

# Annie

ELSIE STEFAN

"Ya'd goods on the fo'th floor please. 'ello? No, I'm sorry, we 'aven't any gingham today." On learning that L. S. Ayres' has no gingham, you put the receiver down, but your curiosity still is not quite satisfied. For that melodious, half exotic voice on the telephone leaves you wondering and puzzled as to its origin, and you resolve to satisfy your curiosity the next time you visit the yard goods department. There, answering the telephone and working in the inspection desk, you will find Annie Crich.

After thirty-three years in the United States, Annie Crich is still as English as the Tower of London. Her English speech, sometimes interspersed with American slang expressions, and her whimsical manner at first made her an object of amusement to the clerks in yard goods. But it was not long before the whole department, in fact, most of the fourth floor, became Annie-conscious. It seemed that when Annie left Ilkeston in Derbyshire, England, she not only brought to the United States her native speech, but also her inherited English adherence to accuracy.

On Annie's arrival, errors in selling, wrapping, and sending yard goods almost ceased to exist. From her vantage point in the inspection desk Annie can and usually manages to oversee the entire department. In her slow, deliberate, but deadly accurate, manner she keeps a self-appointed watch on inspectors and clerks alike. The head buyer himself falls under her jurisdiction. Much as she dislikes to admit it, even the head of the inspection desk, Annie's boss, relies on Annie to remember who sent what package, con-

taining whose merchandise, to whom on what day. If a daydreaming inspector makes a mistake, she is sure to be reminded quietly by Annie, who somehow was there to notice, "That's a delivery you're a'doin'. Be careful, or we'll be a'havin' a 'catrastrophe'."

Accurate and painstaking though she may be, even Annie sometimes slips, and she readily admits, "I hadn't ought to, didn't I?" One morning when she appeared without her usual neat apron tied about her waist, she modestly confided, "I just feel like I'm undressed." Scrupulously clean, Annie makes sure that the desk is duly dusted and scrubbed every morning before the store opens. Every box is in place before a customer appears on the floor. When there is work to be done, Annie does her full share, usually more, and does it uncomplainingly.

More often than would seem respectful, perhaps, Annie falls the victim of the pranks of the younger inspectors in the desk. Frequently the back of her apron is adorned with huge, waving tissue paper butterflies and angel wings, placed there with Scotch tape by one of the girls who administered a supposed friendly embrace. On discovering the joke, Annie always exclaims, "Oh, you young folks! I just cain't keep up with you." But it is with the younger girls that Annie likes to be most, and she often tells them fascinating stories of her childhood and courting days in merry old England. Norlin, Annie's small grandchild, is her grandmother's favorite subject, though.

A tea drinker by nationality, Annie Americanized her palate somewhat when she adopted a few American dishes as

her favorites. Among these, she has a zealous taste for hot chile, and day after day, if it appears to be well-cooked, little Annie feasts on chile for luncheon. When her lunch hour is over, Annie appears at the desk punctually, never a minute late. It is this promptness that makes everyone say, "You can always count on Annie."

Near closing time, when everyone begins to watch the clock, Annie is often asked for the time. With Annie it is never "twenty five to five," but always "twenty and five to five." Her ride home from work is unusual, too, for instead of

being "packed like sardines in a can," the passengers on Annie's bus are "packed like 'errings in a 'boax'." "—an' it's pitch black dark where I get off near the 'droogstore'."

Annie, with her lovable ways and speech, has won the hearts of everyone in the department. Her friends are many; her enemies, few or none. Her determination to "get things done right," deliberately and uncomplainingly, and her slow smile as she replies, "Oh, I'm pretty good, considerin' my old age," has lent a delightful charm to "ya'd goods on the fo'th floor."

## My Most Enlightening Teacher

R. W. CONERTY

My profound apologies go to all my academic teachers of the past, because of all the men and women who have earnestly endeavored to help enrich my meagre store of knowledge, none could I classify as enlightening as when I first went away from home and met the wisest teacher of all I'd met, namely, life. It was she who taught me that English was an instrument of communicating one's wishes and thoughts to another, that mathematics was the mental tonic to keep one alert, and that history was a study of what our ancestors had done, for the purpose of helping us to avoid the pitfalls which hindered their progress.

Most of all, life was my most enlightening source of knowledge because it was her teachings which enabled me to place a truer value on life and what one could accomplish if only the incentive was there.

She was enlightening because all the abstract algebraic formulas, innumerable historical dates, meaningless grammatical constructions took on new form when she showed me why they were necessary to have in our modern everyday contacts. It was out of this maze of knowledge that she sifted, arranged, and emphasized what was necessary, what was important, and what was superfluous to attain success and happiness. Not only did she teach me this, she taught me just what happiness and success are and mean. High school and grade school were part of life, but to meet the lady herself was most revealing. Though I have apologized for what may have appeared a slight to my other teachers, I have learned to be grateful to them for providing me with the proper credentials for meeting the master of them all — life.