GRAHAM GREENE

THE POWER AND THE GLORY

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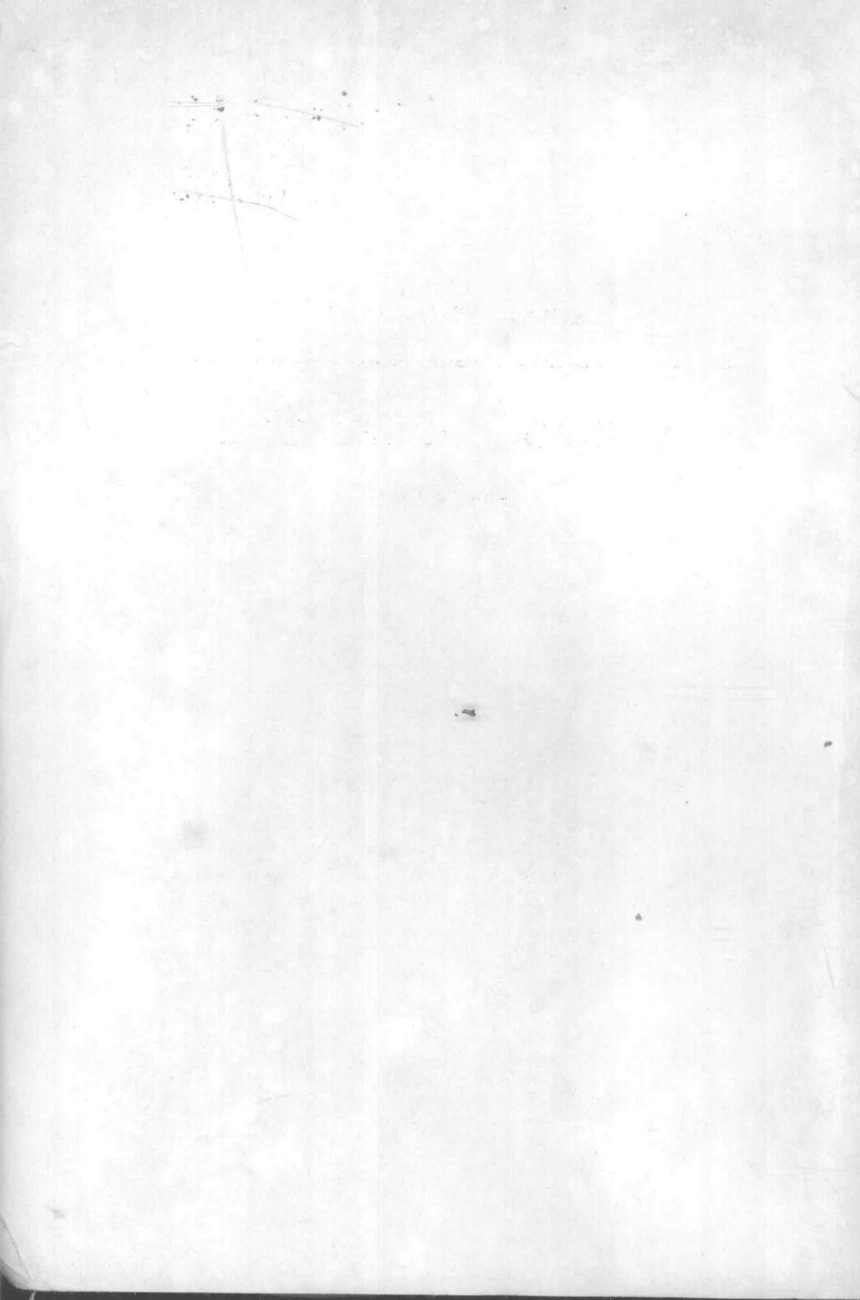

PENGUIN BOOKS

THE POWER AND THE GLORY

Graham Greene was born in 1904 and educated at Berkhamsted School, where his father was headmaster. On coming down from Balliol College, Oxford, where he published a book of verse, he worked for four years as a sub-editor on *The Times*. He established his reputation with his fourth novel, *Stamboul Train*, which he classed as an 'entertainment' in order to distinguish it from more serious work. In 1935 he made a journey across Liberia, described in *Journey Without Maps*, and on his return was appointed film critic of the *Spectator*. In 1926 he had been received into the Roman Catholic Church and was commissioned to visit Mexico in 1938 and report on the religious persecution there. As a result he wrote *The Lawless Roads* and, later, *The Power and the Glory*.

Brighton Rock was published in 1938 and in 1940 he became literary editor of the *Spectator*. The next year he undertook work for the Foreign Office and was sent out to Sierra Leone in 1941–3. One of his major post-war novels, *The Heart of the Matter*, is set in West Africa and is considered by many to be his finest book. This was followed by *The End of the Affair*, *The Quiet American*, a story set in Vietnam, *Our Man in Havana* and *A Burnt-Out Case*. Many of his novels and short stories have been filmed and *The Third Man* was written as a film treatment. His other publications include *The Honorary Consul* (1973), *Lord Rochester's Monkey* (1974), a biography, *An Impossible Woman: The Memories of Dottoressa Moor of Capri* (1975: edited), *The Human Factor* (1978), *Doctor Fischer of Geneva or The Bomb Party* (1980), *Monsignor Quixote* (1982) and *J'Accuse: The Dark Side of Nice* (1982). He has also published two volumes of autobiography, *A Sort of Life* (1971) and *Ways of Escape* (1980).

In all Graham Greene has written some thirty novels, 'entertainments', plays, children's books, travel books, and collections of essays and short stories. He was made a Companion of Honour in 1966.

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PART ONE

Chapter 1: THE PORT

MR TENCH went out to look for his ether cylinder, into the blazing Mexican sun and the bleaching dust. A few vultures looked down from the roof with shabby indifference: he wasn't carrion yet. A faint feeling of rebellion stirred in Mr Tench's heart, and he wrenched up a piece of the road with splintering finger-nails and tossed it feebly towards them. One rose and flapped across the town: over the tiny plaza, over the bust of an ex-president, ex-general, ex-human being, over the two stalls which sold mineral water, towards the river and the sea. It wouldn't find anything there: the sharks looked after the carrion on that side. Mr Tench went on across the plaza.

He said '*Buenos días*' to a man with a gun who sat in a small patch of shade against a wall. But it wasn't like England: the man said nothing at all, just stared malevolently up at Mr Tench, as if he had never had any dealings with the foreigner, as if Mr Tench were not responsible for his two gold bicuspid teeth. Mr Tench went sweating by, past the Treasury which had once been a church, towards the quay. Half-way across he suddenly forgot what he had come out for – a glass of mineral water? That was all there was to drink in this prohibition state – except beer, but that was a government monopoly and too expensive except on special occasions. An awful feeling of nausea gripped Mr Tench in the stomach – it couldn't have been mineral water he wanted. Of course his ether cylinder ... the boat was in. He had heard its exultant piping while he lay on his bed after lunch. He passed the barbers' and two dentists' and came out between a warehouse and the customs on to the river bank.

The river went heavily by towards the sea between the banana plantations; the *General Obregon* was tied up to the bank, and beer was being unloaded – a hundred cases were

already stacked upon the quay. Mr Tench stood in the shade of the customs house and thought: what am I here for? Memory drained out of him in the heat. He gathered his bile together and spat forlornly into the sun. Then he sat down on a case and waited. Nothing to do. Nobody would come to see him before five.

The *General Obregon* was about thirty yards long. A few feet of damaged rail, one lifeboat, a bell hanging on a rotten cord, an oil-lamp in the bow, she looked as if she might weather two or three more Atlantic years, if she didn't strike a Norther in the gulf. That, of course, would be the end of her. It didn't really matter: everybody was insured when he bought a ticket, automatically. Half a dozen passengers leant on the rail, among the hobbled turkeys, and stared at the port, the warehouse, the empty baked street with the dentists and the barbers.

Mr Tench heard a revolver holster creak just behind him and turned his head. A customs officer was watching him angrily. He said something which Mr Tench did not catch. 'Pardon me,' Mr Tench said.

'My teeth,' the customs man said indistinctly.

'Oh,' Mr Tench said, 'yes, your teeth.' The man had none: that was why he couldn't talk clearly. Mr Tench had removed them all. He was shaken with nausea – something was wrong – worms, dysentery . . . He said, 'The set is nearly finished. Tonight,' he promised wildly. It was, of course, quite impossible; but that was how one lived, putting off everything. The man was satisfied: he might forget, and in any case what could he *do*? He had paid in advance. That was the whole world to Mr Tench: the heat and the forgetting, the putting off till tomorrow, if possible cash down – for what? He stared out over the slow river: the fin of a shark moved like a periscope at the river's mouth. In the course of years several ships had stranded and they now helped to prop up the bank, the smoke-stacks leaning over like guns pointing at some distant objective across the banana trees and the swamps.

Mr Tench thought: ether cylinder: I nearly forgot. His mouth fell open and he began moodily to count the bottles of

Cerveza Moctezuma. A hundred and forty cases. Twelve times a hundred and forty: the heavy phlegm gathered in his mouth: twelve fours are forty-eight. He said aloud in English, 'My God, a pretty one': twelve hundred, sixteen hundred and eighty: he spat, staring with vague interest at a girl in the bows of the *General Obregon* – a fine thin figure, they were generally so thick, brown eyes, of course, and the inevitable gleam of the gold tooth, but something fresh and young.... Sixteen hundred and eighty bottles at a peso a bottle.

Somebody whispered in English, 'What did you say?'

Mr Tench swivelled round. 'You English?' he asked in astonishment, but at the sight of the round and hollow face charred with a three-days' beard, he altered his question: 'You speak English?'

Yes, the man said, he spoke a little English. He stood stiffly in the shade, a small man dressed in a shabby dark city suit, carrying a small attaché case. He had a novel under his arm: bits of an amorous scene stuck out, crudely coloured. He said, 'Excuse me. I thought just now you were talking to me.' He had protuberant eyes; he gave an impression of unstable hilarity, as if perhaps he had been celebrating a birthday, alone.

Mr Tench cleared his mouth of phlegm. 'What did I say?' He couldn't remember a thing.

'You said my God a pretty one.'

'Now what could I have meant by that?' He stared up at the merciless sky. A vulture hung there, an observer. 'What? Oh just the girl I suppose. You don't often see a pretty piece round here. Just one or two a year worth looking at.'

'She is very young.'

'Oh, I don't have intentions,' Mr Tench said wearily. 'A man may look. I've lived alone for fifteen years.'

'Here?'

'Hereabouts.'

They fell silent and time passed, the shadow of the customs house shifted a few inches farther towards the river: the vulture moved a little, like the black hand of a clock.

'You came in *her*?' Mr Tench asked.

'No.'

'Going in her?'

The little man seemed to evade the question, but then as if some explanation were required: 'I was just looking,' he said. 'I suppose she'll be sailing quite soon?'

'To Vera Cruz,' Mr Tench said. 'In a few hours.'

'Without calling anywhere?'

'Where could she call?' He asked, 'How did you get here?'

The stranger said vaguely, 'A canoe.'

'Got a plantation, eh?'

'No.'

'It's good hearing English spoken,' Mr Tench said. 'Now you learnt yours in the States?'

The man agreed. He wasn't very garrulous.

'Ah, what wouldn't I give,' Mr Tench said, 'to be there now.' He said in a low anxious voice, 'You don't happen, do you, to have a drink in that case of yours? Some of you people back there – I've known one or two – a little for medical purposes.'

'Only medicine,' the man said.

'You a doctor?'

The bloodshot eyes looked slyly out of their corners at Mr Tench. 'You would call me perhaps a – quack?'

'Patent medicines? Live and let live,' Mr Tench said.

'Are *you* sailing?'

'No, I came down here for – . . . oh well, it doesn't matter anyway.' He put his hand on his stomach and said, 'You haven't got any medicine, have you, for – oh hell. I don't know what. It's just this bloody land. You can't cure me of that. No one can.'

'You want to go home?'

'Home,' Mr Tench said, 'my home's here. Did you see what the peso stands at in Mexico City? Four to the dollar. Four. O God. *Ora pro nobis*.'

'Are you a Catholic?'

'No, no. Just an expression. I don't believe in anything like that.' He said irrelevantly, 'It's too hot anyway.'

'I think I must find somewhere to sit.'

'Come up to my place,' Mr Tench said. 'I've got a spare

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hammock. The boat won't leave for hours – if you want to watch it go.'

The stranger said, 'I was expecting to see someone. The name was Lopez.'

'Oh, they shot him weeks ago,' Mr Tench said.

'Dead?'

'You know how it is round here. Friend of yours?'

'No, no,' the man protested hurriedly. 'Just a friend of a friend.'

'Well, that's how it is,' Mr Tench said. He brought up his bile again and spat it out into the hard sunlight. 'They say he used to help . . . oh, undesirables . . . well, to get out. His girl's living with the Chief of Police now.'

'His girl? Do you mean his daughter?'

'He wasn't married. I mean the girl he lived with.' Mr Tench was momentarily surprised by an expression on the stranger's face. He said again, 'You know how it is.' He looked across at the *General Obregon*. 'She's a pretty bit. Of course, in two years she'll be like all the rest. Fat and stupid. O God, I'd like a drink. *Ora pro nobis*.'

'I have a little brandy,' the stranger said.

Mr Tench regarded him sharply. 'Where?'

The hollow man put his hand to his hip – he might have been indicating the source of his odd nervous hilarity. Mr Tench seized his wrist. 'Careful,' he said. 'Not here.' He looked down the carpet of shadow: a sentry sat on an empty crate asleep beside his rifle. 'Come to my place,' Mr Tench said.

'I meant,' the little man said reluctantly, 'just to see her go.'

'Oh, it will be hours yet,' Mr Tench assured him again.

'Hours? Are you certain? It's very hot in the sun.'

'You'd better come home.'

Home: it was a phrase one used to mean four walls behind which one slept. There had never been a home. They moved across the little burnt plaza where the dead General grew green in the damp and the gaseosa stalls stood under the palms. Home lay like a picture postcard on a pile of other postcards: shuffle the pack and you had Nottingham, a Metroland

birthplace, an interlude in Southend. Mr Tench's father had been a dentist too – his first memory was finding a discarded cast in a wastepaper basket – the rough toothless gaping mouth of clay, like something dug up in Dorset – Neanderthal or Pithecanthropus. It had been his favourite toy: they tried to tempt him with Meccano, but fate had struck. There is always one moment in childhood when the door opens and lets the future in. The hot wet river-port and the vultures lay in the wastepaper basket, and he picked them out. We should be thankful we cannot see the horrors and degradations lying around our childhood, in cupboards and bookshelves, everywhere.

There was no paving; during the rains the village (it was really no more) slipped into the mud. Now the ground was hard under the feet like stone. The two men walked in silence past barbers' shops and dentists'; the vultures on the roofs looked contented, like domestic fowls: they searched under wide dusty wings for parasites. Mr Tench said, 'Excuse me,' stopping at a little wooden hut, one storey high, with a veranda where a hammock swung. The hut was a little larger than the others in the narrow street which petered out two hundred yards away in swamp. He said, nervously, 'Would you like to take a look around? I don't want to boast, but I'm the best dentist here. It's not a bad place. As places go.' Pride wavered in his voice like a plant with shallow roots.

He led the way inside, locking the door behind him, through a dining-room where two rocking-chairs stood on either side of a bare table: an oil lamp, some copies of old American papers, a cupboard. He said, 'I'll get the glasses out, but first I'd like to show you – you're an educated man ...' The dentist's operating-room looked out on a yard where a few turkeys moved with shabby nervous pomp: a drill which worked with a pedal, a dentist's chair gaudy in bright red plush, a glass cupboard in which instruments were dustily jumbled. A forceps stood in a cup, a broken spirit-lamp was pushed into a corner, and gags of cotton-wool lay on all the shelves.

'Very fine,' the stranger commented.

'It's not so bad, is it,' Mr Tench said, 'for this town. You

can't imagine the difficulties. That drill,' he continued bitterly, 'is made in Japan. I've only had it a month and it's wearing out already. But I can't afford American drills.'

'The window,' the stranger said, 'is very beautiful.'

One pane of stained glass had been let in: a Madonna gazed out through the mosquito wire at the turkeys in the yard. 'I got it,' Mr Tench said, 'when they sacked the church. It didn't feel right – a dentist's room without some stained glass. Not civilized. At home – I mean in England – it was generally the Laughing Cavalier – I don't know why – or else a Tudor rose. But one can't pick and choose.'

He opened another door and said, 'My workroom.' The first thing one saw was a bed under a mosquito tent. Mr Tench said, 'You understand – I'm pressed for room.' A ewer and basin stood at one end of a carpenter's bench, and a soap-dish: at the other a blow-pipe, a tray of sand, pliers, a little furnace. 'I cast in sand,' Mr Tench said. 'What else can I do in this place?' He picked up the case of a lower jaw. 'You can't always get them accurate,' he said. 'Of course, they complain.' He laid it down, and nodded at another object on the bench – something stringy and intestinal in appearance, with two little bladders of rubber. 'Congenital fissure,' he said. 'It's the first time I've tried. The Kingsley cast. I doubt if I can do it. But a man must try to keep abreast of things.' His mouth fell open: the look of vacancy returned: the heat in the small room was overpowering. He stood there like a man lost in a cavern among the fossils and instruments of an age of which he knows very little. The stranger said, 'If we could sit down . . .'

Mr Tench stared at him blankly.

'We could open the brandy.'

'Oh yes, the brandy.'

Mr Tench got two glasses out of a cupboard under the bench, and wiped off traces of sand. Then they went and sat in rocking-chairs in the front room. Mr Tench poured out.

'Water?' the stranger asked.

'You can't trust the water,' Mr Tench said. 'It's got me here.' He put his hand on his stomach and took a long

draught. 'You don't look too well yourself,' he said. He took a longer look. 'Your teeth.' One canine had gone, and the front teeth were yellow with tartar and carious. He said, 'You want to pay attention to them.'

'What is the good?' the stranger said. He held a small spot of brandy in his glass warily – as if it was an animal to which he gave shelter, but not trust. He had the air, in his hollowness and neglect, of somebody of no account who had been beaten up incidentally, by ill-health or restlessness. He sat on the very edge of the rocking-chair, with his small attaché case balanced on his knee and the brandy staved off with guilty affection.

'Drink up,' Mr Tench encouraged him (it wasn't his brandy). 'It will do you good.' The man's dark suit and sloping shoulders reminded him uncomfortably of a coffin, and death was in his carious mouth already. Mr Tench poured himself out another glass. He said, 'It gets lonely here. It's good to talk English, even to a foreigner. I wonder if you'd like to see a picture of my kids.' He drew a yellow snapshot out of his note-case and handed it over. Two small children struggled over the handle of a watering-can in a back garden. 'Of course,' he said, 'that was sixteen years ago.'

'They are young men now.'

'One died.'

'Oh, well,' the other replied gently, 'in a Christian country.' He took a gulp of his brandy and smiled at Mr Tench rather foolishly.

'Yes, I suppose so,' Mr Tench said with surprise. He got rid of his phlegm and said, 'It doesn't seem to me, of course, to matter much.' He fell silent, his thoughts ambling away; his mouth fell open, he looked grey and vacant, until he was recalled by a pain in the stomach and helped himself to some more brandy. 'Let me see. What was it we were talking about? The kids . . . oh yes, the kids. It's funny what a man remembers. You know, I can remember that watering-can better than I can remember the kids. It cost three and elevenpence three farthings, green; I could lead you to the shop where I bought it. But as for the kids,' he brooded over his glass into the past, 'I can't remember much else but them crying.'

'Do you get news?'

'Oh, I gave up writing before I came here. What was the use? I couldn't send any money. It wouldn't surprise me if the wife had married again. Her mother would like it – the old sour bitch: she never cared for me.'

The stranger said in a low voice, 'It is awful.'

Mr Tench examined his companion again with surprise. He sat there like a black question mark, ready to go, ready to stay, poised on his chair. He looked disreputable in his grey three-days' beard, and weak: somebody you could command to do anything. He said, 'I mean the world. The way things happen.'

'Drink up your brandy.'

He sipped at it. It was like an indulgence. He said, 'You remember this place before – before the Red Shirts came?'

'I suppose I do.'

'How happy it was then.'

'Was it? I didn't notice.'

'They had at any rate – God.'

'There's no difference in the teeth,' Mr Tench said. He gave himself some more of the stranger's brandy. 'It was always an awful place. Lonely. My God. People at home would have said romance. I thought: five years here, and then I'll go. There was plenty of work. Gold teeth. But then the peso dropped. And now I can't get out. One day I will.' He said, 'I'll retire. Go home. Live as a gentleman ought to live. This' – he gestured at the bare base room – 'I'll forget all this. Oh, it won't be long now. I'm an optimist,' Mr Tench said.

The stranger asked suddenly, 'How long will she take to Vera Cruz?'

'Who?'

'The boat.'

Mr Tench said gloomily, 'Forty hours from now and we'd be there. The Diligencia. A good hotel. Dance places too. A gay town.'

'It makes it seem close,' the stranger said. 'And a ticket, how much would that be?'

'You'd have to ask Lopez,' Mr Tench said. 'He's the agent.'

'But Lopez . . .'

'Oh yes, I forgot. They shot him.'

Somebody knocked on the door. The stranger slipped the attaché case under his chair, and Mr Tench went cautiously up towards the window. 'Can't be too careful,' he said. 'Any dentist who's worth the name has enemies.'

A faint voice implored them, 'A friend,' and Mr Tench opened up. Immediately the sun came in like a white-hot bar.

A child stood in the doorway asking for a doctor. He wore a big hat and had stupid brown eyes. Behind him two mules stamped and whistled on the hot beaten road. Mr Tench said he was not a doctor: he was a dentist. Looking round he saw the stranger crouched in the rocking-chair, gazing with an effect of prayer, entreaty. . . . The child said there was a new doctor in town: the old one had fever and wouldn't stir. His mother was sick.

A vague memory stirred in Mr Tench's brain. He said with an air of discovery, 'Why, you're a doctor, aren't you?'

'No, no. I've got to catch that boat.'

'I thought you said . . .'

'I've changed my mind.'

'Oh well, it won't leave for hours yet,' Mr Tench said. 'They're never on time.' He asked the child how far. The child said it was six leagues away.

'Too far,' Mr Tench said. 'Go away. Find someone else.' He said to the stranger, 'How things get around. Everyone must know you are in town.'

'I could do no good,' the stranger said anxiously: he seemed to be asking for Mr Tench's opinion, humbly.

'Go away,' Mr Tench commanded. The child did not stir. He stood in the hard sunlight looking in with infinite patience. He said his mother was dying. The brown eyes expressed no emotion: it was a fact. You were born, your parents died, you grew old, you died yourself.

'If she's dying,' Mr Tench said, 'there's no point in a doctor seeing her.'

But the stranger got up as though unwillingly he had been summoned to an occasion he couldn't pass by. He said sadly, 'It always seems to happen. Like this.'

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