

# 3

## ESSAYS OF A.G. GARDINER

### STRUCTURE

- Learning Objectives
- Introduction
- On Saying Please
- On Courage
- All About a .Dog
- On Catching the Train
- On the Rule of the Road
- Summary
- Key Words
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### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you will be bale to understand :

1. The essays of A.G. Gardiner, such as:
  - On saying please
  - On courage
  - All about a dog
  - On catching the train

### INTRODUCTION

Alfred George Gardiner (1865—1946) was a British journalist and author. His essays, written under the pen-name Alpha of the Harrow, are highly regarded. Gardiner was born in Chelmsford, the son of a cabinet-maker and alcoholic. As a boy he worked at the Chelmsford Annals and the Bourn mouth Directory. He joined the Northern Daily Telegraph in 1887. In 1899, he was appointed editor of the Blackburn Weekly Telegraph.

In 1902 Ritzema was named general manager of the Daily News. Needing an editor, he turned to his young apprentice to fill the role. The choice soon proved a great success; under Gardiner's direction, it became one of the leading liberal

journals its day, as he improved its coverage of both the news and literary matters while evangelism against social injustices. Yet while circulation rose from 80,000 when he joined the paper to 151,000 in 1907 and 400,000 with the introduction of a Manchester edition in 1909, the paper continued to run at a loss. Though close to the owner of the Daily News, George Cadbury, Gardiner resigned in 1919 over a disagreement with him over Gardiner's opposition to David Lloyd George.

From 1915 he contributed to the Star under the incognito Alpha of the Harrow. His essays are uniformly elegant, graceful and chuckle some. His uniqueness lay in his ability to teach the basic truths of life in an easy and jocular manner. The Pillars of Society, Pebbles on the Shore, Many Furrows and Leaves in the Wind are some of his best known writings.

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## ON SAYING PLEASE

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The young lift-man in a City office that threw a passenger out of his lift the other morning and was fined for the felony was undoubtedly in the wrong. It was a question of 'Please'. The complainant entering the lift, said, 'Top'. The lift-man demanded 'Top-please' and this franchise being refused he not only declined to comply with the instruction, but flung the passenger out of the lift. This, of course was carrying a comment on manner too far. Discourtesy is not a legal felony, and it does not excuse smack and battery. If a burglar breaks into my house and I knock him down, the law will acquit me, and if I am physically smacked, it will permit me to reciprocate with reasonable violence. It does this because the burglar and my assailant have broken quite definite commands of the law, but no legal system could attempt to legislate against bad manners, or could determent the use of violence against something which it does not itself recognize as a legally punishable felony. And whatever our sympathy with the lift-man, we must admit that the law is reasonable. It would never do if we were at liberty to box people's ears because we did not like their behaviour, or the tone of their voices, or the scowl on their faces. Our fists would never be idle, and the gutters of the City would run with blood all day. I may be as uncivil as I may please and the law will protect me against violent retaliation. I may be haughty or boorish and there is no penalty to pay except the penalty of being written down an ill-mannered fellow. The law does not compel me to say 'please' or to attune my voice to other people's sensibilities any more than it says that I shall not wax my moustache or dye my hair or wear ringlets down my back. It does not recognize the laceration of our feelings as a case for compensation. There is no allowance for moral and intellectual damages in these matters.

This does not mean that the damages are trivial. It is probable that the lift-man was much more acutely hurt by what he regarded as a slur upon his social standing than he would have been if he had a kick on the shins, for which he could have got a legal redress. The pain of a kick on the

owes much to the Underground Railway Company, which also runs the buses, for insisting on a certain standard of civility in its servants and taking care that standard is observed. In doing this it not only makes things pleasant for the travelling public, but performs an important social service.

It is not, therefore, with any feeling of unfriendliness to conductors as a class that I pay a acclaim to a particular member of that class. I first became conscious of his existence one day when I jumped on to a bus and found that I had left home without any money in my pocket. Everyone has had the experience and knows the feeling, the mixed feeling, which the discovery arouses. You are annoyed because you look like a fool at the best and like a wretch at the worst. You would not be at all surprised if the conductor eyed you coldly as much as to say, 'Yes I know that stale old trick. Now then, off you get.' And even if the conductor is a good fellow and lets you down easily, you are faced with the necessity of going back and the inconvenience, perhaps, of missing your train or your engagement.

Having searched my pockets in vain for vagrant coppers, and having found I was utterly penniless, I told the conductor with as honest a face as I could assume that I couldn't pay the fare, and must go back for money. 'Oh, you needn't get off: that's all right', said he. 'All right', said I, 'but I haven't a copper on me.' 'Oh I'll book you through, he replied. 'Where d'ye want to go ?' and he handled his bundle of tickets with the air of a man who was prepared to give me a ticket for anywhere from the Bank to Hong Kong. I said it was very kind of him, and told him where I wanted to go, and as he gave me the ticket I said, 'But where shall I send the fare?' 'Oh, you'll see me some day all right', he said cheerfully, as he turned to go. And then, luckily, my fingers, still wandering in the corners of my pockets lighted on a shilling and the account was squared. But that fact did not lessen the glow of pleasure which so good-natured an action had given me.

A few days after, my most sensitive toe was trampled on rather heavily as I sat reading on the top of a bus. I looked up with some anger and more agony, and saw my friend of the cheerful countenance. 'Sorry, sir', he said. 'I know these are heavy boots. Got'em because my own feet get trod on so much, and now I'm treading on other people's. Hope I didn't hurt you, sir,' He had hurt me but he was so nice about it that I assured him he hadn't. After this I began to observe him whenever I boarded his bus, and found a curious pleasure in the constant good nature of his bearing. He seemed to have an inexhaustible fund of patience and a gift for making his passengers comfortable. I noticed that if it was raining he would run up the stairs to give some one the tip that there was 'room inside'. With old people he was as considerate as a son, and with children as solicitous as a father. He had evidently a peculiarly warm place in his heart for young people, and always indulged in some merry jest with them. If he had a blind man on board it wasn't enough to set him down safely on the pavement. He would call to Bill in front to wait while he took him across the road or round the corner or otherwise safely on his way. In short, I

found that he irradiated such an atmosphere of good temper and kindliness that a journey with him was a lesson in natural courtesy and good manners.

What struck me particularly was the ease with which he got through his work. If bad manners are infectious, so also are good manners. If we encounter incivility most of us are apt to become uncivil, but it is an unusually uncouth person who can be disagreeable with sunny people. It is with manners as with the weather. 'Nothing clears up my spirits like a fine day', said Keats, and a cheerful person descends on even the gloomiest of us with something of the benediction of a fine day.

And so it was always fine weather on the polite conductor's bus, and his own civility, his conciliatory address and good humoured bearing infected his passengers. In lightening their spirits he lightened his own task. His gaiety was not a wasteful luxury, but a sound investment. I have missed him from my bus route of late; but I hope that only means that he has carried his sunshine on to another road. It cannot be too widely diffused in a rather drab world. And I make no apologies for writing a panegyric on an unknown bus conductor. If Wordsworth could gather lessons of wisdom from the poor leech gatherer 'on the lonely moor,' I see no reason why lesser people should not take lessons in conduct from one who shows how a very modest calling may be dignified by good temper and kindly feeling.

It is a matter of general agreement that the war has had a petrifying effect upon those little every day civilities of behaviour that sweeten the general air. We must get those civilities back if we are to make life kindly and endurable for each other. We cannot get them back by entreating the law. The policeman is a necessary symbol and the law is a necessary institution for a society that is still somewhat lower than the angels. But the law can only protect us against material attack. Nor will the lift man's way of meeting moral aspersion by physical violence help us to restore the civilities. I suggest to him, that he would have had a more subtle and effective revenge if he had treated the gentleman who would not say 'Please' with elaborate politeness. He would have had the victory, not only over the ruffian, but over himself, and that is the victory that counts. The polite man may lose the material advantage, but he always has the psychical victory. I commend to the lift man a story of Chesterfield. In his time the London streets were without the asphalt of today and the man who 'took the wall' had the driest footing. 'I never give the wall to a reprobate,' said a man who met Chesterfield one day in the street. 'I always do', said Chesterfield, stepping with a bow into the road. I hope the lift man will agree that his revenge was much more sweet than if he had hurl the fellow into the mud.

## **On Saying Please - Summary**

He had won by ballot a place in one of the boats. The ship was going down, but he was to be saved. One pictures the scene: The boat is waiting to take him to the shore and safety. He looks at the old comrades who have lost in the ballot and who stand there doomed to death. He feels the passion for life surging within him. He sees the cold, dark sea waiting to swamp its victims. And in that great moment—the greatest moment that can come to any man—he makes the conquest choice. He turns to one of his comrades. "You've got parents," he says. "I haven't." And with that word—so heroic in its simplicity—he makes the other take his place in the boat and signs his own death warrant.

I see him on the deck among his doomed fellows, watching the disappearing boat until the final shove comes and all is over. The sea never took a braver man to its bosom. "Greater love prompted no man than this..."

Can you read that story without some ruckus within you—without feeling that humanity itself is ennobled by this great act and that you are, in some mysterious way, better for the deed? That is the splendid fruit of all such sublime sacrifice. It enriches the whole human family. It makes us lift our heads with pride that we are men—that there is in us at our best this noble gift of valorous unselfishness, this glorious extravagance that spends life itself for something greater than life. If we had met this nameless sailor we should have found him perhaps a very ordinary man, with plenty of failings, doubtless, like the rest of us, and without any idea that he had in him the priceless jewel beside which crowns and tiaras are empty gimmick. He was something greater than he knew.

How many of us could pass such a test? What should I do? What would you do? We neither of us know, for we are as great a mystery to ourselves as we are to our neighbours. Bob Acres said he found that "a man may have a deal of fearless mass in him without knowing it," and it is equally true that a man may be more chicken-hearted than he himself suspects. Only the occasion discovers of what stuff we are made—whether we are heroes or cowards, saints or sinners. A blustering manner will not reveal the one any more than a long face will reveal the other.

The merit of this sailor's heroism was that it was done with calculation—in cold blood, as it were, with that "two-o'clock-in-the-morning courage" of which Napoleon spoke as the real thing. Many of us could do brave things in hot blood, with a sudden rush of the spirit, who would fail if we had time, as this man had, to pause and think, to reckon, to doubt, to grow cold and selfish. The merit of his deed is that it was an act of physical courage based on the higher quality of moral courage.

Nor because a man fails in the great moment is he necessarily all a coward. Mark Twain was once talking to a friend of mine on the subject of courage in men, and spoke of a man whose name is associated with a book that has become a classic. "I knew him well," he said, "and I knew him as a brave man. Yet he once

did the most cowardly thing I have ever heard of any man. He was in a shipwreck, and as the ship was going down he seized a lifebelt from a woman passenger and put it on himself. He was saved, and she was drowned. And in spite of that frightful act I think he was not a coward. I know there was not a day of his life afterwards when he would not willingly and in cold blood have given his life to recall that shameful act."

In this case the failure was not in moral courage, but in physical courage. He was demoralized by the menace, and the physical coward came uppermost. If he had had time to recover his moral balance he would have died an honourable death. It is no uncommon thing for a man to have in him the elements both of the hero and the coward. You remember that delightful remark of Mrs. Disraeli, one of the most characteristic of the many peculiar sayings attributed to that strange woman. "Dizzy," she said, "has wonderful moral courage, but no physical courage. I always have to pull the string of his shower bath." It is a capital illustration of that squabble of the coward and the brave man that takes place in most of us. Dizzy's moral courage carried him to the bath, but there his physical courage failed him. He could not pull the string that administered the cold shock. The bathroom is rich in such secrets, and life teems with them.

The true hero is he who unites the two qualities. The physical element is the more plentiful. For one man who will count the cost of sacrifice and, having counted it, pay the price with unfaltering heart, there are many who will answer the sudden call to meet menace with prompt confrontation. The courage that snatches a comrade from under the guns of the enemy or a child from the flames is, happily, not uncommon. It is inspired by an incitement that takes men out of themselves and by a certain spirit of challenge to fate that every one with a sporting instinct loves to take. But the act of the sailor of the daunting was a much bigger thing. Here was no thrill of chivalry and no sporting risk. He dealt in cold certainties: the boat and safety; the ship and death; his life or the other's. And he thought of his comrade's old parents at home and chose death.

It was a great end. I wonder whether you or I would be capable of it. I would give much to feel that I could answer in the approbative—that I could take my stand on the spiritual plane of that unknown sailor.

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## ALL ABOUT A DOG

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It was a bitterly cold night, and even at the far end of the bus the east wind that raved along the street cut like a knife. The bus stopped, and two women and a man got in together and filled the vacant places. The young woman carried one of those little Pekinese dogs that women like to carry in their laps. The conductor came in and took the fares. Then his eyes rested with cold malice on the beady-eyed lap-dog. I saw trouble fermenting. This was the opportunity for which he had been waiting, and he intended to make the most of it. I had marked him as the type of

what Mr. Wells has called the Resentful Employee, the man with a great hazy disservice against everything and a particular disservice against passengers who came and sat in his bus while he shivered at the door.

"You must take that dog out," he said with sour bane. "I shall certainly do nothing of the kind. You can take my name and address," said the woman, who had evidently expected the challenge and knew the reply, "You must take that dog out—that's my orders." "I won't go on the top in such weather. It would kill me," said the woman. "Certainly not," said her lady companion. "You've got a cough as it is." "It's nonsense," said her male companion. The conductor pulled the bell and the bus stopped, "This bus doesn't go until that dog is brought out." And he stepped onto the pavement and waited. It was his moment of conquest. He had the law on his side and the whole busful of angry people under the torment. His envenom soul was having a real holiday. The storm inside rose high. "Shameful"; "Why isn't, he in the army?" "Call the police"; "Let's all report him"; "Let's make him give us our fares back," For everybody was on the side of the lady and the dog.

That little animal sat blinking at the dim lights in happy unconsciousness of the furore, of which he was the cause. The conductor came to the door. "What's your number?" said one, taking out a pocket book with a indication of terrible things. "There's my number," said the conductor nonchalant. "Give us our fares back—you've engaged to carry us—you can't leave us here all night." "No fares back," said the conductor. Two or three passengers got out and disappeared into the night. The conductor took another turn on the pavement, then went and had a talk with the driver. Another bus, the last on the road, sailed by indifferent to the shouts of the passengers to stop. "They stick by each other—the villains" was the comment. Someone pulled the bell violently. That brought the driver round to the door. "Who's conductor of this bus?" he said, and paused for a reply. None coming, he returned to his seat and resumed beating his arms across his chest. There was no hope in that quarter. A policeman strolled up and looked in at the door. An deluge of indignant protests and appeals burst on him. "Well, he's got his rules, you know," he said genially. "Give your name and address." "That's what he's been offered, and he won't take it." "Oh," said the policeman, and he went away and took his stand a few yards down the street, where he was joined by two more constables. And still the little dog blinked at the lights and the conductor walked to and fro on the pavement, like a captain on the quarter-deck in the hour of victory. A young woman, whose voice had risen high above the squall inside, descended on him with an air of threatening and annihilation. He was immovable—as cold as the night and as hard as the pavement. She passed on in a fury of infecundity to the three policemen, who stood like a group of carving up the street watching the drama. Then she came back, sniffs gesticulated to her young man who had sat a silent witness of her craze, and evanesce. Others followed. The bus was emptying. Even the dashing young fellow who had demanded the number, and who had declared he

"Difficulty? A subject?" said Rameau. "Not at all. One subject is as good as another. Here, bring me the Dutch Gazette."

That is how I feel now, as the lights of London fade in our wake and the fresh air of the country blows in at the window. Subject? Difficulty? Here bring me the Dutch Gazette. But while any subject would serve there is one of particular interest to me at this moment. It came into my mind as I ran along the platform just now. It is the really important subject of catching trains. There are some people who make nothing of catching trains. They can catch trains with as miraculous an ease as Cinquevalli catches half-a-dozen billiard-balls. I believe they could catch trains in their sleep. They are never too early and never too late. They leave home or office with a quiet certainty of doing the thing that is simply stupefying. Whether they walk, or take a bus, or call a taxi, it is the same: they do not hurry, they do not worry, and when they find they are in time and that there's plenty of room they manifest no surprise.

I have in mind a man with whom I once went walking among the mountains on the French-Italian border. He was enormously particular about trains and arrangements the day or the week before we needed them, and he was wonderfully efficient at the job. But as the time approached for catching a train he became exasperatingly calm and leisured. He began to take his time over everything and to concern himself with the arrangements of the next day or the next week, as though he had forgotten all about the train that was imminent, or was careless whether he caught it or not. And when at last he had got to the train, he began to remember things. He would stroll off to get a time-table or to buy a book, or to look at the engine—especially to look at the engine. And the nearer the minute for starting the more absorbed he became in the mechanism of the thing, and the more animated was his explanation of the relative merits of the P.L.M. engine and the North-Western engine. He was always given up as lost, and yet always stepped in as the train was on the move, his manner exasperate unruffled, his talk pursuing the quiet tendency of his thought about engines or about what we should do the week after next.

Now I am different. I have been catching trains all my life, and all my life I have been afraid I shouldn't catch them. Familiarity with the habits of trains cannot get rid of a secret persuasion that their aim is to give me the slip if it can be done. No faith in my own watch can affect my doubts as to the stalwart of the watch of the guard or the station clock or whatever deceitful signal the engine-driver obeys. Moreover, I am oppressed with the possibilities of delay on the road to the station. They crowd in on me like the ghosts into the tent of King Richard. There may be a block in the streets, the bus may break down, the taxi-driver may be drunk or not



know the way, or think I don't know the way, and take me round and round the squares as Tony Lumpkin drove his mother round and round the pond, or—in fact, anything may happen, and it is never until I am safely inside (as I am now) that I feel really happy.

Now, of course this is a very absurd weakness. I ought to be ashamed to confess it. I am ashamed to confess it. And that is the advantage of writing under a pen name. You can confess anything you like, and nobody thinks any the worse of you. You ease your own compunction, have a good delivery of your failings—look them, so to speak, straight in the face, and pass sentence on them—and still enjoy the luxury of not being found out. You have all the advantages of a conviction without the nuisance of the penalty. Decidedly, this writing under a pen name is a great alleviation of the soul.

It reminds me of an occasion on which I was climbing with a famous rock climber. I do not mind confessing (over my pen name) that I am not good on rocks. My companion on the rope kept addressing me at critical moments by the name of Saunders. My name, I rejoice to say, is not Saunders, and he knew it was not Saunders, but he had to call me something, and in the excitement of the moment could think of nothing but Saunders. Whenever I was slow in finding a handhold or foothold, there would come a blaring instruction to Saunders to feel to the right or the left, or higher up or lower down. And I remember that I found it a great comfort to know that it was not I who was so slow, but that fellow Saunders. I seemed to see him as a arduous, vain person who would have been better employed at home looking after his hens. And so in these articles, I seem again to be impersonating the ineffable Saunders, of whom I feel at liberty to speak plainly. I see before me a long vista of self-revelations, the real title of which ought to be "The Showing Up of Saunders."

But to return to the subject. This train-fever is, of course, only a symptom. It proceeds from that agita of mind that is so common and incurable an ailment. The complaint has been very well satirised by one who suffered from it. "I have had many and severe troubles in my life," he said, "but most of them never happened." That is it. We people who worry about the trains and similar things live in a world of imaginative disaster. The heavens are always going to fall on us. We look ahead, like Christian, and see the lions waiting to guzzle us, and when we find they are only poor imitation lions, our apprehensive imagination is not set at rest, but contrives other lions to scare us out of our wits.

And yet intellectually we know that these angst are worthless. Experience has taught us that it is not the things we fear that come to pass, but the things of which

of despotism, but of liberty. You may not think so. You may, being in a hurry, and seeing your car pulled up by this impudence of office, feel that your liberty has been outraged. How dare this fellow impede with your free use of the public highway? Then, if you are a reasonable person, you will reflect that if he did not interfere with you, he would interfere with no one, and the result would be that Piccadilly Circus would be a vortex that you would never cross at all. You have submitted to a curtailment of private liberty in order that you may enjoy a social order which makes your liberty a reality.

Liberty is not a personal affair only, but a social contract. It is an accommodation of interests. In matters, which do not touch anybody else's liberty, of course, I may be as free as I like. If I choose to go down the road in a dressing gown who shall say me denial? You have liberty to laugh at me, but I have liberty to be indifferent to you. And if I have a fancy for dyeing my hair, or waxing my moustache (which heaven forbid), or wearing an overcoat and sandals, or going to bed late or getting up early, I shall follow my fancy and ask no man's permission. I shall not inquire of you whether I may eat mustard with my mutton. And you will not ask me whether you may follow this religion or that, whether you may prefer Ella Wheeler Wilcox to Wordsworth, or champagne to shandy.

In all these and a thousand other details you and I please ourselves and ask no one's leave. We have a whole kingdom in which we rule alone, can do what we choose, be wise or hilarious, harsh or easy, conventional or odd. But directly we step out of that kingdom, our personal liberty of action becomes qualified by other people's liberty. I might like to practice on the conduit from midnight till three in the morning. If I went on to the top of Everest to do it, I could please myself, but if I do it in my bedroom my family will object, and if I do it out in the streets the neighbors will remind me that my liberty to blow the conduit must not interfere with their liberty to sleep in quiet. There are a lot of people in the world, and I have to lodge my liberty to their liberties.

We are all liable to forget this, and unfortunately we are much more conscious of the imperfections of others in this respect than of our own. A reasonable consideration for the rights or feelings of others is the foundation of social conduct.

It is in the small matters of conduct, in the observance of the rule of the road, that we pass judgment upon ourselves, and declare that we are civilized or uncivilized. The great moments of heroism and sacrifice are rare. It is the little habits of commonplace intercourse that make up the great sum of life and sweeten or make bitter the journey.

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## SUMMARY

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*Essays of A.G. Gardiner*

Gardiner has another title also to distinction. Under the pen-name of "Alpha of the Plough" he wrote a series of essays in the well-known London' weekly, the Star. These are now available in book-form as *Leaves in the Wind*, *Many Furrows*, *Pebbles on the Shore*, and one or two others. His style in these is bewitching. If, as an editor, he is not in the same street with Massingham, as an essayist he is not, to be perfectly candid, in the same class as Robert Lynd and J. B. Priestley. It was he, however, who helped Lynd ("Y. Y." of the *New Statesman*) on to his present position. He was among the first to discern Lynd's genius and, having done so, appointed him as the Literary Editor of the *Daily News*. Though, as I have noted, he is not, as an essayist, of the same caliber as Lynd he occupies a unique position nonetheless. As C. E. Montague observed, "A range of mountains may not be the Alps, and yet have a career." Second-class essayists, like "A.G.G.", have also a special niche in the temple of fame.

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## KEY WORDS

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1. **Assault** : An attack, which includes not only battery threats but the actual use of violence.
2. **Burglar** : Thief who breaks into houses shops etc with the intention of stealing.
3. **Haughty** : A high opinion of oneself and often a low position of others.
4. **Panegyric** : A speech or piece of writing praising someone highly.
5. **Resentful Employee** : A worker who is full of complaints/grievances.

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## REVIEW QUESTIONS

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1. Discuss the importance and effect of good manners.
2. Discuss the impact of good temper and kindness on the society in the Light of the two good-mannered conductors.
3. How could the liftman take a polite and effective revenge?
4. How does the stream of general life get polluted by one's behaviour?
5. Write down the summary of the essay, "On Catching the Train".
6. According to A.G. Gardiner, Who is a gentleman?
7. What are the important courtesies of human beings?
8. Describe the incident of the sailor in *Formidable*.
9. Who is considered to be the Resentful Employee?
10. How the rules should be followed among the public?

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## SUGGESTED READING

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|----|----------------------------------|-----------------|
| 1. | A.G. Gardiner and the Daily News | — Koss, Stephen |
| 2. | Pebbles on the Shore             | — A.G. Gardiner |
| 3. | Many Furrows                     | — A.G. Gardiner |

