CHAPTER - I

ERNEST HEMINGWAY'S APPRENTICESHIP

Hemingway's arrival in the mid 1920s created a new epoch in American fiction. During his lifetime, Ernest Hemingway was very probably America's most famous writer. His style, his heroes, his manner and attitudes have been recognized wherever books are widely read. That lucid prose with its seething emotional force held in check by an iron will has had countless imitators since his time. The romantic glamour with which he coloured the life, loves and locales of his heroes have become legion and they still retain their power from the time he moved with such rapidity, between the wars, from apprenticeship to mastery.

As a man and as an artist, Hemingway began his apprenticeship in the years between 1916 and 1924 during which he acquired much of the material which he was to use in his early fiction, as well as the basic attitudes which were to shape his vision. It was in the field of journalism that Hemingway first worked out his literary apprenticeship. Between 1916 and 1923 he worked as a newspaper reporter and although there were frequent intervals, this was a time of growth and success. Besides journalism, the traumatic experience of war, travel, sport, his early youth in the Michigan

woods as well as his various literary associations all combined to give him the essential background material and medium for much of his work; Hemingway's apprenticeship, however, never really ended, he always stressed upon himself the need for growth and discipline, and it is this which has contributed to his durability.

Ernest Hemingway was born and brought up in the provincial Illinois suburb of Oak Park which not only influenced him but also made him more sensitive to certain aspects of suburban life. He was always acutely aware of Oak Park, although he never actually wrote about its milieu; in fact many Oak Parkers wondered how he could write of a world so steeped in violence and vice raised as he was within the strict confines of suburban respectability. But a young boy with an intelligent, enquiring and satiric mind as Hemingway's was bound to be affected by the narrow Puritanical world of the tightly knit society of Oak Park where a son of the illustrious Hemingways and Halls was scrutinized with interest and curiosity by the neighbours. Hemingway's father was a physician who tried to urge his son on to a healthy outdoor life of shooting and camping but his artistic musician mother almost smothered him with her overpowering love for culture and the resulting conflict naturally created tension in the already precocious young
boy. He found a natural outlet for his restless energy and his inborn creative traits in the active liberal arts department of Oak Park High School where he realised his talent for writing stimulated by the imaginative curriculum and by the particular interest of his English teachers Margaret Dixon and Fannie Biggs. He was editor of the school magazine *Trapeze* and contributed regularly to the literary magazine the *Tabula* where he tried his hand at fiction and verse. The Chief significance of Hemingway's school writing was to emphasise the crucial apprenticeship which lay ahead of him in journalism, in war and his European associations of the 1920s. His high school writing displayed his fresh narrative style, his sharp interest in all new experience as well as his gift for lucid self expression. An important aspect of his school writing was his already growing bent towards violence (as in *Sepi Jingan* and *The Judgement of Manitou*) which later dominated his work so much. But perhaps nothing was of greater significance than Hemingway's response to a Chicago Tribune columnist called Ring Lardner who was the contemporary writer most widely read in Chicago. Hemingway paid suitable tribute to him in the *Trapeze* by adapting the Lardnerian idiom to the High School framework. But like all great imitators, Hemingway did not end with imitation alone; he made Lardner's technique
his own by injecting it with his own brand of high school humour coupled with the Lardnerian posture of self derision. Hemingway learnt a great deal from Lardner's use of burlesque humour and satire and the clever use of idiomatic prose which showed not only his familiarity but also his grasp of Lardner's technique. Like all influences this too was outgrown but Lardner gave Hemingway a sense of direction which later helped him in his writing career. The Trapeze experience on the whole was invaluable in giving him the necessary foothold to move on to a journalistic career soon after graduation in the summer of 1917.

Emerging from the relatively sheltered world of Oak Park, Illinois, Kansas City and the tough world of daily newspaper reporting was an intense experience for the young Hemingway. He had very much wanted to enlist for the war, but to no avail. He was considered too young. Finally, he was sent off to Kansas City where he went through a very crucial period in his career starting off as a newspaper reporter in the Kansas City Star which at that time was one of the best newspapers in the U.S. It was the Star which really taught Hemingway the very basics of good writing which he was to remember throughout his career. The atmosphere of the Star copy room was new and exciting
and the reporters were all young people surging with enthusiasm. The Star editors did not believe in the general practice of recruiting experienced journalists - they gave their reporters the experience they needed. The Star prided itself on its high standard of reporting conveyed through its good, clear, simple language. The slightly heavy High School literary style that Hemingway had brought along with him, inspite of his excellent teachers was chiselled into what we know today as the surface characteristics of Hemingway's very distinctive style. The Star had a long style sheet which the new recruits were expected to study meticulously, and among these were the first principles of good writing: "Use short sentences, short first paragraphs, vigorous language and be positive not negative." Emphasis was laid on originality, accuracy, authenticity and immediacy. The use of hackneyed slang and extravagant language was strongly discouraged. Language had to be sharp and clear like the polished pebbles in a brook. Hemingway's indebtedness to the Star is too apparent.

Hemingway's penchant for action and violence evident since his early high school writing became even more pronounced as a Star reporter. He managed to secure the General Hospital, the 15th Street Police Station and the Union Station

beat and was out late nights reporting on small time crime. Chasing ambulances and meeting shady characters and celebrities coming in and going out of town. He had a full and exciting life hardly ever sitting at his desk, suddenly disappearing at the sound of a siren. He wanted to be always on the spot and refused to report or write on anything which he had not witnessed first hand. Starting out as an ambulance driver in the First World War, he wrote *A Farewell to Arms* having seen the world of Frederick Henry, his fictional hero at first hand. During the Spanish Civil War he was present in Madrid filming the documentary *The Spanish Earth*. The film-making was not easy, the crew having to wade through difficult terrain, army tanks, Loyalist soldiers and lengthy red tape, but it gave him first hand knowledge which he used when he wrote *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. Even his non fiction work, *Green Hills of Africa* and *Death in the Afternoon* evoke a world which Hemingway knew and enjoyed. This urge for first hand experience learnt in the mammoth Star copy room stayed with him throughout his career and gave his work that distinctive flavour of immediacy and accuracy.

Pete Wellington, the assistant city editor of *The Star* at that time was the one person who influenced Hemingway the most during this period. From Wellington, he learnt the craft of writing about simple things simply. A crisp lucid
prose easily understandable without tangling up the words or the mind of the reader was encouraged. "Those were the best rules I learnt for the business of writing", Hemingway told a newspaper in 1940, "I've never forgotten them. No man with any talent who feels and writes truly about the thing he is trying to say, can fail to write well if he abides by them".3 Charles Edgar, Hemingway's friend and confidante of those years recalls that Hemingway considered his journalistic work as a means to an end - the writing interested him mainly and he would often make the dramatic promise not uncommon in a newspaper staff room that he would write the "great American novel". From his seven month stint at Kansas City, Hemingway took with him not only the lessons he had learnt about writing, but also a trained reporter's eye which would enable him to profit considerably from his Italian experiences. He took with him too a reservoir of material from which he could draw when he began his serious writing. He was better prepared for a part of his apprenticeship which would in a way be equally important to him.

"I was an awful dope when I went to the last war", said Hemingway in 1942, "I can remember just thinking

that we were the home team and the Austrians were the visiting team.  

It seemed like the greatest game in the world when Hemingway and his friend Tad Brumback drew their last pay check from the Kansas City Star and started on their long journey to the Italian front.

Looking back to that First War one is tempted to postulate a death wish in an entire culture, perhaps caused by the peace and comfort in the years before 1914, a debt which had to be met by offering the most cherished of their young men as human sacrifice. Those blood sacrifices of the great war were, however, unique in the sense that the young soldiers were often willing victims. For Americans in 1917, the war was something you "went to", as Archibald Mac-Leish has pointed. It was not a condition, but a place. Something Cowley has called the "spectatorial attitude" was especially prevalent among soldiers who were also young American writers, and this for reasons that are not impossible to explain. In 1917, there happened to be a larger than usual number of apprentice writers. They had more imagination than most of their contemporaries. They wanted to see everything so that they could write about everything. One.

service under foreign command that attracted a considerable number of writers was Ambulance driving in the French or the Italian front. It offered an expeditious means of getting to the front and it also offered a panorama of the battle field only a little less extensive than that enjoyed by airmen. The ambulance drivers were gentlemen volunteers detached in spirit from the armies, and to the end they remained observers, if helpful ones, and this spectatorial attitude is revealed in much of their writings.

"I thought... what a great advantage an experience of war was to a writer. It was one of the major subjects and certainly one of the hardest to write truly of and those writers who had not seen it were always jealous and tried to make it seem unimportant, or abnormal or a disease as a subject, while really, it was just something quite irreplaceable that they had missed."

Hemingway had always valued enormously his experience of war. Even at eighteen he sensed instinctively its potential utility as material and as an area for self discipline as observer and student. His behaviour during that period was neither abnormal nor ghoulish. It was the same instinct which impelled a writer of another generation in another war to say:

"All the time I was overseas," Norman Mailer said shortly after the publication of The Naked and the Dead in 1948, "I had conflicting ideas, wanting the way everybody else did to get the softest job, to get by with the least pain and also wanting to get into combat and see it." 7

Hemingway regarded the opportunity in an even more intense way because of his temperament making involvement even more natural for him in Italy than for Mailer in Luzon in 1944.

Hemingway threw himself into the front line life with his old intensity and out of those few days, he would create not only A Farewell to Arms, but also several fine short stories. All Receives Another Letter was, however, the extent of Hemingway's work during the war published in a Red Cross Bulletin called Ciao. There was an illusion of effortless flow and a consistency of treatment that made it superior to Hemingway's Oak Park columns. The story was organized with a coherence that stemmed directly from the severe city

room and discipline of the Kansas City Star. His tenure at the front was, however, short-lived. On the night of July 8, near the tiny Italian village of Fossalta, Hemingway was struck by exploding fragments of a trench mortar while handing out chocolates to Italian soldiers. However, in reality he showed considerable heroism, but this came after he was wounded. He picked up on his back a soldier more severely wounded than himself which earned him the Silver Cross. This scene was forcefully recollected in A Farewell to Arms. After he regained consciousness he was carried by stretcher and the bearers as again in A Farewell to Arms, dropped him several times. He was admitted into the Red Cross Hospital in Milan where he was nursed back to health by a nurse called Agnes Von Kurowsky who later was characterised as Catherine Barkely.

His front line experience was brief but the wound qualified him as a combat man and deepened his absorption in war as a temporary arena for the study of men and for the expression of his creative energy. The brevity of his service, he later concluded, was an advantage to him as a writer. "Any experience of
war, "he said in 1952," is invaluable to a writer. But it is destructive if he has too much." He came back from the front with a burning desire to write and this was directly connected with the war. He seemed to have a tremendous need to express the things he had felt and seen. The effect of Hemingway's wounding naturally had deep psychological implications on his creative faculties. The wound gave him a sensitivity to the trauma of war which was channelled into his creative writing. The war became the back drop for the study of "grace under pressure." His judgements about men at war, because of the nature of his close experience with it would always be sharp and deeply felt for he had gone through the "baptism of fire."

In the summer of 1918 Hemingway was satisfied with war. He was able to learn quickly in Thrace and Macedonia where he covered the Greco-Turkish War as a war correspondent because he was "blooded at Fossa- lta." It is on this basis that World War I must be included in his literary apprenticeship.

Hemingway's tenure as a war correspondent in the Greco-Turk War was particularly significant in

8. Ibid. Page 61.
his apprenticeship, because it was here that he learnt the art of "cabalese." Even in the seventy world cables he had to send back to the Kansas City Star he aimed for Impressionism creating it both by a string of positive adjectives- "Constantinople is noisy, hot, hilly, dirty and beautiful" and by a sense of tension as in "packed with uniforms and rumours." Most writers were content to describe an emotion as it was felt by themselves or their heroes, in the hope that the reader would be moved by it, but this was a method which made him a mere auditor of someone else's fear or rage or longing. Hemingway wanted his readers to feel the emotion directly as if he were taking part in it. The best way, he decided, was to set down exactly in the proper sequence, the sights, sounds, touches, tastes and smells that had evoked an emotion he remembered feeling.

"In writing for a newspaper you told what happened and with one trick and another you committed the emotion aided by the element of timeliness which gives a certain emotion to any account of something that has happened on that day; but the real thing, the sequence of motion and fact which made the emotion and which would be as valid in a year, or in ten years or with luck if you stated it purely enough, always, was beyond me, and I was working very hard to try to get it."11

11. Hemingway, Ernest - Death in the Afternoon (Tfiad/
"Purely enough", for Hemingway, meant without tricks of any sort and without conventionally emotive language and with a bare minimum of adjectives and adverbs. It also meant that the permanent work had to be written like Cabalese, with everything omitted that the reader could take for granted and with each detail so carefully chosen that it did the work of six or seven. One of Hemingway's early studies was the art of omission.

Hemingway's reaction to the tragic spectacle of military defeat was both sensitive and imaginative. He was an accurate and informative reporter of this basic element of war—the withdrawal of a large army through enemy country. Years later he would use his Near East experience and work it into *The Snows of Kilimanjaro* as a fragment of memory. Hemingway learnt other things about a retreat, things he did not mail back but saved for the long Caporetto passage in *A Farewell to Arms*.

The scene of refugee misery was the permanent scar of Hemingway's Near East experience and it was here that he "really learnt about war," as he once remarked to Cowley. Quick to anger and indignation at

human suffering he had reacted strongly to the appalling tragedy of World War I, and here in the road to Adrianople he was witness to a spectacle of human suffering that he had never imagined before. This suffering deepened his desire to express himself as a writer. The shocking cruelty to animals had a powerful effect on him. He used his remembered images, not only in the brief photographic inter-chapters of In Our Time but also in The Snows of Kilimanjaro and Death in the Afternoon.

His Near East experience gave Hemingway a depth to his understanding of war. His political and geographical boundaries were extended and it made him more sensitive to human tragedy. The civilian suffering he saw sharpened his sensibilities and gave him a worldliness which characterised much of his early work. Paris itself with its gay crowds was a shocking contract in to Adrianople. As with Harry/ The Snows of Kilimanjaro there was something in Paris which only aggravated his memories. "So when he got back to Paris that time he could not talk about it or stand to have it mentioned." 13

The strongest impression he took with him from the Near East was one of indifference towards suffering.

Hemingway's debt to journalism was a large one and he always acknowledged it. Unlike many ex-newspapermen he neither sentimentalised it nor exaggerated its threat to creative writing. But in the year 1924, he decided to part ways with newspaper reporting. In newspaper reporting, he maintained later, one has to forget everyday what has happened the day before. He always felt a parallel between journalism and war, each being valuable to a writer up to the point when it begins to destroy the memory. A writer must leave it before that point but the scars will always be there.

It required a considerable intensity and courage to abandon a vocation in which one was considered a professional, and in 1924, Ernest Hemingway was just one among the many aspiring creative writers. But the demands of newspaper reporting were bogging him down and using up all his time and energy. "It is impossible for me to do any writing of my own", he wrote to Sylvia Beach in Paris. And it was Paris, the homing ground of all European artists that beckoned, and urged him to realise his ambition of writing "the great American novel".