

THE SOUL OF JOHN CAMPION

BY MARTIN ARMSTRONG

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JOHN CAMPION followed the hotel porter up the stairs, which seemed almost pitch-dark after the white glare of the piazza. The porter unlocked a door, ushered Campion into a bedroom, deposited his bag on a wooden stand, and departed, closing the door behind him.

Campion went to the window and opened the green shutters. Dazzling autumn sunshine flooded the room and, looking out, he received the sudden impression that he was standing on the brink of a precipice; for, sheer below his window, the plain, covered with miniature vineyards, miniature fields, miniature trees, and streaked by miniature roads like chalk-lines on a slate, spread far and wide, curving up at last into a wall of violet hills, which rose peak above peak, like wave-crests on a windy sea.

The room looked cool and spacious, with its high, elaborately painted ceiling, smooth white sheets and pillows, and the pleasing confusion of clean towels. He could detect only one fault: the servant had omitted to sweep the empty hearth, into which his predecessor had thrown a quantity of tobacco ash and several cigar-ends. He dropped into an easy-chair, feeling suddenly that he was very tired. His heart had been troubling him again in the train, and he reflected that he had been foolish to carry his bag to the station that morning.

Campion was a man of few friends. No one of his eminence had kept himself so aloof from his contemporaries. To the public he was known by his books only; every detail of his life and habits, and even his personal appear-

ance, were wrapped in complete mystery. A hatred of tobacco and a complete irresponsiveness to music were possibly signs of a temperament pharisaic, fastidious, and cynical, which, in his work, revealed itself in a terse, mordant style, a vehicle for sharp definition, exact criticism, pungent wit, and a skepticism that delighted in playing havoc among the conventionally religious.

When he sufficiently rested, Campion proceeded to unpack. His open suitcase displayed perfection in the art of packing; and as he carefully removed each article from its place in the bag, he disposed it with extreme exactitude in its appointed place in drawer or cupboard. Three or four paper-backed books were placed symmetrically on a table near the bed. Between finger and thumb he lifted from the bag a bundle of long Italian cigars, sniffed them with an expression of disgusted curiosity, and placed them in a drawer. The next article to be unpacked was a Bible, newly bound in an elaborately tooled Florentine binding. Campion opened it. The inside was much used: there were pencils here and there, and on a loose sheet of paper were various references headed 'Helpful Texts.' With a contemptuous shrug Campion placed it in a drawer beside the cigars and removed from the bag a large thin volume on which the title, *Beethoven's Sonatas*, was printed in gold. He opened the volume and glanced uncomprehendingly at the musical notation.

When all had thus been unpacked and composed as precisely and impeccably as one of his own essays, Campion took a writing-case from a drawer and pro-

ceeded to write a letter. 'I arrived here an hour ago,' he wrote, 'and after four days here I shall start for England. I have already executed all your commissions. Your fifty abominable cigars are bought and have already impregnated all my linen with their disgusting stench. While in Florence I had my wife's Bible bound according to her orders, with the result that it now looks as inviting as a novel by D'Annunzio. By the way, I found inside it a loose half-sheet of prescriptions (for spiritual consumption only), which I thought best to have bound in.'

'When at Assisi yesterday I acquired a sort of Christmas-card containing a leaf from one of St. Francis's miraculous rose-trees. There is printed information to the effect that excellent results will be obtained from the leaf if used with faith. I have enclosed it in the Bible. For myself, I prefer the old-fashioned mustard-leaf which is equally efficacious with or without faith, since it produces rapid conviction by certain compelling properties of its own.'

'When in Florence I happened to pick up a volume of Beethoven's Sonatas, copiously annotated in pencil by a certain Rubinstein. The acquaintance who pointed it out to me assured me that this Rubinstein was a famous pianist, and that the volume was of considerable interest. I am therefore bringing it home for Muriel on the strict understanding that she refrains from playing the contents while I am in the house.'

'Thanks for your list of younger Italian writers. Obedient to your exhortations, I have bought a volume or two of Papini, but I remain unconverted. Papini's *Un Uomo Finito*, which I shall finish in bed to-night, I find extremely tedious. The feverish verbosity tires and the entire lack of restraint sickens me. I have, so far, found no one to my taste among these younger Italians.'

Having addressed and stamped this letter, Campion posted it in the hall when he went down to dinner. At dinner he found himself sharing a table with the only other Englishman in the hotel, a well-informed fellow and a good talker. Campion liked him, and after dinner they continued their conversation over coffee in the lounge. But Campion's heart was bothering him again. Clearly, he told himself, slightly scared, he ought not to have carried his bag to the station that morning. He would have to take it easy during the next few days. He rose heavily from his chair and, ordering his *café au lait* for ten o'clock next morning, went slowly and carefully upstairs.

In his bedroom he saw the Italian books on the table near his bed, *Un Uomo Finito* on top of the rest. The thought of them filled him with weariness and depression. He could certainly not stand any of that blustering stuff to-night, but he would have his notebook and pencil near him in case of sleeplessness. But the notebook was not to be found. He did not even remember unpacking it. Campion invariably folded the notebook inside some article of clothing; he had done so that morning when packing, and at once he realized that it must now be in one of the drawers, still wrapped in clothes. The first drawer that he tried to open stuck, and the struggle involved in opening it irritated him, and when he got it open he could not find the notebook.

These occurrences repeated themselves in the case of the second drawer, and Campion, losing all patience, pursued a frenzied and unsuccessful search through both, leaving the contents in wild confusion. As they had refused to open, so both drawers refused to shut, and it was only after reproducing a stage thunderstorm, that he succeeded in closing them. He undressed, feeling breathless and upset; and as he unfolded

his pajamas the notebook fell out of the jacket. In stooping to pick it up he noticed that the cigar-ends still lay in the empty fireplace. How disgusting! Feeling very ill-tempered, he got into bed and put out the light.

When the waiter knocked at the door next morning with the *café au lait*, Campion did not reply. The waiter entered and put down the tray on the table near the bed. The English gentleman was asleep. In the twilight of the shuttered room the waiter could see the motionless hands and face and the disordered bedclothes. He went to the window and opened the shutters. When he turned again toward the bed, the waiter received a shock, for the English gentleman was not asleep, but dead. The fact was immediately, appallingly obvious. The waiter glanced hurriedly at the dressing-table, helped himself to a jewelled tie-pin and a gold stud, and left the room, locking the door after him.

When the necessary investigations were made, it was thought best that the only other Englishman in the hotel should be present. It was only after considerable search among Campion's effects that his identity was satisfactorily established.

In England the news of Campion's death produced those results which always follow the death of an eminent writer. Monthly and weekly publications, and those dailies with literary inclinations, printed critical articles, more or less detailed, on Campion's work. Here and there a few rare personal reminiscences appeared, and that other Englishman, who had seen Campion both alive and dead in the Italian hotel where he died, was pressed to contribute his experiences. So little was known of Campion himself, it was pointed out, that it became the duty of everyone who had anything to tell about the great man to tell it. The Eng-

lishman, thus exhorted, contributed his experiences. After describing his dinner and subsequent conversation with Campion, the Englishman continued as follows:—

'It may seem strange that one who had known Campion for not more than two hours should presume to write about his private life and habits; but the fact that it was my melancholy duty to be present at the inspection of his personal belongings a few hours after his death, and in the room where he still lay as he had died, made it possible for me, by reason of this sudden intimate dip into his privacy, to learn a few details not perhaps generally known concerning his tastes and habits.

'Like many people of artistic temperament, Campion was desperately untidy. His clothing was flung pell-mell into drawers, in a disorder which one would almost have said was deliberate. As I have already stated, Campion refused cigarettes, nor did he smoke after our dinner together, so that I was surprised to find that he was an inveterate smoker. In his bedroom cigar-ash and several cigar-ends lay in the grate, and on the table was a bundle of at least fifty Toscani.

'It will surprise those familiar with his writings to learn that actually Campion was an intensely religious man. He carried with him on his travels a Bible which gave evidence of continual use; many verses were pencil-marked, and a carefully written list of references headed "Helpful Texts" appeared on a sheet bound into the book. This Bible was evidently one of his most cherished possessions, for it had recently been rebound in an expensive Florentine binding. Enclosed in it was an illuminated card from the church of the Porziuncula, doubtless brought by him from Assisi on the day before his death.

'Campion was an enthusiastic student of modern Italian literature. By

his bed were found several books by Giovanni Papini, whose *Uomo Finito* he was reading at the time of his death. Inside this book, marking the page he had reached, was a long list of other Italian writers of the younger school.

'No one would suspect from his books that Campion was a keen musician. Yet among his luggage he carried a volume of Beethoven's Sonatas, which gave evidence, like the Bible, of much use, and was, moreover, copiously annotated in pencil. Whether these notes were his own or those of a music-master, the fact remains that he had made a close study of the Sonatas of the greatest of musicians.

'It is facts like these which remind us once more how rash it is to attempt to deduce too literally a writer's personality from his writings, showing us, as they do, how large a portion of an artist's character may be entirely unapparent in his art.'

Perhaps none of Campion's few friends ever saw this interesting fragment; at least, they never publicly commented on it; and when, some years later, a well-known writer was compiling what is now the standard biography of John Campion, the details of this article, in view of the extraordinary scarcity of information relating to the man as distinguished from the writer, proved to be of inestimable value.

BOATS AT NIGHT

BY EDWARD SHANKS

[*The Outlook*]

How lovely is the sound of oars at night
 And unknown voices, borne through windless air,
 From shadowy vessels floating out of sight
 Beyond the harbor-lantern's broken glare
 To those piled rocks that make on the dark wave
 Only a darker stain. The splashing oars
 Slide softly on as in an echoing cave
 And with the whisper of the unseen shores
 Mingle their music, till the bell of night
 Murmurs reverberations low and deep
 That droop towards the land in swooning flight
 Like whispers from the lazy lips of sleep.
 The oars grow faint. Below the cloud-dim hill
 The shadows fade and now the bay is still.