

OVERLOOKED

W. W. Humphreys

John Ploss sat at his desk writing with a dry pen. For thirty years John Ploss had written at this desk and in his present surroundings; and although his mind was for once not busy with his work, the pen would not be denied its accustomed action, but persisted in its dry march across the invoice ledger, for a habit thirty years old clings to a man—becomes, in fact, part of him.

Yes, for thirty years I have sat at this desk, thought John Ploss. You might almost say a lifetime—a lifetime spent in the same way. The same rush to catch the 8.12 a.m.; the same crowded journey; the scurry to the firm; seven familiar stairs—the corridor—the office; same old clothes; same round and shiny; the morning's work; lunch in the same restaurant full of chewing, reading, or gossiping clerks, and stale, warm cooking odours; afternoon with its cup of tea and a bun or shortcake, and its scramble to catch the post; then the rush for the 5.16 p.m. and my landlady's dinner; then a pipe and a book, or a walk in the park; then bed. That's what life means to me. And I've had thirty years of it. Ten more to go before I get my pension. I'm going bald and began to stoop long ago, while in the world are so many things I might have enjoyed, but never had the chance. There's thousands like me. Something's wrong somewhere!

Filtering through the glass partition, before him came the voice of Mr. Luxham, senior partner of Luxham and Prout, pearl merchants and brokers, speaking into the telephone:

"Yes, positively one of the finest necklaces we have ever handled! Worth fifteen thousand pounds if a cent!" Mr. Luxham's voice was a warm gurgle, which with his devoted enthusiasm. "We get active in a week. Eh, what's that?" Oh, those cultured pearls—

Mr. Luxham's voice stamped an octave, touched a soprano. But John Ploss was not listening. He had opened his desk and with a flushed face was soundlessly repeating to paper clips, rubber bands, and ready reckoners:

"Fifteen thousand pounds! All that to hang round some strutting woman's throat! Heavens, what couldn't I do with fifteen thousand pounds? It would mean good-bye Luxham and Prout, good-bye work and the same old routine; and hello to the things I've never known, and the places I've never seen. Spain, Africa, Egypt, India—my gosh, I'd be clean round the world! It would bring back the dreams of my youth. But there—what's the good of thinking? I shall never have that amount—not unless—"

The thought so jabbed him that he dropped the desk lid with a bang, and when the other clerks glanced up he seized the pen, wet it, and filled in a demurrage account. But in his mind the thought tickled to completion.

"Unless I steal the necklace. And—why not? I could. But—"

The necklace was not due for another week but the Advance Invoice arrived the next morning. It gave particulars of each pearl and was surreptitiously copied by Ploss who, armed with these particulars, obtained a necklace of pearls that exactly corresponded with the original—except in worth. Ploss's pearls were artificial.

With the arrival of the necklace the usual procedure was followed. As the trusted and confidential clerk, Ploss received the necklace from Mr. Luxham to check with the Advance Invoice to see that it agreed with the given particulars. Ploss, having checked it, returned to Mr. Luxham the necklace of artificial pearls. The genuine necklace remained in his desk.

It was when he had handed the artificial pearls to Mr. Luxham and had heard his, "Thank you, Ploss. Good man," and had reseated himself at his desk, that panic gripped him. Suppose Mr. Luxham were himself to test the pearls and found them artificial, and suppose the real necklace were discovered in his desk, what a scene there would be! What a disgrace before his subordinate clerks, who respected him as an honest man, incorruptible. The police—a common thief! The thought made Ploss fell ill.

Never had the hands of the office clock moved so slowly, and when at last five o'clock came it found Ploss almost hysterical with the knowledge of the necklace hidden in his desk. He had upset his afternoon's cup of tea and had bullied the office boy for excessive noise with the copying press.

But when Ploss was in the homeward train with the necklace snug in his breast pocket, his fear gave place to a kind of cold exuberance. He told himself that probably not another person on the train carried so valuable an article, and he opened his evening paper with something of pride. In his lodging he ate a good dinner, locked the door, pulled his chair to the fire, lit his pipe, and drew out the necklace. How the pearls shimmered! Globes of imprisoned beauty slumbering silkily.

"Fifteen thousand pounds," he reflected. "Now let me see. Sink ten thousand in cast-iron investments. A sound country cottage with a piece of land—say another thousand. Leaves me four thousand to play about with. I'll go round the world, see all the things I've missed. I'll live! Mustn't do it at once, though. Might look fishy, and this has to be a perfect crime, for if it's traced to me I'm finished. So for another year I'll stay with the firm and behave as usual, to avert suspicion from myself, and I'll take my annual holiday in Holland and realize on the necklace. Then bank the proceeds until wanted."

More thoughts of the joys waiting in the future improved the flavour of his pipe, and he sank into dreams. Then came a knock at the door.

Fear-chilled, he swept the necklace into his pocket. It was only his landlady. Her dolorous voice rose outside the door.

"Sorry to disturb you, Mr. Ploss. But my sister-in-law, 'er wot married me brother Bert wot's a chauffeur, wants me to go and see her to-night, so if you want a bit of supper do you mind seeing after yourself for once?" "Not at all," replied Ploss. "It's only this once and because I sha'n't be back till late, for she lives an hour from the station, and—"

"Quite all right," broke in Ploss. "Quite, quite all right. Never mind how late you are."

He winked to himself at the double meaning of his last sentence. But that was how he felt to-night—elated, warlike, quite unlike the old, staid Ploss. He felt proud, uplifted; pleasantly surprised to find he had both the nerve and the wit to plan a perfect crime.

And it was so perfect a crime that even if Luxham and the police were to knock on the door this moment they would not find the pearls, because—how well he had protected himself—on the mantel was a bottle labelled "Cloth Reviver." But it wasn't cloth reviver. It was hydrochloric acid; and he had only to drop the pearls into that bottle to see them dissolve like salt in water. Then down the sink would go the lot.

Yes, he told himself, it was a perfect crime. Even the artificial pearls now reposing as the genuine ones in Mr. Luxham's safe had not all been bought in one district, but in five widely-separated neighbourhoods.

The street lamps flickered into life, the room grew darker. He did not bother to light the gas but sat before the fire smoking and dreaming of distant coasts, of the filmy light of an Eastern dawn with the pale green of harbour water reflecting hulls, spars and ropes, and of sun-burnished waves.

When he awoke the room was dark. He was stiff and cramped and the fire was out. He struck a match and saw that it was past eleven. "I meant to have a good long night's sleep," he reproached himself as he lit the gas. "Mustn't turn up early at the office to-morrow. Best thing I can do is to turn in at once."

He quickly undressed and got into his pyjamas, turned out the gas, and crossed to the window. As he pulled up the blind he saw a policeman patrolling on the opposite side of the road.

"If he only knew who was looking at him!" Ploss chuckled. "A man who's stolen a fifteen-thousand-pound necklace. How he'd run across the road, and the next moment the thunder of the knocker resounded through the house."

A swooning horror came upon Ploss. He was found out! Mr. Luxham, perhaps worried, had returned to the office, tested the pearls and found them artificial. He had notified the police and they had sent this constable to surprise him late at night and trap him with the pearls.

He trembled where he stood, and he laid a clammy hand for support on his dressing table. Heavens, how his heart was thumping! Again the knocker clamoured through the house. He bounded from the room with the treasure in his grasp, snatched up the bottle of hydrochloric acid, dropped in the pearls, and listened to their beauty dissolving away. Then in one stride he was at the sink, on went the tap, and the next moment fifteen thousand pounds went gurgling down the wastepipe.

The knocking had been twice repeated during these operations, each time with greater insistence. Well, all Scotland Yard could search now. They wouldn't find a thing. Boldly he patrolled down stairs, opened the door, and confronted the constable.

"Beg pardon for disturbing you, sir," said the constable, touching his hat. "But there's a light downstairs. Never seen it so late before, sir, so thought I'd knock just to see if everything's all right."

In Humorous Vein

Mr. Richards was persuaded to buy a parrot that could jabber in several languages. He ordered it sent home.

The same day his wife ordered a chicken for dinner. On learning she said to the cook, "Mary, there's a bird coming for dinner. Have it cooked for Mr. Richards when he gets home."

The parrot arrived first, and Mary followed instructions. Dinner was served.

"What's this?" exclaimed Mr. Richards.

Mary told him.

"But, for goodness' sake, Mary," he said, "this is awful! That bird could speak in three languages!"

"Then why the dickens didn't he say something?" asked Mary.

He had been dining too well, and, hailing a taxi, he crawled gingerly inside, after feigning giving the driver his destination. It happened that the opposite door had been left unfastened by the previous fare, and, stumbling against it, the inebriated one fell outside again.

He picked himself up with great difficulty, and accosted the highly amused driver. "That's pretty quick work," he said, "how much do I owe you?"

"What happens to people who are so foolish as to allow themselves to become run down?" asks a doctor. They wind up in hospital.

The wife had been up on the bud get plan. At the end of each month she and her husband would go over the accounts together. Every once in a while he would find an item, "H. O. K., \$1.50," and a little farther on, "H. O. K., \$3."

Finally he asked, "My dear, what is this—H. O. K.?"

"Heaven only knows," she replied.

Mike: "So you're a salesman, are you? What do you sell?"

Pre: "Salt."

Mike: "I'm a salt seller, too."

Pre: "Snake."

An English bishop received the following note from the vicar of a village in his diocese:

"My Lord: I regret to inform you of the death of my wife. Can you possibly send me a substitute for the week-end?"

Neighbor: "Why is your car painted blue on one side and red on the other?"

Speedy: "Oh, it's a fine idea. You should just hear the witnesses contradicting one another!"

Interference With Radio Reception Now Overcome

Interference with radio reception has long been complained of. In some cases the trouble has been traced to electrical devices of one kind or another, either on the same or on neighboring premises. Of late, the dial telephone has come into a measure of disfavor, for while a number is being dialled a static-like disturbance is caused on the electric dial receiving set. In fact, a similar effect is produced when the dial of the telephone in a neighbor's house is being used.

This matter was brought to the attention of the Bell Telephone Company, with the result that dial telephone users may have a device installed which eliminates the trouble.

This is, however, but one cause of interference with broadcast reception. The British Postmaster-General, Sir Kingsley Wood, speaking recently at the Olympia Radio Exhibition, pointed out that the high amplification of modern wireless receivers and the more extensive use of electricity for domestic and industrial purposes have created problems which the British Post Office is endeavoring to solve, over 10,000 complaints being dealt with yearly. Enumerating some causes of interference with reception, he mentioned flashing advertisements, signs, neon signs, refrigerators, mercury arc rectifiers, street traffic signals, electric fans, vacuum cleaners and battery charging rectifiers. A remedial apparatus, he announced, had now been devised and good results obtained.—Toronto Mail & Empire.

The Gish Sisters



When some of us were mere kids, Dorothy and Lillian Gish handed out plenty of thrills in "Birth of a Nation," and other headliners. This snap of them was made just recently outside their Paris hotel.

Companionship With the Stars

It was a splendid autumnal evening. The horizon, after sunset, was of a clear apple green, rising into a delicate lake which gradually lost itself in a deep purple blue. One narrow streak of cloud, of a mahogany color, edged with amber and gold, floated in the west, and just beneath it was the evening star, shining with the pure brilliancy of a diamond. In union with this scene, there was an emerald concert of insects of various kinds, all blended and harmonized into one sweet and somewhat melancholy note, which I have always found to have a soothing effect upon the mind, disposing it to quiet musings.

The night that succeeded was calm and beautiful. There was a faint light from the moon, now in its second quarter, and after it had set, a fine starlight, with shooting meteors. The wearied rangers, after a little murmuring conversation round their fires, sank to rest at an early hour, and I seemed to have the whole scene to myself. It is delightful in thus "bivouacking on the prairies, to lie awake and gaze at the stars; it is like watching them from the deck of a ship at sea, when at one view we have the whole scope of heaven. One realizes, in such lonely scenes, that companionship which made astronomers of the eastern shepherds, as they watched their stocks by night. How often, while contemplating their mild and benignant radiance, I have called to mind the exquisite text of Job: "Canst thou bind the sweet Influences of Pleiades, or loose the bands of Orion?"

I do not know why it was, but I felt this night unusually affected by the solemn magnificence of the firmament; and seemed, as I lay thus under the open vault of heaven, to inhale with the pure untainted air, an exhilarating buoyancy of spirit, and, as it were, an ecstasy of mind. I slept and waked alternately; and when I slept, my dreams partook of the happy tone of my waking reveries.—From "The Crayon Miscellany," by Washington Irving.

London Animal Society Gets Anonymous Gift

London.—Entering an office in Jermyn Street, an elderly man handed to an astonished official two suitcases bulging with £10,000 worth of £1 notes, and remarked: "Here's a little gift for your society." He then departed, saying he did not wish to divulge his name.

As a result, the fortunate occupants of the office—the Royal Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals—have been aided financially at a time of stress.

Newspaper "Mats" Protect Trees

Discarded newspaper "mats" from which printing plates are cast are being used by fibret growers of Oregon to provide protection to the trees from jack rabbit raids.

The Bakhtiari Mountains

I observe in some diaries, looking back over these pages, that I have given an entirely wrong impression of the Bakhtiari mountains. I have, unintentionally, represented them as over-built and populous; I have mentioned villages; I have mentioned a merchant on his horse, a man ploughing, the son of Il-Khansai, the keepers of a chafkhaner. All this, in the aggregate, must I fear have given the impression of a well-tour through some part of Europe, with never more than a few niggardly miles intervening between one reminder of civilization and the next. . . I have probably evoked a picture of something much larger, more orderly, and more definite than is justified by the few poor hovels of Naxhan or Do-Pulan. For the rest, our path lay along miles of country where not so much as a mill but was visible. The merchant, the man ploughing, were figures so isolated and so exceptional that I have recorded them as if they were greedily for the sake of having something human to record. They were—let me emphasize it—isolated instances; and as such they made an impression on us which in the swarming countries to which we Europeans are accustomed would not have been made.

No, the dominant impression was one of isolation. True, we were on the road; we met an occasional traveller; we met the migrating tribes; but we knew that to the left or to the right lay utter solitude; the solitude of nature which draws us and holds us with a primitive, indefensible attraction, all of us, however sophisticated we may be. And it was a double impression. Isolation and anachronism. Not only had we gone far away in distance, we had also gone far back in time. We had returned, in fact, to antiquity. We were traveling as our ancestors had travelled; not those immediate ancestors who rolled in their coaches between London and Bath, or between Genoa and Rome; but as Marco Polo had travelled, or Ovid going into exile, or the Ten Thousand hoping for the sea. We learnt what the past had been like and what the world had been like when it was still empty. Time was held up and values altered; a luxury which may be indicated today by anyone who travels into the requisit parts of Asia.

More, we knew that had we not elected to travel the Bakhtiari Road at that particular time of the year we should not have met even the tribes, but should have had the mountains all to ourselves, eccentric invaders of majestic desolation. No merchant would have overtaken us beneath the oaks, no peasant ground behind the plough. We should have topped the pass above Deh Diz and seen not only the lonely range of the Kuli-Mauzashit, but known that in the whole of the valley no human being drew breath. Those whom we did meet were as transient as ourselves; the only permanence was in the hills and in the rivers that coiled about their base.—V. Sackville-West, in "Twelve Days."

Contemplation

The woman singeth at her spinning-wheel
A pleasant chant, ballad or barcarole;
She thinketh of her songs, upon the whole,
Far more than of her flax; and yet the reel
Is full, and artfully her fingers feel
With quick adjustment, provident control,
The lines—too subtly twisted to untroll—
Out to a perfect thread. I hence appeal
To the dear Christian Church—that we may do
Our Father's business in these temples mirk
Thus swift and steadfast thus intent
And strong;
While thus, apart from toil, our souls pursue
Some high calm spheric tune, and prove our work
The better for the sweetness of our songs.
—Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Sonnets.

A Fine Railway Record

Canadian railways have set a record this year of which they have every reason to be proud. Only three passengers out of the 25,559,556 carried by them in 1931 lost their lives in railway accidents, which must come very close to a record. The number injured, 359, is not claimed as a record, but is notably lower than in any year since 1925, and deaths and injuries among railway employes in non-train accidents, that is to say in maintenance of right-of-way, etc., also sets a new low record.

When we consider the peculiar difficulties of railway operation in Canada, the remarkably low rate of accidents to passengers is one that the railways have every reason to be proud of. Winter operation, the maintenance of long mileages subject to natural hazards in mountain, rock and muskeg sections, and the constant demand for higher speeds and heavier equipment, with its enormous strains upon tracks and bridges, are all factors which, without greater vigilance, make for greater insecurity. But the railways are providing adequate safeguards and a railway train is nowadays about the safest place in which one can spend one's time.

Happily, the practical immunity from accident that is now being afforded the passenger is extending more and more to the railway employes. The years-long campaigns for "Safety First" in the shops, at stations and along the right-of-way which the railway companies have carried on among their own men are bearing fruit and the terrible casualty lists that in past years seemed inseparable from certain classes of railway employment are yearly growing smaller.

It is a pity that the high standards set by the railways cannot in some way be made applicable in other forms of transportation. While death-lists from rail accidents drop, they so speedily upward from highway and street accidents.—The Montreal Daily Star.

Records 125 Years Old Taken To New French Repository

At the Hotel de Rohan, where the national archives are kept, writes the Paris correspondent of "The Christian Science Monitor," the records of twenty-eight Parisian notaries have been lodged in a new repository. This is the result of the law passed by Parliament in 1928, which "authorized and implored" notaries to store those of their titles which were more than 125 years old in departmental or national archives.

Until now a historian wishing to find out some details in the history of Paris, or in that of any other French town, has often been obliged to hunt through the records and files of the notaries of that town, a procedure which was inconvenient and entailed considerable loss of time. The records of the twenty-eight notaries which have been stored at the Hotel de Rohan fill no fewer than 28,000 voluminous files.

Exactness in little duties is a wonderful source of cheerfulness.—Faber.

Old Waverley Quilts and Cupboards

May a quilt be properly listed under the head of furniture? It takes up room; it fills a space; it is made by human hands, a personal, lasting product. Seven counties—to use a time-graded expression—were secured to produce material for a Waverley quilt. It became a sort of Iraq to possess a liberal number of them. Neither Solomon in his glory nor the Contrary Mary or Mother Goose, with her cowslips all in a row, could ever have surpassed the average York Road quilt in the variety and the brightness of its colors. It was ubiquitous, for it appeared that one was always just completed, and another just begun.

A quilt was a village chronicle. It was heavy with gossip. Griefs and laughter, sweet over it. A hundred memories, small and great, came up at the sight of it. Down in one corner was a bit of chintz, full of fringed flowers, out of a frock once worn to church; in another a scrap of dark calico which was perhaps associated with a lover, and a road, a road with the glow of falling leaves above and around it. When the patches were all sewed, and the cotton batting provided, the quilt was ready for the frame; this, as often as not an heirloom, and missing in many a family, was generally borrowed. . . There was something very domestic and also very universal in the making of a quilt; it brought about a good deal of social intercourse to an extent unknown amongst our modern bridge players. It was handiwork, both a pastime and a necessity. . .

And cupboards? Eloquent cupboards were there in Old Waverley, dim places, built into corners, sometimes with curtained glass doors, sometimes with painted wooden ones. From Pandora down to Ann Elizabeth the kitchenmaid, a closed box or a cupboard has always been and forever will be the most delightful and the most tantalizing object. . . What pomp and circumstance may it not disclose, what mouse strains upon tracks and bridges, what traffic in wares, fit only for visions and dreams! A decaying, tree-encircled house on the York Road held such a one. When opened, there, back on the shelves, lifted a row of the finest and most exquisite china, as thin as eggshells, of a dull white. . .

A hidden, lingering odor, perhaps of lost spices, or other pungencies, hung around this cupboard. You turned the knobs and closed the green-gray door and felt that you had shut away some mist of a thing, some phantom secrecy which had been yours for an instant, and then was yours no more.—Lizette Woodworth Reese, in "The York Road."

Prepared Medicines Sell Well in British India

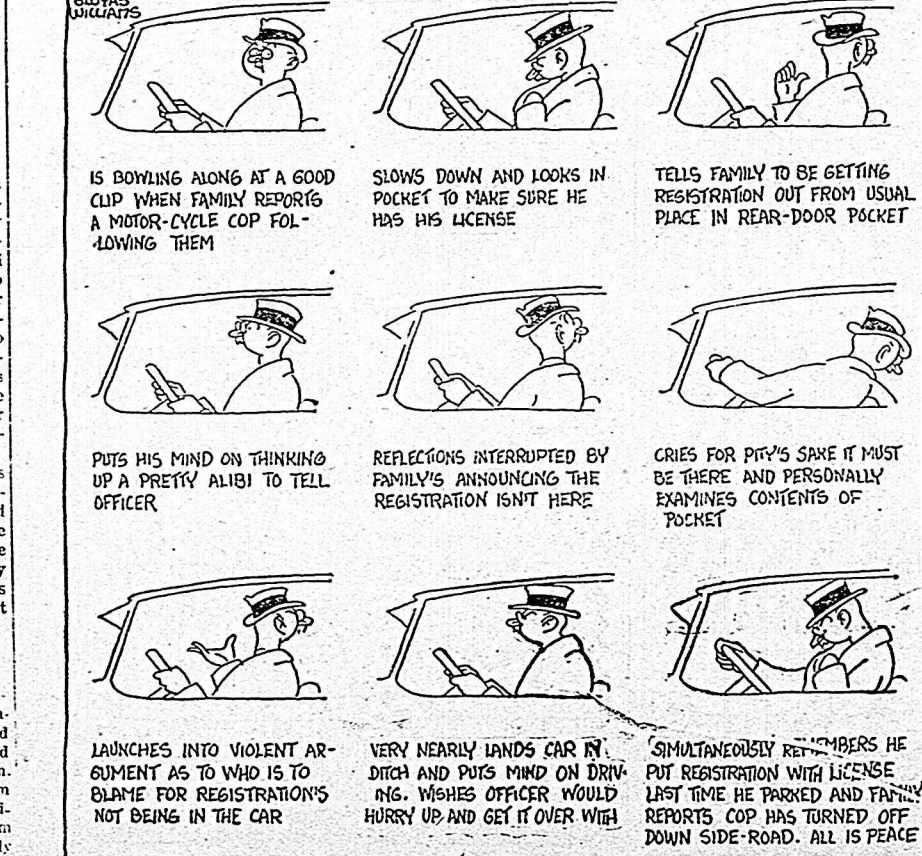
Prepared medicines are the best sellers in British India, constituting over one-third of the \$2,700,000 worth of chemicals sent from the United States to that market in 1931—a figure more than double the total for 1922 and twenty-five times that of 1899. With its large cotton-textile industries, India is a good buyer of dyes and other coal-tar dyes and is the third largest consumer in the Far East.

Both prepared medicines and dyes more than doubled their sales in British India from 1922 to 1927, and declined only a little in 1931 from the 1927 figures. Industrial chemicals to the extent of \$367,669 worth; toilet preparations, \$850,000, and paints and varnishes, \$175,000, are the other principal chemical items sold in India.—United States Commerce Reports.

Tariff Aids Razor Trade According to Sheffield Firm

Sheffield.—An order for 10,000 safety razor blades, which is believed to constitute a record in the industry in Great Britain, has been received by a Sheffield firm. The blades are being made for a London firm which previously bought them from Continental producers. The head of the firm said that by bringing down his costs to the Continental level and with the help of tariffs he was now able to compete in the world's markets. The firm now has two factories here working at full strength.

SNAPSHOTS OF A MAN EXPECTING A TICKET



IS BOWLING ALONG AT A GOOD CLIP WHEN FAMILY REPORTS A MOTOR-CYCLE COP FOLLOWING THEM

SLOWS DOWN AND LOOKS IN POCKET TO MAKE SURE HE HAS HIS LICENSE

TELLS FAMILY TO BE GETTING REGISTRATION OUT FROM USUAL PLACE IN REAR-DOOR POCKET

PUTS HIS MIND ON THINKING UP A PRETTY ALIBI TO TELL OFFICER

REFLECTIONS INTERRUPTED BY FAMILY'S ANNOUNCING THE REGISTRATION ISN'T HERE

CRIES FOR PITY'S SAKE IT MUST BE THERE AND PERSONALLY EXAMINES CONTENTS OF POCKET

LAUNCHES INTO VIOLENT ARGUMENT AS TO WHO IS TO BLAME FOR REGISTRATIONS NOT BEING IN THE CAR

VERY NEARLY LANDS CAR IN DITCH AND PUTS MIND ON DRIVING. WISHES OFFICER WOULD HURRY UP AND GET IT OVER WITH

SIMULTANEOUSLY REMEMBERS HE PUT REGISTRATION WITH LICENSE LAST TIME HE PARKED AND FAMILY REPORTS COP HAS TURNED OFF DOWN SIDE-ROAD. ALL IS PEACE