

Spin a Good Yarn

the story of W. Farrar Vickers

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This, the story of my grandfather, is told largely in his own words, from his diaries, letters and other writing.

Thus, in the book, the reader will find many passages in quotation marks, and unless specifically told otherwise can assume them to be those of Farrar Vickers himself.

Virginia Vickers

Contents

1	“A sketchy education”	7
2	“I believe I could sell oil”	15
3	Army & Navy	23
4	“Vickers Oils Are Good Oils”	33
5	A world of difference	41
6	The proof of the pudding	49
7	“Fair dealing”	57
8	“Ahead of events”	67
9	“Management by inclusion”	77
10	“The new dimension”	85

One

“A sketchy education”

In the days of Trafalgar and Waterloo there was no efficient public street-cleaning system in England, so walking about—especially after rain—was a matter of splashing through filth. To keep the mud off their floor-length hems, and to keep their feet clean, ladies wore a wooden sandal with an oval ring underneath, which raised them a few inches off the ground. It was called a patten.

One of the businesses in Leeds making pattens at that time was styled ‘Mary Vickers & Son’. Born in the reign of George II, Mary Vickers was a shrewd businesswoman, and managed to bring up her nine children and step-children virtually single-handed. One of her sons, Benjamin Randall Vickers, changed his line of work, it was said, when the parents of the girl he wanted to marry refused their consent because he was a mere ‘cobbler’. He became agent for a firm of olive oil manufacturers.

Mary Vickers’ great-grandson, William Farrar Vickers, was born on December 16th, 1882, at Chapeltown—a village on the highway from Leeds to Harrogate. His was a typical Victorian family—staunch Methodists, farmers, merchants, Wesleyan ministers and businessmen. His father’s name was Benjamin Threfall Vickers, and Farrar was one of five children. In 1876 Farrar’s father had inherited the business started by *his* father, the ex-‘cobbler’, in 1828.

“In that year my grandfather, Benjn. Randall Vickers, sold some olive oil at a price much lower than was expected by his employers, and they refused to deliver it for him. Having promised delivery to a certain firm, he didn’t want to let them down, and determined to buy from another source and deliver it himself. He went down to Leeds Docks, the importing centre, and looked at the barrels standing there, hoping to find the names of olive oil importers. A stranger asked what he was doing, and when my grandfather explained, the stranger said, ‘I’ll trust you—I’ll give you credit’.

“Realizing that he could buy and sell this oil cheaper than his employers, and still make a profit, he started business on his own. He traded in Whitby Jet, a black stone shaped into ornaments and beads, and mostly seen at funerals. He ran the first coal ship from South Wales to Leeds. He also tried to import hides from Africa, exporting blankets in return. The natives, however, were superstitious and every colour had some significance for them. The blankets happened to be sewn around the edge with a colour meaning ‘death’ and they wouldn’t buy them, so they were all returned to Yorkshire.

“The time came when conditions in England were very bad and the Leeds bank in which my grandfather had all his money failed. He went to another bank and the manager, Mr. Beckett, knowing him to be an honest man, offered him all the credit he needed for the next six months. This saved the situation.”

They were times of innovation. Benjn. Randall Vickers’ papers contain a letter written on the first day of penny postage, by his brother-in-law. Yet Farrar’s grandfather was also a traditionalist, with strongly-held views. Organs were being introduced into churches, against the better judgement of those, Benjn. Randall Vickers included, who felt it might make the congregation lazy in their singing. Once he had to leave Pateley Bridge in fear of his life, after vigorously objecting to the ancient and popular sport of bull-baiting.

In 1849 the pestilence (a cholera epidemic) swept through the city of Leeds, ravaging many homes. Benjn. Randall Vickers decided to move his family out of harm’s way, further from the centre of town, and accordingly, in 1851, built a house in the countryside at Chapeltown, near Leeds. Thirty years later, when Farrar was born, the area was a suburb of the fast-growing city.

Farrar Vickers’ diary, May 8th, 1976: “On Tuesday next I expect to see the contents of the bottle which my grandfather deposited in the foundations of his new home, Willow House, Chapeltown, when the site was dedicated in 1851. Alongside the house (where I lived until my marriage in 1911) my grandfather built a laundry, above which was a room where Methodist services were held until eventually Roscoe Place Chapel was built.” From that small room developed the Brunswick Methodist Circuit in Leeds.

“At the Willow House service of dedication a prayer was made that on that site there might always be a place of worship to the glory of God and the service of people.” And so, to this day, it has been—a Methodist chapel still stands on the site.

“The part of Leeds in which I grew up had become a working-class area, where the soft water of Sheepscar beck played its part in the quality of the district’s products—leather and wool.”

When Benjn. Randall Vickers died in 1881 his two sons were left to carry on his business alone. Not long after, realizing the business would not support the two families, Farrar’s uncle, Thomas Henry, withdrew from it.

Farrar’s mother’s family, the Farrar-Smiths, came from the Yorkshire Wolds, where they had been farmers for generations. Her great-grandfather, ‘Jackie’ Smith, lived all his ninety-seven years at Smithy Mills, Adel, near Leeds, and remembered his parents entertaining John Wesley in their home. Her father, William Farrar-Smith, after whom Farrar was named, was a cloth merchant and a Justice of the Peace. Farrar’s mother, Lizzie Vickers, was a remarkable woman. Strikingly beautiful as a girl, she remained lively and young at heart all her life. Even in her eighties she would converse with a much younger person as an equal, and young people besides her children and grand-children used to delight in her company.

“The outstanding characteristic of my parents was their clear sense of right and wrong. I always had a considerable respect, affection and I think awe for my mother. She was the dominating influence in our home.

“I was fourth in the family. My eldest sister, Agnes, became an educational missionary in Burma; Irene was the one who maintained the continuity of our home; and my third sister, Helen, became a medical missionary in China. Randall, my younger brother, became a doctor and also went as a medical missionary to China. He and I more or less ran together, as children, but it was Helen with whom I had a ‘defensive-offensive’ alliance . . . we were both rebels against authority.

“I had tremendous admiration for my father, because he was a man of transparent integrity and complete sincerity. But he was not a good

businessman—though inventive and creative, he simply could not make money.

“In my childhood we were often hard up. Whilst preserving an appearance of respectability and financial stability, my parents were at times at their wits’ end to know how on earth to provide for us all. As children we had to make our own entertainment, and do the best with what we had. Why my brother and I were never killed in some of our antics I don’t know—once we climbed to the top of the roof and slid down it till our feet rested in the gutter overlooking the garden!

“There were no expensive clothes or food. It was very frugal most of the time, except once a year at Christmas, when there were three magnificent parties. These were for my parents to entertain their friends and repay hospitality which they had received during the year.

“The first party was for the ‘top brass’ type. For it we put on our best clothes, and my mother got in exotic food. It was a very starchy affair, quite ‘correct’, with everyone doing exactly what they should. We children were not sorry when the evening was over!

“The next night was for more ordinary friends—not very many of them, because it was an age when people kept themselves to themselves and uninhibited friendship was not a usual thing. This was an easier evening for us children, though we had to produce a song or poem, or play the piano or violin, and do something to contribute to the alleged enjoyment of our guests.

“But it was the third evening to which we really looked forward. It was for the Methodist ministers and their families. On that night we all let our hair down.

“The Methodist minister of that period was an absolutely first-class man. He moved among all kinds of people, knew human nature, and was faced with the realities of life. The result was that the attitude to life and conversation of these people was joyful and fresh. They were the best company I ever knew. During the year we had a steady succession of them in our home, men of the city and from abroad, people who had given themselves in the then dangerous parts of the world. It was a very feeding atmosphere in which to grow up. And it was the true complement to the financial frugality which made us look carefully at both sides of a penny before we spent it.

“One year my parents told me they were going to give me a bicycle for my birthday. I had visions of a cushion-sprung machine, shining with new paint and chrome, that would be the envy of all my friends. When it turned up it was a second-hand bone-shaker, with solid tyres. My father had paid five shillings for it, and at first I was ashamed to ride it, lest my friends should jeer at me.

“They were hard times. Unemployed men would come to the back door to beg for food. Occasionally I went with my mother to take food to some of the poor people in our district, for in those days there was no unemployment pay or sick benefit.”

Farrar went to two schools in Leeds—travelling to the first by three-horse bus, and to the second with his brother by the new electric tram. While Randall was ‘a good little boy’ and the favourite of their teacher, Farrar was the one who got into scrapes and had his knuckles rapped. He left the second school after an incident when he and another boy chased a sheep in the neighbouring field.

“My parents decided I must go away to school, to Harrogate College. I found it a miserable life. Most of the boys came from, or seemed to come from, homes where money was no difficulty. They had a glass of milk in the middle of the morning; they played in the school orchestra—for a fee—and various other ‘extras’. I could do none of them. They all had luscious tuck-boxes, kept in the cellar. I had none. But I suppose as is normal, there are instincts which find their way round, through, over or under obstacles. Mine were simply subterranean. I took a glass of milk in the middle of the morning, though it had not been paid for by my father. I was interested in the violin and for some time I played in the school orchestra, I think with a certain success. But my father had paid no fees for music. Occasional well-timed raids on other boys’ tuck-boxes enabled me to give the impression of having a tuck-box of my own.

“One particular boy was a vicious bully and made my life hell. I put up with it all for as long as I could, until I failed an important exam. My parents were greatly distressed and when they upbraided me, I broke down and blurted the whole lot out. I was in trouble with everyone.

“I was about thirteen when I decided to run away. There was a thrashing waiting for me at school, and I was not keen to be thrashed. I had two great-aunts who kept a small grocer’s shop in Leeds, and we used

to love visiting them for tea. They were always glad to see us and used to take us into the shop and tell us to choose what we liked—tinned salmon was my great favourite. So I went to the shop, telling my great-aunts that I had a day off school and had me a wonderful time. They were very thoughtful—or unwise—and I managed to accumulate enough to have something to jingle in my pocket. Naturally in planning to run away money was a consideration!

“Using my season ticket I got on the Harrogate train at Leeds station, but instead of getting off as usual I stayed on it, going in the direction of Newcastle. Of course, when the ticket collector came round the game was up. He told me to take a train back from Newcastle to Harrogate in the morning. I had no intention of taking his advice!

“I arrived at Newcastle—cold, tired and hungry—and stood on the platform wondering what to do. The signal-man took me into his box and gave me his own supper. I have no idea how he did it, but first thing the next morning I found myself on a train back to Leeds, and, to my astonishment, there was my father waiting for me on the platform when I arrived. He took me by the hand and off we went.

“My parents decided to find a school where a lad like me could be dealt with. My father took me up to London to see about it. In one possible school we met an old man who showed me gardens. Gardens! Each boy had one. He said, ‘I hear you have been a bad boy and I am sure you want to be a very good boy’. Well, I didn’t—and that school was ruled out.

“Somehow my father had heard of a man called Alex Devine. He was an idealist with his head in the clouds and his feet heaven knows where. But as regards education he was an absolute genius. He had been a journalist in Manchester, and what he had seen in the police courts caused him to start a school near London for ‘lost’ boys from good homes—he took in about forty. He had a bushy moustache and a wrist and hand which reminded me of a hawk, and there was an aroma of good cigars and Turkish cigarettes about him.

“To him I am eternally grateful. He knew human nature and he knew what to do with it. He wanted to prepare young men for anything but a hum-drum life.



“I had considerable respect, affection and awe for my mother”



“My father was a man of transparent integrity . . . he was creative and inventive”



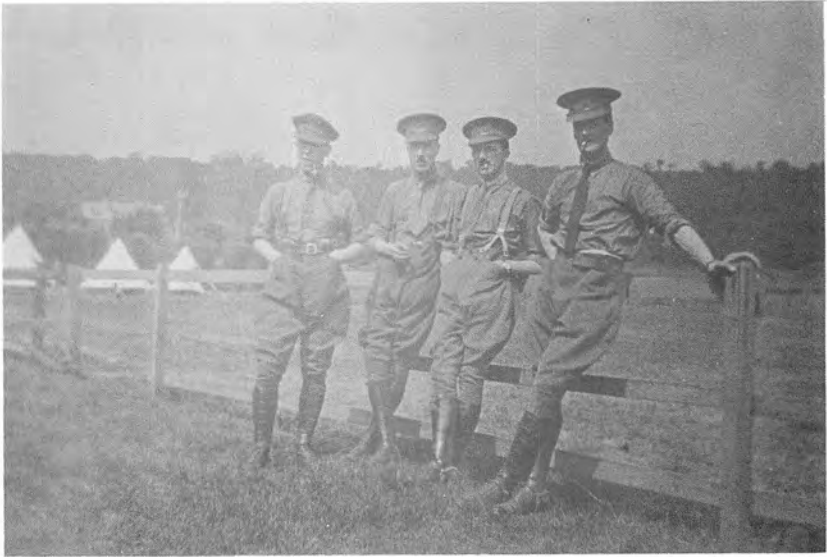
Farrar, 1914



Farrar is seated centre and his brother-in-law, John Simpson, is standing, rear right.



At Boys' Brigade camp, Farrar (standing L.) with Doris (seated L.) and her family.



"In the Royal Horse Artillery we did our training on Salisbury Plain" (Farrar is extreme R).



Doris and Farrar Vickers with aunt Jessie Farrar-Smith.



"In the early days (at Vickers') we made all our own barrels"



Blending oil by hand.



"I had a wonderful team working with me—John Simpson, John Allison, Alfred Latty . . . Cyril Crowther and Ted West."





Farrar in his office with David (L) and John (R).



Alec Taylor, Billy Allanson, and Edgar Sharp with his Leyland Beaver—TJ 521.



“Hard Gap was an ideal setting for Doris, with her wonderful home-making ability”





“At Oxford there were people who seemed to have found the thing for which I was looking, in terms of freedom”



“Doris . . . had a delightful sense of humour”



David and John

“‘Mr. Lex’, as we called him, often went up to London, and when he came back would tell us what he had done, whom he had met, what was going on. He was in London the day the first Labour MP was elected and he said to us, ‘In your life-time you will see a Labour government in this country’. The school was full of copies of ‘The Illustrated London News’, with pictures of people from all over the world. The result was that, unconsciously, we absorbed wide ideas.

“I very much wanted to go to London University. Encouraged by Devine and my parents I worked hard, and when the time came to take the entrance exam I had to go into London, to Parliament Square. At that time it had wooden examination huts in the middle of it. I went into the hut, looked at the question paper and did the best I could. But when the results were published I had failed.”

It was a great disappointment. However, Devine told Farrar’s father that the boy had a great ability with languages, and gave him an excellent character report.

“There were two books which I read during those months—one was on ‘Heat, Light and Electricity’, from which I got a sufficient smattering of the principles involved in electricity; and the other was Lowe’s ‘History of the English Language’, from which I got an understanding of the meaning and derivation of words which has been of inestimable value to me.

“Some years after I left his school Devine wrote to all his old pupils asking what we had learnt whilst under his care. I replied that because of him my mind had been opened to everything. I visited him again during the first World War, a little old man, smoking his interminable Turkish cigarettes, a small dog at his feet. Day by day the names of the boys he had trained were appearing in the casualty lists . . . all he had done seemed to be being destroyed. But as far as I am concerned ‘Mr. Lex’ was one of the great formative influences in my life.

“When we were children at Willow House there was a lady next door, Mme. Eless Winterburn, who was a phrenologist. We were sent in, one by one, to have her ‘feel the bumps’ on our heads and advise on our abilities. As years passed she proved to have been very near the mark with the others. Of me she said to my parents, ‘You could make him an auctioneer, but on no account put him into the Church’. That was fine by me!

“In August 1897 I went on my first business journey. My father, having been ill, was advised to take a month’s holiday at sea, combining business with pleasure. Through the kindness of a Hartlepool firm of shipowners he and I were given free passage on a small ship trading to the Baltic. My father signed on as Purser and I was listed as cabin boy.

“We lumbered across the North Sea with a cargo of coal for Kronstadt. I had the run of the ship, from engine-room to mast-head. I learned about holding a ship to her course, keeping an eye on the tell-tale wake astern, watching the compass by day and the tip of the mast against the stars at night.

“While the ship discharged her cargo, my father and I went to St. Petersburg. This was Russia under the Czar—extremes of wealth and of poverty, a breeding ground for the Revolution of 1917. I remember seeing the meat being cut from a massive joint of beef at our table in the hotel. We went to the Cathedral St. Isaacs and saw the lapis lazuli pillars. The hymns and responses were sung by I don’t know how many hundred men, with their deep Russian voices. We drove about in the three-horse troika cabs, which smelt of horse-sweat, Russian tar and leather.

“From Kronstadt the ship sailed ‘light’ up the gulf of Bothnia into the Arctic Circle—to load timber at Luleå and Piteå on the northeast coast of Sweden. To this day I can smell the pine.

“When we came back to Helsingborg we were fog-bound for a couple of days. The crew decided to have a party one night, to which we were invited. I was asked to recite and my father to sing. I was terrified in case he sang some religious song and got us thrown off the ship. Actually he sang ‘My grandfather’s clock’, or ‘I remember, I remember, the house where I was born’—one of those sentimental songs. I expected those rough men to laugh at him. How wrong I was. There was something in my father’s simple sincerity which transformed his quavery voice and which got through to those men. When we got back to Hartlepool my father bought a small gift for each man.

“It was a wonderful experience for a boy. When we got home I had ideas of emigrating—the North West Frontier Police sounded interesting. But, having no qualifications, the question ‘what next’ was a very real one.”

Two

“I believe I could sell oil”

After the trip to Russia Farrar spent a few months in his father's office in Boar Lane, Leeds, to see if he was suited to the oil merchanting business.

“The ‘firm’ was my father and his colleagues James Kershaw and A. C. Rosenfeld. There was a succession of clerks, plus—a mark of real pioneering—a woman typist. She was put to work in a small room downstairs, away from public sight as though there was something not quite ‘nice’ about having a woman in a business office.

“The office closed ‘early’ on Saturdays—four o'clock. I worked as office boy and hated the whole set-up. I couldn't understand the credit and debit sides of accounts, nor could I add up a column of figures in such a way as to get the same total twice running. Of all office boys I was the worst: rather than walk a long way to post letters, I would slip them down the nearest grating in the road!

“The senior man in the office used to go out about eleven o'clock each morning, across Boar Lane to a pub to ‘change his breath’. The firm's Works was a mile and a half from the Boar Lane office, in Hunslet. There was the Pan House, a small warehouse, and, I think, three men. Every now and then the Pan House caught fire. On one occasion, to our great merriment, the fire chief fell into a panful of oil, and the firm had to buy him a new uniform !

“Olive oil was sold by the *tun*—an old cask measure for liquids. The usual packages were half-ton barrels, unwieldy things to handle. Most of the firm's business was buying and selling—merchanting, rather than manufacturing. We sold almost anything—olive oil, wool grease, oleine, cotton fatty acids, mineral pitch, wool pitch, vegetable oils, stearines,

cotton seed soap. We sold press cloth to seed crushers. We made 'Vickers Storm Oil', used by life-boats to prevent the waves from actually breaking over the boat. We provided a special steam cylinder oil. My father invented a felt dust-shield for the protection of railway axle boxes. We exported Phenolan disinfectant to Hong Kong and wool oil to Tientsin for the manufacture of their lovely rugs. We exported burning oil to Mombasa. You name it, we did it—too often at a loss!

"For a time my father operated a seed-crushing mill in Hull and used to attend the Baltic Exchange there every week, but his operating costs were too high, his quality too good, and his prices too low. Eventually my mother persuaded him to cut his losses and close it down.

"On one of his business visits to Norway he met a man from whom he bought a half-share in an 'iron ore mine'. When he went to look at his new acquisition he found it was indeed solid iron ore, but it was an island—Bjarkø—and there was no means of working it. So that had to be written off too.

"At this stage there did not seem to be much of a future for me in the family business. So my father decided to put me into the clothing trade. He had a prosperous business friend, Sir Wilfred Hepton, later Lord Mayor of Leeds, who owned a women's clothing factory. I think Hepton had the idea that, if I was properly trained and if he played his cards right, I might marry his only daughter and succeed him in his firm. The Hepton cloth was bought in Germany, and Sir Wilfred sent me to a friend of his in Berlin to learn the trade.

"In March 1900, my father took me over and introduced me. It was the time of the South African war, and the English were not popular in the Kaiser's Germany. But my father's simple goodness seemed to penetrate people's defences. During the nine months I spent there I was shown nothing but kindness.

"My father left me in Berlin. I took German lessons from a professor and was set to work in the office of the clothing factory. The man who was my mentor in that office, knowing that I had come to learn German, refused to listen to me if I spoke English. I very soon found that the German the professor taught me was a totally different language from the one I was learning to speak at the office, so I dropped the professor and continued to learn for free!

“I had little extra money, but soon after I arrived in Berlin I went one night to the theatre, and was so fascinated that I made it a frequent habit. I always took the same seat, and had a good dinner beforehand. This meant saving up during the week, so my mid-day meal was often just a bun and coffee.

“Once I got into trouble with the police, for having the wrong sort of bell on my bicycle. They wanted me to pay a fine—but I declined, saying I had no money. The people in the firm I was with were horrified and said I would go to gaol. Well, *I* didn’t mind seeing the inside of a German prison, but they were so distressed that they paid my fine!

“One evening the owner of the factory invited me to dinner. I was shy and clumsy and managed to spill wine over the dress of the lady next to me. Great excitement, of course. They told me that, in Germany, if a man spilt wine over a lady it meant he was automatically engaged to her. I know it was a joke, but it didn’t feel like one at the time.

“Having more or less mastered German ideas of clerical work and accounting, I was sent to the factory in Potsdam for a few weeks. There I learnt the ‘feel’ of the cloth, and all that goes into carding, spinning, weaving and finishing it. From the factory it was carried to the warehouse on great drays, pulled by six Prussian horses. I used to hear the bells on their collars as they passed outside my lodgings.

“When I got back to Leeds Sir Wilfred Hepton asked me what I had learnt about cloth manufacture. Though I had learnt a good deal, it was all in my head and my hands. He told me to come back with the notes from my time in Germany—which I did not possess. I returned to his office with a few hastily concocted notes, and it became abundantly clear that there was no future for me in that firm—or with his daughter!

“The South African war was still on, and one evening, passing the Leeds Rifles Barracks, I decided to enlist. Because my heart was thumping so much I failed to pass the medical test. The doctor said, ‘You’ll never make it’ and rejected me as being unfit. Of all the daft things I ever tried to do, I think that was the daftest!

“On January 1st, 1901, three weeks after returning from Germany, I started work as a trainee in the Leeds wholesale clothing factory of Bainbridge. I worked under a fellow called Tommy Appleyard—a cutter.

I was his trimmer—he cut the cloth and I laid out and cut the linings. I made many mistakes, which he quietly covered up for me. A lot of material that should have been linings finished surreptitiously in the waste bag. After a while I moved up to the stock room, under a man called Freddy Binns, who was also very good to me. We worked long hours—at Easter and Whitsuntide right through the night, for which we got a pork pie and a cup of coffee. I earned five shillings a week.

“After four and a half years of finding only those two wretched half-crowns in my little tin box each week, I took my courage in both hands and asked to see ‘the old man’, hoping for a rise. When I had stated my case he looked over his spectacles and said, ‘You’re not worth the money I already pay you. You’d better take a week’s notice and go’.”

Farrar’s father noted in his diary: “Farrar has had to work hard, often late at night, and has not had a really good holiday for four years. His twenty-first birthday present holiday, promised for Switzerland, is still owing to him.”

Farrar and his sister Helen were taken on a walking holiday in Switzerland in 1905 by their aunt Jessie Farrar-Smith, and they kept a Minute Book of their trip. Farrar described their long mountain walks, from pension to pension, the views they saw and the villages through which they passed. The ladies wore long skirts, no matter what the terrain. Farrar also made careful notes of prices and quality of food, for future reference. They obviously enjoyed every moment of it.

During the years at Bainbridges Farrar had also been a trainee Methodist lay preacher. “The idea was that I might be led to go into the ministry—which many of my friends did. Each week we were given a theme for a sermon on the attributes of God, and a ‘hook’ onto which to hang our points. Then we went out to preach trial sermons. There was always a jolly good meal after the service—our host in one village was the local butcher!

“The man who went to preach was treated with considerable respect. It was a serious business—one dressed all in black. I got weighed down by it all, and one summer I deliberately wore a white flowered waistcoat. I got a polite letter inviting me to wear something more suitable. By the time I went on holiday to Switzerland my mind was beginning to turn in

other directions, and the more I thought it over the less I felt like going into the ministry. Finally my name was removed from the Plan.”

So, Farrar was at a loose end. His father and he had looked in vain for further openings in the clothing trade. Finally he took the obvious course. His father’s diary records in 1906: “Farrar has come to be with me in the business. There was no other door open for him, and this is an old established business, with a good reputation—and there are openings for development in it. The only drawback is that the profits have for some years been so inconsiderable. He is attending evening classes to learn book-keeping, and also chemical classes to get a mastery of the science for the oil trade.”

During those years Farrar’s father really needed help in the firm. “I fear I did little to ease his burden, at first, though I kept some of the books and did odd jobs. Finally, tired of the trickle of orders that came in, and the consequent decline in business, I said to my father ‘I believe I could sell oil’. He gave me a little bag with some samples and prices, and off I went to Wakefield. The train fare was 9d.—or, if you booked through Alverthorpe, Ossett, Earlsheaton, etc., it was only 7½d. In those days a penny ha’penny made a difference.

“At my first call I got an order for a half-ton cask of yarn oil, and came back home with my tail up and my hat, so to speak, on the back of my head. I would show them how to run an oil business!

“I think that order must have been given out of pity, because for a long time after that I tramped the West Riding of Yorkshire, lugging my samples, in every kind of weather, and never got a squeak of another order.

“On visits to Huddersfield there might be twenty or thirty of us on the train trying to visit the same mill. It was a question of the early bird catching the worm. There was a discreet race from the station to the mill office, and if several arrived simultaneously we tossed for who went in first. You didn’t go into an office to be received decently—you had to rattle a little trap door. A head would come out and say, ‘What’s it about?’ ‘Oil’. Often the reply was, ‘Not looking’. You could then walk miles on your own flat feet to the next mill.

“Although after that first order my efforts at selling were fruitless, I

had tasted blood and I was learning what not to do. One tip my father gave me was, 'If you see a chimney, there must be a boiler, an engine, and a need for oil.' I found there was a difference between what was wanted and what was needed.

"People wanted a pale oil for the textile trade, and because real technology was non-existent, price was the deciding factor. The practical test for a good oil was to put a drop of it on your palm, spit on it, and you could interpret the result any way you liked! If the buyer liked your oil and his spit, it was a 'good' oil.

"The foundations of our wool oils in those days were oils which were actually heavy greases, and needed to be warmed before use. In cold weather they were as stiff as cheese, and the oils lay in lumps on the wool until the warmth of the processes made them more mobile. Be that as it may, they produced beautiful yarns. Our Heavy Wool Oil was a successful attempt to provide the 'body' of these thicker oils in a more convenient form.

"The oiling arrangements in woollen spinning were primitive—dollops of oil ladled out of degging cans by men trampling on the wool. As more fluid oils came into use a watering can was used to effect an improvement, but we provided what was, I believe, the first means of spraying all over the blend, with consequent improvement in distribution, coverage and yarn strength.

"One of the bug-bears of the woollen industry in those days was fire risk. Greasy fettlings (left over from carding wool) stored outside in the damp or heat often resulted in spontaneous combustion. The insurance companies' regulations were strict but irrelevant. When a fire did occur, the thick greasy smoke prevented firemen from getting to the root of the blaze.

"My father played an active part in getting the insurance regulations changed. We had a long battle with the Fire Office Committee and at one point produced for them two oils, one of which, though conforming to specification, was almost certain to 'fire'. The other, containing mineral oils which did not conform, was infinitely safer. Like other things which we take for granted—and at times carelessly allow to be eroded—the present more relevant fire regulations for wool oils are the product of persistent, intelligent battle for change.

“Often we needed finance to purchase materials and commodities, which meant visits to the bank for credit. Father would make an appointment with the manager and put on his ‘Sunday suit’ for the interview. When he went to the bank for £150, £160, or £200 overdraft, it was a serious thing. He thought out what he wanted to say, knelt down for a word of prayer, and made meticulous notes of the interview on his return.

“At times I would chafe at what I felt was my father’s puritanical standard of life and work, but I worked at a double desk opposite him for some years and never saw or heard him depart from the absolute standard of integrity which he accepted.

“We used to travel together on business, both in England and in Scandinavia and other parts of Europe. When we reached the hotel the first thing he did was to get down on his knees, expecting me to do the same, and pray that he would know to whom to sell, from whom to buy, and that people would be kind to him and help him in his business.

“This business of praying was a normal part of his life. He would pray anywhere, with anyone, and I used to get most embarrassed. I said to him, ‘Father, I wish you would *not* do this, people don’t like it’. He replied, ‘I have done it for a great many years and I propose to go on doing it until I die, for in all my life there is only one man who has ever been anything but grateful for it’. To that I had no answer.

“I had been brought up in a Christian family—prayers morning and evening, Church and Sunday school, and so on. Prayer and meditation were the backbone and breath of my father’s life. But it had no real effect on me. I conformed, but Christianity had no connection, to my mind, with real life.

“I well remember one moment when something I had done had gone seriously awry. I was in a hotel in London. I came to the conclusion that the whole idea of religion was just baloney. I saw a Bible, put there by a body of Americans who placed a Bible in every hotel room in London. I looked at it. I was at my wits’ end, on a hot day, and I thought, ‘This is what has brought me to trouble—it’s a fraud!’ I threw the Bible out of the window into the street—and never looked to see if it hit anyone!

“My father’s prayers never brought him affluence or prosperity. He never sought that. But there came something else. In good times and bad—and there were many bad times—he was at peace.”

Despite financial anxieties it was a happy family life, chronicled in many letters and diaries. Farrar once wrote to his sister Irene on her birthday, "We are not a vocal, communicable family—maybe good, maybe not good. I certainly freeze in the presence of gush and glamour. But you hold a very special place in the hearts of us all. I thought this afternoon how like mother you are in spirit and appearance, and how like her you must be growing in the affection of your friends."

And Agnes wrote to Randall, "What a boon to a man in a hole, to have Farrar as a friend".

For reasons of health the family took extensive walking holidays in the English Lake District. His mother once wrote to Randall, "Do take a little exercise, dear, if possible. I want to remind you and Farrar that you had a great-grandfather who *never saw his feet* for some years! And these things run in families!"

In 1909 there was one of many holidays near Grasmere. Farrar's parents took lodgings for a fortnight. The only means of getting around were walking, cycling and rowing. In addition to Farrar's parents that year there were Randall and his fiancée Mabel Pocock, Irene and her friend Mary Early, and Farrar and his fiancée Doris Simpson.

Three

Army & Navy

Doris Simpson's father, John James Simpson, was head of the firm of Simpson Fawcett of Leeds which made high quality perambulators. Doris, who had passed many music exams at her schools in Leeds and Settle, had to give up any prospect of a musical career because of her mother's poor health. She was needed at home to help bring up her six younger brothers and sisters.

Later she went away to become 'mother's help' in the home of the Marsden family in Altrincham, Cheshire. Her four brothers enlisted when war broke out in 1914, and the eldest lost his life when, after his ship was sunk in the Mediterranean, he gave his place on a raft to a non-swimmer. One sister, Barbara, was a missionary in China. The Simpsons, like the Vickers, were a God-fearing family, of spirit and conviction.

Doris' grandfather, when a young man, had been apprenticed to the man who built the great rail viaduct near Harrogate. Grandfather Simpson was being given a hard time by the foreman, and finally lost all patience and chased him across the newly-constructed bridge, brandishing a red-hot poker!

Farrar and Doris were married in Leeds on June 15th, 1911. Farrar was earning £250 a year, and the rent for their new little home in Moor-town, Leeds, was £25 a year—which they considered a large sum. For their honeymoon they went to Switzerland, and again Farrar kept a log of their travels and their walks:

June 15, 1911, Thursday: "Left Leeds Station with éclat and confetti by the four o'clock Midland."

Saturday, June 17: "Had a glorious ride up to Grindelwald, evening

lights on the snow peaks and arrived, tired and dusty, at the hotel where a nice dinner was waiting.”

Wednesday, June 21: “Watched the evening light on Grindelwald and sun and cloud light on Eiger and Hörnli until 5.50 pm, and then we came quickly down through lovely woods and fields, past an old dame playing a zither.”

Thursday, June 22: “Coronation Day (George V). Took a very steep and precipitous path through woods, lunched near a cascade and then to the inn and took a glass of goat’s milk (50 centimes).”

Monday, June 26: “To Mürren by train, got to the hotel in a drizzly cloud and found it the rummiest place (Fr. 7), but the view should be glorious when visible.”

Sunday, July 2: “At 10.30 we entered purgatory for the English Church service—I foolishly agreed to play the harmonium, for the hymns. After dinner we walked down the village on the chance of hearing yodelling again, but did not; though we heard two girls singing up on the hillside and their voices were accompanied by cow-bells.”

His mother wrote a letter to Farrar on his honeymoon, which he kept by him for the rest of his life:

“Willow House, July 1, 1911

“My dear Farrar,

“Irene and I have been to your house today for some hours and I think we have made quite an impression. Nearly everything is in now, and I think you will both be very pleased with your new home.”

. . . “It is a pity the weather has not been better, but perhaps this week will make up for the rain, and you both needed rest. We shall be very glad to have you both back again.

“I feel very thankful that you are what you are: I wanted several times to have a good talk with you before your marriage, but though I tried often I did not find a suitable chance. May I tell you now what I wanted to say?

“In *most* things I am satisfied with you, but sometimes I feel *very* anxious about your attitude to God. He has given you all the joy and prosperity of your life, and added to all other gifts the gift of the girl you love to be your wife. Are there many things omitted from your cup of happiness? I think not. I know a few years ago you definitely gave yourself and your life and influence to God, and it made a marked change in you—but I miss some of the ‘fruit’ now. I simply can’t bear to think of you living below the best. Specially now when you are starting a home of your own.

“You have the chance now of starting on a path that will be full of usefulness and righteousness, not necessarily of prominence, and how you act the next two or three years will influence your whole life . . . I don’t mean do or abstain from doing this or that, but I do so want you to be heart-right with God. The outer life I am not so anxious about as the inner life. Don’t think it is a sermon, Farrar, only I think I ought to tell you how earnestly I long to see you a devout servant of God.

“Much love to you both. Yrs. affectionately,

Mother.”

Before and after his marriage Farrar participated in the work of the Boys’ Brigade in Leeds, for much of the time with one of Doris’ brothers, John Simpson.

“John and I had the wave-lengths of those twelve to eighteen year old lads. Very good use was made of discipline, and there was the most imaginative handling of the boys. In those days we and the other BB officers were as well known as the police in some areas of Leeds. We had to choose the time to go visiting. Sunday dinner was at three or four in the afternoon, and if we arrived at the wrong moment they weren’t at all pleased to see us.”

Farrar was Secretary of the Leeds Battalion 1903-1906, Treasurer 1907-1908, Secretary 1908-1909, President 1921-1924, and finally retired as Vice-President in 1935. In 1926 the Boys’ Brigade and the Boys’ Life Brigade were merged, and Farrar was one of the Committee who handled the amalgamation in Leeds.

The highlight of each year was the Annual Demonstration in Leeds

Town Hall, conducted with split-second timing. Farrar served for ten years on the National Executive of the Boys' Brigade and attended council meetings all over the country. Stanley Smith, son of the founder of the BB, often stayed at Farrar's home, and Farrar took his own sons to Glasgow for the Jubilee Celebrations in 1934. Lord Home, father of the present Earl, and then President of the BB, stayed with Farrar and Doris around that time, in their home in Linton. The colleagues with whom Farrar worked in those Boys' Brigade days were to be his life-long friends.

* * *

The immediate pre-World War I years saw the development of many new ideas in the family oil merchanting business. In July 1913 the firm was incorporated, and Farrar became a Director.

His father had the idea that oil could penetrate metal plates and give protection from water. The floating dock in Bergen, Norway, was painted with this oil. Farrar saw that same dock when it was raised after World War II, after the Germans had sunk it. When he scraped the oil off, the metal was still in perfect condition.

Vickers Grease, or waterproof packing, was made for the stern-tube packings of ships. Marshall Valve Gear was used on railway locomotives, to give better mileage and lower fuel consumption. When pursuing a new idea Farrar's father went to the top technical men, to present his ideas and ask their advice.

Thus he developed VISTA (Vickers Improved Stern Tube Appliance). It had become apparent that a ship's tail-shaft showed expansion when operating in the high temperatures of, say, the Suez Canal. So, in the designing of any stern-tube gland for the after end of a ship, one must allow for the longitudinal expansion and contraction of the shaft. The ability to do this is the heart of the VISTA gland.

In November 1913 Alfred Latty, who was to be a close friend and colleague of Farrar's for over sixty years, first joined the firm. His description of the work he was employed to do gives a picture of how the business was carried on.

“When I was interviewed in 1913, Mr. B. T. Vickers thought I did not look strong enough to carry the heavy parcels on daily journeys from the Boar Lane office to the firm’s Works at Airedale Mills—a trip of a mile and a half, done on ‘shank’s pony’. Mr. Vickers decided to give me a fortnight’s trial, which went on for fifty-seven years. The firm in those days had neither cars nor lorries, and the tram fare was a half-penny, between office and works. I was given a half-penny on the understanding that I had not to use it unless it rained. If the weather was fine I had to give it back on my return to the office. Frequently there were gallon tins to bring back from Airedale Mills, often four strung milk-maid fashion—two over each shoulder. Many’s the time I had to push a forty gallon barrel of oil on a pair of wheels the mile and a half from the Works.”

To have his son at his side in the business was a relief to Farrar’s father. Though, by his own admission, he had been a poor office boy, Farrar was becoming a shrewd and capable businessman. They made many journeys around Europe, together and separately, building up the firm’s connections and trade.

“I remember July 1914. I was on my way back from my annual trip to Scandinavia, travelling from Abo to Helsinki. As the train rolled along I saw the flash of sunlight on metal. I afterwards discovered it was the Russian army mobilized behind the trees.

“I went on home via Berlin, where I had hoped to spend a few days seeing the old places and my friends. But after one night in the Friederichstrasse Hotel there was such a nasty atmosphere that I went straight back to Leeds. My father, who was in Scandinavia at the time, felt it there too and turned for home a day or two before war was declared.”

Because of his responsibilities in the business Farrar did not join up immediately, though many of his friends did. “I was appointed a Special Constable. I used to go to Leeds Town Hall, climb up to the Clock Tower and sit looking for Zeppelins. I never saw a single one, of course!

“Later I joined the Imperial Cadet Yeomanry and then transferred to the Royal Horse Artillery and did my training at St. John’s Wood Barracks in London and on Salisbury Plain. At the end of the day the horses had to be fed and watered before the men could attend to themselves.”

Farrar was shipped out to France, to Bethoun, and then stationed at Le Havre and St. Omer. He kept little books of meticulous gunnery notes, operations orders and other mementos. And he made a note of all the places where he was stationed throughout the war on the back of a photograph of his son, John, born in November 1914.

In 1917, while on holiday in the Lake District, Farrar's father died. Farrar resigned his commission and went home for a period to look after the business, which was engaged in supplying textile lubricants, under government contract, for the manufacture of khaki.

After some months he decided to get into uniform again, leaving the business in the hands of his father's colleagues, James Kershaw and A. C. Rosenfeld.

"I had heard that a Mr. Rogers (a fruit-merchant in Leeds Market) was recruiting men for 'a special service' and, provided that I was willing to go anywhere at 24 hours' notice, I was accepted into the RNVR. I was posted to Aberdour, in Scotland, with Doris and our young son, where I was to serve in the submarine hydrophone service. There was not much to do at first, so the men were set to quarrying rock. It was a leisurely life—the Chief Petty Officer suggested that we work slowly, to leave something for later arrivals to do!

"After three weeks I began training in the hydrophones—their design, servicing and installation. A set was placed in an old 'drifter' where we could record and observe the sound history of passing vessels.

"It was practicable to hear a vessel which one could not see at something up to twenty or thirty miles distance, and to distinguish the origin of the sounds. For example, an internal combustion engine had a rapid pulse, a turbine-driven engine gave a more continuous sound, and a steam engine had a much slower and heavier pulse.

"At times I could hear the wash of the water on the sea bed. In those early days of hydrophone listening gear, it was only possible to 'hear' the far-off sounds if everything within the boat was absolutely silent—pumps, air pumps, engine—everything had to stop. This was not liked by submarine commanders, because when the speed of the boat was stopped there was a certain instability.

“In those days the hydrophones were built into the hull of the boat, one on each side of the bows, and so when one heard the general sound of a potential enemy vessel one listened with the port side ‘ear’ and then with the starboard side, and the ship had to be steered and handled in such a way that the sounds of those two ‘ears’ were balanced. It was a tricky job.

“I happened to have a particularly sensitive sense of sound and direction. On taking my original tests the marking was so high that I was taken off the course and summoned by the commanding officer. Asked my occupation I replied ‘Marine engineer’. (I knew marine engineers were high on the demobilisation list at the end of the war, and after all I did know one end of a boat from the other!). The C.O. said ‘Go to London and get some uniform. Report to the Admiralty for instructions.’ I was commissioned sub lieutenant.

“Next morning the unpopular Chief Petty Officer came along and ‘damned’ and ‘blasted’ me for not being out of bed. I retorted, ‘How dare you speak to an officer like that?’ He nearly exploded, and I gleefully explained that I had been commissioned and was no longer in his care.

“At the Admiralty I was given my terms of reference—to see every set of hydrophones in every submarine that was being built in Britain and to run trials if necessary. I asked, ‘What do I do first? Where do I find them?’

“The Commodore nearly blasted me out of the room—‘Go and find out!’ So I came out into Whitehall, responsible for the working of the submarine hydrophone service of the Navy, and without the faintest idea how to go about it!

“But I did have sufficient contact with and knowledge of ship-building, from my work with my father, to know where these vessels might be being built. I had a book of travel warrants, and I went into the likely yards. In the end I traced all but one of the 97 submarines being built. My entry to a yard was only challenged once—at Vickers’ in Barrow!

“My first dive in a submarine was in the old experimental B3—so full of holes and patches that the last man in tied an empty petrol tin to the conning tower to indicate our position if we didn’t emerge. I was bolted into a compartment in the nose of the sub so that if the water entered it

would be confined to the part where I was. *I* might be drowned, but there was no point in everyone else being drowned too.

“On the dive I listened and reported, and the authorities took note of my ideas for improvements. When we emerged again I went into the ward/gun/mess room, where I was given a basin of the hottest, strongest cocoa that I’ve ever had—a spoon would have stood up in it.

“I was then given command of the boat and told to take it to Leith. It was my first experience of responsibility.

“During 1918 someone invented the directional hydrophone with which, instead of having to turn the whole boat in the desired direction, it was possible to move the two listening ‘ears’. The sounds of both ‘ears’ were read off on a monitor, showing the direction from which the vessel was coming. It took three days to cut a two-inch square hole in the inch-thick hull to install this latest directional hydrophone. I kept the piece of metal we took out.

“Whereas in those conditions it was impossible to *see* what was on the surface of the water, it was possible when one got down into the still water below the surface to *hear* and to know the direction from which the sound was coming. There were some officers in the Submarine Service at that time who refused to use their ‘ears’ and failed to take account of the sounds which could have been available to them. One man who said it was all a lot of tommy-rot decided to surface his boat without listening, unaware that a big ship was bearing down on him. The result was that his boat was cut down and all on board except, I believe, one, were lost.

“Safety did in practical ways depend upon listening and hearing.”

Many years later, when thinking of his war-time experiences, Farrar wrote:

“The world is littered with devices listening for the sound of a hostile plane or missile, for the note of fear. Why not listen for the note of faith, the voice of peace? Think of the times through Biblical history when men listened and were saved. ‘Prevenient guidance’ the theologians called it. That meant you had a hunch *before* the event.

“There is need to relearn the value of stillness and to rediscover the

art of listening in this unsure world. Calculation will not do it, nor will sight. We need the gift of perceptive listening. It is our historic inheritance.”

In December 1918 Farrar said to his Commanding Officer that he'd like to get a ship and sail round the ships of the German Navy Surrender Fleet, lying in the Forth. He had never seen the vessels and men whom he had been fighting for years. The Commander's deliberate blind eye allowed him to make that trip.

“On December 31st, 1918 the Commander asked if I wanted to be demobilized, and I didn't let much dust collect on my heels. I reported to the Admiralty in London and signed out.

“My first act as a civilian was to submit to my Lords of the Admiralty a memo suggesting investigation into the value of oilbath lubrication for the tail-shafts of submarines, as a means of ensuring their 'silence'. No notice was taken of my suggestion!”

Four

“Vickers Oils Are Good Oils”

“It was the beginning of an exciting adventure when, in early 1919, I found myself picking up the threads of a merchanting business which had only survived the pressures and tensions of the war by the momentum of its pre-war integrity and the faithful handling of its affairs by two or three men.

“I came to this opportunity at thirty-eight, having had a rebellious youth and a sketchy education, the soundness of which only became apparent as time went on.

“The civilian world had changed beyond recognition. The very names of our raw materials meant nothing to me. I had to start again at the beginning, learning afresh the origin, character and use of materials, while at the same time trying to handle supply, production and plant matters, publicity, costing and selling prices, and instituting performance control tests. I also went to Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany and Holland to find out what, if anything, remained of our pre-war connections.”

The firm’s offices were still in Boar Lane, in the old warehouse built by Farrar’s grandfather, and the Works were—and still are—at Airedale Mills in Hunslet, Leeds, which the firm had bought in 1877.

“I had a wonderful team working with me—James Kershaw, Alfred Latty, Milner Woodhead, John Simpson, Geoffrey Cowlshaw, Cyril Crowther, Tom Mitchell . . .”

Alfred Latty’s sister, Madge, joined the firm in 1918, and became Farrar’s secretary. In October 1919 Doris’ brother, Col. John Simpson, arrived to be in charge of the representatives and their areas. Geoffrey Cowlshaw began with the firm in July 1921, and soon became chief

chemist. Cyril Crowther had joined as office boy two weeks before, and he never forgot the reaction from 'Mr. Farrar' when he inadvertently dropped the tea-tray in the corridor outside Farrar's office—or that Farrar was much more concerned about Cyril's welfare than about the spoutless teapot.

The style of 'Benjn. R. Vickers & Son', adopted in 1865, had been replaced by the incorporation of the company as 'Benjn. R. Vickers & Sons Ltd.' in 1913. At the same time the manufacturing and engineering activities of the marine stern-tube gland, pioneered by Farrar's father, were separately handled by the 'B. R. Vickers (Leeds) Engineering Co., Ltd.'. This was incorporated in 1915, and known in the firm as 'E. Co.'.

The work of 'E. Co.' was further strengthened when Mr. W. McLaren Forwell joined on December 1st, 1923. He was given a private office with drawing boards etc., where he drew up the manufacturing plans and specifications, for each gland was specially built for the dimension of each individual vessel. This expertise, as is later related, was to stand Britain in good stead at a crucial moment of World War II.

Farrar was one of the first to have a motor car in Leeds. He had one beloved 'G.N.' two-seater. "Sometimes a wheel fell off, but it didn't matter—the car was so near the ground." His son John remembers sitting in the back of a bus overcome with laughter as his father was towed home from Harewood, getting more and more spattered with mud thrown up by the back wheels of the bus. Farrar used to do the maintenance in and under the car on Saturday afternoons.

"With John Simpson, I covered the woollen industry from Penzance to Thurso, using an 8 horse-power Rover, with an air-cooled engine with horizontally opposed cylinders. After a time we got onto the bull-nose type Morris car.

"After the restrictions and frustrations of war all of us could get going full blast, and we forged ahead. In the early 1920s business grew and prospered. All we had to do was get hold of raw materials and sell them.

"I went to Sweden to pick up the threads of our pre-war trade. Knowing there was a world shortage of certain oils, I bought on spec. a hundred tons of linseed oil and sold it off in five-ton lots at an ever

increased price. There was an urgent need for that essential ingredient of paint for the preservation of the wooden buildings in Scandinavian countries.

“At one place, in Malmö, a dog snapped at my leg, and to compensate for injury to my self-esteem I charged a bit extra to the owner-buyer. It was a game. I don’t think I had many principles. ‘Buy as cheap as you can and sell as dear as you can’ was my philosophy.

“I met another Englishman and told him what I was doing. He asked what price I was selling at. When I told him he said, ‘You’re daft. Add an extra ten or twenty pounds a ton.’ So I went on to Finland with this advice.

“Years later, when I had learnt the meaning of integrity, I went back to Stockholm and publicly apologized for my actions over that linseed oil.”

Farrar and James Kershaw, first Secretary of the Company, were the two Directors of the firm at this time. “We were so busy getting on with the work that we never bothered about our incomes. We suddenly realised, ‘Hey, we’re paying employees more than we are taking ourselves’. I got in touch with my uncle, who was my father’s executor, and consulted him on what to do. He said, ‘You’re keeping the business going. You need a thumping good increase in your salary.’”

On May 1st, 1925, Farrar engaged John Hart from the Border country of Melrose. John had been in the watch trade, but at the time was teaching textiles at the Galashiels Technical School.

“Nobody in those days really knew anything about the oiling of wool. Everyone wanted a nice colour, but no one knew what the effect of the oil was on the wool, or on the machinery.

“At one firm, in Hawick, we sold ten tons of a very fine pale yarn oil. One day I was sent a cop of yarn that had gone yellow. They said it was due to our oil. I was ‘out’—the business was lost. I realized I did not know what my oil was doing. I set to work to find out which oil did what, to what sort of wool, and found myself mastering the technique of the oiling of wool.

“It became obvious that the colour of the oil was not necessarily a guarantee of the final colour of the yarn. The nasty word oxidation reared its ugly head. We had to track the trouble to its source and eliminate any offending raw materials or conditions. So at once we instituted a drastic review of every one of our raw materials, testing each under working conditions of heat and cold, light and dark, dry and humid. We quickly found the cause of the trouble, and in so doing laid the foundations for our later expertise and authority on oils for woollen processes.

“Performance control tests simulating actual working conditions were instituted for each of our products, and what was needed—as distinct from what would bring profit—became the dominant factor of policy. Because of our obvious knowledge we were now taken into mills, right to the problem points of process, and as we learned what was needed we were quickly able to produce it.

“One man took me right through his mill. On one of the carding machines I saw red rust, metal soap formed by the type of oil I had been used to selling—high free-fatty acid content distilled oleine. This gave me the second reason for the yellowing of yarns. The first was the oxidation of the oil. The second was the metallic soap, created by the free-fatty acid in the oil.

“I set out to produce a range of oils with a much lower free-fatty acid content, which would be kinder to the wool, and probably give better results in yarn strength and yarn condition. Then I came up against a major snag, with the scourers.

“The usual scouring practice in those days was to use high-test oleine, which was scoured out of the cloth simply by the addition of alkali—i.e. soap. This created a high-lathering, frothy soap, and if the scourers saw what they called ‘the greyth’ pouring out over the scouring machine, they said it was scouring all right. Now our new oils (which we termed glyceroleines, to indicate that they were a mixture of glycerides and oleines) didn’t make a frothy scour like that. It was a very small, fine bubble, instead of the great fat ones . . . so the froth was about one-fifth of what the men were accustomed to.

“I remember going to one mill and the man said, ‘Your stuff won’t scour’. I had done sufficient work in the laboratory myself to believe that it *would* scour. I said, ‘Wait till you’ve run the scouring machine for the

full length of time. Then see what it's like.' To his surprise, when he had finished his normal scouring run, the cloth was perfectly clean. There was no soap residue and the oil had come out entirely. It had previously been a bit of a problem that, unless care was taken in rinsing, some of the oleine soap was left in the cloth, and this made the piece smell.

"The next thing to do was to spread our new ideas on the oiling of wool. John Hart and I covered virtually the whole of the Scottish woollen industry, especially the Borders and Hillfoots, with our ideas. We would take a room at the local hall or hotel and invite carders and spinners to come. Notes of our lecture were put onto a visual aid film and projected onto any white space available, usually a wall—once it was the ceiling. It was a very simple idea and ensured that our presentation followed a clear, regular pattern which provoked the practical men present to confirm or challenge our ideas and experience. All of us learned together.

"Very largely as a result of our work, the insurance companies' tariffs for wool oils were altered. The old tests, which by that time had become obsolete, were changed. Some of the work which we did became the basis on which the Wool Industries Research Association did their first development work." Small wonder that one of the Vickers advertising slogans was "Spin a good yarn with Vickers Oils."

"As the firm achieved success, prosperity increased, and by ploughing back profits into the business, instead of 'milking the cow', the foundations of the present financial stability were laid. With the whole-hearted support of our shareholders every development then and since then has been financed out of our own resources."

Two others who greatly served the company joined in 1926—Edwin ('Ted') West of Nottingham, and George Payne.

"Then came the needs of the hosiery industry, where wool and silk were the two fibres—with cotton used to a certain extent. For those, olive oil and olive oil soap were the two lubricants or processing oils for knitting. We found that in knitting artificial silk, the hose lengths were quite unreliable, and no one knew why. There were a tremendous number of what they called 'press-offs'—hose that had been knitted up but which was useless because the length was not the same as its pair. It occurred to Ted West and myself that atmospheric humidity might have something to do with this, because artificial silk was very susceptible to atmospheric

moisture. We spent years experimenting till we found something to do the trick. It was a problem that had not been solved by anyone before. And the result was that we were five years ahead of all the competition and were the acknowledged authorities on this subject.

“That was the back-bone of our life in those post-World War I years. I do not remember ever having made a promise of performance that was not fulfilled. In this matter I never chanced my arm. If I was not sure I said so. We became the ally and not just the supplier of the people with whom we did business.”

During the General Strike of 1926 Farrar volunteered, like many another, to drive trams in Leeds for the duration of the emergency. He kept a copy of the Strike Bulletin, dated 8.5.26, among his papers.

In 1928 a simple twelve-page brochure was issued to mark the one hundredth anniversary of the founding of the firm. It was entitled ‘Three Generations—being the story of a boot maker who became an oil maker’, with the by then traditional block of the word ‘Vickers’ with ‘Leeds’ superimposed below.

“A ram’s head on a capital ‘V’ was also our trade-mark. ‘V’, the initial of the firm, corresponds with the sign of Aries, the Ram; and the firm being so closely connected with the skin and the fleece, the conjunction of a ram standing on the initial letter forms a happy illustration of Vickers’ Oils being a sure basis for good spinning and good leather.”

Farrar and Doris had moved in the early 1920’s from their first little £25 a year home to Moorland Drive, Leeds. Their second son, David, had been born in 1919. Those who lived in that area at that time were, in a real sense, living in a community of their own—many minutes walk beyond the end of the tram-line into the city. Farrar and Doris and the other parents in the neighbourhood clubbed together to buy an old army hut and to install a primary school teacher for their children. With the other children John and David formed ‘the Moorland Braveries’, ostensibly to repair the potholes in the road, but also getting into other less charitable activities.

“On my first overseas business journey after the war I picked up some bug in Belgium which, for more than fifty years, played havoc with my ‘inside’. There was no time then to stop for proper investigation, so what

might have been temporary became a chronic condition. I fear many people suffered from my reactions and my temper in those days.”

In 1921 the doctor advised Farrar to take a winter holiday. Doris being fully occupied at home with their children, Farrar went to Switzerland with his sister Irene. Farrar wrote to Doris:

“Our hotel looks onto the whole range of snow and pine-covered mountains behind which the sun rises. The pine trees are just weighed down with snow, and of course hardly a sound except occasional sleigh bells. Everyone dresses for dinner here, and some of the robes are low on high and high below, but most of the people are very nice.

“. . . On Monday morning we walked down to a quiet little slope and there, by our two selves, we fell about. Imagine your feet strapped to polished and slippery bits of plank, about six foot long and three inches broad, which slip about if you make a false move—they take a bit of controlling—and if you try to go up too steep a slope they gently slide backwards and land you on your nose.

“. . . Today, Thursday, we have had a gorgeous time, practised in the morning and then after lunch climbed steadily up the mountain. The snow was very deep and slippery and the going extra-ordinarily hard. Arriving at the top we skied down magnificent slopes—I can’t describe the sensation. It combines flying, floating, steering and wind, with an ever-present sense that you may suddenly trip over a bush or come to a sudden drop and have to jump while travelling at full speed.

“My love to Jimmy and David and you,

F.

“P.S. I quite think a dog is a good idea, but you don’t want a pure bred one, it would only be stolen. I incline to an Irish or Welsh terrier, as being cleaner and smaller, and better in the house: an Airedale takes a lot of grooming, but you might certainly ask about it. A bulldog is delicate to rear, and an expensive type. The question of exercise would be all right now, in our new home.”

It was the family custom of those years that Farrar and Doris, with John and David, would spend Sunday evenings after Chapel with ‘Granny

Vickers', Farrar's mother. His sister, Irene, was a gracious co-hostess. Granny Vickers was now the much-loved head of the wider family, who used to come together for joint summer holidays at Filey, Criccieth, Seascale and Melrose, especially so that her numerous grandchildren might all get to know each other.

Five

A world of difference

“In 1932 we moved from Moortown to a most lovely house in the country—‘Hard Gap’ at Linton, near Wetherby. It was built by one of the Luptons who had a fatal hunting accident whilst it was under construction. Every detail was perfection.

“We really moved there to give John and David the space in which to grow before they became enmeshed in the industrial turmoil in which we expected their lives would be spent. It was an ideal setting for Doris, with her wonderful home-making ability—space, light, beauty. And she was able to give to her husband and sons the sort of setting which she longed for them to have.”

Doris was a shy person, and had trained herself in early life to take second place, when she sacrificed a promising musical career to help care for her brothers and sisters. While Farrar roamed Britain and the world in search of trade, she kept their home going. Only after they had moved to Linton did his drive ease up, and she began to venture outwards to meet new people.

She was a gracious woman, a careful housekeeper and keen judge of quality, with a high standard of workmanship. Her flower arrangements were always beautiful, and at Linton she delighted in planning the garden to give vegetables and fruit for the family’s needs, as well as flowers for their enjoyment.

Guests who stayed in their home were given a warm and generous welcome, and expense was not spared. This sometimes led to family disagreements and criticism that Doris’ standards were too high—her daughters-in-law agreed with rueful respect that she was the most perfect housekeeper they had ever met. Although she was so self-effacing, she

had a rugged determination, and would not tolerate second-best from anyone she met, be it imperfect delivery of provisions for her home, the living quarters provided for her sons at school, or individual friends who tried to dodge honesty in their personal living. The quality of her determination that wrong should be put right was felt powerfully and eventually gratefully by many a person. For, with her aim for perfection, she had a delightful sense of humour.

“I would have longed, years ago, to live a country life, but my roots were too deep in industry for that. Those years at Linton when John and David were growing up and Doris was in that lovely setting were the nearest I got.”

Farrar had been successful, but through these years he was also searching. Two good friends were Rev. Wilfred Gower, minister of Roscoe Place Methodist Church, with whom he had long talks and whose talents as a cartoonist he engaged for illustrating the firm's data sheets, advertising blotters and so on; the second was Rev. Leslie Weatherhead, minister of Brunswick Methodist Chapel, with whom he used to go off for a quiet round of golf at Headingley Golf Club—and this also gave a chance for some real heart to heart conversations.

“I had reached the point of success, but also of frustration. With the exception of keeping the accounts (at which I had had a disastrous attempt in the early years of my time at the office) there was not a single job in the business that I had not myself done. From the actual blending of the oil, through designing, costing, publicity, selling, lecturing—the whole bag of tricks.

“By 1933 we had as a firm ‘arrived’. I had the big house in Linton, two or three cars, and a firm that was so well-running that all I had to do was to give a touch on the wheel now and again, to give it direction.

“But really that was no use to me. I wanted something that I could put myself into, in experimentation and exploration. I often used to go and play a round of golf in the afternoon, and then come back to the office and sign my letters. It was a wonderful freedom, but what was it all in aid of?”

It would not be unfair to describe Farrar in those days as a hard, arrogant, self-made man who did not mince his words if he disapproved of something or someone. He was not a ‘bad’ man, but—“Something was

missing. To me personally success did not bring satisfaction. There was an emptiness of spirit which was coupled with frequent ill-health. Deep in my heart I knew the malaise was not physical. It lay deeper, and in a different dimension, into which I was afraid to peer."

At the first Christmas at Linton in 1932 Farrar had planned to accept the suggestion of his friend and new neighbour, J. Ernest Appleyard, to take both families for a skiing holiday in Pontresina, in Switzerland. But once again he had been incapacitated by his internal bug, so his two sons went with the Appleyard family, leaving him at home. When John fell heavily, damaging his wrist, one of the Appleyards lent him a copy of a book about the Oxford Group, 'For Sinners Only', by the London Sunday newspaper editor, A. J. Russell.

"John went to some small meetings with these people of the Oxford Group in Leeds, and one Sunday evening when we were visiting my mother he told us he had had an invitation to attend the summer international assembly being held in four Oxford colleges. It was reported people were there from all over the world, who seemed to have found the thing for which I was looking in terms of freedom.

"My mother was then eighty-five. She said 'John, do you think I can come too?'. He said, 'I'm sure you can'. Then Doris said, 'Can I go too?' 'I'm sure you can' said John.

"In the end they all went off to Oxford without me. I said to myself, 'My wife, my son and my mother all seem to be getting involved. I had better watch my step or I may be caught up in it too.'

"Then I had a phone-call from Doris in Oxford. She said, 'You really ought to come and see. This is what we have been looking for.' I thought myself far too busy to go, but under pressure agreed to make the trip . . . having first taken steps to extricate myself in case I wanted to leave! I left word at the office that if I sent a certain telegram they were to send me another telegram recalling me immediately for something extremely urgent, needing my personal attention. I kept an escape route!

"But when I actually got to Oxford I saw people who were living so nearly what I thought freedom was that I concluded that if this was not freedom, then freedom did not exist at all. It was something that I was afraid to face, but dare not evade.

“One day I met Frank Buchman, the initiator of the Oxford Group, who was propounding certain basic ideas on which alone he believed life could be fully and constructively lived. Although he talked in terms of individuals, his concept was for the world, irrespective of colour, class, race or point of view.

“He shone a fresh light into my thinking, and by indirection he reminded me of things which I had been taught in my youth, and which I recognized as true, but which I had never been able to assume for myself. Basically it was the relevance of the power, the wisdom and the authority of the Almighty, in dealing with human affairs. I had always assumed that the Almighty had a particular care for orphans, infants, and the aged and godly. It had never occurred to me that the Creator of the world knew more about the technical things with which I had to deal, and the social responsibilities which I had ignored, than I or anyone else ever would do.

“I was standing by the gate of one of the Oxford colleges one afternoon and a man I had met at one of the meetings came past. I thought, ‘This bird knows all about this thing they call divine guidance, and, if he knows anything at all, he must know what a hell of a jam I am in myself’. So I said, ‘Francis, have you got any guidance for me?’ (I used their proper phraseology, you see!) But he said, ‘No, should I have?’ I walked on saying ‘Oh well, thank you very much’, and thinking to myself ‘If this fellow had any touch with the Almighty at all he would know I am at my wits’ end—but he doesn’t, so there’s nothing in it’.

Then he said, ‘Hey, half a minute, what’s the matter?’ I said, ‘I don’t know. I’m in a hell of a mess and I don’t know where to go or which way to turn’.

“Francis said, ‘God can tell you’. I thought, ‘Oh dear, I’ve got hold of one of these fellows, have I?’ I thanked him again and said goodbye.

“He stopped me and said, ‘I tell you God can get you out of your jam and put you on your feet’. I thought I had better go quietly, so I said, ‘All right’.

“‘Well’, he said, ‘ask God to do just that’. So feeling a perfect fool I asked a God whom I did not know to do something that I did not think He could do. And then Francis said, ‘Now, aren’t you going to say thank you?’ ‘Thank you for what?’ I demanded. ‘Thank God for setting you free’, he replied.

“My reaction was that this man was a lunatic, but to humour him I thanked a God whom I did not know for having done something that I did not know He had done, and thought that was an end to it.

“The first few days I was at Oxford I had noticed that no one was smoking. I was a very particular smoker, because I had my favourite brand of tobacco and a pipe specially made for me with a long stem so that it was cool. I went about thinking, ‘Well, if these people don’t understand the use of tobacco, I had better show them’. And I blew as much smoke as I could all over the place.

“On the Saturday evening I decided to stock up with tobacco for the Sunday, and I went into a tobacconist’s and got a little square block of Player’s Navy Cut. That was the last tobacco I ever bought. I liked smoking—yes—but I knew I was relying on it, if I was nervous, or meeting someone new. I had begun to realize I could not do without it and had thought, ‘We’d better deal with that’—but I couldn’t break the habit.

“At noon the day after I had talked to the man at the college gate, I suddenly realised that I had not wanted a smoke, and that was unusual. ‘It’s not really got anything to do with that conversation yesterday’ I told myself. But I could think of no other reason either. I thought, ‘Perhaps it’s a psychological reaction, in which case it will pass’.

“But day after day passed and I still did not want a smoke. ‘This really is something—I don’t understand it, but it works’, I said to myself.

“One morning, a few days after the college gate conversation, I decided to make the experiment in a new dimension—the thing which these people said was practicable.

“‘God can put ideas into your mind—have you ever listened?’ Frank Buchman had said. ‘Have you ever taken pencil and paper and written down what comes? They may seem to you like ordinary thoughts, but be honest.’

“So I sat up in bed, with paper and pen to make notes, and waited for God to give me ideas. I tried to think of nothing, and to let whatever thoughts occurred come. I had no idea what to expect, and I was a bit apprehensive. Would it be bright lights, or bells, or angels, or the voice of authority, or flames, or what?

“As a matter of fact, nothing seemed to be coming at all, and I was just thinking the whole thing was a bit of a dud, when I had a very simple thought—‘Go to the Works with your eyes and heart open’.

“‘Go with your eyes open.’ When I got back to Yorkshire I did just that. I went in at the gate of Airedale Mills, and looked about just as a stranger might have done. I saw a lot of things I had never seen before.

“I noticed a large area on which we stored our barrels of oil, and which was covered in cinders. The place was a mess. Over the years oil had leaked all over it; in the hotter temperatures of the summer the wooden barrels sweated oil. We often had to turn a cold water hose on them to keep the oil from sweating out. My first reaction was, ‘This is filthy. I must do something about cleaning it up’.

“Then, as I walked around the Works, I saw a man washing his greasy hands under a cold tap in the yard. I realized my employees had no proper washing facilities. They had nowhere to eat their meals either. There may have been a kettle on the fire in the cooper’s shed (in those days we made all our own barrels) but there was nowhere for the men to sit down. It was merely a place to work.

“Another thing I realized was that when they finished work my income went on, but theirs ceased—during holidays, or when they were sick, the men were not paid. I decided on payment for holidays, which at that time seemed daft to many people. Simple things like that occurred to me for the first time. And I decided to pay the men a proper wage. I raised wages to about twenty-five shillings a day—quite a lot at that time.

“The next thing to do was obvious . . . to provide a clean place where men could have hot water to wash and change their clothes, in order to go home clean. At that time it was normal for men to go straight home from work, greasy and all. No one cared very much about the homes of employees then.

“Then I thought, ‘I really must get the whole place cleaned up’. It was a time of considerable unemployment for which, of course, I expressed suitable regret, but about which I had taken no action. So I got hold of a man and said, ‘I will give you a spade, a brush, a barrow and a guarantee of six months work if you can get this place clean and keep it clean, and then we’ll see how we get on’. By the end of those six months of course the place was so completely different we could not possibly have gone back to the filth that had existed previously.”

There was another man for whom Farrar created a job at that time. Edgar Sharp's father was a milk dealer, and after his death Edgar carried on, eventually joining into a sort of partnership with a man who was supplying milk. This partnership went bust in 1932, when those who had a job were the lucky ones. There were thousands out of work, and getting a job was well-nigh hopeless. Edgar said:

"Mr. and Mrs. Vickers came to see me and Mrs. Sharp one Sunday morning after Chapel, and without much ado work was found for me. Although there were no real vacancies, he provided a job for me.

"I started work the next day. I had to meet Mr. Vickers with Billy Allanson (the garage mechanic) near his office. He said 'Good morning' to me. That was something new—I had served my apprenticeship in engineering and you could only speak to the Foreman, you weren't allowed to speak to the Manager or any other Executive. Then he asked Mr. Allanson to rig me out with overalls—this shook me, as I had no money to buy any, and usually in the engineering trade you had to provide your own.

"My job was to help Billy Allanson look after Mr. Vickers' car. Just fancy—two men to clean one car! When I arrived home that night I said to my wife, 'This job can't carry on very long—I'm not earning salt'. I was a bit down-hearted, but the next day Mr. Vickers came down to the Works and spoke to me again. He asked me what I was doing, and rather sheepishly I told him. He smiled and told me to carry on. This cheered me up a little.

"After about three weeks I had the chance to drive the only lorry Vickers then had—a Ford six-wheeler—and I helped out with deliveries until lorry no. 2 came along, a Leyland Beaver. Then I felt I was doing a job to earn my money."

In fact, Farrar bought the second lorry specifically for Edgar Sharp to drive, and Edgar remained at the firm for thirty-five years.

Farrar noted in 1934, "Edgar is a good, careful worker. He uses his intelligence and does more rather than less than his job. He brings in bits of information that he gathers on his rounds, and represents us very well to our customers. He has done excellent propaganda work in delivering our goods."

Six

The proof of the pudding

“I repeated my experience early each morning and every day I got fresh ideas—ideas I could put into action. I suddenly thought ‘Heavens, is this what they mean by getting guidance?’ Theology and metaphysics were beyond me. But practical ideas and direction that a man could act upon—that I could understand and do something about. My sense of frustration and lethargy disappeared.

“A God who could talk to me in terms of responsibility for the work to which I had set my hand and which I loved! He was interested in and capable of giving me intelligent direction about things like raw materials and the manufacture of oil, about the employment of men and the pricing of our products, the markets to enter and explore or keep out of, the scientific development of our goods. Life began to be exciting again.

“Basically my philosophy of life up to this time had been atheist—God helps those who help themselves, so let’s get on with the job. This idea of an Almighty being or power or whatever it was, who had created the world and who knew more than I did about the practical things with which I was dealing—as well as about human nature—was something new. I felt as though I had got into touch with a secret source of information about things which really interested me.

“God takes a man and talks to him in language which he can understand, and step by step leads him into areas and ideas and dimensions that he does not understand. This is true exploration.

“Fresh ideas came to me in terms of the relationship between employer and employee. I started to develop convictions which grew as I put them into practice. One was about the income which an employer must provide. The employee should receive what he earned and he should earn what he received.

“I understood that any man who came into my employ was a responsibility of mine—much more was involved than the buying and selling of labour or ability. What was really in my hands as an employer was the responsibility for seeing that a man had the opportunity of growing to his full stature. This was a completely revolutionary idea. Till then I had been pioneering in my own dimension of daily work—highly technical processes in the textile trade. Now this instinct extended to a different dimension. I began to have considerably more sense of responsibility for our employees than was normal in industry in those days, when the existing policy was ‘hire and fire’.

“The business was so efficiently established that I had leisure, time, facility and ability to make some of the social changes which were then needed. Yet I was also aware that a failure on my part with these new experiments could put at risk the livelihood of all who worked for the company.

“I thought about the social implications involved in managerial functions in industry. And I steadily began to reduce my own income. As each fresh thought came to me I put it into action. There was a lot of cleaning up to do in my life before I could hear the word of God—that was obvious. A self-centred man cannot hear the voice of God. Something has got to give—one or the other has to go. But the more I did, the more clearly I saw, and the wider the scope and outlook and worth to life.

“There was a man in charge of our production at the works whom I felt was a perfect nuisance. His stock accounts were wrong—everything was in a mess. I became more and more annoyed by his behaviour, and came to the point where I decided I could no longer tolerate it. By nature I am quick in perception and quick in moving before I think.

“Having begun to recognize this, I had decided to give myself some corrective. Going down to the office one day I called in at a garage and bought two ‘L’ plates—a big red ‘L’ on a white plate—‘LEARNER’. I put them on two different walls, facing the desk in my office, so that when I looked up from my work I couldn’t help seeing one or the other. To me they were a reminder—‘Listen and Learn’.

“So when I was deciding to dismiss this man I happened to notice one of the ‘L’ plates, and I thought, ‘No, no, that’s not the way’. And then, sub-consciously perhaps, I asked the Almighty, if He knew anything about finance, employment and incompetence, to tell me what to do with the fellow.

“The thought came to me to give him a fortnight’s holiday and a sum of money—I think ten or twenty pounds. Well, of course that was absolutely daft! Yet somehow it seemed to be right.

“The man came to see me in the afternoon. We sat in my office and all the time I was aware of these ‘L’ plates. I said, ‘Bill, I was going to sack you. But I had the thought that what you really need is not the sack but a fortnight’s holiday, and here’s some money to help pay the expenses.’

“His jaw dropped, and he said, ‘Well, I don’t know! I’ve had a lot of things on my mind about you; I’ve written them all down. I knew I was for the sack, and this was my last chance to let myself go. I have three or four pages of notes here. I don’t know what to do with them now.’

“He threw them across the desk to me. I said, ‘Bill, I think we’ll put them on the fire’. Which is exactly what we did.

“Very soon after that he was called up, went into the Army and was killed on active service. I am grateful our relationship was clean.”

The daughter of Milner Woodhead, one of the firm’s technical representatives, wrote: “So often when I hear stories of the business world, I say ‘That wouldn’t have done for Vickers’, and of course by ‘Vickers’ I mean Mr. Farrar. I particularly remember a firm’s trip to Bolton Abbey when I must have been quite a small girl. Everyone was so much part of the whole concern. Mr. and Mrs. Vickers knew everyone personally—the men who were part of the firm, but also their wives and families. It seemed quite normal and ordinary to me then, but now I see what a gathering it was.”

Michael Parkinson worked in the firm’s technical department before becoming a lecturer, and said about Farrar: “Of all the men I have known, he was the one who inspired absolute honesty and integrity. The twinkle of his eyes when he looked at me for the first time put me immediately at my ease, and informed me that here was a man who knew what was what. My over-all impression is of a keen and incisive mind which got to the heart of the matter instinctively.”

And Farrar never ceased to be a hard-headed businessman:

“One of the basic issues which I had to face was the matter of what is

a fair price. I didn't know. I would charge as much as the buyer would pay. One day I went to see my friend, Professor Jones, head of the Economics Department at Leeds University. I said to him, 'What is the formula for a fair price?'

"He looked at me and laughed—'God only knows! I certainly don't'. As I came away from his office I thought, 'Does God know the formula for a fair price?' This was a new idea.

"I had never been taught that God knew or cared anything about prices and profits. I thought He was only interested in sin and salvation and that sort of thing. A God who could talk about price and competition . . . well!

"Anyway the next morning, with considerable trepidation, I sat up in bed and asked a God of whom I was rather ignorant to tell me what was the formula for a fair price. Immediately came the thought 'Write down everything that goes into your idea of costs'. That was easy enough. All our production costs were practically the same—to devise, manufacture and distribute. It was just the one calculation—the raw material price plus a certain figure per ton.

"So I wrote down everything I could think of—not only actual out-of-pocket payments but provision for depreciation and the other imponderables. Then the knotty point arose—and of this I was afraid—what about profit? Is it an abomination unto the Lord, or is it a normal, reasonable charge on industry, initiative and effort? I was afraid the Almighty would say that profit is evil.

"So, with a certain diffidence, I honestly asked Him, if He knew anything about finance, just to give me the word. There came to mind a certain figure per ton, so I wrote it down. I added up the whole thing and came to the conclusion that *this* indeed was a fair selling price.

"Then I compared the results with our existing price list. They didn't match! What is more, some men who were hard and difficult buyers used to beat us down until we took a lower price. And some men—I am ashamed to say—who were decent people and were generous-hearted, we could get a bit more out of. I am also ashamed to say that our representatives at that particular time were credited with half our standard list 'over-price', which they were able to obtain above the normal list price from the buyer.

“So I made out a new list of prices. Then I called our representatives in and I said, ‘Now then, in future these are the prices you will charge, and it is no good coming and telling me that Mr. So-and-So was a hard buyer and you had to accept a lower price; or that you were able to get a bit more out of somebody else. *This is the price.*’ And, somewhat uneasily, they went off.

“A week or so later they came back to report. One fellow, a good tough Yorkshireman, who had been the biggest grumbler of the lot, said with a smile on his face, ‘It’s absolutely marvellous! To some of my customers I have been able to reduce the price, and of course they are pleased. Some of them I have told that we are on a new costing basis, and trying to find a fair price and would have to put their price up. What shakes me is that none of them have raised any serious objection. The great thing now is that when I see a man I don’t have to remember which cock-and-bull story I told him last time we talked about price!’”

At the annual dinner of the British Lubricants Federation, held in London in November 1976, Farrar’s son John, as President, invited Mr. R. W. McFadyen, recently retired from Burmah-Castrol, to respond to the Toast of ‘The Guests’. During his speech Mr. McFadyen recalled an incident when someone at Vickers’ had beaten him down on the price for some mineral oil. A short while later Farrar had invited Mr. McFadyen to his office and apologised, and paid the fair price. Bob McFadyen said he had used this incident in training his younger salesmen ever since.

Farrar once wrote, “It is the music not the words that is missing from British industry. Our task is to restore music, basic harmony, in which individual honesty of conviction and expression is needed. Discordant notes—ideas—need to be disclosed. The harmony comes from the players, not the conductor, whose function is only to ensure the full contribution of each player.

“To put it another way, the vertical threads of responsibility need to be reinforced by horizontal threads of relationship. A weft as well as a warp is needed for the strong fabric of society. Unity is a matter of conviction rather than concurrence, and Britain’s need is unity. We in management need to unite and guide, instead of divide and rule; to manage by the inculcation of ideas rather than the imposition of instructions.

“I once had to search for a man who had left the firm with a grievance. I dropped my work and drove miles to find him, to be reconciled. This sort of thing is not taught in text books of management. I had to learn it the hard way—to understand that the relationship between employer and employee is not only economic but social and ideological as well.”

As he continued his new way of working, Farrar came to realize that the principles he had been putting into practice in his business were necessary for and applicable to British industry as a whole, and to other nations.

“I had always been scared of communists, because I believed they were competently planning to take over my nation—including my work, my family, my home and my everything. I feared Communism. But as I went along, doing the practical things which came to me in guidance from the Almighty, I began to find myself going further along the road of social justice than any Communist government. While the radical Marxist talked about all men being equal and so forth, I found I was able to meet him with practical experience.

“I met one fellow in London—a watchmaker by trade, who had been an extreme Left revolutionary. The first time we met he said, ‘You’re a boss, aren’t you? Well, I’ve had only one place for the likes of you—at the wrong end of a rifle, with the butt on my shoulder.’ But he and I became colleagues in this new dimension of thinking and living.

“I was privileged to meet some of the outstanding Marxist-trained men in this country and in many parts of Europe. They ceased to be my enemies. I was further along in a constructive revolution than they were in a destructive revolution. But I had much to learn from the hard-won convictions of the convinced Marxist. And we had all better learn a lot of lessons pretty fast.

“In fact Communism and Capitalism are but two faces of the same coin—what is needed is a new currency of ideas.”

Often the leaders of labour would not believe a capitalist and an employer could change so much in his attitudes. George Light, a leader of the unemployed hunger marchers of the 1930’s, came to the firm one day and after a thorough investigation said to Farrar, “You have done more voluntarily than any extreme government could force you to do”.

Tim Rignall was a boilermaker for most of his working life, in London and on the Mersey. Early in 1940 he and his wife were invited to a meeting of the Oxford Group (now called Moral Re-Armament) at Tirley Garth in Cheshire. "When we arrived I was full of class war and highly suspicious. The first morning I went to clean my shoes and seeing someone already there just put my shoes down and said I would come back later. When I returned I found my shoes cleaned and nicely polished. I enquired who the stranger was, who had done it. When I heard he was the owner of an oil company it did something for me. This was not, in my experience, the usual practice of an employer.

"When I finally met that man, Farrar Vickers, and talked to him I realised that this was an unusual employer. It began a friendship which lasted over thirty years, and it also gave me an insight into the change which had to come into my own life. His action in cleaning my shoes took me further along the road than a thousand sermons."

Seven

“Fair Dealing”

“By the Articles of Association under which the firm was founded, I became Governing Director on the death of my father in 1917—which meant that I had one more vote than all the votes which could be cast against me on any subject in Directors’ meetings. I realised this was an anachronism, and so surrendered that position. From then on I had to rely on the quality of my own ability and the support of my family, friends and associates in the firm.”

Farrar made notes of events in the business in those years, which give an insight into the way his mind was working.

WFV report to Directors, December 1932: “. . . Money has been lent free of interest to H to enable him to move into a healthier house. Workmen are now receiving full pay for Bank Holidays, and one week’s holiday on full pay.”

1.6.33 “Memo. to everyone who drives a motor vehicle for the firm: I have just returned from the painful duty of dealing with matters arising from a death by motor accident. I have been amazed at the amount of careless and bad driving—not fast driving but general disregard for the safety of other road users. I feel that in fairness to myself and to you I ought to say very clearly that although speed in getting about from place to place, and the saving of time between calls etc. is of great importance, I attach far more value to careful use of the road.”

17.6.33 “Sales staff all gone by 4.45. This is too drastic an interpretation of my wish to get people home early on fine afternoons.”

August 1933. “Stanley Dawson, one of three applicants for the post of office boy—a likely lad—engaged by us.” Some forty years later Stanley Dawson is a Director and Works Manager for the Company!

November 10, 1933 "Difficulty with N, straightened up by a frank discussion. I have perhaps been too ready to criticize."

1933/34, WFV year end report: "The policy of paying for holidays, giving as much holiday as is reasonable, and giving financial assistance in case of ill health, has been pursued both at the Office and at the Works, and it will be recommended to continue. Further improvements for efficiency and for comfort have been carried out at the Works . . . during winter hot soup is provided free every day. As far as I know every transaction is carried out in honesty and fairness and everyone connected with the Staff is treated with justice, consideration and generosity."

Family shareholders of the firm took a major step when they handed over a substantial proportion of their capital to Trustees for the benefit of employees, ex-employees and their families.

12.12.33 "The idea for this Trust came to me quite clearly and definitely during a time of quiet last Sunday morning . . . its object is to ensure for members of the Staff certain financial assistance by way of loan, gift or pension in times of sickness, need, etc. It is a great relief to have this done and I am satisfied that in addition to good conditions and reasonable pay, I am now able to give people on the staff a greater degree of security than has been possible in the past. I am only sorry that I did not think of it a few weeks earlier, while my mother was alive."

Thanks to his business journeys, Farrar was also aware of events in the world outside the firm: 1.6.34, Göteborg, Sweden: "Swedish armament firms working night and day, and when an anti-aircraft gun trial at Brussels showed Bofors to be most efficient, they were besieged by orders all over for quick delivery. Sweden is nervous and fears German militarism."

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"As a family we regularly went to Church on Sundays. I gave the parson about three minutes during which I waited to see if he had anything to say that was of real use to me. I listened intently. But if I didn't feel he had something I needed to hear, I used to let my mind wander.

"On one such occasion my thoughts turned to our offices in the centre of the city, which my grandfather, father and I had occupied

for getting on for a hundred years. I thought, 'Why should we stay in that small, dirty, noisy office in Gascoigne Street?' It was a dead-end, and the street was getting fuller and fuller of cars—at times we found our exit blocked.

“By the time the parson had got to the end of his sermon and we rose to sing the last hymn I believe I had made the decision to remove.

“Without much difficulty, and with no bargaining or haggling about price, premises were found near Hyde Park, Leeds.”

But Farrar did not clinch the purchase till all the Staff of the day had agreed to the additional travel time involved in getting to work out of the city centre.

“The place was a house in a garden. Many people said it was too far out of the centre of Leeds, and that no one would come to see us—as a matter of fact, if we had stayed in the centre of the city nobody today could have got anywhere near us.

“I felt it was important that men should not be shut away from each other in isolation. So I took the top panel out of every door and replaced it by glass. We pulled down a partition so that girls in the Reception Office could work in daylight. I had a hunch that the idea to go for was ‘integration’, to train and accustom people to be one of a team rather than individuals. That idea directed many of the changes which I made in creating the new setting for the firm.

“Several difficulties were encountered, and the results of previous bad workmanship necessitated considerable extra expense; but having had an estimate from the architects and having doubled it for safety’s sake, I felt quite free financially. No expense was spared to ensure that the Staff could work under the best possible conditions in a suitable building and district.”

With the office established in its new surroundings, business life continued unabated:

WFV report to Directors: “During the year 1935 the wages of all the men at the Mill have been raised, as part of a policy of sharing the profits of the business more equally between capital and labour. One ex-employee is

already drawing a pension from the new Staff Benefit Fund. I now propose, still further to secure the position of employees and ex-employees, that one of the policies on my life should be assigned to this Staff Trust Fund."

September, 1935 "The week ending September 7 constituted a record output from Airedale Mills. Friday was a record for one day. N.B.—in spite of this, and the fact that the Works was upset because of roof reconstruction, the Works Cricket Club beat the Office on September 7!"

Early in 1935 Michael Joyce, now one of the firm's technical representatives, applied for the post of office boy. "I was shown into an office, to come face to face with the head of a firm for the first time in my life—a somewhat awe-inspiring experience for a boy of fifteen. At that time I was a junior member of the Boys' Brigade, and I recall that most of the 'interview' was spent talking about BB summer camps rather than my suitability for the job! However, Mr. Vickers' parting words stayed in my mind—'Michael, I believe there is a right job for every person. If, after you have been here a while, you feel that this is not the right place for you, then go! And I will do my utmost to help you to find the right job.'"

Farrar noted a year later: "Michael Joyce is interested in railways. Arranged to send him for a trip on 'Silver Jubilee' (the crack train of the LNER) to London, returning via Pullman train. Cost about £3."

In June 1936, to mark their silver wedding anniversary, Farrar and Doris were presented with a silver tea set and tray by the Staff of the firm.

November 1936. WFV report to Directors: . . . "there will come a time when our 'average age' will be a little aged, if we don't look out!

"A larger calendar was issued by the firm this year, almost too large, but we have the following comments: a medical officer at Middleton School uses it as an eye test, and a teacher at Dewsbury used it to teach children numbers!

"It is against the policy of the firm for gifts to be made to any user of such a type or value as places him under an obligation to us, and induces him to give or withhold favour. This does not rule out personal gifts by individuals to individuals, but if a gift prejudices our position, then the

gift cannot be given. Extravagant hospitality, or entertainment beyond that which would be normal with the individual concerned is not part of the policy of this firm."

Thursday, December 10, 1936: "At four p.m. Mr. Baldwin in a simple statement announced the decision of King Edward VIII to abdicate."

16.6.37 "Another hosiery firm, paying 2/6d. for an oil, gave a sample to one of our men which we examined and find we can sell at 1/9d. What are we to do? In a time of quiet it came clear to me that we have a responsibility to our competitors as well as to our customers. It may bring us into a new relationship with the oil seller, who is a little man, merchanting oil and getting what he can. Out of it may come a wholly new realization of what is a fair price."

About this time a man with a supposed grievance against Farrar travelled to Leeds from Canada, threatening to shoot Farrar unless his demands were complied with. In fact the man wanted to get hold of a large sum of money, to pay for his excessive drinking.

Against the advice of his colleagues Farrar decided to see the man alone, in his office. In the event, when the interview was over, the man said that Farrar had opened his eyes by the way he dealt with him, and apologised for all the things he had said against Farrar. Though he had come to Leeds with murder in his heart, he said, he was now happy in mind and at peace with the world.

However, as many people would testify, Farrar was not a man entirely without a temper, all sweetness and light! One entry in his diary in his latter years begins: "In fifty years I have never had such slovenly incompetence tolerated . . ." And if ever one heard him say, "What the Hamlet is going on . . ." it was time to take cover!

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During the pre-Second World War years, Farrar was thinking of how to hand on his responsibilities in the business to either or both of his sons, should they wish to enter it. After coming down from Cambridge, John began to work with him in Leeds; and David took a Degree at Cambridge, before entering the Forces.

24.6.37 "I went down to Airedale Mills at one o'clock with John and saw each man individually and explained how the new wage increase affected him."

John Andrews, a laboratory steward at Airedale Mills, remembered: "I had only been at the firm about three weeks. One Saturday morning while I was busy filing raw material samples, I heard a gentle voice behind me say 'Welcome to the firm, Mr. Andrews'. I turned round and saw two men, the older of whom said 'I'm Farrar Vickers, and this is my son John'. I apologized that I couldn't shake his hand because mine were greasy. 'Put your hand in mine' he said, and gave it a firm, strong shake. It is an experience I had never had in all my working years—the boss of the firm being friendly."

In the summer of 1937 there was a suggestion of selling the business. Farrar was quite undecided what to do about it. He noted at the time: "I believe we are entering on a new stage of our business history. The future will not be just a continuation of the past but will require policy framed to meet changing conditions.

"I have been fortunate that the thrifty personal habits in which I was trained by my father, with the family financial difficulties of the first twenty years of my life, have coloured my business policy and when the firm was making money rapidly we turned the profits back into the business.

"From time to time I have looked forward to taking life easy, to doing some shooting and fishing and letting other people carry the financial responsibility of management. However, since 1919 I have carried continuous responsibility wherever I was. I have been told frequently by Dr. Stacey to ease off. But temperamentally I have never been able to *watch* other people work or to live on other people's efforts.

"I had the thought to go right away for a month, and a definite conviction that before I came back I should know, more clearly, what line to follow in regard to selling the business. I went to Bavaria and Austria."

On his return Farrar talked things over with his fellow Directors: "We, as Directors, are bound by our responsibility for the Staff, and I feel we should not entertain the question of sale of control, however attractive to us personally. We all agreed on this. I then said that, as they were willing to continue their responsibility, so was I.

“The next point was John’s expressed offer to enter the business officially, for a period when he could see whether or not this was his vocation. I believe this step is right—it emerged finally as a decision for me on the verandah of a hotel in Austria.

“It means I shall have someone with me who, with his fresher mind, untired thought and as yet untapped stores of initiative, will not only check my thoughts but will initiate his own, and will carry into effect the thoughts which, jointly and severally, will come to us. There will be difficulties—I shall have to learn to communicate my ideas while yet in embryo, and John will have to learn to work out ideas which come from a mind other than his own.”

However, though Farrar had set great store by having his son with him in the business, it did not work out as he thought. For years, on many issues, Farrar had pre-planned John’s life, and instinctively John had rebelled against that not inconsiderable force. At the end of the six-month trial period in the firm John decided this was not the place for him to be at that time and, with considerable courage, told his father he wanted to leave.

26.6.38 “It is clear to me that John must be free from the business. At first I was very hostile and reacted strongly against it, but now I gladly accept the rightness of his following his own convictions, in this time of national emergency. He will leave to join the Oxford Group team working to bring into the daily life of ordinary people the hidden factor which alone can save civilization from self-destruction. He can work from without, helping to bring the solution to materialism to bear on individual people as he has faced it for himself, and with the authority which comes from having paid the price of his convictions. He and I now, in a different relationship, are counterparts.”

From this point there came a satisfying new relationship between father and son which lasted for forty years. They agreed on the right course for each other. John left for America with Frank Buchman and his group. David was still at Cambridge. So Farrar found himself still at the helm of the ship.

As he saw world confrontation coming closer, towards the end of 1937, Farrar equipped the cellar of the Office as a specially strengthened air-raid shelter. Later the Air Raid Precaution authorities said their task would have been easier if more firms had done the same!

2.11.37 "Air-raid precautions: get in stocks of candles, matches, torch-lights, pencils, pads, games, blankets, brandy, medical equipment, fire extinguishers, old bicycle, bully beef, butter, biscuits."

28.2.38 "Professor Jones, speaking at the Leeds Luncheon Club, pointed out that Germany's economic machinery is very strong; her coal exports are rapidly ousting British coal in near European states; her economic policy, previously dictated by an international economist, is now laid down by political needs and leaders. Her present demand for colonies is in part to gain an immediate outlet market.

"N.B. My immediate reaction of fear is no sure guide of conduct. I too easily take colour from those who speak authoritatively."

4.10.38 "Sanctioned preparations for gas-proof trenches at the Works.

In July 1939 Farrar went to the United States for a month with his friend George Muff, then Labour Member of Parliament for Hull Central, and later to become Lord Calverley. They visited New York and San Francisco. But the real purpose of their visit was to attend the rally of 30,000 people at the Hollywood Bowl, Los Angeles, where Frank Buchman was launching his nation-wide programme of Moral Re-Armament. Packed meetings had already taken place in New York and Washington.

John met them at Los Angeles airport. Though a careless passenger had set the cabin carpet on fire with a cigarette, the plane landed safely!

"George Muff was my guest on that trip. Arriving in Los Angeles we went to sign the register at our lovely hotel, but when I looked at the price of our room I got a shock. George was for going straight home the next day when he saw what it was going to cost!

"Next morning, as we were eating breakfast, Frank Buchman came past and asked what sort of night we had had. I said, 'A bad night, Frank'. He said, 'Why?' 'Money' I said, 'it's costing me a lot more than I had expected.' We went along to Frank's room to talk things over. I explained, 'I had allowed a certain amount for this trip, for George and myself, and we have run out, and when I saw the bill to be paid for the hotel it worried me a bit'.

"Buchman said, 'You may be a very good businessman, but you know

absolutely nothing about the use of money'. Well! I thought I knew a great deal about the use of money! He turned to George Muff and said, 'George, if Farrar's too poor to pay for you here, you stay on at my expense, and he can go to the YMCA and do what he likes there'. This shook me considerably, and not least because I knew Buchman had no income himself at all!

"I had been brought up to believe that one's capital was sacrosanct—you could use your income, but never touch capital. In a flash, at that moment, a barrier was broken down in my thinking, and it gave me a new sense of the use of resources and of what is a valid investment. We both stayed on at that hotel, and it was a wonderful time.

"I returned to Britain, at the beginning of August, on the 'Queen Mary'. As we came into Southampton harbour there was a boom which opened to let us in and after we had passed was shut again. An American standing beside me on the deck muttered, 'My God, it's true'. Though we did not fully realize the implications, we knew we were arriving in a beleaguered country."

30.8.39 "Allegations that Polish towns were bombed by Germany this morning. School children are already being evacuated from major cities."

At the end of August, 1939, one of the firm's technical representatives was going off to Scandinavia on a business trip. Farrar passed on a few thoughts to him: "There will be alarms and rumours of wars—be at peace. Study and interpret nations as you go. Keep a mind clear on God and you will be immune to suspicion and fear. A new world *is* growing up—take every chance of seeing it. Don't be limited by what folk expect you to do—build for the future, refuse to be blinded by fear. Learn to be a world citizen—no pressure, no haste, no fear."

Eight

“Ahead of Events”

September 3, 1939 “Sunday morning, eleven o’clock, the time fixed for a reply to the British note came and went. No answer. A beautiful sunny English September day and once again we are at war. Somehow we have failed in twenty-one years to build on the sure foundations of peace.

“We bear much blame for events twenty years ago, thinking we could permanently limit a virile people by force and constraint. History proves this is not possible. Only God’s way can bring peace. There are a growing number of people saying this.

“I need courage and good cheer, faith, hope and charity; not something I put on but something welling up inside. My job is, without any preconcert for myself, to give myself for other people. This will be hard because I am just sick at heart to think of all the needless pain, fear and distress coming to millions. Young men who will be called to give the flower of their life to counter the effects of the failure of all of us. These crowded towns and cities—fear dominated. Waste, waste, waste. May God forgive us all.

“Some of our Staff are on air-raid duties, some are night telephonists, some air wardens. I met all the twenty-thirty year old men and talked about the incidence of national service. General shifting of hours in the office may be needed so that folk get sleep and time with their families.”

In Farrar’s diary, in April 1939, there is an entry relating to the activities of the B.R. Vickers Engineering Company: “Go ahead with the marine work. Changes in national policy may affect the textile and leather trades, but those stern-tubes of ours may be needed.”

“For many years my father and I had been producing an arrangement for the oil-bath lubrication and protection of the tail-shafts of ships. It

involved the use of lignum vitae and brass, which would be in short supply during the war. When I had this thought personally to look into 'E. Co.' and our marine affairs, I discovered that we could make our gland from other metals, by using a special oil which was adhesive to the metal. However, there being no obvious demand for the idea at that time, I put the blue-print away in my drawer and got on with producing oils for the textile industry.

"Then one day during the war I had a telephone message from the Admiralty, followed by a visit from Commander Slater, who wanted to see me about our work in the marine field. He filled me in on the problem the Navy were having with minesweepers.

"The development by Germany of the acoustic mine presented a threat to the food and raw materials supply of Britain. The way ships were being sunk was beyond endurance. So somebody had devised protection by means of a magnetic sweep, and a whole fleet of little minesweepers was being built to ensure that the channels leading to the main ports of the country were kept clear.

"These ships were made of wood and were built in all sorts of little boatyards around the country's coast. But they were so badly designed that they were useless when put into service. The propelling machinery was faulty in design and operation.

"As Commander Slater explained his problem I realized that the work we had been doing might be a solution. I went to my file, pulled out the blue-print and showed it to him. I told him the metals and the oil we used. It turned out that, without knowing it, we had been working to the exact diameter used on these minesweepers.

"He asked me for a copy of the drawing to show his colleagues. Meantime I went to look at the problem for myself, to a yard building those ships in Scotland. After I had seen the situation I said, 'This is urgent. I'd better go ahead and make up a couple of sets of these things.'

In August 1940, Farrar was meeting in his office with half a dozen of his colleagues, to decide what to do about the marine engineering side of the firm—even considering letting competitors carry it on under licence. Suddenly a phone call came through.

“It was Commander Slater—‘Yes, we think your idea could be the solution to our problem. Please put half a dozen sets into production immediately. When can you let us have the first?’

“As a matter of fact, the first two sets were actually ready and coming out of our Works, so I replied ‘Within a week’. He said ‘What?!’.

“What we did saved the situation and made the minesweepers effective in operation. At first the Admiralty refused to use the oil we recommended. They said they must use their own oil—diesel, the only oil the ships had aboard. We said ‘That won’t do the trick’. And so convinced were we that, although it was not ordered, we sent a supply of the only oil we knew would work, with every set of gear we supplied for refitting in the sweepers (about ninety altogether).

“The Naval people who had to run these ships knew the value of our oil. The diesel let through sea-water and ran out of the bearings as fast as it was put in. They began to buy our oil out of their own pockets, to keep their ships operational. Finally the Admiralty sent us a message that they had decided to use our oil officially.

“After the war I was told by the Admiralty that we were the only firm which had never kept a ‘sweeper waiting to dock for refit, nor to undock after completion. I believe divine guidance kept us always just ahead of events.”

Vickers also fitted their glands to hundreds of small ships built by the Ministry of War Transport, and used for carrying supplies in support of Allied troops at the Normandy Beach landings.

10.9.40 “London is being bombed by night. B got back after a difficult journey, and reports much damage and many fires.”

One of Farrar’s nephews, David Vickery, recalled a visit to Linton for the weekend in the early part of the war. “‘Hard Gap’ had often struck me as a luxurious place, comfortable and serene, and I had imagined that Uncle Farrar had always enjoyed this sort of comfort in life. That night I asked about his early life and he told me something of his struggles. It was a revelation. We talked until late in the night, and afterwards I realised from something Aunt Doris said that he was really deathly tired. But because he saw that it was important to me, he talked on in a most light-hearted way, with his infectious chuckle every now and then.

“Later I realized that much of what he said had not been of his own achievements, but of the way the team at the firm had worked together. That combination of leadership with teamwork was his gift. He insisted on meticulous work, with high standards, but he could make one feel that it was within one’s grasp.

“He was very much a Yorkshireman—alert and enquiring, like a Yorkshire terrier. And he established contact so rapidly with others.”

10.5.39 “Visit of about twenty-five members of the Yorkshire Lubricating Oil and Grease Trades’ Association to our Office and Works. The visitors saw round the Office and the Laboratory also.”

Behind this short entry in Farrar’s diary lies another story which had repercussions on war-time Britain.

“In 1939 I took a bold step. I had always regarded my competitors as shifty, unscrupulous people with whom I did not want to associate. So I never attended the meetings of our trade federation. Actually I imputed to them conduct which existed in myself. One morning there came to me the thought, ‘Go and rejoin your association and apologise for being so stuck up’.

“I sat in that meeting of the YLOGTA, listening to a heated argument about price-cutting, and hearing interminable criticism of what other firms were stated to be doing in terms of unfair competition. Some basis for co-operation other than criticism must be found. I rose to my feet and apologized to those men for my stand-offishness, and almost on the spur of the moment—certainly without thinking about it much—added that as a mark of my sincerity I would be happy for them all to visit our Office and Works.

“When I sat down again I was completely perplexed, because I had never intended to say such a thing—the last thing in my mind. But, of course, they all thought it was a wonderful idea—the chance to see around the inner workings of a competitor’s company!

“For a few months the meetings went on and I did nothing about my offer, until one day someone said, ‘When are you arranging for us to come and see your Works?’ So I knew I had to do something, and I fixed a date—the 111th anniversary of our company.

“It was a blazing hot day. I had arranged that each of my competitors should have one of our own men to go round the place with him, to keep him from seeing too much. Some of our barrels had a note of their contents painted on them, and I had them all turned around so that the painted end faced the wall. I took every possible precaution to prevent my competitors finding out anything that they shouldn’t.

“Well, the Almighty had His own way of dealing with it. As soon as my visitors got into the yard they broke away from their ‘sheep-dogs’ and were off individually, poking about into things, talking to our employees. I stood by the gate and sweated, thinking to myself, ‘What an adjectival idiot you are—you’ve thrown everything away’.

“But as they went out of the place at the end of the visit—I shall never forget it—I stood at the gate of our Works and realized that I had lost my enemies and found friends. I had given them freely more than they could ever have taken from me.”

“The Petroleum Times’ of June 3rd, 1939, said of this visit: “Lest any should pass by such an event as of but passing interest, let them think back and decide how many such firms would but a few years ago have set such a fine and honest example of the fear-free relationships which ought to exist in the common service of industry. It is typical of what is intended and meant by that still misunderstood movement—Moral Re-Armament.”

“It’s funny, you do a thing and then you find out afterwards the gate that it opens. Soon after the outbreak of war the Ministry of Supply took over all supplies of raw materials coming into the country for our particular industry. The chief chemist came to me one day and said ‘We are running out of raw materials. What can you do about it?’ I made a date with the Ministry of Supply in Horseferry Road, in London.

“My old friend, Stephen Foot, who contributed so much to the development of the tank in the first World War, was staying with us at Linton at the time. He asked me what I was going for. I said, ‘I’m going up to London to see about the supply of raw materials’. He said, ‘Who for?’ I said, ‘Me’. He said, ‘If you cannot ask for the trade as a whole, you had better not go’.

“It took me aback. I postponed my visit by twenty-four hours, to get into a frame of mind where I could think for the whole of the industry.

When I eventually arrived at the office of the man in charge of the rationing in London and stated my business he showed me a pile of letters on his desk and said, 'These are all from people in your line of business, asking for supplies'. I said, 'What do you do?' He said, 'I take the ones from the bottom of the pile and give them all they ask for. The rest just have to wait until there are more ships coming in with more supplies.' I said, 'But that's not fair'. He said 'I know—but what else can I do?'

"I thought, 'Well, all the men in my association are my friends now', so I said to the man, 'If I could get them all to agree to accept a fair proportion, based on their previous using, would that help you?' He said 'Help? It would solve my problem'.

"As I was getting up to go I realized I had never even thought of my own needs—this surprised me! When the man asked me what I needed myself I said 'I would be grateful for anything you can give me', and he gave me an allocation of raw materials which was far more than I would have dared to ask for.

"So I arrived back in Leeds and went round to see these competitors who were now my colleagues, and I said to each of them, 'Would you trust me with the amount of oil you've been using? I will keep it to myself. If everyone did it, we could build up a picture of the total usage and the proportion, so that everyone would get a fair share of whatever is available.' They all agreed, and in a week or so I took the figures back to the Ministry of Supply.

"That was in the autumn of 1939, and from then until well after the end of the war, when rationing finally ended, there was never a suggestion that anyone was trying to get more than his fair share.

"Also at the beginning of the war the Government wanted to bring in a standard oil for the combing industry. Half a dozen of us, who each had our own particular formula, felt that rather than let some Government department tell us what to do, we would tell ourselves what to do. We met in my office and each declared our particular formulation—in fact there was very little difference between them all—and we concocted our own controlled combing oil, which was used right through the war."

Farrar served on the Council of the Leeds Chamber of Commerce from 1931-34. The Chamber's Journal, in its obituary in the summer of

1977, said, "Farrar Vickers was prominent in the Yorkshire Lubricating Oil and Grease Trades' Association and, during the Second World War, was Chairman of the Yorkshire Committee of the Oil Distributors' Emergency Council, which was set up to oversee the most effective use of raw materials and to maintain the principles of fair trading, so that even the smallest firm was kept in business.

"This appointment was a great tribute to the confidence the local industry had in his integrity and judgement. The work involved the Chairman in seeing the confidential records of the firms concerned, and he brought in the Chamber of Commerce to provide a reliable and impartial secretariat."

27.2.41 "Another competing firm wants men, we have surplus labour. I suggest we let them go, on the understanding that if we want them back we have the right to invite them to return. R, who has done a good job of work on our steaming-out plant, was offered a job and accepted it. This is the first instance that I know of voluntary labour pooling by two unrelated firms in the oil trade."

November 1st, 1942: "Men in industry must help to find the antidote and alternative to materialism—that philosophy of life which relies on power, position, size, prestige. Reliance on those things makes faith in God more difficult.

"During the last war the call was to patriotism. This time the appeal is to efficiency. In an age of material perfection we need to enter the age of spiritual force. The course we take at the moment of victory is being decided now.

"The only answer to materialism is to turn ownership into stewardship. If we fail there will be a pause while another generation learns, if it can. We literally have a chance to save a generation. My interests are just a part of God's concern for all men, and I must not get them out of focus—not rush off after every impulse, but be very attentive to every whisper of God. 'The wisdom that comes from above is first of all peaceable.' Guidance from God does outflank difficulty. If one doesn't listen or doesn't obey, one doesn't know what is missed."

The 'Sunday Express' of February 7, 1943 wrote: "Informal discussions in the firm's time on the future of industry have been arranged by

Benjn. R. Vickers & Sons Ltd., oil manufacturers of Leeds. Mr. W. Farrar Vickers, managing director, said, 'Chances of shaping the future of their own industry will be offered to the workers. By this means we could think over our problems together. The discussions are not designed to stuff knowledge into people. Management and workers are trying to hammer out their ideas on what they believe should be done.'

In August 1945 Farrar made a second trip to the United States for three months, this time with his friend John Nowell, General Manager of the Camden Tannery at Runcorn in Cheshire, later President of the Leather Institute. As soon as it was possible to travel after V.E. Day they set off on one of the 'Queen' liners to New York, and then on to Mackinac Island, Michigan, where Frank Buchman was holding an international conference for Moral Re-Armament.

Throughout the war MRA-trained men and women in the United States, John among them, had been at work on the civilian morale-building programme 'You Can Defend America', based on the three themes of sound homes, teamwork in industry and a united nation. The men who had been called up used every moment of leave to help with the programme in whichever State the mobile force was working.

Farrar and John Nowell arrived between V.E. and V.J. Days. Having been the wartime arsenal for democracy, the United States was about to provide the sinews of reconstruction through the Marshall Plan. But Buchman foresaw there were more fundamental issues also to be tackled.

"I went to the United States intending to stay a week or two with Buchman and his friends, and then go on to American and Canadian industry, to see what were the prospects of renewing our connections there. But I found myself in a setting which was so dynamic and constructive for the future that I stayed on and on, and only had about two weeks left for my business operations.

"One October morning Buchman called the non-Americans together and I noted a few of the things he said: 'A mighty advance is upon us. You will together forge the instrument which will bring the answering ideology to Europe. God still has a secret plan to be given. You must be prepared to live in a leftist world. Britain—the spearhead of Europe.'

"It was really a unique morning. Little was said. Gradually ideas in

a wholly new dimension came to one or two people, and these men articulated the new thinking which was coming. It was like watching the liquid emerge from a spinneret, in one of the machines making man-made fibres, and seeing it being coagulated into the form of a continuous filament. In the next few days, as different people developed their thoughts, one began to see the shape of a new society, relevant to all classes, colours, creeds, all types of men. Something in a new dimension.

“One thought that came to me was that as employers we must integrate the factors of responsibility, risk and reward, and must train employees to carry those along with the employer. The idea that individualism can change to corporate teamwork is basic.

“Shortly after that morning three Swiss, whose names should be recorded on the pages of history—Hahnloser, Mottu, Peyer—returned to Europe, and Caux came into being as the MRA world centre in Switzerland—the first mobilization point for a new thinking in the heart of Europe. And amid all the post-war wreckage there came signs of new growth.”

Farrar felt deeply about Britain, and the future of the country he loved so much. It was part of his breath and bones. Being an Englishman—and a Yorkshireman at that—it did not often find its way onto paper! In December 1949 he wrote:

“Now perhaps it is the task of ideologically intelligent individuals to set the pattern of fresh development, the idea of the responsible leader being one of a team, one of a family, instead of the top person, the top firm, the top nation. That certainly is a change which Britain needs to learn. There is a thrust upwards of men of every race claiming ‘a place in the sun’ and in world councils. These are young nations—America is historically an infant, Russia has emerged from serfdom only within a few years. Here in Britain we have a political maturity. We could become the trusted friend of all the world, but it would cost us pride of place, pride of face, pride of race.

“The very words which were basic to the character of our people—loyalty, faith, integrity, obedience—have become dirty words. We must enlarge men’s ideas—keep large maps on the wall. Don’t be afraid of vision. Joel 2, verses 25 and 28 (a favourite quotation): ‘I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten. And it shall come to pass

afterward that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions.'

"God spoke to the prophets of old. He warned of dangers and opportunities. He still speaks to those who listen, and acts through those who obey. I know it to be true.

"We in this generation are the trustees of Magna Carta, the legatees of Drake, Wilberforce, Shaftesbury, of Dunkirk, Cromwell, Wesley, the Tolpuddle Martyrs. When one beggar, one starved man tells another where food may be had, when one lost man tells another where the road may be found, renaissance has begun to be possible."

Nine

“Management by inclusion”

The first winter after the war was the toughest and coldest in years. Raw materials were in many ways scarcer even than during the war.

On July 1st, 1946 Farrar's younger son David was demobilized and started in the firm for a period lasting a dozen years. He was first Works Manager and then moved to Sales Management. His brother John too, although still away from Leeds, became a non-executive Director of the company.

With the fourth generation now in the business, Farrar was able to think about handing on responsibility for the firm to others—Col. John Simpson (Sales Manager), Alfred Latty (Commercial Manager), John Allison (Secretary) and Geoffrey Cowlshaw (Technical Manager).

November 1946: “Industrial management is faced with responsibility for leading the nations through dangers greater than those of war-time. World shortages of raw materials call for pooling of resources on a global scale. We have problems which can only be faced by collective action. The operations and policy of our own business must therefore be considered against a background of national interest.

“We are fortunate in reaping the reward of sound relationships built up during pre-war years. The preservation of those relationships is at least as important as the provision of employment or the securing of profits. We have welcomed back a number of ex-servicemen who bring with them a new spirit of alertness and expectancy.

“Every consideration of speed and convenience suggests management by *instruction*; every consideration of social security emphasizes the need of management by *inclusion*. This is the value of the small, personally-managed business. In the great combines efficiency depends on organiza-

tion; in the smaller units it can rest on personal relationships. The emotional freedom of open discussion is a vital factor in industrial affairs.

“I believe a new spirit is being born. I believe we shall write a new page of industrial history and create a new pattern of industrial teamwork.”

In 1946 Frank Buchman was invited to bring the industrial drama, ‘The Forgotten Factor’, to Yorkshire. While it was shown in the Doncaster coalfields, he stayed at Linton with Farrar and Doris. In one of the largest pits of the area the manager used to be known as ‘the pocket battleship’, on account both of his size and temperament. Shortly after the visit of ‘The Forgotten Factor’ it was noticed that the weekly output of his pit had risen from 13,000 to 17,000 tons. The manager said, ‘That play taught me to apologize and look at the whole of my work quite differently’. A year later, without extra machinery or men, the output was 20,000 tons a week.

“That play had a dynamic impact on the coal industry. It was obvious that the stage could do a lot to restore not only the spirit of the nation, but also the purpose and productivity of industry.”

Other people shared this view with Farrar and Doris. In London one weekend they met with twenty other couples and together decided to raise £132,000 to buy a London theatre—the Westminster, close to Buckingham Palace. The purpose of the purchase was to portray, through plays like ‘The Forgotten Factor’, the ideas which could secure the future of the democracy which so many of their friends had died to preserve. Several times during the weekend they came to an impasse, and once Farrar broke the tension by getting everyone to sing ‘On Ilkla Moor bah’t ’at’.

The theatre was bought in April, 1946—by the contributions of hundreds of people: relatives who gave in memory of those killed as soldiers, sailors, airmen and civilians; servicemen who gave their demobilization pay, and families who sold treasured possessions. Farrar became one of the Trustees responsible for the theatre.

“It was not a matter of looking after some financial investment in ‘theatre’, but of becoming a trustee for the nation of a national asset, and if I was to do that properly I needed to be close to the job.

“So, in July 1946, Doris and I removed from our lovely country home

at Linton, on the River Wharfe, to a flat in Westminster, in London. From our windows we saw over the roof of Westminster Abbey to the towers of the Houses of Parliament; across the square lived the Chancellor of the Exchequer; in a flat above us was one of the leaders of the House of Lords. I was frequently in and out of the House of Commons. I came to know men of the City of London and of the trade unions, as well as the editors of the industrial press.”

‘The Forgotten Factor’ opened at the Westminster in the autumn of 1946 and played there for twelve months, attended by industrial delegations from all over Britain. Farrar and John sat with Hugh Gaitskell, Labour MP for South Leeds, on the opening night, and over ninety from Farrar’s firm had a weekend trip to London to see the play. Some twenty years later Farrar wrote:

“The impact of the Westminster Theatre on national and international affairs, industry, education and policies, is a matter of history now. Constructive changes have taken place which are directly attributable to the plays presented on that stage.”

Germany’s post-war leaders, trying to restore democratic values after the collapse of the Third Reich, asked Frank Buchman to take ‘The Forgotten Factor’ to the coal and steel industry of the Ruhr. Farrar was one of a few employers and trade unionists who, from time to time, joined the group there.

“I met some of the militant Marxists whose only answer to the vacuum of defeat was to set up a dictatorship of the left, indistinguishable in character from the already defeated dictatorship of the right.”

With others Farrar addressed meetings of miners and steel-workers and of management, and took part in long and heated discussions with Works Councils. Some workers would not believe that one of the visitors could be an employer, from the way he talked, until they had seen his profession written in his passport! One miner, a Communist for 25 years, said, “If Marx had met such employers he would have written a different book from *Das Kapital*”.

“At the MRA conference at Caux, Switzerland, I once sat down for a meal with a man from the London docks. We were talking naturally, when suddenly he got up, walked away and shook himself, and when he

came back said, 'I have never sat at a table with an employer before in my life, and I certainly never dreamed that I should ever call such a man my friend. I had to go away and shake myself, to make sure it was not a dream.'

"Then he told me his background, and I could see every reason for his fear and hatred of the employer. As employers we have a terrific debt to pay, to atone for the sins of our predecessors. They may not be our sins, but we have inherited that debt and it has to be paid, either by free conviction or it will be exacted under duress. This is an issue which faces the nation today—not only to put right the present wrongs, but to make restitution for the wrongs done by those whom we have succeeded."

In 1971 Farrar wrote, on this subject, "I have a deep sense that not only justice but some sort of restitution is needed by the employer as a class, for the injustices inherited from the past."

And in 1977, at the age of ninety-four, three months before he died, he wrote to a friend, "It was such a refreshment to see you the other day. The entrenched forces of capital and labour offer little evidence of a new hope—perhaps the silent majority of ordinary men and women of all races hold the key—men and women of creative industry, as distinct from competitive commerce. A mass of as yet unvocal people, of good will, who—like the prodigal son, sick of self-centred competition—say 'I will arise and go to my father and say sorry'.

"A new dimension of the Spirit is practical, not theory. The world is full of noisy groups, sections and committees! The new world will be based on individuals. The groups will look after themselves.

"The classification of 'labour' is to me divisive and sterile. I suppose I rank as representing 'capital'—utterly stupid. I come from and belong to the active ranks of labour. All my life I have been a worker, not an arms-length boss. Maybe an act of restitution is involved by many of us in industry. A sincere personal acceptance of the sins of a class and even some God-given act of restitution that would heal the hurts which underly inherited class war."

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“Those post-1945 years were for me years of enlarged education, while I was still responsible for the policy and much of the operation of the firm. I was regularly in the office at Leeds.”

In the office, as elsewhere, Farrar was capable of strong words if someone disagreed with him. But he was not too proud to admit his mistakes. Michael Joyce remembered one such occasion. “Just after the war, I returned to the firm from the Navy, to take over the marine work inside the office from Cyril Crowther. I had literally to do everything—deal with orders, enquiries, prepare quotations, correspondence, sales promotion, letters, keep records and drawings, even type my own letters. One afternoon Mr. Vickers came in and, in a friendly way, asked how things were going. He wanted to see what I was doing, and—more important—how I was doing it! He expressed the view that I was spending too much time keeping things ship-shape, and that ‘there should be a stream of letters flowing out to clients’.

“Politely I pointed out that, if I were to do this as well, chaos would result. But he wouldn’t have it! The only serious argument I ever had with him followed, and our voices were raised. Finally he stormed out of the office, passing some rather scathing remarks.

“The following morning I was just going up the stairs when he came in on his way to his office. I still felt bitter and said, rather coldly, ‘Good morning Mr. Vickers’. He returned my greeting and then stopped. ‘Michael, I want to apologize to you. I was wrong yesterday, and I hope you will forget my words.’

Farrar had high ideals about the sort of person he would like to employ: 16.12.47 “A young man of tidy mind, alert, teachable, and with the right background and outlook is needed; worth taking and training, preferably past military service, able to act as personal assistant, discreet, able to hear without talking.” (However, it is *not* recorded that this paragon ever turned up!).

Farrar made many journeys, often with other industrialists who had found a similar motive for industrial leadership. In 1948 he and Doris went to South Africa, where the Minister of Trade, Dr. Arthur Norval, had invited a group of MRA-trained people to his country to launch a multi-racial programme for the continent. John and his wife Eleanor had flown to South Africa soon after their marriage a few months earlier, and

Farrar and Doris joined the group for three months. They were all received by General Smuts, then in his last term as Prime Minister, at 'Groote Schuur'.

Farrar also worked in his own city, and all over Britain. "Austin Reed, who was a close friend of mine, came to stay with me in Leeds once. He was looking into the idea of opening a branch of his clothing stores here in Leeds. We went round the city together, looking at everything, and found a place. But, he said, he had come to the conclusion that Leeds was adequately served by the existing firms at that time, and it was economic and social nonsense for him to crash in on a market where he was not needed. My word, what a difference it would make today if everybody adopted that idea! It would put a new flavour into competition."

In November 1949 Farrar sent out one of the firm's occasional news bulletins to all the members of the Staff of the firm:

"Where I live, when I am in London, is in the heart of the City of Westminster. A couple of weeks ago traffic was diverted, and spaces cleared for the Cenotaph service of remembrance. Into Whitehall came men and women of every race, class, creed, of all ranks of society and all political parties, to ponder in two minutes of silence something of the living history of our nation and to recapture for a short moment the ideas and emotions that are our common experience.

"Britain is not an organization or planned society—it is the product of free relationships between free people. Every time freedom has been threatened a few men and women have stood firm. Our social and political institutions are the mark and memorial of men and women who saw further than their fellows, and who stepped out of the present to create and secure the future. There are many tangible reminders of the part that common men have played in our country.

"Practically every past civilization has been destroyed by divisions of class and the hatreds of war, but civilization itself has survived. Today a different prospect faces us.

"I want to see that, in addition to facilities for technical and commercial education, anyone in this firm who wants it should have a chance to know at first hand what is going on behind the news; to understand events and to recognize and accept the changes which face us. I hope in the

early spring to arrange a series of occasions when together we can meet men capable of informing and instructing us.

“Meantime, please remember that although there are ‘correct channels’ for management and organization of work, there are in this firm no ‘correct’ channels of approach. Anyone, at any time, has complete and immediate access to me or to any of the management, without going through anyone else. What we stand for here is freedom of thought, speech, association and access.”

Ten

“The new dimension”

In 1953 the firm had its 125th anniversary. To mark the occasion Dr. Randall Vickers, Farrar's brother, prepared material from the old family papers and archives in the form of a book—'This Family Business'. Copies were sent out widely, and also presented to each member of the Staff.

When after the war it became possible to expand, Farrar sent men around the European countries to find out what the current needs were, even though there was not likely to be an immediate return of large orders. This laid the foundation for a new export trade, to some forty nations world-wide.

Jack Thornton, now Director and Sales Manager, recalled: “In the days before the economic return hardly justified the costs of travel to overseas countries, I once queried to WFV the profitability aspect. He replied ‘We will do it as long as we can afford to do so. Never forget ideas can arise anywhere. You need to know something of other nations and peoples, and if you come back a wiser person for what you have seen and learned, that is profit enough for me.’”

As the firm's traditional business returned to normal and as it became increasingly involved in the trade associated with the newer man-made fibres, the chance was taken to modernize the productive plant. This was financed out of the money earned in previous years and carefully conserved for future improvements. In January 1969, for example, a new Works Administration building and laboratory was opened. Farrar was particularly delighted with this development. The new building was opened by the head of the Textile Department of Leeds University, Professor J. B. Speakman. He and Farrar had been friends for forty-five years.

“From the day when I voluntarily laid down my arbitrary rights there has been one long process of experimentation into new ways. Benjn. R. Vickers & Sons Ltd. is essentially a service unit. We are totally and diametrically different from firms who produce and then go out to sell. We send men to find out what is needed to improve efficiency and economy in the industries we serve.

“As a firm we must do far more than create and observe good industrial relations. They are a by-product, like profit, not a motive. When a man’s spirit droops his work shows it. The spirit is decisive . . . if a man’s spirit is right, his work will be right.

“To use this business as a constructive force in national and international industry is our responsibility as a Board; on our discharge of that, I believe, depends our survival. If the making of profit or the growth of power ever becomes the dominant factor then I believe our days are numbered. Our only qualification for survival is the maintenance of moral incentive and an awareness of spiritual reality, expressed in ordinary, practical ways of doing business.

“It means finding the right timing for action. It means refusal to be governed by pressure from competitor, supplier or user. It means learning to move together, even at the cost of speed, instead of moving alone for quick results. It means quality before quantity, performance beyond promise. It means discerning the priority tasks, out of a mass of urgent demands; it means wise choice as distinct from mere ability to decide action. Industry is in a privileged position, being a creative nucleus of national life—a cradle of national and individual character.

“What matters is the motive, not the target. The war of ideas is fought on many fronts, in many ways, and is for the good of all and the exploitation of none. It is a battle *for*, not *against*, a war of motives, not of achievements, often an unconscious war of decisions rather than choices. An age-long war—the line runs *through*, not *between* races, nations, families. A war in which men step out of their accustomed ways and, however expert in one realm or medium, become amateurs in a different dimension.”

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Farrar and Doris lived in their flat in Smith Square, Westminster,

from 1946 to 1958, when they moved to Putney, London. In 1960 John moved back to Leeds, with his family, to become Joint Managing Director of the firm, with Farrar, and a year later Managing Director.

In the spring of 1963 Doris died peacefully at home in Putney. Miss Ursula Helm, who had nursed her, graciously stayed on to look after Farrar. He decided in 1964 to move back to his native Yorkshire. A convenient bungalow was found in Bramhope, near Leeds, close to John's home. Miss Helm volunteered to go north with him, to make the independent home possible. From his window he looked out over lower Wharfedale, and he took great delight in being able to drive himself around his much-loved countryside again.

In 1968 Farrar retired as Chairman of the company, handing this position on to John and in October 1969 he retired as a Director, in his eighty-seventh year. It was an office he had held for over half a century, since 1913.

For thirteen years, from June 1964, Farrar received countless members of his family and friends in his home. People found him a centre of calm and wisdom. His nephew, Col. Graham Simpson, wrote, "He had a quite extraordinary interest in people and their lives. My wife and I always came away from visting him revitalized by his belief in the future of Britain and the world—and quite exhausted by his penetrating questions. I do not think I have ever met a man who—regardless of age—has presented a greater conversational challenge to me."

During those years Farrar carried on a large correspondence, which literally encircled the globe. His family was often in different parts of the world, and it was a frequent experience for them to meet someone in a far-off country who said, 'I have just received a letter from Farrar'. Written in his unmistakable, rugged hand, his letters, though not often long, always contained fresh thought. He liked to keep in touch with people. One man, Alec Taylor, spent a few years working in the firm before 1939, when he joined up. After the war he emigrated to America; "Farrar Vickers and I corresponded from time to time and always I was aware of his clarity of thought about world affairs, politics, and whatever. I learned more of what was happening in and around Europe from one of his short letters than I could possibly have done from a treatise by a so-called professional correspondent."

The last letter one of Farrar's grand-daughters received from him arrived while she was in Turkey: "How little we still understand about the basic motives of men and nations—greed can be controlled by force, but fear does not yield to reason or sense. So we go on preparing mutual defence against other men and nations. Greed is a human motive, but fear is a spiritual malaise and can only be resolved by spiritual factors. The thing about Frank Buchman was that he appreciated other men's faiths, so that the Koran as well as the Bible made its contribution to his hope for the world of tomorrow. In the world we have a lot to learn of and from each other—there is no monopoly of hope."

He was always prolific in writing his ideas and visions for the future, and after his retirement in 1968 he worked to develop the concept that the world needs men and women who live in the 'fourth dimension':

"The dimension calling for research is beyond those known to science. You cannot describe such things as sight, taste, hearing, smell. No more can you define this new dimension. The ancients called it faith.

"Everyone can listen to the word of the Lord. Prophecy is not an emanation of man, it is a dimension of perception given by God—a growth, not an expression; a gift, and every man has this potential.

"Every generation must shape its own convictions, steward its own heritage, assume its own responsibilities, erect its own standards, accept or reject its destiny, for itself.

"History states that all down the ages men of all sorts believe they have 'touched' a presence, 'heard' a voice, got 'this sort of feeling'—a dynamic for good, constructive and beneficial. Is this mere rumour? Can man today—at his wits' end—listening in case there *is* something, hear and appreciate in a new dimension? Is 'inspiration' as appreciable and as relevant a factor for the man who has to deal with metallurgy, with carding, spinning, dyeing, adhesion, as for the men of poetry, music and art?

"It is a matter of experience in this modern age that God, by whatever name known or unknown, can and does put ideas into a man's mind, attractive in content, exciting in application.

"The ideas may seem like ordinary ones, but they still have the feeling that you have never thought of them before, and that is new. To put

these ideas into practice in ways open to you, within your ability, can bring the new dimension. And only as one looks back will the full range and value of what has happened be clear.

“I have seen this change of spirit and motive among men of privilege and position bring hope to men who had no hope of freedom, except by violence. The ideas of Frank Buchman go out into life and action in a quite different way from a withdrawal into monasticism. They are relevant to men who deal with the practical and personal issue of industry. The real revolution, the permanent revolution in the structure of society, will be in the dimension of the spirit, where the Holy Spirit of God dominates and operates through the decisions of men. A current name for that revolution of spirit and structure is Moral Re-Armament. It will be judged in the light of history not by the affirmations of adherents, but by its impact on the life and work of people in industry, politics, education, press, medicine.

“We are called to live in this fourth dimension, where we cannot even imagine what we may find. The man who first walked in space opened doors of imagination beyond those in a physical sense. ‘I am willing to take my orders from God.’ That is the crucial, simple decision. To begin with I didn’t know how. But I let God do the talking, from the beginning I did the understanding. It is not a code of values to try and apply, but a thought to follow. Listening each morning, day by day. That shows how to make experience available and fruitful.

“Experience is only an illustration of the validity of your ideas. The fruit and the root must be related to each other. If ever the result becomes the objective, sooner or later achievement will be empty.”

Farrar was passionately keen for coming generations to learn from the mistakes of the past—not least those of himself and his generation—and not to waste time in repeating them and learning the hard way. This applied especially to John, and the business. Though officially ‘retired’, Farrar found it very hard to let the policy and affairs of the company which had been his life for more than fifty years pass to other hands. For a long time it was a struggle, requiring patience on both sides.

19.12.67 “I do not want to write my memoirs. I *do* want to make available the basic lessons learnt together. Some were escapes, some were discoveries, but each has a value when mobilized.”

But in the last years of his life, he was much more at peace:

Easter, 1976: "The only value of looking back to yesterday is that we may learn from experience—we are pattern-makers for tomorrow. We cannot stand still nor contract out of responsibility. Time marches on, and we have to accept our future."

One sunny October day, Farrar was out on one of his much-loved Yorkshire moors, and wrote in his note-book:

"What a rich life—God has been very good, yet I am so aware of follies at every stage of my life that I never get to a real appreciation of the fulness that has been mine, so I am unthankful.

"Always plenty of rewarding work, health far beyond my deserving, inadequately used, a quick mind—tenacious too—a full life with always some fresh aim. Yet the remembrance of stupidities and mistakes has more validity than recognition of rewards, especially since Doris went away. How much of an unappreciated debt I have to her. I think I have many times in my life undervalued the most precious things.

"What gracious patience I have been shown, all my life, unmerited. These years have not been easy for either John or myself—I am too long and deeply involved lightly and painlessly to see another man take on my life's work—great forbearance he has shown, now the time is ripe. He and I are ready. 140 years, father to son, is the story of our family business."

Farrar died peacefully at home in June 1977, in his ninety-fifth year. Six months earlier he had written to an old friend:

"I have been where you are now, as you deal with the by-product of years of active responsibility and the doctor's direction—'twice as long to do half as much'. We have trained our minds to responsible activity until we have come to a habit in which self-management does not operate.

"Nothing but the grace of God can uproot the instinct of activity and give freedom and peace.

"It took me years of blood and sweat to find deliverance from the instinctive habit of what I used to call 'service' or activity, but today I am

free and at peace—the old instinct of ‘do something’ has been mastered by the grace of God.

“I could not let go the sense of self-confidence, but bit by bit God loosed my grip on self-assurance and took away my sense of overwhelming responsibility. All I know is that now I am free, lots more to learn, but I am free from the infection of self-reliance and delivered from the bondage of fear. Strangely enough life is *not* emptied. I really feel as a child—I sleep like a child and wake fresh.

“Frank Buchman never told me what to do. He simply shone a light in which I saw for myself. No. 281, in the Methodist Hymn Book, is full of encouragement:

‘Go not my soul in search of Him
Thou wilt not find Him there,
Or in the depths of shadow dim,
Or heights of upper air.

For not in far-off realms of space
The Spirit hath its throne;
In every heart it findeth place
And waiteth to be known’.

“Limitation of activity of mind and body is not readily acceptable, but I am learning things in a dimension of spirit—of *motive* as distinct from *objective*, which opens up a dimension quite new to me. Accepting rather than creating, discovering rather than initiating.

“May you have great peace in your evidently restrictive condition. Great peace to you—for blessed are the *peace*-makers.

Farrar”

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“The idea which arrested, intrigued, stimulated me more than forty-five years ago, and which by experiment I proved to be practicable, was that to men who ‘listen’, the voice of God, whatever you call it, is audible and the language is intelligible. And my own experience and conviction

is that God talks to a man's perception in his own language, and a man expresses what he perceives in his own medium.

“The changes which it came to me as an employer to introduce were all within my ability to do. They were all practicable and necessary. The needs had long existed—the change was that my eyes opened, and I saw things to which I had been blind.

“It could be that if men will research into this fourth dimension of the validity of ‘guidance’ we might find ourselves solving our problems, and be able to give the results to a waiting world.”