



# KENNETH ALLSOP on the NEW BOOKS

# THE INCREDIBLE VILLAIN

### HE DUPED THE WORLD—BUT THE QUESTION REMAINS: WHY?



The face that won Darlington for the Liberals in 1910...



... The face that won converts to the League of Truth in Shanghai

It is not unknown for the British electorate to hold the view that their M.P.s are rogues, chisellers, and liars.

This belief has never been so torrentially substantiated as by Ignatius Timothy Trebitsch-Lincoln, elected Liberal member for Darlington in 1910, whose wildly unlikely life is documented in *The Self-Made Villain*, by David Lampe and Laszlo Szenasi (out yesterday, Cassell, 21s.).

At 18 Ignatz Trebitsch (the name was later often modified) fled the coop from his native Hungary on the proceeds from flogging his sister's gold watch.

### His break

**A**BANDONING the Jewish faith he was born to, he was ordained an Anglican Church deacon in Canada. After a lecture tour as a missionary ("I got a good Press"), he arrived in London and somehow inveigled from the Archbishop of Canterbury the curacy of a Kent village. Rural administration was not

much to the sophisticated palate of this Central European exotic. He swapped dog-collar for wing-collar and set out to invade the world of politics and finance.

This had penetrated no further than dog-to-door selling when he sold himself as German tutor to Benjamin Beebohm Rowntree, the Liberal reformer. Soon he was running Rowntree's field research into continental farming economics.

This was Trebitsch-Lincoln's break-through into expensive account living, and the kind of international butterfly flitting he adored. He was a proponent of today's jet-set, of the type of big-spending character who lives not so much on his wits as on nits.

During the next few years he described a spectacular trajectory from obscurity into fame



—Unwin-tan caption to typical drawing from "THE MISCELLIAN MANUSCRIPT."

and fortune and down into ruin. He became an M.P., welcomed by the Prime Minister, Lloyd George. He almost became a millionaire in an audacious oil-well scheme, but instead went bankrupt.

He experimented with professional gambling at Monte Carlo, dabbled further in oil deals in Bucarest, forged company papers, and even managed to bilk moneylenders.

Trebitsch-Lincoln's schemes laid so many eggs that he might be excused for counting chickens before the hatch. But despite the results of his financial games and farces his paranoid faith in his public image never wavered.

### His plan

**H**E had to borrow 4d. to get to his London club but went in top hat and tails. On his usually abrupt hops from capital to capital, with wife fanning his heels, he carried a £400 Maplin and Webb pigskin case, custom-made with foreign currency wallets and silver-topped bottles for brandy and wine.

Photographs of this period show a portly lizard in pince-nez, mouth clenched in cartoon resolution, stony eyes glaring with deception. About him was the aura of untrustworthiness usually radiated by the pathological trickster.

In 1914 he abortively offered the Admiralty a plan to scupper the Kaiser's entire North Sea Fleet, next hawking himself as espionage agent first to the British then the enemy.

### His lies

**T**HE spy short-sightedly overlooked the debtors closing in on him, and in 1915 he had suddenly to do another swift skip, this time to America. There he published his faked memoirs as a German secret agent, lurid hookum that reached Britain and brought about his extradition and trial for signing dud cheques and false pretences.

After three years in Brixton Prison, he resumed his post-posterous adventures. Within seven months of deportation from Britain he was organising the Berlin Kapp Putsch, and was leader in the new German Government. Next he turned up in China as adviser to a war-lord.

He sidled through Europe

under false names, reshuffling his poker hand of passports, and usually muffled in melodramatic disguises. In Budapest he revealed himself to some relatives by peeling off a long black beard.

In 1921—after his eldest son had hanged for murder—he made another religious transfer to Buddhism, and was then the Venerable Chiao Kung ("Light on Space"). Soon he had appointed himself abbot of a Zen splinter movement he called the League of Truth, the box-office for Paradise being a seedy Shanghai boarding-house.

He died in 1942, suspected of running fifth-column broadcasts

from a secret Japanese radio station in Tibet.

It is a dumbfoundingly amazing story, but throughout as mechanically sensational as a bad thriller. The authors present their findings conscientiously enough yet without illumination of his character and deluded dreams.

Tunes of glory must have buzzed in his mysterious skull. There must have been a touch of mesmerism, a small wish of the buccanier, to have taken in the powerful however briefly.

But all one sees here is a drab, ineffectual twister whose false beard was always coming unstuck at the edge.

Through darkest Miscily—and a bitty far on

Wildlife life has always centred of the waterfowl, notwithstanding to wind and trickily up the backy or bowl, there to chadder and gossip before they; headers high bear home the water fuggler. (This is thark by many to lean to the graceful fold of the femaloder as they walk—skippy hup.)

—Unwin-tan caption to typical drawing from "THE MISCELLIAN MANUSCRIPT."

ONE country Trebitsch-Lincoln missed—though had he blown in there he would probably instantly have become its pro-consul—is Miscily.

This island, "situate on the north-west corm of the Twestan," is extolled in *The Miscillian Manuscript* (out today, Cassell, 12s.), a gibberish-stick jointly manufactured by Stanley Uwin, who writes the weirds, and Roy Dewar, who has en-versed the illustrations.

Mr. Uwin is the ex-B.B.C. sound engineer who, four years ago, stepped from behind and in front of the TV cameras with an original vein of ad-libbing in a kind of dream language, half sense, half nonsense.

From that sad, rubbery face came a stream of gobbledigook double-talk which induced in the listener a frantic dread that the wires between his ears and brain had become scrambled.

Now Mr. Uwin puts this on paper—a travesty about the fictitious Miscily, aided by Mr. Dewar, who makes messages of his own drawings and prints of Victorian knock-knacks. Result: a tear by goose-rocket into a solar system of new fancies. The text is a cocktail of Lewis Carroll and Flanagan's Wake, a dash of Spike Milligan bitters. The pictures combine Steinberg's sombre whimsy and Dalí's surrealism.

Mr. Uwin's far-out farrago is blunted in print when set audible like a tape-recorder with a warped spool, but this is definitely an album all those on end beyond the fringe should have to dippy into.

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# When H E Bates stops Larkin about...

**H**ERBERT Ernest Bates has become the problem middle-aged man of English letters.

After leaving a Midlands grammar school, he worked as a local newspaper reporter, then as a warehouse clerk, and published his first novel, *Two Sisters*, at 20.

During the next 15 years the reputation of H. E. Bates lowered. His novels (*Charlotte's Rose*, *The Poacher*), his short stories (*Day's End*, *The Woman Who Had Imagination*), and his essays (*Through The Woods*, *Flowers and Faces*) were the work of a rural craftsman, trim and solid as thatch, beautifully pleached as a well-cut hedge.

### Rustics

**H**IS country people were never gured hayseeds or sentimentalised peasants but were revealed as characters different in their rhythmic beat but just as intricate as any urban intellectual. His eye for the natural scene



Author Bates On the way back?

was a prism capturing every tone, mood, and minutia of the changing seasons.

His technical excellence was matched by a rare combination of the artist's sensual joy and a biologist's exact observation.

In the war Mr. Bates published his flying stories, and after his Burma novels. Then, in 1958 came *The Darling Buds of May*, which introduced, for my money, the most repellent family in modern fiction—Fa and Ma Larkin, the sunny, boozey, music-hall rustic snags

and their swarming farrow of sticky, romping nippers.

Nevertheless, *The Darling Buds of May* was a gasper on the Channel Nine wavelength, and knowing the thin living to be had from short stories and straight novels, one did not begrudge Mr. Bates his lucky strike.

But one's heart hardened when he concocted two more instalments of his pastoral comic strip. *A Breath of French Air* and *When the Green Woods Laugh*, each one increasingly pseudo as tinned salmon.

Now, with today's publication of *The Day of the Tortoise* (Joseph, 7s. 6d.), Mr. Bates appears to be trying to recover his vocation. It is a slender story about a crushed, abject, bachelor, enslaved to his three sisters, who has a momentary glimpse of life through a flimsy bit of fluff from the local dairy.

### Odd-balls

**M**R. BATES'S grip again seems hard upon the evocation of ordinary life—Fred's two cardigans, one bleached sage green, the other red; the mouldering Victorian interior; the hot breath of summer among the gooseberry bushes of the vegetable garden.

Yet has he for too long been drawing caricatures of grotesques to achieve the subtleties of real people? All his small cast here are garish odd-balls.

Fred could be a henpecked sad sack off a Donald McGill postcard. The three sisters are Grimm Fairy Tale monsters. The dairymaid is an apple-cheeked wanton out of Lucius Apuleius.

Even the pet jackdaw—the bearer of the mad sister's messages—eccentrically croaks in bird-lore.

The implicit sadness of the story never breaks through the burlesque. But perhaps the Larkins have now been left to wallow in their luxurious sium and Mr. Bates is again setting about serious writing.

## BOOKS IN BRIEF

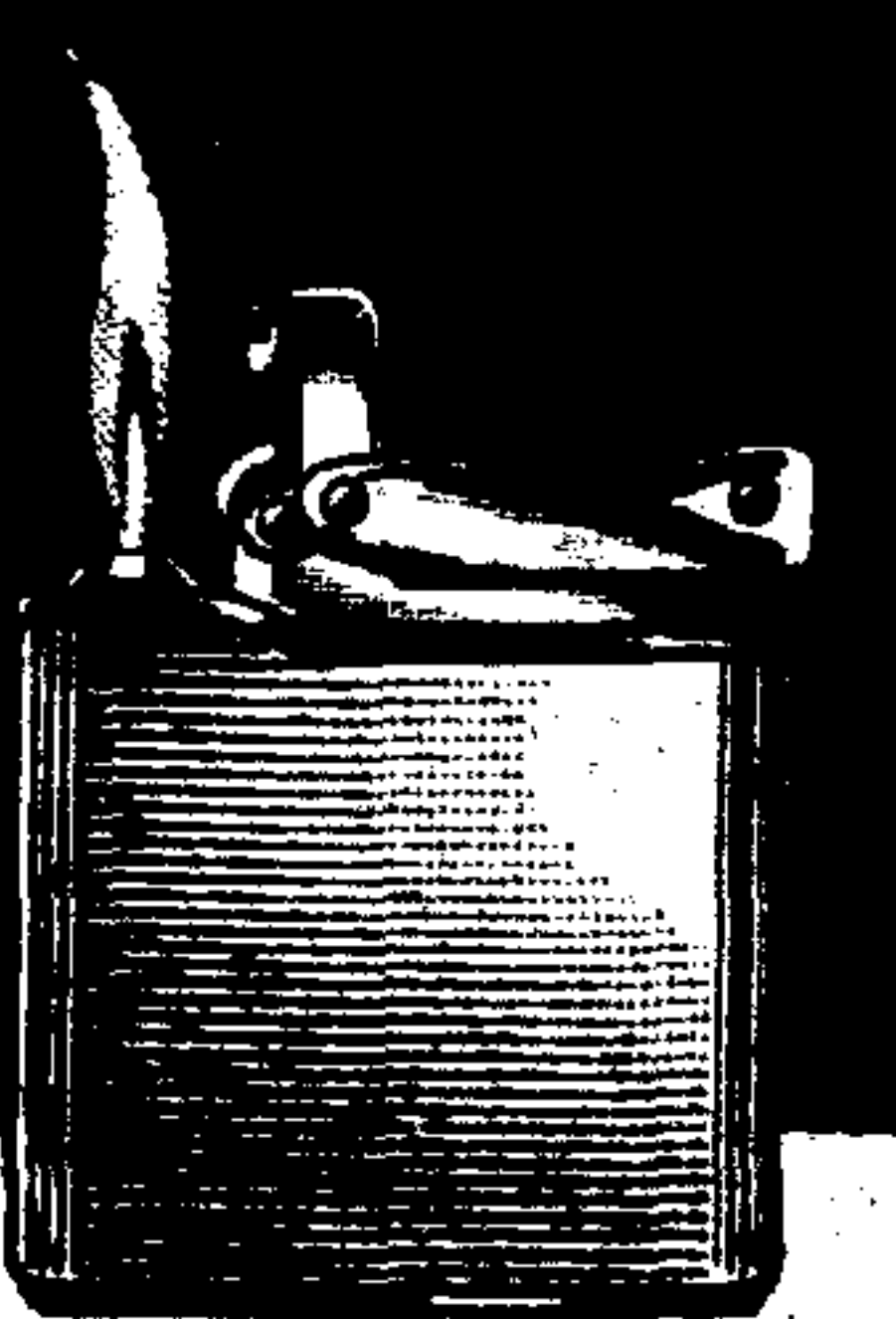
**VANISHING ANIMALS**, by Philip Street (Faber, 21s.). The world's wild regions shrink; the technological age tames jungle and ice-cap; and the animals and birds decline and vanish. But their extermination has aroused concern, and this zoologist's examination of the problems of fauna conservation shows that many can be saved for our delight and for the balance of nature—if the job is urgently tackled.

**THE LOST PLANTATION**, by Warren Miller (Secker & Warburg, 21s.). Mr. Miller, an American novelist, suspected that his countrymen were not getting the oblique truth about Castro's Cuba, so he flew south to see for himself. His report is cool, wary, and detached. As well as the piratical pistol-wagging he also sees the hope the Cubans have.

**TREASON IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY**, by Margaret Boveri (Macdonald, 35s.). An excavation into one of the most fascinating paradoxes of our time—the honourable man who tests must put ideology over patriotism. The motives and personalities of Petain, Joyce, Ezra Pound and other traitors are given deep analysis.

To uncles who always respond with a will

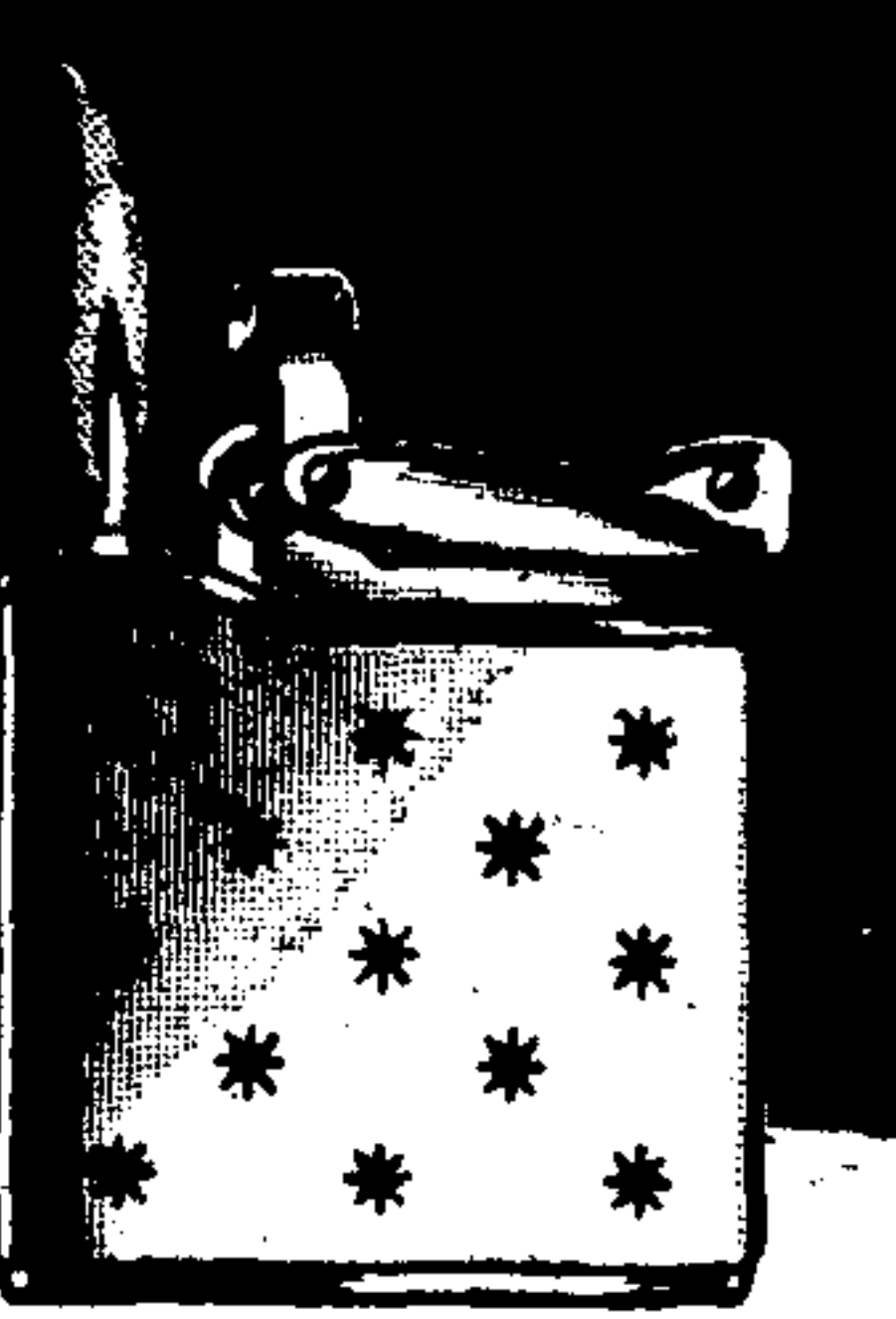
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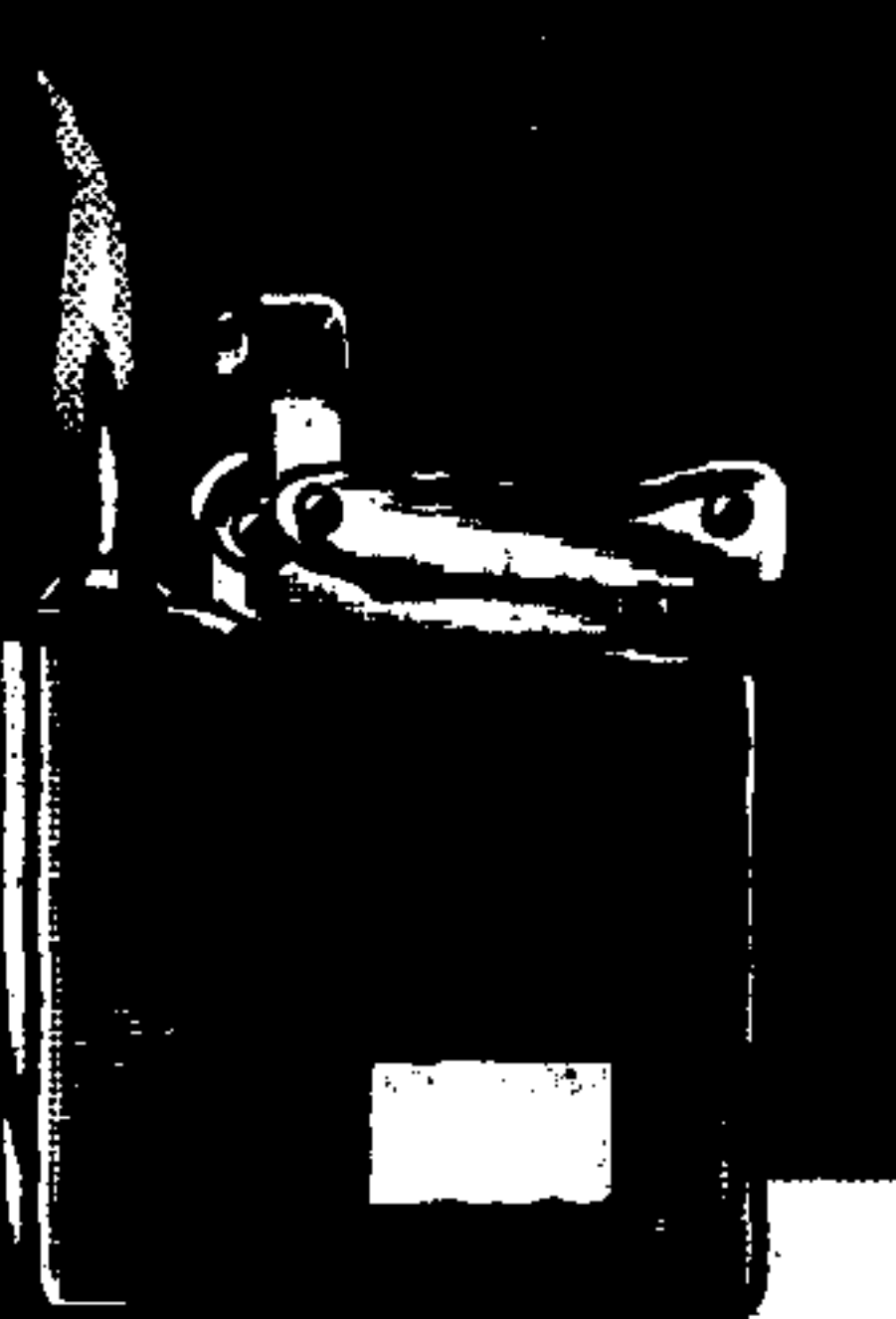
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To would-be fiancées when making the kill

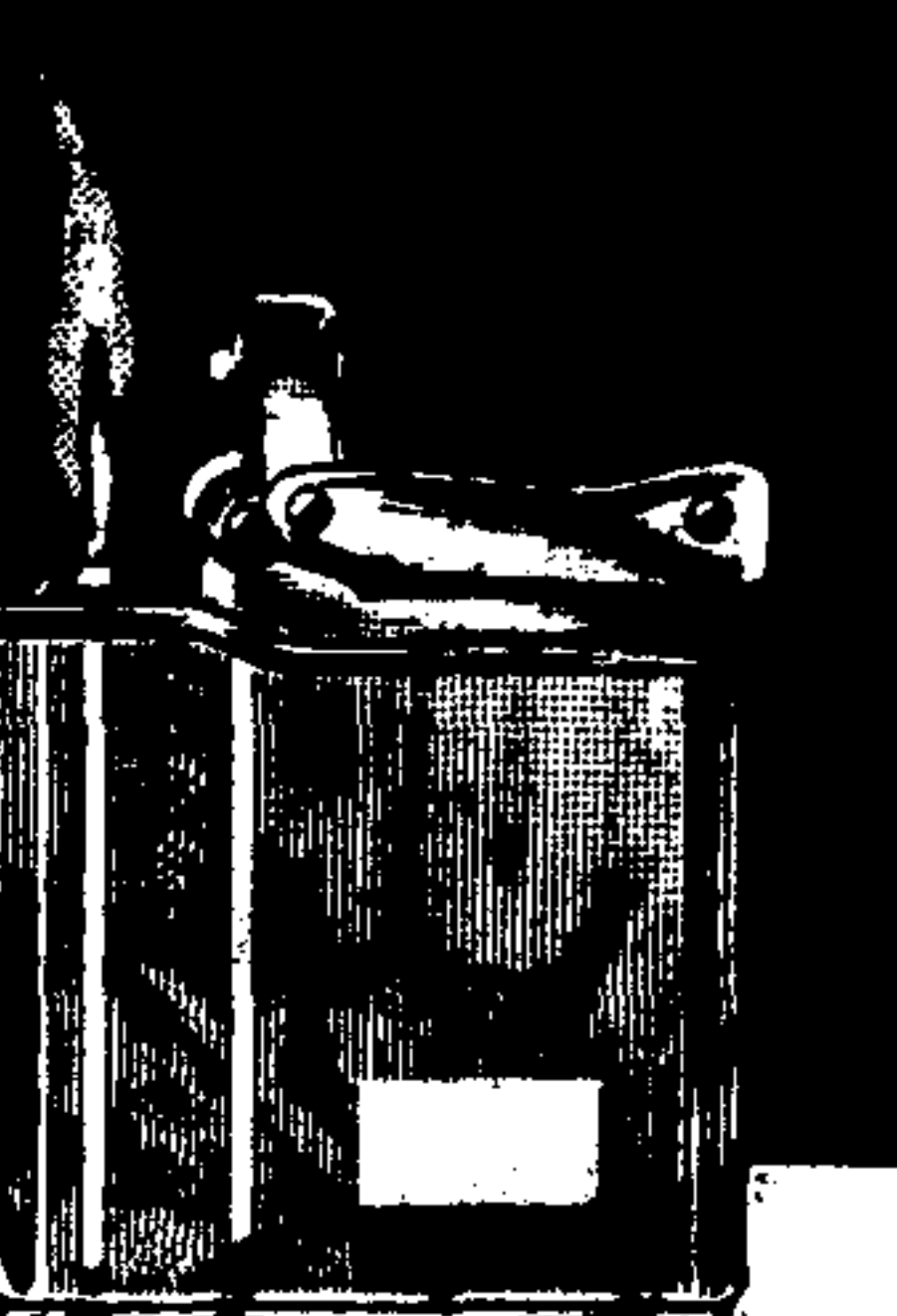
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