

FRANCIS BENNION'S JOURNAL FOR 2005

Budleigh Salterton

8 February 2005

I am prompted to begin another journal by having resurrected some previous ones for my website. My Oxford freshman journal consisted of weekly letters home in my first term (Michaelmas 1946). Mother kept these, though surprisingly she did not keep any other letters of mine. I particularly regret the loss of all the letters I sent home during my time in the RAF (1941-45).

The freshman journal surprised me by the excellent way it was written. I wonder how I gained such a high standard of literacy pre-Oxford. I have left it unaltered in the hope of retaining the period flavour, such as it is.



10 February 2005

I have been looking again at the sex code I wrote in the early nineties, which was published in my book *The Sex Code* and is repeated on its own in *Moral Sex*. I am troubled by the contrast between precept 12 (sex respect) and what the code says about pornography. The first runs-

'12. Since sexuality is the source of all human life, and is of profound emotional concern to all human beings in the living of their lives, we should treat our own or another's sexual organs, functions and desires with respect, even reverence (the duty of sex-respect). We should therefore not commit any act that degrades or trivialises them.'

How does this square with precept 58-

'58. Stimulative pornography has the effect of initiating or enhancing sexual desire. The duties of sex-acceptance and sex-fulfilment, together with the principle of free speech, require such pornography to be treated as not immoral, provided the nature and provenance of the material does not infringe the duty of sex-respect or any other ethical principle, such as the duty of consideration for a spouse or the requirement of consent to participation by models. That this kind of pornography causes the commission of immoral acts such as rape is unproved generally. On balance more such acts might be committed if this material were not available for masturbatory use.'

I have never really used material for masturbatory purposes, or investigated the nature of stimulative pornography. I decide it is high time I completed my education, and enrol for a month with an American soft porn website. It is guaranteed to be fully legal, with all models over the age of 18. I will report on what I find.

11 February 2005

Very impressed by Channel Four's *Boot Camp*. Express my reactions to it in [Blog FBB117 LINK](#).

I find the American website strange. It does 'stimulate' to see handsome naked youths, apparently known in the trade as 'twinks,' doing naughty things with their anatomy. I am reminded of what in *The Sex Code* I call the Henry Moore syndrome. (I was roundly told off for using this name by an earnest lady admirer of the sculptor when I gave a talk on the book at the Conway Hall in Red Lion Square, London.) The passage (p. 35) goes-

'The sculptor Henry Moore became famous for his depiction of the human figure in abstract shapes frequently containing holes in place of vital parts of the anatomy. So apt is this as an image of psychic sexual mutilation that we may conveniently refer to that phenomenon as the Henry Moore syndrome.

'The Henry Moore syndrome is the determined pretence that the sex anatomy does not exist. It is not a pretence in express terms, for that would require mention of the very thing desired to be suppressed. The syndrome works obliquely, in a manner reminiscent of Hans Andersen's tale of the emperor who wore no clothes. It operates in relation to the way living human bodies appear in the presence of other living people; but also in relation to photographs, paintings, sculptures and other depictions of the human body, and in relation to the language used about that body. It even has some effect as respects the bodies of animals.'

In the book I argue that this syndrome, which is practised on our children from the earliest age, affronts their sense of truth. That is certainly the way it operated with me. I felt I was being denied something I had a right to know about *simply because it was there*. The result was that the desire to know about it grew by being denied. With some people it becomes an obsession.

On the American site one strikingly beautiful naked youth beat his meat (as they used to say in the RAF barracks) for what seemed a very long time indeed without result. The meat did not seem very interested in being flogged (no doubt put off by the lights and cameras – not to mention the camera crew). Dutifully he persevered, uncomfortably shifting position on the grotty sofa from time to time. Abruptly the film ended without a result (as the football people put it). One felt sad rather than stimulated.

15 February 2005

Forty-three years ago my first book was published, on Ghana and its constitutional arrangements under the late Kwame Nkrumah. It quickly became out of date simply because the Nkrumah constitution did not last five minutes. So it went out of print even though it contained some items of lasting value. I rescued one of these today by rejigging it as an article for a Commonwealth legal journal. It was about the way they published the laws in Colonial times. I started with the following sentence: 'By a curious paradox, Britain arranged these matters much better for its colonies than it did for the home country'.

16 February 2005

I continue to find the antics of naked young men on the American website more embarrassing than stimulating (but still stimulating). On whether they infringe the duty of sex respect I am still doubtful. There are arguments either way. What they do achieve, which I welcome, is honesty in an important but hidden area of life: male sexuality. I concentrate on this because, being a male myself, I know a lot more about that subject than I can possibly know about female sexuality – which is of course equally important. I am more likely to

achieve a near-complete (and therefore important rather than sketchy) knowledge of males than females.

I have just finished re-reading *Gaudy Night* by Dorothy L. Sayers, a significant book for me. It has been criticized as snobbish – but then I am snobbish (if you want to use that unkind word). I would prefer to say that I value quality. In my youth it was a term of approbation to call someone elitist, as it was to call them discriminating. Those were the values I absorbed in youth and I cannot discard them now – even if I would.

Bits that struck me in *Gaudy Night*-

‘Oxford has been called the home of lost causes: if the love of learning for its own sake is a lost cause everywhere else in the world, let us see to it that here, at least, it finds its abiding home’ (p 31).

‘Do you know what makes me feel most homesick [when living in Wales]? The cultured speech. The dear old much-abused Oxford accent’ (p 49).

On May Day morning Harriet Vane is on Magdalen Tower when she sees a girl climbing over the parapet as though intending to throw herself off. ‘The girl spoke with a slightly common accent, and Harriet would have put her down for a shop-assistant . . .’ (p 223).

‘Why was it called New when it was so old, and why mustn’t you call it “New” but always “New College”?’ (p 260).¹

‘They turned along the Broad . . . “There’s something about this place,” said Peter [Wimsey] presently, “that alters one’s values.”’ (p 439).

The striking thing about male sexuality is that when a man sights beauty he feels a need to do something about it, recognise it by responding in some physical way. He is conditioned (by what?) to regard his phallus as the obvious instrument for achieving this recognition. That, he feels, is what it was given to him for. It is his recognition stick to insert and probe. When he sights a rounded male or female from behind he may be urged to recognise the aperture and its owner by an insertion that strikes him as appropriate because it produces union with that other. Yet truly it is inappropriate, for the aperture has a different natural purpose. This is betokened by signs inappropriate to sexual congress and sex-respect, namely unpleasant odours. Yet sex too has its unpleasant odours. Demanding women nowadays insist that the wincing lover apply his mouth in places where they lurk . . .

Jonathan Sacks the Chief Rabbi says you should never respond adversely to a person without first trying to put yourself in his place and striving to understand his point of view.

As the Michael Jackson trial gets under way I start reading *All That Glitters*.² It is the story of the 1993 scandal about Jackson’s seduction of Jordy Chandler, told by Jordy’s uncle. It begins-

‘On a warm Spring day in 1992 pop icon Michael Jackson set out incognito on a leisurely drive down LS’s boutique-studded Wilshire Boulevard. An innocent outing at first, but one that would by day’s end bring him face to face with the loveliest pubescent boy he had ever seen.’

This reminds me of Christopher Isherwood’s description of Wylan Auden: ‘He was so beautiful – you have no idea – he was the most beautiful boy I’d ever seen, blond all over . . .’

17 February 2005

¹ I recall being humiliated as a freshman when on the bank of the Isis during Eights Week I shouted ‘come on New!’ only to be rebuked for not saying *New College*.

² Raymond Chandler, *All That Glitters: The Crime and the Cover-up* (2004).

Looking at the American soft-porn website I feel I am approaching some truth. A certain reality is unveiled that is normally kept hidden. It is obviously inadequate in some essential ways, yet has its cheerful side. Today, lying on his back, a naked twenty-year old rubs himself to a climax (how long they take over that!) and is hit in the face by his own juices. His response is an engaging laugh followed by a lasting grin. All very normal.

19 February 2005

Rather than the healthy, cheerful view of sex than the usual tiresome attitude. The latter was shown when I listened to a CD of Gervase Phinn reading about his time as a school inspector in the Yorkshire dales – ‘guaranteed to delight’ says the blurb. He starts with a six-year old girl asking him how to spell ‘sex’. He wriggles and evades, but she is persistent. No, it’s not what you are meant to think. She has (it finally emerges) written a story about insects. She knows how to spell the ‘in’ part but not the rest. We are meant to breathe a sigh of relief that the little girl has not been wickedly sexualised after all.

It is similar with the final story. An aggravating cocky boy of eleven, with a broad Yorkshire accent, tells the headmistress and the narrator of his visit to a farm (the first in his life). The tedious account ends with the shocking statement that he was shown some ‘fuckers’. After close cross-examination by the horrified teachers the boy ends by saying: ‘The farmer said they were “effers”, but I knew what ‘e meant all right!’

25 February 2005

The young man of the week on the American website is a 19-year old who is somewhat hirsute. A helpful note explains: ‘For all you guys who have been emailing with requests for some models with a bit of hair in the crack, we bring you Eric’. I watch Eric perform, at inordinate length as usual. I think: all this is simply voyeurism. In the sexual field that is widely despised, though accepted as perfectly normal in others. Whole industries have been founded on it. What does Hollywood depend on but voyeurism? The same goes for television, the stage, and the entire sporting enterprise. The thousands who attend a football match would be much better off playing the game themselves, but are not criticised as ‘voyeurs’ – though that is what they are.

I look up *voyeur* in the OED and find it is confined to the sexual field. They quote Michael Gilbert: ‘His conscience wasn’t all that clear, if he’d been out doing a spot of voyeuring’. They mercilessly define a voyeur as a person whose sexual desires are stimulated or satisfied by covert observation of the sex organs or sexual activities of others, adding: cf peeping Tom, scopophilic. My French dictionary doesn’t have the word. Nor does my *Sex Code*, though Precept 13 says-

‘It is immoral, as contravening the right to privacy and the duty of sex-respect, for anyone, without the consent of the person in question, to gaze at or listen to the sexual activity of another person, whether directly or by means of a recording or listening device’.

Eric of course consented, and was of full age. So that’s all right. I reflect that voyeurism has just for the first time in our law been made a criminal offence (by the Sexual Offences Act 2003). What does that say about our so-called permissive society?

26 February 2005

George Orwell tried to find a style of writing which eliminated the adjective.³ I know what he meant, but it’s too Spartan to deprive oneself of the chief source of colour in writing. Sparing yes, denying no.

³ Gordon Bowker, *George Orwell* (London, Abacus, 2004) p. 176.

Having had my 1946 Freshman diary transcribed, I sent a copy to Adrian Hamilton asking if he had kept in touch with 'Billy' Whiteley. He thanked me, saying it brought back nostalgic memories. He added:

'I kept in touch with Bill Whiteley for a time, but lost touch. Recently Trevor Wilson told me that Bill had been ill, but was somewhat better. Last summer I had lunch with Ken Brown & his wife, when they were over for a Rhodes Do.'

There's something to conjure with there! I shall have to come back to Ken Brown, last seen as a youth with a body that was entrancing when naked I swear I never laid a finger on him – but I did write a poem. It even mentioned his wife-to-be, though I misremembered her Christian name.

Bill Whiteley, preferred by me as William, I loved when we were undergraduates together. It was a chaste love, not in any way sexual, but deep and sincere. I've never seen him since, or had any communication. He and Adrian Hamilton had been Naval officers in the war. They kindly let me make up a glorious (to me) threesome in a Norfolk Broads holiday lasting a fortnight, when I served as a very inadequate cabin boy while they did the sailing between them. I used to irritate William, we were so different. This led him to scone me at dinner in Hall for not wearing a gown, which was mean – especially as I failed to hold down the gallon of ale taken in one swallow. I was hurt at his unkindness, but didn't hold it against him. I continued to be thrilled when he paid me attention. This has been a trait of mine through life – sitting by myself hoping a particular person, or several persons, would choose to come and sit with me. It happened with the youths in the Maudsley.

27 February 2005

Hunter S Thompson the Gonzo journalist has died. 'The most overriding of all human desires', he wrote at 21, 'is the desire to amount to something'.⁴

Even those whose lives have been made various by learning, wrote George Eliot, may find it hard to keep a fast hold on their habitual views of life when they are suddenly transported to a new land where the beings around them know nothing of their history and share none of their ideas - where human life has other forms than those on which their souls have been nourished. I register this while re-reading *Silas Marner* after an interval of seventy years. The remark was made about people who, like the young Silas, are uprooted and moved to another part of the country. It strikes me that it also applies to the old, whose values were imprinted in their impressionable youth and are now required to change radically. Why should I be forced to change my imprinted values? Can I even do so? Of course I can pretend to do so – is that what is demanded by the *zeitgeist*?

British film director Michael Winterbottom says 'most cinematic love stories miss out on the physical relationship, and if it is indicated at all everyone knows it is fake'.⁵ Correcting this squares with my quest for sexual honesty, so it should please me to learn that Winterbottom has made a film, *9 Songs*, which is largely composed of a man and woman doing various sexual things together. *Actually* doing them, not pretending to do so. The British Board of Film Classification has given the uncut version an 18 certificate. Suzi Godson says watching it is both fascinating and reassuring. 'Most of us never get to see other people "doing it" and as such (she means therefore) no gauge exists with which we can objectively measure our own, or anyone else's sexual ability'. I would say there's a bit more than that involved: sharing say. Predictably the *Mail on Sunday* film critic Marshall Julius completely misses the point. He writes⁶-

'Do we need hard-core sex in our films? Not really. That's what porn is for.'

⁴ Jemima Lewis, *Sunday Telegraph* 27 February 2005.

⁵ *The Times* Body & Soul, 26 February 2005.

⁶ 27 February 2005.

The term hard-core is inappropriate here. We need truth to life not a hole in life. I don't mean we should not have privacy in our own sexual relations, but only that an important part of human life should not be blocked out.

1 March 2005

Today I terminated my contract with the American website that I contracted with on 10 February. It was all very gentlemanly and polite. They evidently think I won't be able to resist coming back to them at some time in the future. I don't think this will happen. One feels sympathy for the young men parading their dearest possession for the money, though logically there is no objection. Logic doesn't have the final word in such matters however. I couldn't shake off the feeling I was soiling myself – illogical though that is.

3 March 2005

Mary Howarth (mother of my old friend Gerald Howarth MP) had the following letter in the Times of 1 March-

'My old passport, issued in 1979, describes me as a British subject, citizen of the United Kingdom and Colonies. The current one (1998) describes me baldly as a British citizen. As a native-born loyal subject of the Queen I resent this subtle change in my constitutional status, with its echoes of the French revolution. Who authorised this change, and why?'

Good question.

5 March 2005

Today I had a long telephone conversation with Dr Kay Goodall, law lecturer at Glasgow University. She tells me she would like to be my 'apprentice' in statute law and is 'very left wing'.

Interesting item from today's Times (author Mike Pflanz)-

'Slavery in Niger, a practice dating back centuries, was outlawed during independence from France in 1960, but the new constitution carried no penalty. Although the French had stamped out the trafficking and slave markets, they refused to class bonded workers as slaves, terming them "voluntary labourers" in a 1905 survey. Post-colonial administrations have until now turned a blind eye to the mass bondage of their people, most captured as the spoils of war, kidnapped or traded as dowry. The practice is still widespread throughout the southern Sahara, in Mali, Mauretania and Chad. Slave masters and slave are often from the same tribe.'

6 March 2005

Today I sent the following letter to the *Sunday Telegraph*, which they did not publish-

Dr John Adamson, described on the College website as a Bye Fellow of Peterhouse Cambridge, concludes his review of *Boudica: Iron Age Warrior Queen* by saying that the book's greatest virtue is that it resists the temptation to construct a seamless, spuriously authoritative narrative of 'what really happened'. He praises the authors for instead 'confronting us with a complex series of possibilities, probabilities and provisional conclusions.'

I doubt if the authors were really tempted to do what he suggests. They knew what they would get from professional historian reviewers if they defied the professional *zeitgeist* in that way.

Yet, judging from its title, the book is directed to the general reader rather than the

historian. General readers of a book like this do not want to be 'confronted' with a professional's complexities. What they want is a narrative. They do not want it to be 'spuriously authoritative' but genuinely authoritative. They want it to be presented as the best conjecture possible, given the current state of knowledge.

In the 1980s a new history of the University of Oxford was published. I eagerly laid out £50 on the first volume, but was disappointed to find that instead of a 'seamless' narrative of the early days it consisted of a bundle of disconnected papers by various historians. It was not what I wanted. When I challenged the editor Jeremy Catto about this he looked at me with raised eyebrows. 'We don't do narrative any more' he said.

I believe historians should start doing narrative again when they are writing for the general reader.

When as a matter of courtesy I emailed Dr Adamson a copy of this letter he replied-

'Should you wish to write to me, I will be happy to discuss this matter. I am not in the habit of commenting on letters about me sent to third parties.'

Very curious.

9 March 2005

The founder of Amnesty International Peter Benenson died on 25 February 2005. We were contemporaries as Balliol undergraduates, though I do not remember him. He lit the first Amnesty candle surrounded by barbed wire at the church of St Martin in the Fields on 10 December 1961. The *Times* says 'he accepted no honours'.

As an undergraduate I remember attending a concert on the harpsichord given by Wanda Landowska. It included a Scarlatti sonata that has stayed in my head ever since, even though generally I have no memory for musical themes. It portrays a village band. One hears them from a distance, marching along and playing a tune. The music gets louder as they approach, then fades as they move away. Now at last I know that it is the sonata in E major Kk 380. The blurb for the CD says-

Kk 380 vividly depicts a Spanish street procession moving with a steady tread behind a small *banda* whose trumpets and drums strike up every so often. At one point the music touches G high in the treble, a note rarely found on 18th century harpsichords'.

I shall write a poem about a girl called May who loves to eat cumquats (defined as a small orange-like citrus fruit native to southern China and Malaysia). She is known as Cumquat May.

A tunnel or passage affords an opening running in two directions. So a passage intended only for movement in one direction may be used by ill-disposed persons for movement in the opposite direction as well. This especially applies if it is a passage within the human body equipped with nerve ends designed to encourage its owner to perform a necessary function by giving feelings of pleasure when he or she does so. Similar feelings of pleasure may ensue when a suitable object uses the passage for movement in the 'wrong' direction. This is even more likely to happen when the owner of the passage is young and attractive, so that the rounded entrance seems enticing.

13 March 2005

When Franz Schubert was a young man in 1815 a law was introduced in his country Austria that-

‘ . . . for a while required that the majority of men in Austria must seek state approval before they could marry (the *Ehe-Consens Gesetz*). Members of the aristocracy, property-owners, higher officials, and professional people were exempt from the ban. For others, permission was granted only to those who could give proof of an adequate income to support themselves and any children who might be born to them.’⁷

In his diary Schubert, who wished to marry Therese Grob but did not meet these criteria, noted that they meant he had to live in misery either as a celibate or in gross sensuality. One of his biographers mentions that Schubert believed that basic human nature cannot be changed by education, adding: ‘He refers with some intensity to the misery caused by the state’s refusal to permit the marriage of men without means, forcing them instead into either unwilling celibacy or commercial sex . . .’⁸

It is extraordinary how quickly we have become casual about what used to be unspeakable. Here are two items in today’s *Sunday Telegraph*.

First, it is reported without comment that Boy George ‘is very partial to a sturdy rear end’.

Second, various sexual tastes of Lytton Strachey, revealed in his letters, are mentioned as if they were nothing out of the way. To Maynard Keynes he wrote in 1906 that his ‘best feelings’ were sodomitical. To Leonard Woolf he remarked in 1907-

‘Have you ever been to the Trocadero? It’s filled with little messenger boys, who do their best to play the catamite, but it hardly comes off. The nearest one of them got was to put his arm round Keynes’s neck as he was helping him off with his coat. Remarkable? The truth is that sodomy is becoming generally recognised in England – but of such a degraded sort! Little boys of 13 are what the British Public love. There are choruses of them at most Comic Operas, and they flood all but the most distinguished of the Restaurants. In Florence people have better taste. Duncan [Grant] (who’s there) writes to say that large crowds collect every day to see the young aristocrats bathe [naked] in the Arno – and they are 18 or so.’

I find it odd that while in the news pages of this respectable Sunday paper men consorting with boys of thirteen would be given the scream treatment, with much talk of penal servitude and sex registers, on the arts pages it is reported in the same tone of voice as the weather. What can this be but hypocrisy on a massive scale?

1 May 2005

I have passed over three great television events, the funeral of Pope John Paul II, the inauguration of Pope Benedict XVI, and the wedding of Charles and Camilla. They were just too stupendous for me to try and record in this journal, though I have written about them elsewhere.

What starts me up in the journal again is a trifle from the Booker-winning novelist J G Farrell, who moved from London to Cork and in four months was dead (he sat fishing on a rock and was swept away by a sudden wave).

The volume containing Farrell’s *The Hill Station* (a novel left unfinished when the wave struck) is padded out with an Indian Diary in which Farrell perpetrates the most glorious wrongly-attached pronoun-

‘After a nightmarish day’s journey . . . the last three of four hours anyway . . . in a third-class carriage full of young children, one of whom shat on the floor to the unconcern of its parents who flung it out of the window . . .’

⁷ Elizabeth Norman McKay, *Franz Schubert* (Oxford, 1996), p. 44.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 66-7.

At least I *hope* it was wrongly-attached . . .

Do you pull the chain (or equivalent) while still sitting or after rising? I always assumed everyone rose first, but immediately after the baby incident Farrell has-

'To Laurie's Hotel, the old-established place to stay in Agra, a room with an enormously high ceiling, the lavatory failed to flush hard enough but *hot* water poured in when one pulled the chain, *steam rising around one's bottom*.'⁹

19 June 2005

I have bought Rudyard Kipling's autobiography *Something of Myself*¹⁰, which so far well lives up to expectations (I have been intending to read it for years). It is curious to trip across 'quotations' I have long had in my commonplace book, eg-

'The greatest reverence is due to the young. They have, when irritated, little of their own'¹¹.

'One cannot repay the unrepayable by grins and handshakes'¹².

'Every nation, like every individual, walks in a vain show - else it could not live with itself - but I never got over the wonder of a people who, having extirpated the aboriginals of their continent more completely than any modern race had ever done, honestly believed that they were a godly little New England community, setting examples to brutal mankind.'¹³

'Most things in this world are accomplished by judicious leaving alone.'¹⁴

'As soon as you find you can do something, do something you can't.'¹⁵

'Every man must be his own law in his own work . . .'¹⁶

Yesterday, visiting Beer, I bought for £1 at a church bookshop George Hutchinson's *The Last Edwardian at No. 10: An Impression of Harold Macmillan* (Quartet Books, 1980). It contains an affecting photograph of Macmillan as a schoolboy. I will let it be the first item in a new gallery of Affecting Portraits on my website.

I had a thought that the main difference between the England of my childhood and the England of today is that different people are living in it. I am not just talking about immigrants; the natives are different too. The main difference is that most of them have different memories. When I was say a boy of ten in 1933 the adults around me were all born before 1914. Most of them were born in the nineteenth century. The values they taught me to imbibe were the predominant values of that period of their lives, for those chimed with the memories they had. At any given time the people then living essentially consist of their



⁹ Second emphasis added.

¹⁰ Rudyard Kipling, *Something of Myself* (Macmillan, 1937).

¹¹ P 93.

¹² P 99.

¹³ P 123. I had known this passage only up to and including 'live with itself'. The ensuing reference to American attitudes is instructive.

¹⁴ P. 187. A saying of Kipling's father's, who added (see p 188) that it did not apply to artists.

¹⁵ P. 190. Described by Kipling as 'the old Law'.

¹⁶ P 204.

memories of what they did, and what happened to them, in their lives up to that time. The values of the English people who are now in charge are very different from the ones I was taught because they have very different memories. I am now living in what is to me a foreign country, or rather I am a foreigner in my own country. I am content with that. As Logan Pearsall Smith said, I don't remember where-

'I have always felt that it was more interesting, after all, to belong to one's own epoch: to share its dated and unique vision, that flying glimpse of the great panorama which no subsequent generation can ever recapture.'

I have just read the following in *Something of Myself*-

'I had some notion of sailing from Auckland to visit Robert Louis Stevenson at Samoa, for he had done me the honour to write me about some of my tales; and moreover I was Eminent Past Master R.L.S. Even today I would back myself to take seventy-five per cent marks in written or *viva-voce* examination on *The Wrong Box* which, as the Initiated know, is the Test Volume of the Degree. I read it first in a small hotel in Boston in '89, when the negro waiter nearly turned me out of the dining-room for spluttering over my meal.'¹⁷

This takes me back to January 1951, when I was called to the bar by the Middle Temple. At the ceremony an aged bencher whose name escapes me made a speech impressing on the assembled acolytes that the one thing we must all do without fail, and as soon as possible, was read *The Wrong Box*. Obediently I tried to comply, but found it unreadable. I conclude that it was because I was not then ready for it, so I will try again. I have ordered an 1884 edition from Amazon over the internet. We shall see.

I am reading the autobiography of a notorious maverick of a few years ago, Judge James Pickles.¹⁸ Writing about the use of unmarked police cars, he comments: 'if ordinary middle-of-the-road drivers resent their use they can be counter-productive'.¹⁹ I wonder how many drivers appeared before His Honour Judge Pickles charged with driving in the middle of the road.

To much opposition, the Labour Government's Identity Cards Bill is now before Parliament. In his book Pickles comments-

'I favour the compulsory carrying by adults of an identity card with a photograph and signature. Here again, there would be "Big Brother" objections, but in the former West Germany they had such a law for years; the document could also double as a passport. In case after case before me, defendants have used stolen credit cards bearing other people's names . . . Most of that fraud would be prevented if a purchaser had to produce an ID card which bore the same name as on the plastic and a photo of himself.'²⁰

I found in *Something of Myself* the perfect epigraph for my proverbs book: the English are racially immune to advice.²¹

26 June 2005

A few day ago I sent the following email to the BBC Radio Three request programme *3 for All* (presenter Brian Kay)-

'My request is for Brahms's Academic Festival overture. This is in connection with your World War II 60th anniversary theme.

¹⁷ Pp 100-101.

¹⁸ *Judge for Yourself* (Coronet Books, 1992).

¹⁹ P 136.

²⁰ *Ibid*, pp 136-137.

²¹ P 124.

I was an RAF pilot in World War II. In 1941 the Air Ministry started a programme of six-month university courses as initial training for RAF aircrew cadets. I was on the first of these to be held at St Andrews University, Scotland's oldest university. There were 55 cadets on my course in 1941, 25 of whom did not survive the war.

I was 17, and remember that it was while listening to a concert in the student common room at St Andrews University that I suddenly woke up to the fact that classical music was essential to me. I bought a portable gramophone in St Andrews town which I took around with me during my wartime service in Britain, Canada (flying training), and the Mediterranean (antisubmarine patrols with 221 Squadron, RAF Coastal Command).

The Academic Festival overture was the first classical music record I bought.'

Today this was played by Brian Kay. My only regret was in not specifying a recording. The one chosen was by a chamber orchestra, whereas the Brahms piece demands full orchestral treatment.

In *Something of Myself*²² Kipling records that the last words of King Oskar II of Sweden on his death in 1907 were 'Don't let them shut the theatres for me'. 'So', Kipling adds, 'Stockholm that night went soberly about her pleasures, all dumbed down under the snow' (he was there to collect the Nobel prize for literature).

My maternal grandfather Laban Robinson owned a paint-shop in Manchester and introduced me as a boy to the *Manchester Guardian*. Who would have thought Kipling would praise that newspaper, but he did. I have just read the following in *Something of Myself*²³ -

'In Manchester was a paper called *The Manchester Guardian*. Outside the mule-lines I had never met anything that could kick or squeal so continuously, or so completely round the entire compass of things. It suspected me from the first, and when my "Imperialistic" iniquities were established after the Boer War, it used each new book of mine for a shrill recount of my previous sins . . . and, I think, enjoyed itself. In return I collected and filed its more acid but uncommonly well-written leaders for my own purposes.'

Kipling goes on to explain how the paper caught him out in plagiarising Chaucer's *Wife of Bath*.

My final reference to *Something of Myself* reveals a coincidence. A few days ago I thought out of the blue of the doggerel verses about the green eye of the little yellow god, and got the full text off the internet. Today, in the closing pages of Kipling's unfinished autobiography I read that he had been thought to be their author.²⁴ He says 'they were always ascribed to my graceful hand', and continues-

'They described an English Colonel and his daughter at Khatmandhu in Nepal where there was a military Mess; and her lover of the name of "mad Carew" which rhymed comfortably. The refrain was more or less "And the green-eyed yellow Idol looking down". It was luscious and rampant, with a touch, I thought, of the suburban Toilet-Club school favoured by the late Mr Oscar Wilde'.

27 June 2005

I have failed again with *The Wrong Box* (see 19 June). What *is* the matter with me?

28 June 2005

²² P 202.

²³ Pp 211-212.

²⁴ P 219.

I am irritated at the way in its Law supplement the Times constantly features lengthy articles by David Pannick QC, a practising barrister. In the old days he would have been disbarred for advertising. Why should things be different now? My first law article written as a barrister for the popular press appeared in *Everybody's Weekly* on 14 July 1951 as being 'By a Barrister'. It is not so long since Lord Upjohn said that a professional man must submit to such 'elementary' restraints as prohibition against advertising and touting.²⁵ In my 1969 book on professional ethics I wrote-

'The Bar continues . . . to prohibit mention in the lay press of the professional qualification . . . A barrister who writes for general publication any account of cases in which he has appeared is required to do so anonymously unless he has given up private practice.'²⁶

That salutary rule has been scrapped by the Bar, which I think a great pity. Inevitably and rightly, it has led to a lessening of respect for barristers and the law generally.

What makes things worse in Pannick's case is the way he departs from accuracy in his writings. In protest at one example of this I emailed the following letter to Times Law on 15 June 2005-

'In his piece on 14 June about the Identity Cards Bill David Pannick was not considerate enough to give the reference for the Muckle case on which his argument relies. With some difficulty I discovered the report (*Willcock v Muckle* (1951) 49 LGR 584) and read the judgments. They do not support Mr Pannick's opposition to the Bill. Lord Goddard did not rule against identity cards. He acknowledged that for the police to ask a motorist to produce his identity card was reasonable "if they are looking for a stolen car or have reason to believe that a particular motorist is engaged in committing crime". Evershed MR and Devlin J agreed with this. I regret Mr Pannick's wholesale condemnation of the Bill in somewhat extreme language. The Bill raises complex and serious issues which need to be considered calmly.'

I expected to see this correction published on 28 June, particularly since the Identity Cards Bill was receiving its second reading in the Commons on that day. Instead there was yet another article by David Pannick QC, this time on immigration control. I did not bother to read it. At its foot was the note: 'The author is a practising barrister at Blackstone Chambers and a Fellow of All Souls College, Oxford.' Lord Upjohn must be turning in his grave. (Why is it that there are times when one cannot avoid cliché?)

2 July 2005

David Pannick acknowledges my note sending him a copy of my 28 June journal entry, but makes no comment. He addresses me as 'Dear Mr Bennion'. I reply saying it is inappropriate to address a fellow member of the Bar in this way.

Today my hairdresser in the Devon village of Otterton told me that her 25-year old son had injured his feet by jumping over a 3-foot hedge. When I asked how, she said: 'There was a ten-foot drop the other side'. Obviously he had not heard the proverb Look before you leap.

6 July 2005

Today I finished reading *Judge for Yourself*, the autobiography of the maverick Crown Court judge James Pickles. He is very inclined to condemn his own profession, going so far as to say 'I cannot recall any lawyers or judges proposing any reform unless it benefited

²⁵ *Dickson v Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain* [1968] 3 WLR 311.

²⁶ F A R Bennion, *Professional Ethics: the Consultant Professions and their Code* (Charles Knight, 1969), p 164.

themselves'.²⁷ I have spent most of my professional lifetime proposing reforms that would not have benefited me. Judge Pickles never showed any interest in them.

9 July 2005

The Times today announces that workmen on the roof of St Peter's Basilica in Rome have discovered that the so-called *palla di bronzo* (bronze ball) above the dome is in fact covered in gold.²⁸ I could have told them that. When I was among the troops who liberated Rome on 4 June 1944 I visited the Basilica, climbed up and entered the *palla*. There was only room for one person at a time. The guide told me, as was indeed obvious, that it was covered in gold leaf. The Times adds-

'The workmen also found the date 1593 and the signature of Giacomo della Porta, one of the architects who designed the basilica, engraved on the ball's surface. The narrow windows of the hollow *palla* give dramatic views over the city, but it has been closed to the public since the 1950s.'

10 July 2005

Two strange sexual pieces I came across today.

The first was in *The Kingdom by the Sea: A Journey Around the Coast of Great Britain* by Paul Theroux.²⁹ I have found this book very interesting. For one thing, he describes³⁰ how he was invited by John Bratby RA to sit for him in the same manner, and at around the same time, as I was. The book was written while the Falklands War was on in 1983, so as Theroux journeys round the United Kingdom³¹ he gathers reflections of how people regarded that war. He only travels among the poorer classes and stays in bed-and-breakfast accommodation rather than decent hotels. I suppose this was to bring the democratic American 'closer to the people'. He vows to eschew tourist sites like museums and ruined abbeys, so has a rather boring time. The contrast between the poverty of Britain in the early 1980s and the prosperity we know twenty years later is striking. Disgracefully, the book has no index. The sex bit is the following. Theroux is at Anstruther in Scotland on the day the Queen took lunch at a local hotel. That night there was a celebration party in the hotel car park.



'There was moonlight on the water, and this moon-glow had settled on the waves and made them stand out like the ribs of a washboard. I walked towards this light and on the stoney [sic] beach, just below the seawall [sic] where I was standing, a boy was clumsily fucking a girl, his buttocks plum-blue under the bright moon and her upraised legs almost luminous and seeming to steady him. It was chilly, he was having a little trouble, but he was so eager he did not see me. They made me feel invisible, but I left

²⁷ P. 253.

²⁸ *The Times Register*, 9 July 2005, p. 88.

²⁹ Hamish Hamilton, London, 1983.

³⁰ Pp. 37-38.

³¹ Not just Great Britain, but Northern Ireland as well – how ignorant travel writers can be!

them there. I thought of the band and the dancing and beer and the haybales [sic] and the moonlight and the smell of seaweed and the young couple fucking where the Queen had just been – it was like a mural, an allegorical painting, but a funny one, a Gully Jimson or a Stanley Spencer.’³²

This is writing almost in the *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* class, though I have never before seen Stanley Spencer considered ‘funny’.

The other sexy bit was a letter from Anthony Weale in the *Spectator*-

‘Max Hastings tells a story about two well-known MFHs who argued at dinner about the relative size of their sexual parts. In the 1930s Sir Thomas Beecham and Richard Strauss were about to board the Golden Arrow at Victoria Station and, like Sir Max’s huntsmen, had an argument about the size of their members. They did not, however, retire timidly, but settled the matter man to man on the platform. The competition was observed by a Scottish singer, the late John Tainsh, who told me about it over 40 years ago.’³³

16 July 2005

Justice of the Peace, to which I contribute, is the oldest legal journal in the world that is still publishing. It began in 1837, the year Queen Victoria came to the throne. Although not highest in repute it has four advantages over prestigious legal journals such as *Public Law* (for which I also write). (1) It pays good money. (2) It publishes an article the week after I submit it, instead of months later. (3) It has never yet declined an article from me. (4) I am in easy contact with the friendly editors Adrian Turner and Diana Rose.

In today’s issue the JP published two contributions from me correcting errors it had made. [One corrected a dangerous proposal by the consulting Editor Adrian Turner](#). The other corrected a mistaken ‘Practical Point’ it had published.³⁴

Mary my wife has the pleasant habit of buying me surprise books. The latest is Julian Clary’s autobiography impudently titled *A Young Man’s Passage*³⁵ Surprisingly and touchingly this confirmed homosexual writes that the best sex he has had was with a girl he calls Michelle, with whom he kept in touch after their affair was over-

‘Heterosexual sex was a revelation to me. So snug, warm and wet – I was full of admiration for Nature’s cleverness . . . When I look into Michelle’s eyes, my heart still races and I imagine a life other than the one I have lived. I have never reprieved my heterosexual life, or dabbled again in that procreative world. I have thought of it – sometimes longed for it – but it has not come to pass . . . Once you become a renowned homosexual you subconsciously, if not culturally, feel obliged to keep within those boundaries.’³⁶

Sad really. With my loathing for anal intercourse (whether heterosexual or homosexual) I was interested in Clary’s first experiences of this: ‘Passing a stool the next day was a painful experience, a bit like (I imagined) giving birth, but this too made me feel grown up at last’.³⁷ Elsewhere (in what is presented as fiction) he writes: ‘You can’t get a grip on your turds next day, neither’.³⁸ Pathetically horrible.

³² P. 256.

³³ *The Spectator*, 9 July 2005, p. 22.

³⁴ See p. 564.

³⁵ London, Ebury Press 2005.

³⁶ Pp. 129-132.

³⁷ P. 107.

³⁸ P. 108.

George Orwell wants his young adopted son Richard brought up in a permissive manner. He says, as he leaves the new minder in charge of Richard: 'You will let him play with himself, won't you?'³⁹

20 August 2005

Orwell called his reminiscences of St Cyprians Preparatory School Eastbourne 'Such, Such Were the Joys' without explanation. His title came from William Blake's poem 'The Echoing Green'-

The sun does arise,
And make happy the skies;
The merry bells ring
To welcome the Spring;
The skylark and thrush,
The birds of the bush,
Sing louder around
To the bells' cheerful sound;
While our sports shall be seen
On the echoing Green.

Old John, with white hair,
Does laugh away care,
Sitting under the oak,
Among the old folk.
They laugh at our play,
And soon they all say,
'Such, such were the joys
When we all - girls and boys -
In our youth-time were seen
On the echoing Green.'

Till the little ones, weary,
No more can be merry:
The sun does descend,
And our sports have an end.
Round the laps of their mothers
Many sisters and brothers,
Like birds in their nest,
Are ready for rest,
And sport no more seen
On the darkening green.

The best thing in Orwell's essay is his observation on what it is to be a child-

'The question is not whether boys are still buckled into Eton collars on Sunday, or told that babies are dug up under gooseberry bushes. That kind of thing is at an end, admittedly. The real question is whether it is still normal for a school child to live for years amid irrational terrors and lunatic misunderstandings. And here one is up against the very great difficulty of knowing what a child really feels and thinks.

'A child which appears reasonably happy may actually be suffering horrors which it cannot or will not reveal. It lives in a sort of alien under-water world which we can only penetrate by memory or divination. Our chief clue is the fact that we were once

³⁹ Gordon Bowker, *George Orwell* (London, Abacus, 2004) p. 331.

children ourselves, and many people appear to forget the atmosphere of their own childhood almost entirely.

‘Think for instance of the unnecessary torments that people will inflict by sending a child back to school with clothes of the wrong pattern, and refusing to see that this matters! Over things of this kind a child will sometimes utter a protest, but a great deal of the time its attitude is one of simple concealment.

‘Not to expose your true feelings to an adult seems to be instinctive from the age of seven or eight onwards. Even the affection that one feels for a child, the desire to protect and cherish it, is a cause of misunderstanding. One can love a child, perhaps, more deeply than one can love another adult, but it is rash to assume that the child feels any love in return. Looking back on my own childhood, after the infant years were over, I do not believe that I ever felt love for any mature person, except my mother, and even her I did not trust, in the sense that shyness made me conceal most of my real feelings from her. Love, the spontaneous, unqualified emotion of love, was something I could only feel for people who were young. Towards people who were old—and remember that ‘old’ to a child means over thirty, or even over twenty-five—I could feel reverence, respect, admiration or compunction, but I seemed cut off from them by a veil of fear and shyness mixed up with physical distaste.

‘People are too ready to forget the child’s *physical* shrinking from the adult. The enormous size of grownups, their ungainly, rigid bodies, their coarse wrinkled skins, their great relaxed eyelids, their yellow teeth, and the whiffs of musty clothes and beer and sweat and tobacco that disengage from them at every movement! Part of the reason for the ugliness of adults, in a child’s eyes, is that the child is usually looking upwards, and few faces are at their best when seen from below.

‘Besides, being fresh and unmarked itself, the child has impossibly high standards in the matter of skin and teeth and complexion. But the greatest barrier of all is the child’s misconception about age. A child can hardly envisage life beyond thirty, and in judging people’s ages it will make fantastic mistakes. It will think that a person of twenty-five is forty, that a person of forty is sixty-five, and so on.

‘Thus, when I fell in love with Elsie I took her to be grown up. I met her again, when I was thirteen and she, I think, must have been twenty-three; she now seemed to me a middle-aged woman, somewhat past her best. And the child thinks of growing old as an almost obscene calamity, which for some mysterious reason will never happen to itself. All who have passed the age of thirty are joyless grotesques, endlessly fussing about things of no importance and staying alive without, so far as the child can see, having anything to live for. Only child life is real life. The schoolmaster who imagines he is loved and trusted by his boys is in fact mimicked and laughed at behind his back. An adult who does not seem dangerous nearly always seems ridiculous.’

24 August 2005

Have been reading at intervals the novel *Notes on a Scandal* by Zoë Heller, about a middle-aged woman pottery teacher Sheba who has a sexual affair with a boy pupil Steven. Two passages strike me as particularly telling. The first time the two have sexual intercourse they are standing up behind the pottery kiln in the school workshop. The boy is muttering something the woman at first does not understand, then realises what it is. ‘Miss’, he is saying, ‘is it all right if I come in you, Miss?’⁴⁰.

In the other passage the narrator, another woman teacher, is upbraiding Sheba, who tries to explain.

⁴⁰ P. 82.

‘You’re right of course . . . He is awfully young. But I can see now that boyhood has a very distinct charm . . . I see for myself what it is that can drive you mad about a beautiful young body. I can stroke and nuzzle Steven for hours and I’ve never had quite enough. It’s like I want to . . . to . . . penetrate him . . . I don’t mean, you know, literally, with one of those ridiculous dildos. The fantasy is more that I would burrow up inside him, somehow. Or be swallowed by him . . . Being in love is a condition isn’t it? It’s like being depressed. Or like being in a cult . . . No, I can’t tell you why I’m doing this. That’s what I’m saying. I don’t know. That’s sort of the point of these kind of experience, isn’t it? That they can’t be reduced? There have to be some mysteries – I don’t mean holy-moly ones, but mysteries of human behaviour – that *can’t* be fathomed.’⁴¹

That rings true. There can somehow be a desire with a particularly attractive person (attractive for any reason) to penetrate them, more in a psychic sense than physically or literally. That recognises the fact that usually the other would have no wish whatever to reciprocate, and such a thing would in fact be inappropriate – often wildly so, and for any of many reasons.

The novel is brilliant in using the narrator device instead of having the facts about Sheba recited by an all-knowing authorial voice not connected with the events narrated. This narrator is part of the story, which adds to the interest and sidesteps the usual clumsiness in communicating the facts to the reader.

3 September 2005

At Otterton today I went for a walk as usual after having my hair done by Alison, leaving Mary to have hers done in turn. I heard a woman call out behind me. Her name was Wendy. She had mistaken me for an old man who lived nearby, and whom Wendy kindly looked out for because he suffered from senility. I put this mistake down to my tottering gait, which may be put down to the same cause. We chatted amiably for a while, then she invited me back to her home Box Cottage to meet her husband John and have a coffee. It turned out they come from the Potteries.

5 September 2005

Interviewed by Clive Anderson for BBC Radio 4 programme *Politically Charged* to be broadcast in December. It is about my private prosecution of Peter Hain in 1972.

9 September 2005

Heartened to find that George Orwell shares my view that people need to retain a regard for the imprints made upon them in their formative years, and not be forced to admit that the current thought patterns are necessarily right just because they are fashionable.

‘One ought to realise that a human being cannot continue developing indefinitely, and that a writer, in particular, is throwing away his heritage if he repudiates the experience of his early life . . . one is likelier to make a good book by sticking to one’s early-acquired vision than by a futile effort to “keep up”. The great thing is to be your age . . .’⁴²

Wonders of the Internet. After the destructive hurricane Katrina, which destroyed New Orleans, attention focused on the neighbouring town of Baton Rouge. Idly I wondered why a town in the former French colony of Louisiana should have been given the name Red Stick. I

⁴¹ Pp. 160-163.

⁴² See Gordon Bowker, *George Orwell* (London, Abacus, 2004) p. 379.

sent the following question to the Public Information Office there: 'What is the origin of the name Baton Rouge? Jamie Spencer replied-

'A pole covered with animal blood separated two Indians [sic] tribes. The French explorers coming down the Mississippi river saw the pole and called the area Baton Rouge which is French for Red Stick.'

He gave me the URL of a website from which I took the following-

from Red Stick



to River Capital
Three Centuries of Baton Rouge History



18 September 2005

As well as the hundreds of Remembrance services that took place up and down the country, the 18th September 2005 also saw the unveiling of the Battle of Britain Monument on the Victoria Embankment in London by the Prince of Wales. The Monument is perhaps one of the most significant accolades so far to honour not only the fighter pilots who won the crucial victory in the Battle of Britain 65 years ago, but also to honour the ground crews and many thousands of others who gave so much.



The monument is made up of two bronze friezes set in an 82ft-long granite structure. One frieze depicts all the achievements of Fighter Command, while the other focuses on the people of London, featuring St Paul's Cathedral and an Anderson air-raid shelter. Accompanying them is a plaque inscribed with the names of the 2,936 pilots and crew from Britain and 14 other countries. The plinth beneath the relief is engraved with Sir Winston

Churchill's famous phrase: 'Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few.'

I got the above from the Internet. Why it should have taken so long to create this memorial one does not know – or why it was left to private enterprise to organise it and raise the money. As I watched the ceremony on television I recalled my experience of the aerial battle. I was seventeen, travelling to London each day from Rayners Lane on the Piccadilly line to my place of work. This was Gosling's branch of Barclay's Bank at 18 Fleet Street. I have written about it in my autobiography, so will just add a few words here.

My father Thomas Roscoe Bennion and I travelled on workmen's tickets (starting the journey before 7 am) in order to save money. He went to his job as an auditor in the Exchequer and Audit Department of H. M. Treasury. (This was on days when he was not there overnight on firewatching duty watching for incendiary bombs.) On the way we looked out of the carriage window to spot bomb damage inflicted during the night before. During my lunch break I walked round the streets of the City of London to inspect new damage. I recall the strange smell made by the dust of centuries rising from the wrecked buildings. Each night on the nine o'clock news the BBC wireless told us the figure of enemy aircraft shot down that day. The highest total was 185 on 15 September 1940.

I recall my insouciance as I impatiently waited to be old enough to volunteer as an RAF pilot, which I later did. Not many bombs fell on Rayners Lane, though we saw the searchlights and heard the crack of distant bombs and the constant discharge from anti-aircraft guns. No one I met in those days had the slightest fear that we would do anything but win the war.

19 September 2005

Today I received the following email from Edward Fenton-

'I came across your website while I was doing a Google search using the words 'Dicey Conference'. My mother Alison Fenton has just written a biography of her brother, John Hall, who I believe was a fellow speaker of yours at a Dicey conference in Oxford. He was also an RAF pilot, as I see you were too. If you remember John Hall, and would like a complimentary copy of the book, I would be very pleased to send you one.

I said I would like this.

20 September 2005

George Orwell said-

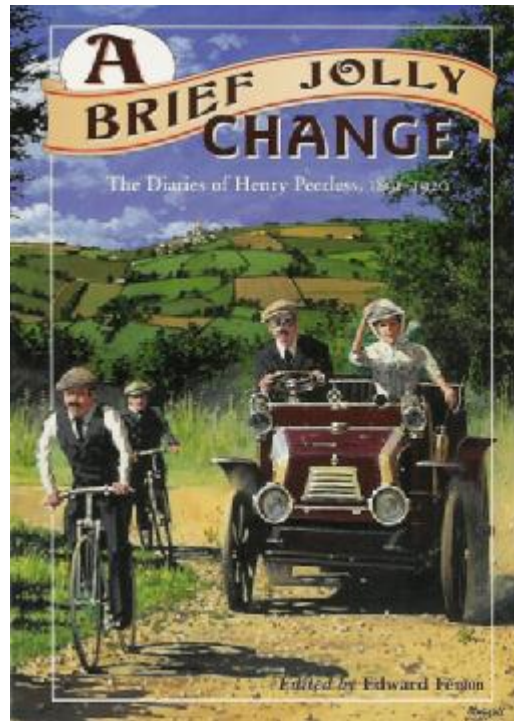
'... one can write nothing readable unless one constantly struggles to efface one's own personality. Good prose is like a window pane.'⁴³

True only of most, not all, writing. With the remainder the reader is presumed (or desired) to be interested in the writer who is seeking to amuse or distract or instruct him. What is important is for the writer to present the truth, even if it is seen to be only the truth about himself.

⁴³ See Gordon Bowker, *George Orwell* (London, Abacus, 2004) p. 390.

21 September 2005

Edward Fenton acknowledges my email in a message hand-written on a card on the other side of which was the following:



I was intrigued by this and have ordered the Henry Peckless book.

8 October 2005

After taking the *Times* without a break for around sixty years, I cancelled the order and switched to the *Guardian*. For Sundays I switched to the *Observer*. I have felt growing dissatisfaction with what Rupert Murdoch has done to the *Times*.

10 October 2005

The Shrewsbury School website says-

‘Shrewsbury is one of England’s oldest and largest boys’ boarding schools, standing in a hundred and fifty acres of ground set high on the banks of the River Severn and overlooking the ancient town. It remains a school committed to full boarding education . . .’

When undergoing this ‘full boarding education’ at Shrewsbury School in the 1950s the late disc-jockey John Peel claims in his autobiography *Margrave of the Marshes* that from the age of thirteen he suffered systematic sexual abuse by older boys, but was not traumatized by it. He says-

‘. . . when I was 13 or 14 I was kinda cute and therefore craved by quite a few older boys . . . Having experienced few physical expressions of affection at home – something that would have been true, I imagine of almost every boy in the house – I was rather flattered by these attentions and was aware, too, that the only people to

whom I could turn for help were, by and large, the very people who yearned to cuddle me.’⁴⁴

This bears out my contention that pubescent boys tend to be starved of cuddles, and physical affection generally. I am not suggesting that these should be supplied by pederastic men, though some people contend that nature gives these men their urges so that they may supply the corresponding wants of the boys they pursue. Society obviously does not see it that way. Responding to Peel’s remarks the NSPCC is reported as saying-

‘Celebrities can help break down the silence of *abuse*. They can play a vital role in encouraging children to speak out about their *maltreatment* and adults to talk about *abuse* and recognise the signs.’⁴⁵

27 October 2005

Go to see Professor John Usher, head of Law Faculty at Exeter University. He suggests I might become a Visiting Professor there.

30 November 2005

Voted for David Davies as Conservative Party’s new leader. I think the other candidate David Cameron is too much of a risk as a complete unknown.

7 December 2005

I sent the following to the BBC-

I wish to complain about the human heads trail for digital TV. I cannot watch this, and have to avert my gaze. It makes me acutely uncomfortable. Why? Because the trail demeans the human head, which is the vital component of our humanity.

I got a fulsome reply from Jonathan Carberry-

I acknowledge that you claim the trail demeans the importance of the human head and can assure you that your comments will be fully registered and made available to the BBC Digital department and other senior management within the BBC. Feedback of this nature helps us when making decisions about future BBC trails and services and your views will most certainly play a part in this process.

Fancy that!

9 December 2005

In *Palinurus* Cyril Connolly writes that however attractive the animal graces of youth may be it is maturity that really matters. Of that he says: ‘I believe that a ripe old age is nature’s reward to those who have grasped her secret’. Also: ‘the great minds of the past are not less intelligent than we are because they happen to be dead’.

10 December 2005

I have started to read for the second time Tom Sharpe’s *Porterhouse Blue*. By coincidence I receive today a letter from my friend Roderick Munday, fellow of Peterhouse. Printed across the top is his college post: *Wine Steward*.

⁴⁴ Quoted in *Daily Mail*, 10 October 2005.

⁴⁵ Emphasis supplied by me so as to stress the one-eyed stance.

11 December 2005

Finish the Peerless book (see 21 September). He was a Brighton timber merchant and the book consists of the diaries he kept of his annual holidays ranging from 1891 (Southsea and Ryde) to Bath (1920). He regarded each of these as a 'brief jolly change' from his humdrum working life. I did not expect much, and was surprised by their high quality. Peerless comes over as a hearty, energetic, uninhibited character nearly as artless as Mr Pooter. This means that the book gives a remarkably fresh flavour of that period in England. Here are characteristic examples at random-

20 July 1891 Our honeymoon. Under a fierce fusillade of old boots (one of which knocked my cigar out of my mouth) we jumped into a cab which drew up to 6 St Margaret's Place, Brighton, at about 3.35. At the station we took tickets for Southsea. We went on the platform and tried to seduce the guard, who promised to see what he could do, and were soon whirling on our way. At Barnham the guard gave us a cheery 'Now then, sir' and it was the work of a moment, and we were safely ensconced in a second-class carriage alone.

30 May 1914 Ross-on-Wye. Millie [his wife], vigorously combing her hair, hits the electric lamp and breaks it – good beginning. Anyhow it was hanging too low.

1 June 1917 New Forest. All went well till we got to the level-crossing at Lyndhurst Road. A goods train was shunting, and how many times that doggone engine shuffled and dealt those trucks I should not like to say . . . When at last the gates swung open , Tom coaxed Matilda [their car] to life again and we bounded off. Oh the mad joy of it, bounding along full of strength and power, able by a deft turn of the wheel to swing right or left, and still irresistibly forging our course.

Today at 10.45 pm the Clive Anderson broadcast on Hain was transmitted on BBC Radio 4 (to be repeated on 14 December at 8.45 pm). It is a series called *Politically Charged*. It included the following interchange-

Anderson: 'So what does a staid member of the cabinet these days think of English cricket tours to Zimbabwe, which the government seems unwilling or unable to prevent?'

Hain: 'I do not think these tours should happen. I don't think the English cricket team should have gone to Zimbabwe. Mugabe is an oppressive tyrant and if I were 30 years younger, and not playing the role that I am now, I would probably be organising similar direct action protests to the ones that I did all those years ago.'

So although this man, now a Cabinet Minister, was convicted of criminal conspiracy in 1972 for his direct action protests he confesses now that he would do the same again. So much for the rule of law!

13 December 2005

Apropos the entry for 7 December, I read this in today's *Daily Mail*-

Uproar forces BBC to scrap 'psychotic' ads

A BBC advertisement to promote digital television has been pulled after a flood of complaints from viewers who said it was 'disturbingly psychotic' and made their 'skin crawl'. The ads featured a giant, computer-animated head comprising hundreds of smaller moving faces that bounce across the countryside before changing into familiar BBC presenters such as John Simpson. The campaign provoked more than 400 complaints from viewers who said they found the images deeply disturbing.

17 December 2005

Today's *Spectator* has an article by Michael Vestey on the Hain broadcast of 11/14 December. It runs in part-

'Until I heard Politically Charged this week on Radio Four, part of The Westminster Hour (Sunday, repeated Wednesday), I'd forgotten that the sleek, smug, perma-tanned Peter Hain had been prosecuted in 1972 for conspiracy to disrupt all-white sports tours from South Africa as part of the anti-apartheid campaign. I remember his absurd, bogus prosecution for carrying out a bank robbery in Putney — he was quite rightly acquitted — but not the private prosecution for conspiracy brought by Francis Bennion, a barrister and parliamentary draughtsman. Bennion was just as principled a man as Hain and was outraged that protesters could disrupt or stop rugby, cricket and tennis tours by South Africans.

How innocent he seems to us today. It's become the norm to take 'direct action' to make life difficult for or to stop other people doing things of which some other people don't approve. And if you have a Labour government and you pay them enough they'll even ban what you don't like, hunting being the most glaring example. Or, if Rupert Murdoch supports you, pay him back by allowing English cricket rights on television to go to him, thus preventing non-satellite subscribers from seeing any English Test cricket for four years. At a time when a government appeases the IRA psychopaths and does nothing about animal rights terrorists *Bennion's* belief is gloriously old-fashioned. He told the presenter Clive Anderson, 'The way a civilized society conducts itself is by reasoned debate and decision on whether to change the law, and until the law is changed in that way you do not allow crude force to have its effect. That is a defeat for democracy.'

In the second paragraph I have put *Bennion's* in italics because through a slip it was provokingly printed as *Hain's*.

27 December 2005

Items from two Christmas-present books chime with my recent thinking on male sexuality (which women fail to understand because their sexuality is different and their imaginations are inadequate).

In *Tis* the Limerick-born Frank McCourt writes how, on his arrival fresh from an immigrant ship in New York, he is befriended by a travelling Irish priest who shares his hotel bed with young Frank. The priest takes a drink too many in the bar. Back in the bedroom Frank manages to undress him.

'He collapses on the bed on his back and I can see he is in a state of excitement with his hand on himself. Come here to me, he says, and I back away. Ah, no, Father, and he rolls out of the bed slobbering and stinking of drink and puke and tries to grab my hand and put it on him but I back away . . .'⁴⁶

As Frank runs off the priest stands in the doorway calling 'Ah, come back, son, come back, it was the drink. Mother o' God, I'm sorry.'

The priest is a good man, trying to live a good life (which in his terms means a sexless life). He genuinely wants to help Frank, and finds him lodgings and a job. His sexual denial exerts pressure, which he relieves with alcohol. His inhibitions released, what he would call the old Adam rears its head. Frank has no sympathy for his human sexual desire, though later (when in the US Army for a spell) he takes a different view as regards the needs of servicemen. He

⁴⁶ P. 21.

reports without comment the remark of an older enlisted man: 'you're a kid, you need to get laid or you'll get strange in the head'.⁴⁷ This belief may account for many army rapes; I don't know if it has any validity.

The other writer is Christopher Hitchens, the book his excellent *Letters to a Young Contrarian*. I devour this at a sitting, so close is it to my own thinking. At one point Hitchens says of Martin Luther King that he spent his last night on earth in 'some pretty rough fornication.'

'I like the fact that he had feet of clay and a digestive tract and reproductive organs: all human achievement must be accomplished by mammals and this realisation (interestingly negated by sexless plaster saints and representations of angels) puts us on a useful spot. It strongly suggests that anyone could do what the heroes have done.'⁴⁸

If our mission in life is to evolve spiritually then why, asked Cyril Connolly, are we provided with bodies that are so refractory? The body has various systems, including the connected nutritional system (eating and drinking), digestive system (mastication, digestion, excretion) and reproductive system. All three involve physiology, the brain and the emotions. Only the last is also thought to be connected with morality – no doubt because the creation of new mammals is involved. Only the last is not needed for its designated purpose during a large part (or sometimes the whole) of its owner's life. Therein lies the problem.

Later Having just finished *Letters to a Young Contrarian* I have to record dissent. In his last letter Hitchens records his opinion that 'the worst crimes are still committed in the name of the old traditional rubbish: of loyalty to nation or "order" or leadership or tribe or faith'.⁴⁹ For me this will not do. After all the first words of my million-word book *Statutory Interpretation* are 'The search is for order'. And I prefer tribal solidarity to multiculturalism.

31 December 2005

So the year comes to an end. One moment of shame to be remembered is that Carol, daughter of the great Lady Thatcher, demeaned herself by appearing on a television programme stupidly called *I'm a celebrity – get me out of here*. The most talked about image from this, projected round the world, was of the unspeakable Carol relieving herself in the middle of the night by squatting beside the bed and urinating on the floor. She couldn't be bothered to find what was inevitably referred to as the toilet.

Another shameful episode was the use of the ineffable 'Sir' Bob Geldof to head a campaign for Africa pathetically called Make Poverty History. Everyone with any sense knows that you can never make poverty history. As Christ said 2,000 years ago, the poor are always with us. One reason for this is that at subsistence level the world population inevitably increases with every rise (however small) in the standard of living and medical care. If everyone had enough to eat, and efficient medical care, it would be standing room only on our precious planet. What benefit would that be to anyone? None whatever.

Africa has in any case long been a lost cause. Dickens showed with his character Mrs Jellaby in *Bleak House* the folly of an English do-gooder who totally neglects her own children and husband in efforts to improve the lot of feckless Africans in the district of Borrioboola-Gha. She uses her daughter Caddy as an unpaid amanuensis, and loud are the complaints of that put-upon young woman. She tells Esther Summerson she is about to run off and get married, saying-

'. . . I am quite worn out. I was directing the new circulars till two in the morning. I detest the whole thing so that that alone makes my head ache till I can't see out of my

⁴⁷ *Tis*, p. 115.

⁴⁸ Pp. 92-93.

⁴⁹ P. 118.

eyes. And look at that poor unfortunate child [pointing at her little brother Peepy]. Was there ever such a fright as he is! . . . Pa will be bankrupt before long, and then I hope Ma will be satisfied. There'll be nobody but Ma to thank for it . . . His family is nothing but bills, dirt, waste, noise, tumbles downstairs, confusion and wretchedness . . . One great comfort is that I shall never hear of Africa after I'm married.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Pp 157-158.