



## PATRICK CAMPBELL

### *Noulded Into The Shake Of A Goat*

When I was a tall sensitive boy at school I once sent up for a booklet about how to be a ventriloquist.

I was always 'sending up' for things—variable focus lamps, propelling pencils with choice of six differently coloured leads, air-pistols discharging wooden bullets, scale-model tanks with genuine caterpillar action, tricks in glass-topped boxes, and so on—anything, I suppose, to vary the monotony of straight games and education.

The booklet arrived at breakfast time one morning in a large square envelope. I told the other boys it was a new stamp album, and got on with my shredded liver poached in water. I wanted the voice-throwing to come as a real surprise.

We had twenty minutes after breakfast in which to get our things ready for first school. I had a quick run through the new book.

It was called *Ventriloquism in Three Weeks*. On the first page it explained that ventriloquism came from the Latin *ventriloquus*—'a speaking from the belly.' There was also a drawing of a school-boy smiling pleasantly at a railway porter carrying a trunk. From the trunk



came hysterical cries of 'Help! Help! Murder! Police!'

It was just the sort of thing I was aiming at. I slipped the book in with my other ones, and hurried off to first school.

In the next fortnight I put in a good deal of practice, sitting right at the back of the class, watching my lips in a small piece of mirror, and murmuring, 'Dah, dee, day, di, doy, doo.'

It was necessary, however, to be rather careful. Dr Farvox, the author of the book, suggested that it might be as well to perform the earlier exercises 'in the privacy of one's bedroom or den.' Dr Farvox was afraid that 'chums or relatives' might laugh, particularly when one was practising the 'muffled voice in the box.'

The best way to get this going, Dr Farvox said, was to experiment 'with a continuous grunting sound in a high key, straining from the chest as if in pain.'

He was right in thinking that this exercise ought to be performed in the privacy of the bedroom. It was inclined to be noisy—so noisy, indeed, that I was twice caught straining in a high key during practical chemistry, and had to pretend that I'd been overcome by the fumes of nitric acid.

But in the end, it was the easy, pleasant smile that terminated my study of what Dr Farvox described as 'this amusing art.'

It happened one Saturday morning, in the hour before lunch, ordinarily a pleasant enough period devoted to constitutional history. Bill the Bull, who took the class, was usually fairly mellow with the prospect of the week-end before him, and there was not much need to do any work.

As was by now my invariable custom I was seated at the back of the room with a large pile of books in front of me. I was working on the Whisper Voice, which had been giving me a considerable amount of difficulty.

'Lie down, Neddy, lie down,' I whispered, watching my lips closely in the glass.

'It's due in dock at nine o'clock.'  
Not bad.

'Take Ted's Kodak down to Roy.'

There it was again—the old familiar twitch on 'Kodak.'

I sat back, relaxing a little. Dr Farvox was strongly in favour of the Smile. 'What the young student,' he said, 'should aim at from the first is an easy and natural expression. He should Smile.'

I smiled. Smiling, I whispered, 'Take Ted's Kodak down to Roy.'

To my absolute horror I found myself smiling straight into the face of



Bill the Bull.

He stopped dead. He was in the middle of something about the growth of common law, but my smile stopped him dead in his tracks.

'Well, well,' said Bill, after a moment. 'How charming. And good morning to you, too.'

I at once buried my face in my books, and tried to shove the mirror and *Ventriloquism in Three Weeks* on one side.

Bill rolled slowly down the passageway between the desks. He was an enormous Welshman with a bullet head, and very greasy, straight black hair. He took a subtle and delicate pleasure in driving the more impressionable amongst us half mad with fear at least five days a week.

'Such pretty teeth,' said Bill. 'How nice of you to smile at me. I have always wanted to win your admiration.'

The other boys sat back. They knew they were on to something good.

I kept my head lowered. I'd actually succeeded in opening my constitutional history somewhere in the middle, but the corner of Dr Farvox was clearly visible under a heap of exercise books.

Bill reached my desk. 'But who knows,' he said, 'perhaps you love me too. Perchance you've been sitting there all morning just dreaming of a little home—just you and I. And later, perhaps, some little ones. . . .'

A gasp of incredulous delight came from the other boys. This was Bill at his very best.

I looked up. It was no longer possible to pretend I thought he was talking to someone else.

'I'm sorry, sir,' I said, 'I was just smiling.'

Suddenly Bill pounced. He snatched up Dr Farvox.

'Cripes,' he said. 'What in the world have we here? Ventriloquism in three weeks?'

'Scholars,' he said, 'be so good as to listen to this.'

He read aloud: 'To imitate a Fly. Close the lips tight at one corner. Fill that cheek full of wind and force it through the aperture. Make the sound suddenly loud, and then softer, which will make it appear as though the insect were flying in different parts of the room. The illusion may be helped out by the performer chasing the imaginary fly, and flapping at it with his handkerchief.'

'Strewth,' said Bill. He looked round the class. 'We'd better get ourselves a little bit of this. Here am I taking up your time with the monotonies of constitutional history, while in this very room we have a trained performer who can imitate a fly.'

Suddenly he caught me by the back of the neck. 'Come,' he said, 'my little love, and let us hear this astounding impression.'



He dragged me down to the dais.

'Begin,' said Bill. 'Be so kind as to fill your cheek with wind and at all costs do not omit the flapping of the handkerchief.'

'Sir,' I said, 'that's animal noises. I haven't got that far yet.'

'Sir,' squeaked Bill in a high falsetto, 'that's animal noises. I 'aven't got that far yet.'

He surveyed the convulsed class calmly.

'Come, come,' he said, 'this art is not as difficult as I had imagined it to be. Did anyone see my lips move?'

They cheered him. They banged the lids of their desk. 'Try it again, sir,' they cried. 'It's splendid!'

Bill raised his hand. 'Gentlemen,' he said, 'I thank you for your kindness. I am, however, but an amateur. Am I not right in thinking we would like to hear something more from Professor Smallpox?'

They cheered again. Someone shouted, 'Make him sing a song, sir!'

Bill turned to me. 'Can you,' he said, 'Professor Smallpox, sing a song?'

It was the worst thing that had happened to me in my life. I tried to extricate myself.

'No, sir,' I said. 'I haven't mastered the labials yet.'

Bill started back. He pressed his hand to his heart.

'No labials?' he said. 'You have reached the age of fifteen without having mastered the labials. But, dear Professor Smallpox, we must look into this. Perhaps you would be so kind as to give us some outline of your difficulties?'

I picked up *Ventriloquism in Three Weeks*. There was no way out.

'There's a sentence here, sir, that goes "A pat of butter moulded into the shape of a boat".'

Bill inclined his head. 'Is there, indeed? A most illuminating remark. You propose to put it to music?'

'No, sir,' I said. 'I'm just trying to show you how hard it is. You see, you have to call that "A cat of gutter noulded into the shake of a goat".'

Bill fell right back into his chair.

'You have to call it *what*?' he said.

'A cat of gutter, sir, noulded into the shake of a goat.'

Bill's eyes bulged. 'Professor,' he said, 'you astound me. You bewilder me. A cat of gutter-' he repeated it reverently, savouring every syllable.

Then he sprang up. 'But we must hear this,' he cried. 'We must have this cat of gutter delivered by someone who knows what he is at. This-this is valuable stuff.'



He caught me by the ear. 'Professor,' he said, 'why does it have to be noulded into the shake of a goat?'

'Well, sir,' I said, 'if you say it like that you don't have to move your lips. You sort of avoid the labials.'

'To be sure you do,' said Bill. 'Why didn't I think of it myself? Well, now, we will have a demonstration.'

He turned to face the class. 'Gentlemen,' he said, 'Professor Smallpox will now say "a pat of butter moulded into the shape of a boat" *without moving the lips*. I entreat your closest attention. You have almost certainly never in your lives heard anything like this before.'

He picked up his heavy ebony ruler. His little pig-like eyes gleamed.

'And,' he went on, 'to make sure that Professor Smallpox will really give us of his best I shall make it my personal business to give Professor Smallpox a clonk on the conk with this tiny weapon should any of you see even the faintest movement of the facial muscles as he delivers his unforgettable message.'

Bill brought down the ruler with a sharp crack on my skull.

'Professor,' he said, 'it's all yours.'

I don't have to go into the next twenty-five minutes. The other boys yelled practically on every syllable. I got the meaningless words tangled up, and said 'A cack of rutter noulded into the gake of a shote.'

At times Bill was so helpless with laughter that he missed me with the ruler altogether.

When the bell went for the end of the hour he insisted on being helped out into the passage, wiping his eyes with the blackboard cloth.

After that, I gave it up, feeling no recurrence of interest even after reading Bill's observation on my end-of-term report. 'He ought to do well on the stage.'

## CANNING, FRERE, AND ELLIS

### *The Rovers*

#### PLOT

Rogero, son of the late Minister of the Count of Saxe Weimar, having, while he was at college, fallen desperately in love with Matilda Pottingen, daughter of his tutor, Doctor Engelbertus Pottingen, Professor of Civil Law; and Matilda evidently returning his passion, the Doctor, to prevent ill consequences, sends his daughter on a visit to her Aunt in Wetteravia, where she becomes acquainted with Casimere, a Polish Officer, who happens to be quartered near her Aunt's; and has