

Chapter 4

GRADUAL CHANGE IN MY OUTLOOK ON ALEXANDER

As the training course progressed I learned to know more and more about Alexander the man—through the incidents of our daily life together and from what he told us about his early days in a pioneer environment. My euphoric dream was not yet over, but my increasing knowledge of him as a human being with difficulties and limitations like everyone else, and indeed in a greater degree than most people, weakened the dream somewhat and marked the beginning of the end. It was this knowledge of the man that enabled me to see what caused him to handle his work the way he did, spreading its fame on the one hand, impeding its growth and establishment on the other. No one can understand the position of the work in the world today without knowing the man, his quirks and psychological difficulties.

My first picture of F. M.'s daily life and interests was given me by our visits to Penhill. Penhill was near enough to London for F. M. to commute daily. He kept a gardener called Rose and a woman who looked after the house and cooked for him. Outside, the house was pleasing, unpretentious and comfortable. Inside, one saw again the strange colour schemes of Mrs Alexander. They did not look so well at Penhill as they did at Ashley Place. They seemed less suitable for a simple country house, too sophisticated and somewhat unwholesome. When, later on, Alexander's little school for children was moved to Penhill, various people remarked on the possible effect such a colour scheme would have on small children.

On his Sundays at Penhill F. M. would take a horseback ride. This was his one recreation. He liked Penhill and enjoyed being there, but it was not an absorbing interest to him and he did not potter around doing things about the place

himself as many an Englishman is apt to do on his country place. F. M., throughout his life, had exactly three interests apart from his work: food, horse racing and acting. The first two of these were born of his frontier environment.

In describing his early days, Alexander told us what an important part good food and its proper preparation played in the life of his family. They would take any amount of trouble about it. They would kill one of their own lambs, for instance, hang it just the right number of days, and then at the strategic moment cut slits in the carcass and pour in red wine for flavouring. The preparation of even a minor dish had to be just right. (During the training-course days some of us once went together in a party to the Derby, and the elaborate ritual the Alexander brothers advised us to go through in order to make tea and put it in thermos bottles was amazing.) The subject of food would frequently come into the training course. He would talk about the relative merits of well-known London restaurant and tell us what we were going to have for our summer term dinner at Penhill. In the early days of the course we had things like a saddle of mutton and a magnum of champagne, but with the years our fare deteriorated until in the end it resembled Sunday School box suppers. Attending horse races was the favourite sport of his youth and everyone bet on these races. Horse racing continued to be a passion with him although at this time he rarely had the leisure to go to the races. On the few occasions when he did go, he would appear, looking very dapper indeed and like an actor, in what we rather affectionately called the 'grasshopper' suit—a grey morning coat and matching trousers and a grey top hat. F. M. liked us to speak of his grasshopper suit, and for our benefit he moved quite like a grasshopper when he had it on.

Betting on horse races, however, continued to be his passion; in fact, it was the greatest outlet of his life. F. M. made no secret of his interest in betting, but the details and the extent of it we found out only in the course of time. When I did find out, I was staggered. Later on I became more tolerant, realizing that what to an American might seem an