money."

It's therefore vitally important, says Young, that a company provide sufficient information about its plans and prospects, about the calibre of its management and the rate of its growth, to ensure that its shares trade at a reasonable price. The value of its shareholders' equity will determine, to a large degree, the amount of money it can borrow and the amount it can raise by issuing additional shares.

Says investor relations manager French: "To my mind, communication is the most important element of any job. It's also one of our basic responsibilities to those who have placed their money in our hands."

To meet these responsibilities, the company deploys a variety of communication vehicles, from formal to informal, from traditional to high tech.

Unusually, the cornerstone of that communication effort — certainly the largest project in which the most time is invested by the widest range of people throughout the company — is Imperial's annual report, which is mailed to shareholders each March, reaching them approximately one month before the annual meeting. The amount of thought and effort devoted to the report has not gone unnoticed in recent years. In 1984, it captured the respected Financial Post gold award as Canada's best annual report for 1983. More recently, the 1985 report was judged in the same competition to be the best among those of all petroleum companies in the country. During three of the past four years, it has been chosen by Oakville magazine as the best report in the petroleum industry. What's more, during the period in which those accolades have been won, the cost of producing the report has been cut by more than 50 percent.

"Every year we receive at least a few comments from shareholders who say that we spend too much money on the annual report and ask us to forget about sending them the report and just send them the money," says French. "I'm always troubled when I see that comment, not only because we're legally obligated to send out the report, but because we make such an effort to ensure that our shareholders have good, useful information on which to judge whether they wish to continue to invest in the company, sell or invest more. Even if we spent nothing on it and instead distributed all the money to our shareholders, you would have to own more than 500 shares before you would get a dollar."

The annual report, however, is only one element in the communication program. There are also interim reports, distributed every three months; the management proxy circular, sent out with the annual report; as well as the annual meeting itself, which provides a major opportunity for shareholders to learn about corporate plans and results and to question senior management and the directors in person if they wish.

Other information initiatives are less visible to the average shareholder. How would be aware, for example, that the senior executives of the company meet several dozen times each year with institutional investors — those pension-fund and mutual-fund managers who hold away over millions, sometimes billions of dollars in investment capital — as well as with financial analysts who specialize in recommending the shares of companies in the petroleum industry. The meetings are held not only in major centres across Canada but in selected locations in the United States, which has recently been the source of considerable demand for Imperial shares.

"People tend to buy shares in companies located in countries about which they have a comfortable level of knowledge," says French. "For that reason, we would normally restrict our meetings with the U.S. financial community to places in reasonable proximity to Canada, such as Boston, New York and Chicago and to such areas as California, where there are large populations of expatriate Canadians."

Not content with excellence in traditional methods of communicating with investors, members of the investor relations group are breaking new ground by being the first company in Canada to provide direct access through telephone lines to information about corporate results and developments stored on a computer. To date, the service is available only to those with a special need for detailed information — namely security analysts, Judson Arrowsmith, Imperial's coordinator of investor information, says a group of about 25 investment analysts use the system, with a core group of about six who also receive information from it on a weekly basis: "It's quite useful for people who are being fed information quickly or want more detail on a particular topic than they have room for in our annual or interim reports. In addition, the information on the system is available 24 hours a day, not just during normal office hours."

Arrowsmith says the company is currently investigating computer software that will allow more phone lines to be linked to the system. And, someday, sometime in the future, shareholders with personal computers and a modern (a device that allows computers to transfer information over phone lines) will be able to use their machines to obtain information and ask questions just as the 16 founding shareholders might say about the latest methods of evaluating the investment worth of their creation is, of course, impossible to say. But you have to think they wouldn't be too surprised. After all, the one thing they didn't lack was vision. ◄
A WORLD WITHOUT WORDS

You may take reading for granted. Most of us do. But too many men and women can't read. Or write a sentence. Or enjoy what the world offers. There's help coming. And dignity.

BY SHONA MCKAY

When I was a youngster, I suffered from allergies, so I ended up missing a lot of school. I never did really learn to read and write. Still, I always wanted to get an education, so, when I was 21, I tried again. It was a one-room school, and I knew the teacher saw me as just one more problem. When I made mistakes, she would send a grade 1 boy or girl up to the blackboard to correct me. I was so embarrassed I left. Not reading and writing means that life is very narrow, full of things you just have to avoid. It means not being able to write a cheque, getting other people to fill in forms for you and following a route someone else drew on a map so as not to get lost when you travel. At the church, when they ask you to take a Sunday-school class, you have to say no because the little children can read the Bible words better than you can. It means being humiliated and ashamed.

DOROTHY SILVER, AGE 53
FREDERICTON

IN Canada, one in five adults can empathize, intimately, with Dorothy Silver. They are the people who are classed either as illiterate or functionally illiterate—possessing in the former case no more than five years of formal schooling, no more than eight in the latter. Although describing everyone without some high-school education as illiterate may appear to be somewhat rigid, most educators and literacy experts have found the assessment to be accurate. The Canadian Commission for UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), in its definitive 1983 study "Adult illiteracy in Can-
da — A Challenge," defines literacy as "the ability to participate fully in the rights, responsibilities, and privileges of citizenship." And singling out just one area of society, namely work, the report examines why this "ability to partici-
pate" rarely exists for those with minimal education: "In Canada, the attainment of a grade 10 education has become a prerequisite for most skilled jobs... and this need is likely to become even higher in the future. Those with less than grade 8 are in fact excluded from many areas of employment and skill training, regardless of their individual abilities."

But who in Canada, where education is a right, are those one in five people who are, at the least, functionally illiterate. They are both the old and the young (60 percent of all illiterate Canadians are under 45). Some are immigrants, yes, but 30 percent are Canadian born. And while 50 percent of all people with reading and writing difficulties live in rural areas, the vast majority work in cities and towns. Illiteracy is part of the social fabric of every province, numbering 13 percent of the population in Quebec, 18 percent in Ontario and 11 percent in British Columbia. It figures highly in Canada's unemployment statistics. Approximately 60 percent of all illiterate Canadians are not only out of work but have given up looking for jobs. It is no mere coincidence that Newfound-
land, which has the highest illiteracy rate in the country (one-third of a
In the recent past, when she enrolled in a full-time education upgrading program. However, confident and talkative today, she speaks of taking high-school courses next year, of going on to become a computer technician. She also speaks of a part-time job filled with despair and pain. "For years, I just hid away," she says. "All my life, people called me stupid, retarded. And I believed them. Why shouldn't I have it? But they couldn't print my own name. Even a simple thing like going grocery shopping was an ordeal. I have a list, but it was a list not of words but pictures I had drawn. I was full of anger and frustration. Most nights I'd cry myself to sleep."

Ultimately, this loss to the individual becomes a real burden for society. What makes democracy happen when so many citizens cannot even read the names printed on a voting ballot? And what of economic structures? John Davis, a group vice-president of AbilityPrice, Inc. and a founding member of the Canadian Business Task Force on Literacy, writes: "Economists estimate that Canada loses approximately $2 billion annually due to mistakes, inferior product quality and health and safety problems—because people can't read and understand the information they've been exposed to." The economic costs to everyone are tremendous, as workers seeking jobs are isolated from the labor market and more likely to be unemployed.

According to the study, "65% of employers said there were too many illiterate people on their staff as the top complaint." Literacy is one of the most critical skills for success in today's economy, as the jobs of the future require higher-level thinking and critical analysis.

"I know that being literate won't solve all of their problems, but it can help," says Johnson. "Our research proves it. Indeed, since the program began in May 1985, 140 of the 600 to 700 teens who have participated in the program have found jobs, 47 others have returned to school, 56 have returned home and 77 are permanently housed. The success of the program has drawn interest from social workers and government officials from across North America and from many Third World countries."

The program has become successful in part by tapping into the existing community infrastructure. "People come to us, and we work with them to identify their needs and provide the appropriate support," says Johnson. "We also work with local businesses to identify opportunities for employment."

"Furthermore, I can prove that retrospect, the volunteer community remains a focal point of the battle against illiteracy. Typically, the thousands of small groups at work throughout the country are reading and writing skills on an individual basis, matching each student with a tutor, which is a more comfortable and enjoyable learning situation for most adults than a crowded classroom. The teaching method of the volunteer groups also tends to be similar in that they eschew pedagogy and traditional teaching aids in favor of newspapers, cookbooks, and driver's manuals. "To teach the adult to read with a grade 1 reader is insulting," says Michael, a literacy worker at East End Literacy in downtown Toronto. "It is not the purpose of literacy training to teach people to read Finnegans Wake. What we try to do is use material that is relevant to a person's life and that has a link to a person's goal, whether it be to get a motor vehicle permit or to go to college. Among such groups, resourcefulness plays a major role not just in the teaching process but in making the public more aware of the plight of the illiterate."

Costance Gaylor is a life-enhancing and a means to help our children with homework. Michael Moore (centre): "To teach the adult to read with a grade 1 reader is insulting."
"But if illiteracy in the workplace is a problem many admit to, it's also one that few want to own. Employees and unions are fearful that an admission of illiteracy will result in job loss. And for their part, employers worry that a public admission that some of their workers are bereft of reading skills will result in loss of consumer confidence."

Certainly, recent political involvement has given the literacy issue new impetus. A particular spark was lit during last fall's throne speech when Prime Minister Brian Mulroney announced the federal government's intention to make literacy a priority. Since then, a departmental working group has been formed under the leadership of the secretary of state, David Crombie. The group met with literacy associations across the country during the spring and summer; its recommendations and findings are currently being considered by the federal cabinet.

Many of the provincial governments, too, are becoming involved in the fight against illiteracy. After digesting the alarming results of a provincial royal commission on employment and unemployment, in which illiteracy surfaced several times, the Newfoundland government commissioned a study specifically on the illiteracy problem. Completed last spring, it made a wide range of recommendations regarding basic education.

Similar studies in Ontario led to the government's making $20 million available to the province's 22 community colleges for the express purpose of enhancing adult basic learning. So far, according to Gerry Wright, a senior manager with the Ontario ministry of skills development, programs developed as a result of the funding "attracted 3500 new students within the first five months." In addition, Ontario has set aside $5 million to assist volunteer literacy groups and to raise public awareness.

Other provinces, most notably Quebec and Alberta, have long-standing programs for combating undereducation. Since 1984, the government of Quebec has funded a total of 71 volunteer literacy groups, at a cost of $1.8 million in 1986 alone. Most of this money — $1.2 million — ends up in the hands of Regroupement des groupes populaires enalphabilisation du Que- bec (RGPAQ), a coalition of 40 organizations that reaches 2000 illiterate Canadia- nans a year and that, according to the coalition's president, Louise Miller, is very successful. "About 30 percent of our students go on to get jobs and another 30 percent go on to high school," she says. "Much of our success stems from the fact that we don't just help people to read and write but to have confidence, to feel worthwhile and that they can do things." Quebec also instituted one of the strongest school-based literacy operations in the country, a program that received $12 million from the province's government last year. According to Miller, the strength of the movement is, in part, due to the decision by many volunteer groups to unite their efforts in the early 1980s. "However," she insists, "nothing could really have been done if the government had not made literacy a priority."

In Alberta, people wishing basic educational upgrading are able to enroll in courses offered through five vocational training centres or participate in an $11-million program run by local school boards or one of 30 government-supported volunteer tutor projects. In spite of a three-percentage point reduction in the last year, the province has announced its intention to maintain its assistance in the literacy training area.

Joan Webber, a consultant with the adult learning support branch of Alberta Advanced Education, remarks that the province has recognized the need to meet the issue head on since the early seventies. And even more, with a depressed economy, we know we have to continue." For an understanding of the reasons behind that knowledge, one has only to think of Constance Gaylor. Helping her children with their homework and writing her own grocery lists— with words— hers is a life transformed. "I no longer think of myself as slow or worthless," she says. "And nowadays, instead of crying, I read myself to sleep."

Certainly, more needs to be done. For in spite of the increased activity today, still only a small percentage of Canada's illiterate community is being reached— still, the Gaylors and the Russells are the exceptions. And that, as those involved in literacy work are quick to point out, translates into a society that is unable to fulfill its potential economically or socially. It also means a society diminished in spirit. The pity is that such need not be the case since illiteracy is a solvable problem. That's something Dorothy Silver knows first-hand. Just three years ago, at the age of 50, the New Brunswick grandmother contacted her local Laubach Literacy office. Within one day she was matched with a tutor, and now she reads and writes well enough to run her own jewelry marketing business, fill in her own forms and choose her own travel routes. "But, best of all," says the devout Silver, whose greatest joy is reading the Bible, "I'm able to teach Sunday school."

AN HONORABLE ORDER

By Ted Ferguson

Founded by the world's oldest charity.
St. John Ambulance
has been building a healthier Canada for more than a century

Back in 1911, a Halifax police chief at the time of J.A. Rudland's death asked the members of his force to take a St. John Ambulance Association course during their off-duty hours. The response was, to say the least, enthusiastic. Only a few men showed up; one was a Constable Lovett. Five years later, while serving in France during the First World War, Lovett happened to be in a tent with Rudland's brother. A piece of an exploding German bomb ripped through the canvas, severing Rudland's leg— Lovett applied his St. John Ambulance training and saved the man's life.

The Lovett story is far from unique; it
is one of thousands, if not millions, of examples of the life-saving value of the St. John Ambulance Association, formed in London in 1877 "to teach first aid, home nursing and related subjects.

The association spread to Canada in 1882, when a British surgeon organized and ran St. John courses in Quebec City.

While the St. John Ambulance Association itself wasn't formed until the 19th century, it is, in fact, one of two foundations of the world's oldest charity, the Most Venerable Order of the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem, whose roots go back to 1023. It was then that Benedictine monks established a hospital for Christian pilgrims in Jerusalem and became known as the Brothers of the Hospital of St. John. In 1113, the monks formed a separate order, the Order of the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem. They established hospitals and orphanages throughout Europe, built up a large army of knights to protect pilgrims and, in 1530, made their headquarters in Malta, where the order's dreaded naval fleet managed to ward off aggressors until 1798, when Napoleon captured the island, putting an end to both the order's presence there and its military role.

To promote the St. John Ambulance Association was formed, the order, then based in London, had ceased to be a religious organization, though the names of its branches and positions suggest otherwise.

Since its establishment, the order's Canadian branch, officially known as the Priory of Canada, has grown into a coast-to-coast network with 13,500 uniformed volunteers (the Brigade), who provide first-aid services at public events, and 12,000 nonuniformed volunteers, who are involved in developing and implementing the organization's various first-aid and health-care programs. Together, the two groups devoted more than two million hours to public-service duties last year.

"We're proud to say we don't charge accident victims or sick people a single penny for treating them," says the organization's priory secretary and chief executive officer, James Cowan. "However, we are obliged to charge a nominal fee for our training courses. If we didn't, it would be hard for us to develop new ones." About 70 percent of the order's annual $11 million budget is derived from training fees and the sale of instruction material; the rest comes from charitable organizations, government, and corporate and private donors. The Toronto author and lawyer Richard Rotmer is a keen supporter of the association. In his role as the official patron of St. John Ambulance in Ontario, he personally signed 500 fund-raising letters last year. "I do whatever I can to help St. John Ambulance because it does such a wonderful job," he says. "What impresses me is that the organization does so much with so little."

Despite the mounting need for funds, the association tends to shy away from publicity campaigns, preferring a reserved, low-key public image. Perhaps because of this, many Canadians aren't aware of the full extent of the group's activities. In fact, the St. John Ambulance Association provides a wide array of services that include health-care instruction for senior citizens, first-aid training for workers, child-care lessons for young parents, day-care workers and baby-sitters and a bursary program that awards grants to a number of nursing students each year — in 1986, 43 such students received a total of $25,000.

St. John Ambulance makes a solid effort to serve less populated regions as well as urban centres. In rural Alberta and Quebec, for instance, volunteers often get around on skis and snowmobiles, while B.C. members use power boats and a Northwest Territories unit employs light aircraft. On Prince Edward Island, 350 volunteers find that one of their toughest tasks is driving on treacherous winter roads to outlying farm communities. Yet, says Leanne Sayle, executive director for Prince Edward Island, the harsh weather conditions don't hurt enrollment. "Volunteerism" she says, "is a way of life in this part of the country.

Although the biggest role that St. John Ambulance volunteers play is teaching first aid and health care — more than seven million Canadians have passed St. John courses since the 1880s — the association truly shines during emergencies. In October 1988, it provided 24-hour service for two weeks after an explosion at a mine in Springhill, N.S., trapped 174 people underground. And when a freight train carrying dangerous chemicals derailed near Mississauga, Ont., in 1979, 21 St. John Ambulance members established first-aid posts within two hours of the accident. Another 400 hurried to the area to aid in the mass evacuation of an estimated 220,000 residents. They transported hospital and nursing-home patients to temporary shelters and took food and blankets to people encamped in schools and shopping malls.

St. John volunteers were also on the job as long ago as 1918, when the Spanish flu epidemic killed more than 30,000 Canadians, and they operated blood banks, carried stretchers and performed other vital chores in civilian and military hospitals during both world wars. "Vigilance is a key word in our organization," says Donald Smith, a St. John Ambulance divisional superintendent in Toronto. "Division leaders constantly update their disaster and emergency procedures and take part in community planning sessions."

For many young volunteers, working with the St. John Ambulance proves so absorbing that it leads them to pursue careers in the health-care field. "Throughout our long history, we have pointed out a great many young people in a positive career direction," says priory secretary James Cowan, a retired brigadier general who joined St. John Ambulance in 1982. "Hundreds have gone on to become doctors, nurses and para-medics or to be associated with the medical profession in some other way. If they start helping people at an early age, they are often inclined to want to do so later in life."

That is precisely what happened to Lawrence Swift. The 26-year-old Toron...
St. John Ambulance volunteers have been helping accident victims across the country since the early part of this century. Teaching ordinary citizens how to deal with medical emergencies is the main reason why St. John Ambulance instructors go into factories and other industrial workplaces. But there's a side benefit to their visits: they have discovered that after taking the courses, workers become much more safety conscious and workplace accident rates decline impressively. In 1977, for example, after enlisting the services of the St. John Ambulance, the Electrical Reduction Company of Canada reported an 84-per-cent drop in its accident rate at its plant in Long Harbour, Nfld. Similarly, in 1980, on-the-job mishaps caused B.C. Hydro Rail employees to miss 700 man-days of work; the following year, having taken St. John courses, the workers lost only 35 man-days. And an Ontario community, North Bay, disclosed that St. John training resulted in only 29 municipal employees being hurt on the job in 1984, compared with 49 in 1983.

The St. John Ambulance Association has been supervising industrial first-aid lessons since 1909, when it went into Canadian Pacific Railway's workshops in Montreal. Jacques Morneau, a former St. John executive director for Quebec, says that while he has no statistical evidence of the effectiveness of his region's long-standing industrial-safety program, he often hears of the benefits of the courses. The chief instructor for first aid at Pratt and Whitney, for example, told him that over a two-year period in the early eighties, eight employees who suffered heart attacks at work had been saved by people who had taken a CPR course. Morneau adds that a Quebec Hydro study on the importance of first-aid projects revealed that the corporation saves about $4 million a year because of workplace health and safety programs.

With 4241 uniformed members, the Quebec St. John Ambulance branch is the country's largest. The region's biggest task in recent years came during Pope John Paul II's 1984 visit to Montreal: more than 100 members patrolled the papal route, treating people who had fainted or required minor injuries. Many of the branch's members are young. "It's pretty easy these days to recruit young people for the St. John Ambulance," Morneau says. "There is a tremendous urge among the younger generation to get out and help the world. So many youths seem to be just waiting around, hoping to be asked to do something worthwhile.

Under a special youth program, St. John Ambulance brings youngsters from the age of 11 to its uniformed Brigade rank. Initially called cadets, they become crusaders at age 16 and at 21 full-fledged adult members. Like all Brigade members, the cadets and crusaders undergo continuous training and face an annual proficiency review.

Divisional superintendent Donald Smith says a few youths have joined the organization in the past believing it would lead to a glamorous life. "They went to a rock concert and saw a St. John member on duty and thought, 'Gee, maybe I'll get to hobnob with Mick Jagger or someone,'" he says. "In truth, most assignments are at civic parades or other public events where there is precious little glamour." But, Smith adds, once recruits have been bitten by the St. John bug, glamour or not, they are apt to stay with the order a long time. Eighteen-year-old David Bugeya agrees. His sister, a uniformed member herself, convinced him to become a cadet when he was 12 years old. At the age of 15, he successfully handled his first serious case—a elderly woman collapsed on the grounds of Toronto's Canadian National Exhibition, displaying symptoms of a stroke. Bugeya says some people probably wonder why he spends so many holidays on duty when he could be lying on a beach or sitting at home watching television. His answer is one that seems to sum up the feeling's of almost all St. John members. "Well, the answer has got a lot to do with how I feel at the end of the day," he says. "When I go off duty, I have this marvellous feeling that I've accomplished something important, and, to me, that easily compensates for any sacrifice I make in my personal life."
The Tides of Change

The seas of the eighties haven't been entirely smooth for the oil companies of Canada. The waters have often been rough. A look at how Imperial charts its course

"To me," said the tall, soft-spoken man in the golf shirt with the Canadian paintings on the wall, "managing Imperial Oil is rather like sailing a boat in water you know can be dangerous and subject to sudden squalls. You have to know what you're going to do if a sudden storm hits or if a big wave washes you overboard. If you panic, you're quite likely to go under. But if you stay calm and concentrate on staying afloat, the storm will eventually run its course. That's the way Young speaking, the man who, aside from being the primary influence in the renewal of Imperial's noted art collection and a highly accomplished gardener, is best known for the financial intelligence he brings to Imperial. He is the company's chief financial officer and an executive vice-president.

Young's analogy seems apt, especially in its reference to the squalls and storms that can rise quite suddenly on waters that only a short time before seemed mirror calm. Take the current decade as a textbook example. As the 1980s began, Imperial's earnings reached an all-time high. The future seemed, if not assured, at least full of promise, written large in etchings for the ambitious Cold Lake project, which, seen it to proceed as planned, would employ 10,000 people and recover untold riches from the Alberta oil sands, making a historic contribution to Canada's energy security. Then came the squalls and storms. First, in late 1983, came the National Energy Program with punitive taxes that staggered the oil industry. Then, in 1985, came the most severe recession in half a century. Finally, in 1986, came the collapse of the world price of oil. Taken together, they added up to a difficult environment for the oil business. No wonder the country's television news programs were awash with pictures of oil rigs leaving Alberta and once-optimistic families packing to head back East.

But Imperial has weathered the difficult times. In fact, to people on the outside who make a practice of assessing how well the industry is managed, Imperial is doing very well indeed. In New York, late last year, the Wall Street Transcript, a financial newspaper, after surveying Canadian and American oil analysts to determine the best led oil company in Canada, presented its gold award to Imperial's chairman and chief executive officer, Arden Haynes. It was, in fact, the second year in which Haynes was presented the top prize (the first year he won it jointly with his predecessor, Donald McIvor). One comment from a person involved in examining Imperial's performance seems worth noting: "They just seem to do everything right... Everything they do just seems to come out looking awfully good!"

If so, that flattering result is the outcome not just of the talents of the time at Imperial but of a history in which preparation for change and renewal through change have been cornerstones of the corporation's culture. Last year the comment was made that Arden Haynes is a man who "always has his head around the next corner." That sentiment might well be applied to Imperial itself.

Responding quickly to changing times goes back a very long way at Imperial—at least to a day in 1927. That was the day when, in response to the new needs of highway motoring, Imperial opened the first gasoline station in Canada. It seems merely an incident now, but it stands as one of the telling symbols of Imperial's sense of itself. Its eye is on tomorrow.

But to be responsive—to be a company that can change direction promptly and wisely—means many years of attention to choosing people with great care, training them thoroughly, then picking the best of the brightest as leaders.
The result, even to its critics, is a company that moves through waters of adversity with considerable confidence and ongoing success. Take, as only one example, that Imperial had funneled in the late 80s, as world crude oil prices were rising high ($30 a barrel) and its refinery at Edmonton (US$9 in the summer of 1986 and rebounded to a more modest (US$18) in January 1987. It was a turbulence and challenge never quite before in the company's history. "The prospect of US$18-per-barrel oil, which a few years ago would have seemed a dream, is a daunting prospect for us," says Tom Peterson, president of Esso Resources Marketing. "But we have to develop our own energy." The company's strategy can be summed up as: "We are developing new processes and technology to increase efficiency, and we are developing new products to meet the needs of our customers." The goal is to make Esso's production of gasoline, diesel, and jet fuel more efficient and cleaner, while reducing its dependence on imported oil. The company has invested heavily in research and development, and has made significant investments in new facilities and infrastructure. Esso is also working to reduce its carbon footprint, and is exploring new sources of energy, such as wind and solar power. Overall, Esso is committed to being a leader in the energy industry, and to providing its customers with the reliable, affordable energy they need.
SEEN THINGS

The special rewards of being nature's friend
BY WYNNE THOMAS

One day in the late 1900s, as war clouds gathered over Europe, Sir Neville Chamberlain, then Britain's chancellor of the exchequer and soon to become its first wartime prime minister, was moved to write a letter to the editor of The Times on a matter of some urgency.

"It may be of interest to record," wrote the chancellor, "that whilst walking through Central Park today, I noticed a grey wagtail. Perhaps the occurrence of this bird in the heart of London has been recorded before, but I have not myself previously noted it in the park."

For the purpose of removing doubt, as we say in the House of Commons, I should perhaps add that I mean a grey wagtail and not a pied wagtail.

Present day bird-watchers will understand and commend the chancellor's fine sense of priorities. What, after all, do grave matters of state signify when compared with the opportunity of being the first to record the appearance of a species in a new habitat?

As a young schoolboy I was bitten early by the birding bug. The first bird I ever consciously identified—apart, that is, from robins, thrushes, sparrows and the like, which everyone seems to be born knowing—was a European bullfinch. A striking rose-red bird with black cap, wings and tail, it was sitting on a shrub in the garden of our home in the Welsh hills. Even today, dismaying close to half a century later, I can still clearly recall the visceral thrill I experienced from that sudden expansion of my visual knowledge. It was not that I hadn't seen a bullfinch before—in our area it was what modern birding guides would describe as "abundant"—but what made the difference was that, for the first time, I knew it to be a bullfinch.

And, knowing it for what it was, I was really seeing it for the first time.

Bird-watching then was harder work than it is today. Books on the subject were scarce (the invaluable field guide had not been invented) and binoculars, today regarded as essential, were both unaffordable and, in wartime Britain, unavailable.

My equipment consisted of an ancient hand-held telescope that I bought at an auction (for the bankruptcy sum of 10 shillings) and a copy of T.A. Coward's Birds of the British Isles and their Eggs. Thus, while a work of considerable literary and artistic merit, was a far cry in terms of practical usefulness from the excellently illustrated publications on the market today.

Still, with the relentless enthusiasm of youth, I persevered and, with telescope to eye, a Nelson among naturalists, achieved a passing measure of proficiency. Like many country boys, I was also an avid egg collector. For several years my collection, housed in three neatly labeled chocolate boxes, was my most cherished possession, but over time, nudged perhaps by early stirrings of an environmental conscience, I grew disenchanted with egg-collecting (as I did with another boyhood pastime—fishing) and eventually exchanged my collection for a model airplane.

When I first started watching birds it did not take me long to discover that they could not be studied to the best advantage in isolation. Every species has its favorite habitat, its preferred nesting spot. Some European woodpeckers, I learned, are partial to hornbeam trees. But this item of information was of little use to one who couldn't tell a hornbeam from a hawthorn. Slowly, to improve my knowledge of habitats, I began to identify trees and, in the process, to really notice them for the first time, to appreciate their beauty, to recognize them for the gravity-defying miracles that they really are. Came the time, many years and a continent later, when my total ignorance of wild flowers seemed mildly inexcusable. They provided a new interest and their identification an absorbing occupation. (Like trees, flowers have the inestimable advantage over birds of not disappearing at the critical moment.)

And so on to the fungi. And grasses, and rocks, and butterflies, and fossils (a lifetime study in themselves), and insects, and mollusks.

Not to mention clouds. I have been a cloud-watcher for nearly as long as I have been a bird-watcher and a fascinating pastime it is (as Shakespeare recognized). Apart from the aesthetic pleasures to be derived from observing an ever-changing cloudscape, a knowledge of clouds and what they portend is practical and useful. When a layer of high cirrus begins to spread across the western sky, to be followed by gradually thickening and lowering layers of altocumulus and stratuscumulus, those classic indicators of an approaching warm front, I do not need a weatherman to advise me to carry a raincoat. When a towering cumulonimbus sprinkles its anvil of ice crystals across the horizon I am already prepared for the inevitable thunderstorm. Among some of my non-friends I enjoy a reputation for being a good weather forecaster. It is an art they could acquire for themselves in a month of cloud-watching.

I doubt whether I would have taken an interest in any of these facets of nature had it not been for my early interest in birds. It was, I am sure, one of the inseparable enthusiasms of childhood, and my interest could just have easily been piqued by any of a dozen other pursuits. But birds it happened to be, and they were to provide me with a passport to a lifetime of fascination with nature in general.

When my interest was first aroused, bird-watchers were regarded as a mildly eccentric but harmless minority and viewed by the rest of the world with a mixture of perplexity and amused tolerance. Bird-watching was essentially an upper- or upper-middle class activity, typically practiced by the landed gentry, the clergy, schoolmasters, politicians and statesmen. True to the tradition, the Right Honorable Malcolm MacDonald, Britain's wartime high commissioner in Canada, found the time from his pressing official duties to write a delightful
book on the birds he observed at Earnscleugh, his Ottawa residence. How different the scene is today, from being the preserve of a small and privileged minority, bird-watching has grown in recent decades to become the all-consuming hobby of ordinary men and women — and boys and girls for that matter — from all walks of life, in pursuit of a relaxing antidote to the pressures of the modern-day world. It has been described by a recent study as the fastest-growing pastime in Canada and the United States, attracting millions of newcomers to its ranks every year.

If you wish to observe the species in one of its favorite habitats you could not do better than to visit Point Pelee, at the southern tip of Ontario, at the height of the spring migration. One of the most famous birding spots on the North American continent, Pelee is a bird-watcher's Mecca. Every spring it serves as a staging point for hundreds of thousands of birds en route from their wintering grounds in the southern United States, the Caribbean and South America to their summer nesting sites in Canada. With some effort and a little luck, it is possible to see upwards of a hundred different species in a single day.

It is an exhilarating experience but it can be an exhausting one. Increasingly, Point Pelee draws bird-watchers from liveworlds of kilometres around, in quantities that sometimes threaten to outnumber the birds. It is not the place to spend a tranquil afternoon savouring the quieter pleasures of this gentle pastime. My preference is for less trying trips. I enjoy spotting gulls, black-backed gulls, dowitchers, sandpipers, killdeer, a great blue heron, a selection of ducks. They were the beauty of the hummingbird, whose throat "when it is seen in a certain light emits a fire brighter than the ruby. But there is evidence to suggest, from the names they gave to birds, that Canada's native peoples were even more observant of birds. The Maliseet Indian of New Brunswick gave the name non-eatlisat — literally "rocks its rung" — to the black-throated blue warbler. We know it today as the spotted sandpiper and its rump-rocking, twittering action is an echo of this -a-skiat — an old word from Algonquin.

The storm petrel was men-be bi-mehtsil or "skims the water." There were many other words employed to describe these pioneer chroniclers of Canada's avifauna were prompted by the same motives that inspire the bird-watchers of today. Their interest was practical rather than recreational. Nico- has Denys may have been taken with the beauty of the hummingbird but his comments on a couple of other birds, the brant goose and the herons, were exquisitely, not only in their skill of execution but in the perfection of their details and the faithfulness of their poses. Every feather was in place, every nuance of the species had been captured, every eccentricity of habit carefully recorded. I doubt whether an artist — for such was he — had ever con- sulted a birder's guide in his life but it would be hard to imagine anything that he had not observed for himself. He was, indeed, a skilled observer.

Our friend was not quite as touched but slightly embarrassed by our admiration. He had recently loaned his collection, he said, for display at a provincial craft show and several people had wanted to buy his carvings. But he was reluctant to part with them. They were for his own pleasure, not someone else's.

An unlikely encounter? Perhaps. But I have come across bird-watchers in more improbable locations. On a oil-drilling rig in the Davis Strait, off the east coast of Baffin Island, I asked a meteorologist how he enjoyed his job. "It's lonely," he replied, "but the birds are terrific." He was studying the storm petrel. As we spoke a vast raft of them — more than 3000 by his count — floated on the sea.

There had been earlier watchers in those coastal waters. The French explorer Samuel de Champlain described a bird with an aquatic beak — probably the black skimmer — and was suffi- ciently taken up with it to request a "red-winged song- bird" to take a couple of them back with him to France to present to his king. Ni- colas Denys, who first set foot in New France in 1632 and who became the first governor of Acadia, was much taken by the grace of the iridescent blackbird clotted to their merits as table fare. "The brant, he wrote, should be "roasted or boiled but not salted." Today's bird-watchers, as bird-watchers have generally come to be known, give a va- riety of reasons for their interest in the subject. Some find it a friendly and congenial hobby that takes them out of doors in the company of like-minded friends. It is a pastime that adds a new and fascinating dimension to a walk in the park. They find it relaxing and invigorating. No one can watch birds or observe any aspect of nature, at no matter how cursory a level, without gaining some measure of better understanding of how this mysterious universe of ours operates, of sensing the irrepressible bonds that shackles us humans to our environment, of glimpsing an inner harmony and interdependence in every work of nature. That has been my reward and it is a difficult one to articulate.

From time to time I ask myself, from my perspective as an amateur naturalist, what I would want for my children's and yours. And the best answer is that I would wish for a better realization on the part of its most intelligent species, homo sapiens, of its rightful place in the universal order. Hubris is a dangerous trait and there is no evidence to suggest that man possesses the ability, let alone the divine right, to shape the world to his image. The irresistible logic of nature requires a perfect union, an intricate balance, among all living things. When man assumes that he can detach him- self with impunity from the other species and pursue actions without refer- ence to his fellow creatures, he threatens that union and, in doing so, jeopardizes his own survival. Every species that we allow to disappear, through benign ne- glect or thoughtless action, inevitably hastens our own extinction.

The more we learn of nature the more we appreciate that elementary truth. The more each of us knows of birds, of flowers, of trees, of any other organism, the better informed we become of our own species and of what we must do to ensure our survival. To acquire deeper understanding of seeing things is to acquire the scent of knowing ourselves.
In Closing

A cartoon I remember from childhood came back to me the other evening: a man, standing at the rail of a luxury liner, is saying to a couple of fellow passengers, "I'm taking this cruise just to get away from myself." It's a thought that has tempted me from time to time—a cruise being more scenic and less costly than six years of transactional analysis—but I'm a bit skeptical. It would take more than a cruise to get away from myself and it may be impossible. I'd better make the best of things—I and me are companions for life.

Since that is the case, and since my work is by nature somewhat solitary, I've spent years coming to appreciate the possibilities of solitude, so that now no matter where I am—strange lodgings, long flights or silent nights—I may be alone and not alone, my world of memory filled with aging recollections that I revisit with all the pleasure of arriving in a strange city just as lamps take light on evening streets. I am forever returning to old rooms above tiled roofs or sidewalks with cafés around a corner or pensions where the rattle of the key in the door seems the only sound of the day.

Sometimes I wonder if, in some form of self, I do not fully understand that I actually belong more to the places of my inner wandering than the places of my external existence. I read once of a man who, many years ago, lived in the countryside outside London, but who longed to be within the city's limits, close to its noise and rhythm and the landscape of its character. "Hampstead," wrote one of his friends, "might be called a convenient lodging place. But he belongs to London and his true home is there." Perhaps we belong to both, the places of our shade and the places of our experience, which in the journeys of memory are filled with rich realization.

For some years now I have been back and forth to Italy, and each time I have gone there I have begun my travels and concluded them in the same town, which is quiet and remote from tourists in the hills outside Rome and beyond Frascati. I spend a few days there, at the beginning and end of my journey, so that I have come to know the town well—a few of its people, many of its streets, the square and the twilight lamps and the vineyards and olive groves that descend into the broad valley. I stay at a hotel called the Giannozza, a small lodging where, at times, I seem the only guest, aside from the handful of commercial travelers who, like their counterparts everywhere, arrive in dusty cars packed with suitcases of samples—candy, soaps, nicknacks. They eat silently and alone and then, wearing their slippers, sit watching the soccer games in the room off the lobby, where the only television the Giannozza has sits dark all day, as if awaiting its evening viewers.

Here at home, whether facing the approach of long winter nights or the approach of a dentist's drill, it is easy to return to that town and walk up the cobbled hill to the piazza and listen to the murmurs of voices that descends with an Italian evening: in fact it is so easy that I sometimes wonder if I am here or if I have receded permanently into the realms of memory. Sometimes, when I am alone in my study or sitting in a waiting room, the sound of an accent can be the conductor's signal that the train of the imagination is leaving and I am on board. I find myself entering the old town again and others as well, confirming both them and myself, smelling again the wheat on the afternoon breeze and hearing the children singing in the Iris forest.

One evening last week, a sun-red window suddenly took me to another window out of which I look, often in late afternoons that dates back to the early 1800s and stands in the heart of Rome, overlooking the Piazza de Spagna. It is a room that has a symbolic meaning to all of us who believe that before we shall see a renewal of the spirit of man, we must see a renewal of poetry in man's heart. For this is the room in which John Keats lived the last months of his life in 1821 and from which his body was taken to the historic Protestant Cemetery in Rome. After I visit the room, I catch the 95 bus and a half-hour ride later pull the chord at the cemetery gate to ring a bell. The attendant quietly lets me in, and I stand for a few moments at the simple place where Keats was buried in that old and beautiful cemetery where the pines and the cypress trees shelter his grave and hundreds of others in green and gentle benediction.

It seems to me now that my memory, vivid though not ecyclopedic, is becoming for me a promise that in my middle age, and I hope my old age, solitude need not be loneliness, a condition supposedly so pervasive that, according to the experts, a quarter of the population is so devastated by it they try to cure it with remedies that go all the way from videocasting clubs to mood-altering drugs.

I am not, of course, an authority on any of this and speak only from a background of life's wanderings, not from the learned position of an expert. All I know is that any day now I will take up the journey once more, arriving again in old places and among old friends, sure of them and of my place among them and of the sudden gifts of imagination.