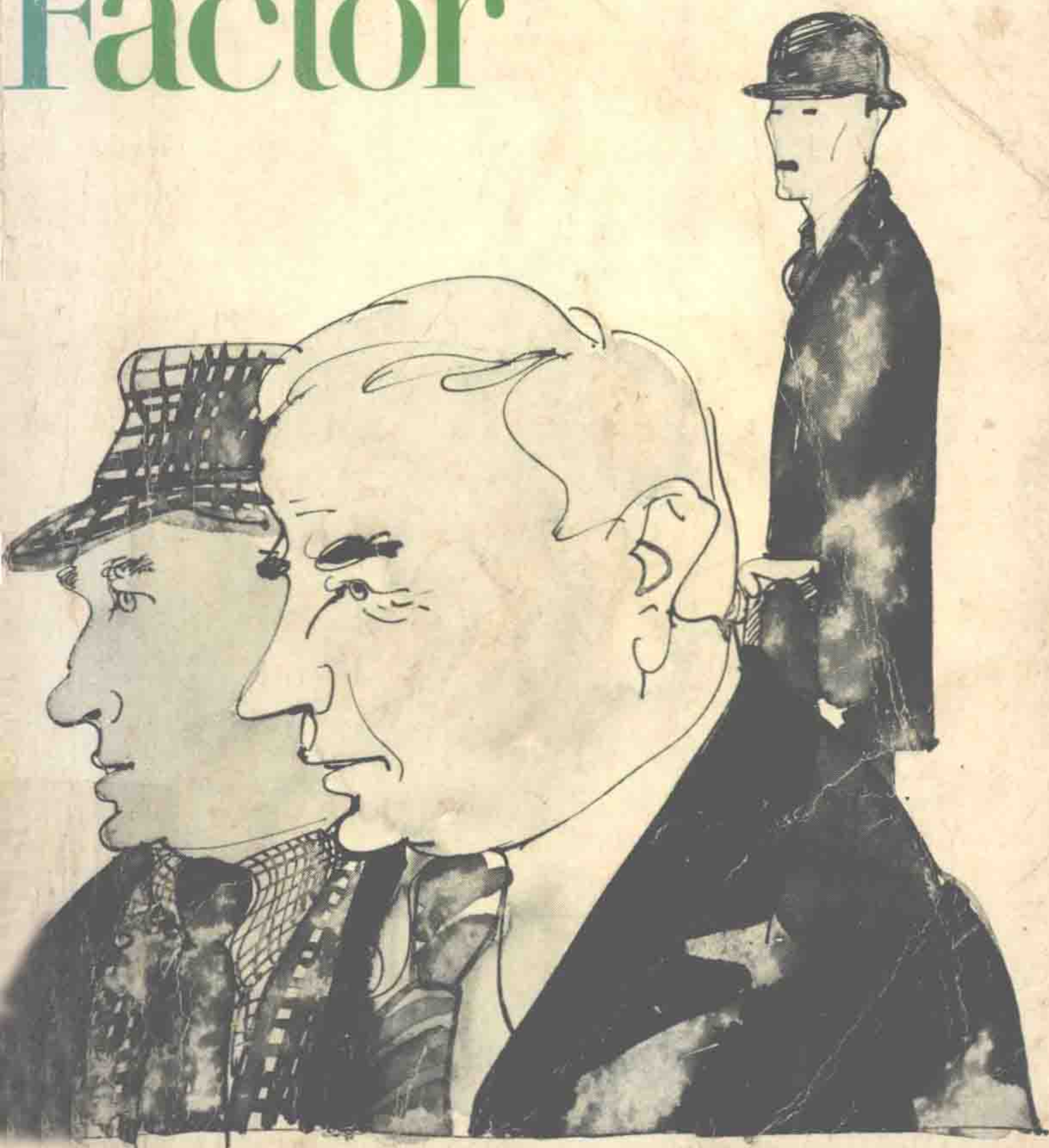


Graham Greene The Human Factor



GRAHAM GREENE

THE HUMAN FACTOR

'I only know that he who forms a tie is lost. The
germ of corruption has entered into his soul.'

JOSEPH CONRAD



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THE HUMAN FACTOR

Graham Greene was born in 1905 and was educated at Berkhamsted School, where his father was the headmaster. On coming down from Balliol College, Oxford, where he published a book of verse, he worked for three 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*. *The Comedians* and twelve other novels have been filmed, plus two of his short stories, and *The Third Man* was written as a film treatment.

In all Graham Greene has written over 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. Among his latest publications are his long-awaited autobiography, *A Sort of Life* (1971), *The Pleasure Dome* (1972), *The Honorary Consul* (1973) and *An Impossible Woman: the Memories of Dottorella Moor of Capri* (edited; 1975).

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To my sister Elisabeth Dennys,
who cannot deny some responsibility

A novel based on life in any Secret Service must necessarily contain a large element of fantasy, for a realistic description would almost certainly infringe some clause or other in some official secrets Act. Operation Uncle Remus is purely a product of the author's imagination (and I trust it will remain so), as are all the characters, whether English, African, Russian or Polish. All the same, to quote Hans Andersen, a wise author who also dealt in fantasy,

‘out of reality are our tales of imagination
fashioned’.

PART ONE

CHAPTER I

CASTLE, ever since he had joined the firm as a young recruit more than thirty years ago, had taken his lunch in a public house behind St James's Street, not far from the office. If he had been asked why he lunched there, he would have referred to the excellent quality of the sausages; he might have preferred a different bitter from Watney's, but the quality of the sausages outweighed that. He was always prepared to account for his actions, even the most innocent, and he was always strictly on time.

So by the stroke of one he was ready to leave. Arthur Davis, his assistant, with whom he shared a room, departed for lunch punctually at twelve and returned, but often only in theory, one hour later. It was understood that, in case of an urgent telegram, Davis or himself must always be there to receive the decoding, but they both knew well that in the particular sub-division of their department nothing was ever really urgent. The difference in time between England and the various parts of Eastern and Southern Africa, with which the two of them were concerned, was usually large enough – even when in the case of Johannesburg it was little more than an hour – for no one outside the department to worry about the delay in the delivery of a message: the fate of the world, Davis used to declare, would never be decided on their continent, however many embassies China or Russia might open from Addis Ababa to Conakry or however many Cubans landed. Castle wrote a memorandum for Davis: 'If Zaire replies to No. 172 send copies to Treasury and FO.' He looked at his watch. Davis was ten minutes late.

Castle began to pack his briefcase – he put in a note of what he had to buy for his wife at the cheese shop in Jermyn Street and of a present for his son to whom he had been disagreeable that morning (two packets of Maltesers), and a book, *Clarissa Harlowe*, in which he had never read further than Chapter LXXIX of the first volume. Directly he heard a lift door close and Davis's step in the passage he left his room. His lunchtime with the sausages had been cut by eleven minutes. Unlike Davis he always punctually returned. It was one of the virtues of age.

Arthur Davis in the staid office was conspicuous by his eccentricities. He could be seen now, approaching from the other end of the long white corridor, dressed as if he had just come from a rather horsy country week-end, or perhaps from the public enclosure of a racecourse. He wore a tweed sports jacket of a greenish over-all colour, and he displayed a scarlet spotted handkerchief in the breast pocket: he might have been attached in some way to a tote. But he was like an actor who has been miscast: when he tried to live up to the costume, he usually fumbled the part. If he looked in London as though he had arrived from the country, in the country when he visited Castle he was unmistakably a tourist from the city.

‘Sharp on time as usual,’ Davis said with his habitual guilty grin.

‘My watch is always a little fast,’ Castle said, apologizing for the criticism which he had not expressed. ‘An anxiety complex, I suppose.’

‘Smuggling out top secrets as usual?’ Davis asked, making a playful pretence at seizing Castle’s briefcase. His breath had a sweet smell: he was addicted to port.

‘Oh, I’ve left all those behind for you to sell. You’ll get a better price from your shady contacts.’

‘Kind of you, I’m sure.’

‘And then you’re a bachelor. You need more money than a married man. I halve the cost of living . . .’

‘Ah, but those awful leftovers,’ Davis said, ‘the joint remade into shepherd’s pie, the dubious meatball. Is it worth it? A married man can’t even afford a good port.’ He went into the room they shared and rang for Cynthia. Davis had been trying to make Cynthia for two years now, but the daughter of a major-general was after bigger game. All the same Davis continued to hope; it was always safer, he explained, to have an affair inside the department – it couldn’t be regarded as a security risk, but Castle knew how deeply attached to Cynthia Davis really was. He had the keen desire for monogamy and the defensive humour of a lonely man. Once Castle had visited him in a flat, which he shared with two men from the Department of the Environment, over an antique shop not far from Claridge’s – very central and W1.

‘You ought to come in a bit nearer,’ Davis had advised Castle in the overcrowded sitting-room where magazines of different

tastes – the *New Statesman*, *Penthouse* and *Nature* – littered the sofa, and where the used glasses from someone else's party had been pushed into corners for the daily woman to find.

'You know very well what they pay us,' Castle said, 'and I'm married.'

'A grave error of judgement.'

'Not for me,' Castle said, 'I like my wife.'

'And of course there's the little bastard,' Davis went on. 'I couldn't afford children and port as well.'

'I happen to like the little bastard too.'

Castle was on the point of descending the four stone steps into Piccadilly when the porter said to him, 'Brigadier Tomlinson wants to see you, sir.'

'Brigadier Tomlinson?'

'Yes. In room A.3.'

Castle had only met Brigadier Tomlinson once, many years before, more years than he cared to count, on the day that he was appointed – the day he put his name to the Official Secrets Act, when the brigadier was a very junior officer, if he had been an officer at all. All he could remember of him was a small black moustache hovering like an unidentified flying object over a field of blotting paper, which was entirely white and blank, perhaps for security reasons. The stain of his signature after he had signed the Act became the only flaw on its surface, and that leaf was almost certainly torn up and sent to the incinerator. The Dreyfus case had exposed the perils of a wastepaper basket nearly a century ago.

'Down the corridor on the left, sir,' the porter reminded him when he was about to take the wrong route.

'Come in, come in, Castle,' Brigadier Tomlinson called. His moustache was now as white as the blotting paper, and with the years he had grown a small pot-belly under a double-breasted waistcoat – only his dubious rank remained constant. Nobody knew to what regiment he had formerly belonged, if such a regiment indeed existed, for all military titles in this building were a little suspect. Ranks might just be part of the universal cover. He said, 'I don't think you know Colonel Daintry.'

'No. I don't think . . . How do you do?'

Daintry, in spite of his neat dark suit and his hatchet face, gave a more genuine out-of-doors impression than Davis ever did. If

Davis at his first appearance looked as though he would be at home in a bookmakers' compound, Daintry was unmistakably at home in the expensive enclosure or on a grouse moor. Castle enjoyed making lightning sketches of his colleagues: there were times when he even put them on to paper.

'I think I knew a cousin of yours at Corpus,' Daintry said. He spoke agreeably, but he looked a little impatient; he probably had to catch a train north at King's Cross.

'Colonel Daintry,' Brigadier Tomlinson explained, 'is our new broom,' and Castle noticed the way Daintry winced at the description. 'He has taken over security from Meredith. But I'm not sure you ever met Meredith.'

'I suppose you mean my cousin Roger,' Castle said to Daintry. 'I haven't seen him for years. He got a first in Greats. I believe he's in the Treasury now.'

'I've been describing the set-up here to Colonel Daintry,' Brigadier Tomlinson prattled on, keeping strictly to his own wavelength.

'I took Law myself. A poor second,' Daintry said. 'You read History, I think?'

'Yes. A very poor third.'

'At the House?'

'Yes.'

'I've explained to Colonel Daintry,' Tomlinson said, 'that only you and Davis deal with the Top Secret cables as far as Section 6A is concerned.'

'If you can call anything Top Secret in our section. Of course, Watson sees them too.'

'Davis – he's a Reading University man, isn't he?' Daintry asked with what might have been a slight touch of disdain.

'I see you've been doing your homework.'

'As a matter of fact I've just been having a talk with Davis himself.'

'So that's why he was ten minutes too long over his lunch.'

Daintry's smile resembled the painful reopening of a wound. He had very red lips, and they parted at the corners with difficulty. He said, 'I talked to Davis about you, so now I'm talking to you about Davis. An open check. You must forgive the new broom. I have to learn the ropes,' he added, getting confused among the metaphors. 'One has to keep to the drill – in spite of the confi-

dence we have in both of you, of course. By the way, *did* he warn you?’

‘No. But why believe me? We may be in collusion.’

The wound opened again a very little way and closed tight.

‘I gather that politically he’s a bit on the left. Is that so?’

‘He’s a member of the Labour Party. I expect he told you himself.’

‘Nothing wrong in that, of course,’ Daintry said. ‘And you . . .?’

‘I have no politics. I expect Davis told you that too.’

‘But you sometimes vote, I suppose?’

‘I don’t think I’ve voted once since the war. The issues nowadays so often seem – well, a bit parish pump.’

‘An interesting point of view,’ Daintry said with disapproval. Castle could see that telling the truth this time had been an error of judgement, yet, except on really important occasions, he always preferred the truth. The truth can be double-checked. Daintry looked at his watch. ‘I won’t keep you long. I have a train to catch at King’s Cross.’

‘A shooting week-end?’

‘Yes. How did you know?’

‘Intuition,’ Castle said, and again he regretted his reply. It was always safer to be inconspicuous. There were times, which grew more frequent with every year, when he daydreamed of complete conformity, as a different character might have dreamt of making a dramatic century at Lord’s.

‘I suppose you noticed my gun-case by the door?’

‘Yes,’ Castle said, who hadn’t seen it until then, ‘that was the clue.’ He was glad to see that Daintry looked reassured.

Daintry explained, ‘There’s nothing personal in all this, you know. Purely a routine check. There are so many rules that sometimes some of them get neglected. It’s human nature. The regulation, for example, about not taking work out of the office . . .’

He looked significantly at Castle’s briefcase. An officer and a gentleman would open it at once for inspection with an easy joke, but Castle was not an officer, nor had he ever classified himself as a gentleman. He wanted to see how far below the table the new broom was liable to sweep. He said, ‘I’m not going home. I’m only going out to lunch.’

‘You won’t mind, will you . . .?’ Daintry held out his hand for the briefcase. ‘I asked the same of Davis,’ he said.

‘Davis wasn’t carrying a briefcase,’ Castle said, ‘when I saw him.’

Daintry flushed at his mistake. He would have felt a similar shame, Castle felt sure, if he had shot a beater. ‘Oh, it must have been that other chap,’ Daintry said. ‘I’ve forgotten his name.’

‘Watson?’ the brigadier suggested.

‘Yes, Watson.’

‘So you’ve even been checking our chief?’

‘It’s all part of the drill,’ Daintry said.

Castle opened his briefcase. He took out a copy of the *Berkhamsted Gazette*.

‘What’s this?’ Daintry asked.

‘My local paper. I was going to read it over lunch.’

‘Oh yes, of course. I’d forgotten. You live quite a long way out. Don’t you find it a bit inconvenient?’

‘Less than an hour by train. I need a house and a garden. I have a child, you see – and a dog. You can’t keep either of them in a flat. Not with comfort.’

‘I notice you are reading *Clarissa Harlowe*. Like it?’

‘Yes, so far. But there are four more volumes.’

‘What’s this?’

‘A list of things to remember.’

‘To remember?’

‘My shopping list,’ Castle explained. He had written under the printed address of his house, 129 King’s Road, ‘Two Maltesers. Half pound Earl Grey. Cheese – Wensleydale? or Double Gloucester? Yardley Pre-Shave Lotion.’

‘What on earth are Maltesers?’

‘A sort of chocolate. You should try them. They’re delicious. In my opinion better than Kit Kats.’

Daintry said, ‘Do you think they would do for my hostess? I’d like to bring her something a little out of the ordinary.’ He looked at his watch. ‘Perhaps I could send the porter – there’s just time. Where do you buy them?’

‘He can get them at an ABC in the Strand.’

‘ABC?’ Daintry asked.

‘Aerated Bread Company.’