*GERALD DURRELL*

**Menagerie Manor**

…At ten o’clock the gates open and the first coachloads of people arrive. As they come flooding into the grounds, everyone has to be on alert, not, as you may think, to ensure that the animals do not hurt the people, but to ensure that the people do not hurt the animals. If an animal is asleep, they want to throw stones at it or prod it with sticks to make it move. We have found visitors endeavouring to give the chimpanzees lighted cigarettes and razor-blades; monkeys have been given lipsticks which, of course, they thought was some exotic fruit and devoured accordingly, only to develop acute colic. One pleasant individual (whom we did not catch, unfortunately) pushed a long cellophane packet full of aspirins into the chinchilla cage. For some obscure reason one chinchilla decided that this was the food it had been waiting for all its life, and ate most of it before we came on the scene; it died the next day. The uncivilized behaviour of some human beings in a zoo has to be seen to be believed.

Now, there might be any one of fifty jobs to do. Perhaps you go to the workshop where Les, with his bruiser’s face and bright eyes, is busy on some repair work or other. Les is one of those people who are God’s gift to a zoo, for no job defeats him and his integrity is incredible. He is like a one-man building firm, for he can do anything from welding to dovetailing, from cementing to electrical maintenance. You discuss with him the new line of cages you are planning, their size and shape, and whether they should have swing-doors, or whether sliding doors would be more convenient.

Having thrashed out this problem, you remember that one of the giant tortoises has to have an injection. On your way to deliver this, you pass an excited crowd of north-country people round the mandrill cage, watching Frisky as he stalks up and down, grunting to himself, presenting now his vivid, savagely beautiful face, and now his multi-coloured rear to their eyes. “Ee,” says one woman, “you can’t tell front from back!”

Lunch-time comes, and so far the day has progressed smoothly. As you sit down to eat, you wonder if there will be a crisis during the afternoon: will the ladies’ lavatories overflow, or, worse still, will it start to rain and thus put off all the people who are intending to visit the zoo? Lunch over, you see that the sky is, to your relief, still a sparkling blue. You decide to go down and look at the penguin pond, for which you have certain ideas of improvement…