I

SEVENTY and more years ago a boy was born in France who was destined to play a large part in the life of English Cambridge, and who died on Friday.* He was not a man of science, and only in a limited sense a man of letters; he wrote nothing; he held no chair in the University and he had no degree; but few men in the last generation have influenced Cambridge men more deeply, stirred more men to the pursuit of knowledge, or given so much honest pleasure to hundreds of those who think and teach. He kept a bookstall on the Market Place.

In the nineties he appeared in Cambridge; it was a stroke of genius to set up that bookstall in the market place, and he soon saw that he was right. There he was daily to be seen—but not on Thursdays. Thursday is the early closing day in Cambridge, so on Thursday as a rule, and at times on other days, David went to the book auctions in London. Anyone who has mingled at all with the Antiquarian Booksellers' Society knows what a figure the old man was among them—at book sales and at their

* November 20th, 1936.

annual dinners; they all knew him, and the feeling was kindly. David's forte was not tidiness in shop or garb; he had not the trim personality of Cambridge's other great bookseller, Nicholson, the "Maps" of the famous engraving. David in a dinner-jacket at the annual dinner was a sight to remember; affection was startled into amused surprise; but it was good to see him.

For many years he was on the brink of ruin—at least he said so—always nervous about the new generation of students, the death or removal of steady old customers, the prevalence of the passion for cars over the love of books, the problem of getting his money from his happy-go-lucky young collectors. But he kept afloat and educated his son (the well-known Hubert); and the bookstall at times maintained two assistants along with them. So somebody must have paid bills now and then.

What legends there are of those assistants and their relations with the old man! His nervous temperament made him blaze with wrath at times, and then—— Then, on one occasion, after "getting the sack" on the spot, and being consigned to the most awful

dooms, when the old man's breath failed, came the quiet response: "Have you got a cigarette?" and the guilty wretch was forgiven and kept in service till conscription swept him off to serve his country. Another is reported to have said that he "got the sack" every week for fifteen years, and then began to fear the "guv'nor" was in bad health, when the sixteenth year wore through without the weekly "sack". He tells of his first "sack" when he was a lad, and how he sadly went across the market, pursued by the "guv'nor", with a shilling and instant restoration.

In early days men sought folios, he used to say, and *incunabula*; in late years he added "remainders" to his trade. Probably no bookseller has ever sold so many first editions of Dickens—certainly not in Cambridge; but if you preferred Thackeray, or Borrow, or Trollope, all you had to do was to pay a daily visit, and sooner or later everything collectable came to the stall, and generally at prices that even college people could afford. For he shared his luck with his customers; if he bought cheap they had the advantage of it. He borrowed a system

of marking his prices from an old master of his abroad. Some phrase in a foreign tongue gave him letters with numerical meaning, and his books were marked *g/l* and *m/-* and *r/-* and so forth. These letters in a bold, sloping hand must be in thousands of volumes all over England, and every price-mark by now a memento of happy hours at the stall.

Saturday morning was the time—unless you were of the small group of enthusiasts who so sadly hindered him in "marking off" the newly unpacked books on Friday. There was always the chance of a "find". One man boasts an old 1532 Simon Grynaeus bought of David, in which after purchase he found the autograph of Sir Thomas More *ex dono authoris*; another a volume with several lines in the autograph of Martin Luther. One never knew what there might be; there was hardly a field of literature from which something significant might not turn up. As William Bateson, the Mendelist, said, to haunt that stall was a liberal education. So it was; and one wonders how many addicts of bibliography, how many collectors, began there. You bought

your first "first edition"; a better copy might appear, and you could exchange with a little profit to David. By and by he came to know your wants—"There's a good *Romany Rye* coming on Saturday"—or *Peter Bell*. *Don Quixote* in every garb—Shelton, Jarvis, the moderns, and the shameful Phillips—you found them all there sooner or later, with the Spanish and the French; possibly not the Gujerati, but it too may have been there unrecognized. Brown's *Telugu-English Lexicon* turned up on the shilling stall, and was snapped up by a purchaser who had a relative studying Telugu. And the works you got now and then for *6d.*—Archbishop Benson's *Cyprian*, Sir George Adam Smith's *Isaiah*. A rhymer in the *Cambridge Review* once wrote an address to prospective authors with the refrain "Surely thou shalt come to David!" and it was true. Others came to David. William Nicholson drew him at his stall. Charles Whibley, Lytton Strachey, and "Q.", with a great many more interested in literature, entertained the old man at a luncheon in Trinity; and mighty pleased he was with it, though when he came to reply

to the toast of his health words failed him and he sat down quickly and abashed, and rather the more endeared himself by this sincerity.

On Thursday the 19th of November, 1936 he went to London for some book sale. He returned by "the mail" and reached his house at 1.30 a.m. on Friday. About three or so he woke feeling ill, and after a little his wife went to fetch the doctor. When they reached the house David was dead. The end came with merciful quickness. He will be greatly missed. Thirty-eight years of the stall—and how many friends he made! Moody even to grumpiness at times, responsive to a joke, at bottom kindly, constantly helpful—and as for knowledge of books and editions! By a strange chance, on the day of his death the *Review* had a stanza about the booksellers—Deighton, Porter, and the rest—ending:

"And Mr Bowes and Bowes and Bowes,
He knows—*he* knows—HE knows—HE knows!
And what old David doesn't know
Is what the telephone calls O—
Or something even shorter."

T. R. GLOVER (in *The Times*)

II

AMONG vanished and fast vanishing features of the Cambridge Market Hill, none will be searched for by habitual eyes and missed with a keener sense of loss than he.

Gustave David was born in 1860 in Paris. Four years later the family—of French descent crossed with Hebrew—moved to Switzerland, where the child received his early education in three languages; thence in the "seventies", under what mysterious direction is not known, migrated to England, to start a book-trade in Gorleston. "At that time", says Boswell, writing in 1709, of Lichfield and of Dr Johnson's father, "booksellers' shops in the provincial towns of England were very rare 'and might only earn with assiduity' a reasonable share of wealth." One may guess that in one hundred and fifty years or more Gorleston had scarcely overtaken Michael Johnson's Lichfield as a literary mart. At any rate another move was made, this time to London; where Gustave, now a grown man, set up in a small business of

his own. Whether it wilted, or a narrow street in a Capital palled on him, or (let us believe) urged by the daemon of his genius, one day he put up his shutters, headed for Cambridge and erected a stall; and there for many generations (as generations are counted here) was a centre of his own amid ancient colleges, accepted as belonging to a "University" which, literally translated, means "all of Us".

There it just *was*. And there he stood on all working days save Thursday and Saturday; always smoking but at your service; inscrutable with a subdolent smile which lit up with something like affection on the approach of some tried favourite among his clients. (His greeting of the late Charles Whibley, for instance, had to be witnessed to correct anyone's estimate of his own worth in the scale of David's.) On Saturdays, when the merry costers invaded the market, like some grave Tyrian trader he withdrew to the neighbouring eminence of Peas Hill, and there, among the fried fish stalls, undid his corded bales. Also, if you had hesitated over a purchase or passed in too great a hurry to snap it up, the odds

were you would miss it for ever. It had been swept back overnight into his shop, in which to recover it was to search for a needle in a haystack. Legend even held that he disposed each day's surplus stock under the *hic jacets* of St Edward's Churchyard. On Thursdays he attended the book sales in London. His method of bidding and buying there must have obeyed some steady system into which it is no business of ours to inquire. But his system of pricing and selling, long tested, could be accepted as an honest conspiracy of help between dealer and purchaser. It was based (if I understand it) on the working out in the long run of a simple, modest and reasonable percentage. He must have been wise enough to know the money's worth of many a *trouvaille*, but sacrificed that knowledge to his noble reputation for probity.

A spice of vanity may have mixed itself into this, as into most men's high purposes: but it once led to the defeat of a lower one. A few years ago some friends and admirers planned a luncheon in his honour, and would have decorated the front of the menu card with a photogravure of David, singular and

familiar personification of something in the *genius loci*. Unhappily, getting wind of this, he faced the photographer in a "gent's boater", frock coat, light trousers and white spats. At the subsequent luncheon in the Hall of Trinity his emotion, expressed in manner rather than in words, went straight to the hearts of all the large company gathered.

An obituary notice in *The Cambridge Daily News* tells us that "his great ambition was to retire and collect old books". This to many will suggest a possible parallel with Omar Khayyam's wonder:

"What the Vintners buy
One half so precious as the stuff they sell."

May the stall he founded, and so curiously made his own and the University's, long stand on Market Hill!

"Q." (in *The Cambridge Review*)