

The

Salisbury Review

Absolutely the wrong opinion on everything



**France After the
Virus**

Theodore Dalrymple

China's Revenge

Alistair Miller

**Britain Without
Frontiers**

Myles Harris

Marx's Freemasons

Mark Griffith

**The National Death
Service**

Roger Watson

Have we left the EU?

Andrew Tettenborn

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Between 1348 and 1349, bubonic plague killed sixty per cent of the population of Europe. During one such outbreak, Margaret Paston, writing from East Anglia to her son in London, spoke of ‘... great death in Norwich, and in other borough towns in Norfolk, for I assure you that it is the most universal death that I ever knew in England.’

Margaret fled a city where two thirds of the population would die. We can imagine her, a figure from a medieval tapestry, riding side-saddle, hooded, servant in front and behind, riding out of the doomed city past piles of unburied corpses at the city gates. Her first call on arriving in her village would be to church to thank God for a safe journey and to invoke his further protection from the plague. She being an important figure perhaps the local priest, warned by a child sent running across the fields at her approach, would have joined her.

We cannot in our imagination follow the two figures into the church today because churches have little place in this age of aggressive materialism, the cause of our present tragedy. Most are locked. When the Church of England renounced Christianity in the mid twentieth century, vandals followed Canterbury’s lead by smashing their stained-glass windows, chopping up the stalls for firewood and stealing their bells for scrap. Moreover, although many are still consecrated, services are no longer held as in them as are no parishioners; people these days fly to Dubai or Florida rather than going to church.

All we can do is to peer through plain glass windows into their interiors with what remains of the wooden pews and faded plaster before exploring their graveyards. The headstones, some upright, some fallen, lie under the trees surrounded by the burrows of animal who once treated the corpses as their larder.

What did Margaret Paston think of death, what would she think of us and our attitudes toward it? In the early Middle Ages death was not to be indefinitely postponed

but to be accepted at whatever age it came. The dying, as far as they could, were expected to make a ‘good death’. This meant behaving with dignity and restraint, and, if possible and there was sufficient time, propped up in bed to say their goodbyes. Family, children, friends and other villagers might call on the dying to say farewell as they might on a friend in better times. Displays of grief were frowned on and the priest was only called at the very last moment to drive off the devil. After the corpse was buried and as soon as the body had rotted down to bones, the latter were piled in a common ossuary. Graveyards were not specially regarded as sacred, their most useful purpose being as places where villagers could meet to socialize, gamble, drink, trade and fornicate.

We don’t accept this view of death anymore. Yes, we agree we are all going to die, but in our hearts, we are not so sure, we have made the Big Reservation about death. If there are enough respirators, vaccines, biologics and investment, not only will Covid be beaten, but all diseases, even the disease of ageing itself, will be conquered and a time will come when our descendants will live to be hundreds of years old. Which is why, instead of preparing ourselves to die we hand ourselves over to technicians in intensive care units, where sedated, hooked to machines and among strangers, we ask to be saved at any cost.

Covid-19 has exposed the cost; people locked in their homes deprived of human contact, their faces hidden by masks if they go out, consequent mental illness, suicide, crashed economies, riots, the breakdown of law and order, of society itself. The price is too great and the prospect of winning impossible unless we aim to be the only species on earth; for life depends on death, and if we abolish it there is no life. We all have to die, so let’s not waste happiness, money or treasure on running away. Better an early medieval death, which was an exercise in courtesy. Which is really what life is about.

The National Death Service

ROGER WATSON

Trying to represent the UK National Health Service (NHS) on an organisational map is like trying to represent General Custer's last stand at the Battle of Little Bighorn; arrows flying in all directions. I faced this problem a few years ago when I gave a lecture at a Japanese university on the NHS. I covered the political origins of the NHS, the funding model, staffing levels and organisation. The president of the university asked me a question along the following lines: Was it not a great thing to live in a country like the UK where a decision about health made one day by the government was immediately implemented across the whole organisation? I had to let him down lightly there.

I explained, from a funding perspective, how the NHS was a bottomless pit. The NHS was designed at a time when we could cure very little and prevent almost nothing. Now it was struggling to cope with its own success in keeping people alive, being able to cure some previously fatal conditions and having a wide range of vaccines at its disposal. To do this the NHS had to take an increasing share of our GDP – quadrupled since the NHS was established – and this could only be done by increasing taxes. Any notion that the NHS was ‘free’ – albeit at the point of delivery – was ludicrous and with advances in healthcare, likely to become even more ludicrous. At some point the NHS might well prove too expensive for the country. Especially if it was going to insist on offering procedures which were not aimed at saving lives and were concerned with choice rather than necessity. However, the socially sacred nature of the NHS made the fundamental principles untouchable by political parties of left or right. Instead of instituting the changes which

would ensure the survival and the success of the NHS, we were constantly reorganising it, playing about with funding models and, essentially, engaged in a continual process of management fiddling while the NHS burned. Moreover, the NHS was not really a UK-wide organisation. Playing up to nationalistic sentiments in three of the countries of the UK we had, including England, four very expensive NHS hierarchies.

To demonstrate the dynamic nature of the structure of the NHS, overlaid on a map of England (not including the rest of the UK where the NHS is organised differently) I showed the number of reorganisations that had taken place in a relatively short time from health regions through primary care trusts (PCTs), the subsequent amalgamation of

these and the eventual reformation of regions, now called strategic health authorities (SHAs). In less than a decade the map representing the old regions was simply recreated with an almost identical configuration of organisations relabelled SHAs. PCTs are now called Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) and these, in theory, buy services from a bewildering array of other NHS Trusts: acute trusts, university hospital trusts, mental health trusts, foundation trusts, teaching hospital trusts, ambulance service trusts, and community trusts. Forgive me if I have missed any.

If only it stopped there. Trying to keep up with the kaleidoscopic organisational changes that take place in the NHS reminds me of the Red Queen's dictum in *Alice in Wonderland*; ‘It takes all the running you can do to stay in the same place.’ Superimposed on the regional structure of the NHS there exists a bewildering array of management. At the highest level we have the NHS (Chief Executive Simon



“There’s nothing in the rules about not visiting third homes.”

Stevens) but this has the subdivisions called NHS England and NHS Improvement. Then we have The NHS Confederation (Chief Executive Niall Dickson) and across England, approximately 250 CCGs. All these structures have their own senior management teams and non-executive directors (NEDs). In one of my local CCGs the senior management team alone consists of eight people. Don't confuse the 'non-executive' aspects of NEDs with some kind of altruistic non-remunerated contribution to the national good; these are people – usually already in well-remunerated jobs – earning up to an additional £20,000 annually for a limited contribution. I was unable to ascertain the number of NEDs but each of the myriad of organisations included above will have at least one. Contrary to the view expressed by my Japanese colleague who envisaged a slick nationwide organisation taking decisions quickly in the best interests of the British people, it is actually a miracle that anything gets done. As one local neurosurgeon once described things to me, the NHS was like a sinking ship where, instead of patching up the hole, more and more cabins were being built on top.

Navigating the management structure of the NHS is like exploring the shallow tidal waters of the Frisian Islands described in Erskine Childers' *Riddle of the Sands*. Try to find anything out or bring about change and you simply get stuck. On the other hand, some monumentally bad decisions, once put in train, are hard to stop until it is too late. This is exemplified by the farcical purchase of an IT system purporting to solve all the communication and data sharing problems of the NHS. Millions of pounds were spent on a system that was never installed and the process of procuring a new one had to start over with the concomitant spending of further millions of taxpayers' money.

And now mid-COVID we come out at 8pm on Thursday evenings to clap for the NHS. Virtue signalling is bad enough but when it is accompanied by several minutes of banging on pots and whooping around my neighbourhood it is simply irritating. One good thing to come out of the recent pandemic, folk say, is that it has made us in the UK appreciate the NHS. Frankly, this defies logic as the NHS has been manifestly ill-prepared for the COVID crisis. Many will blame a lack of funding over many years by successive governments, but the fact is that the NHS is poorly managed and

as much in thrall to the doctrine of bureaucratic centralism as was the military industrial complex of Stalinist Russia. We are not short of PPE for our nurses and doctors because of a lack of funding but because the highest echelons of NHS management, residing across the road from Downing Street, appear to have been incapable of taking decisions in the face of information that a pandemic was on the way long before this pandemic was apparent. With two nursing daughters on the 'frontline' of the current pandemic I probably have more 'skin in the game' than most; I worry about them and my many other NHS colleagues but that does not move me sufficiently to join the chattering classes on my middle-class Labour-voting street in a weekly round of applause. This mesmerising spectacle will merely serve to convince the senior management of the NHS that it was right all along, and the much-needed change in this state-sponsored dinosaur will never come.

One myth that has been shattered by the COVID pandemic is that we need the NHS to be able to deal with national crises such as this. We are the only country in the world with the NHS, but it is plain that the jewel in our political crown has not been able to deal with the crisis any better than any other health system. In any case, a significant amount of the care of COVID-19 and other patients during the pandemic was carried out in private nursing homes where staff do not have the pay and pension privileges of their NHS counterparts. In fact, the NHS off-loaded its older patients to the nursing home sector, cancelled much of the care of other suffering patients and frightened people off from using emergency services. It is possible that this added to the death toll rather than reducing it. Moreover, much of the capacity thus freed up and the extra beds that were created, were never used. Comparatively, we have managed no better and possibly less well than some other countries. International comparisons are hard, however, as there are so many confounding factors such as more or less draconian lockdowns and tracking, and variation in the extent of testing for infection and resistance. But, to the same extent that this may undermine the argument that the NHS did not perform best, it equally undermines any claim that it performed well.

Roger Watson is a Professor of Nursing

France After the Virus: the Same only Worse

THEODORE DALRYMPLE

The French, as did most western nations, complied with the restrictions on their movement imposed by their government during the Covid-19 epidemic with impressive, or depressing, docility. This docility could, like most social phenomena, be interpreted in more than one way: as a sign of civic conscience and discipline, or as a sign that the population was now so used to being regulated and told what to do that it had less independence of thought than a sheepdog.

It was not as if the government had itself shown such consistency that it inspired complete confidence that it knew what it was doing. Just before confinement became obligatory, it recommended that people kept indoors and confined themselves to prevent the spread of the virus, at the same time permitting the municipal elections to proceed. Was the virus, then, a respecter of democratic procedure? It was hardly surprising that many people did not follow what were then only recommendations.

Once recommendations became orders, however, they seemed to be pretty much obeyed, at least in the part of Paris in which I happened to be staying. Obedience at that stage was enforced, for the streets were suddenly full of police, checking that people in the street had filled in their *laissez-passer* correctly. This *laissez-passer* had to be printed from the internet: bad luck on those without a printer, they had to write it out longhand (and the form of words was quite long).

In its first version, the *laissez-passer* included the words 'On my honour,' namely that the reason given for leaving home was truthful: but soon all reference to honour was dropped perhaps as seeming anachronistic in this age of formalised rights and duties. There was a fine, soon increased from 35 to 135 euros for failing to fill in the form correctly; I met a young man, admittedly of the loitering type, who had been stopped by a policeman and fined 135 euros because he had got the date wrong.

I was stopped only once, and strictly speaking could have been fined myself because I had forgotten to tick the box indicating the reason for my departure from home. But I was clearly on my way to the post office to collect a parcel (there were no home deliveries by the post office at that stage) because I had the notification with me, besides which men of my age in tweed jackets and dark green corduroy trousers do not usually pose a

threat to the preservation of law and order. The young policeman was very polite and let me off, but others – I could not help noticing that those of a lower class or ethnic minority – seemed to have a harder time of it. Once I saw a middle-class intellectual-looking man in his sixties run away from the police, three who had lived about as many years between them as he; presumably he had forgotten his *laissez-passer* and did not want to be fined. They didn't run after him, though they could have caught him within a handful of yards. Was this humanity on their part, or a subliminal acknowledgment that their task did not have much of an inner purpose or legitimacy?

All these police, who later in the period of confinement disappeared from the streets as swiftly as they had appeared, where did they come from and where did they go? I was reminded of the ants in my kitchen which suddenly appear out of nowhere when there is a little jam on a surface, and disappear again when there is no more jam. What were they doing before, and what are they doing after? No doubt in the case of the police, as in the case of the ants, there is an explanation.

There were, of course, reports that in the less favoured parts of Paris, where so much of the population lives, obedience to authority was less well (or badly) observed than in the better parts. I couldn't check this for myself, and one never knows from reading newspapers or reports on the internet how representative is whatever is reported. But there seemed to be reliable accounts of the police, ambulances and fire-engines being stoned when they entered what are sometimes called *les territoires perdus de la République*, that is to say those regions, mainly the outskirts of large towns or cities, where the writ of the country's government does not run, or runs only haltingly and intermittently, and which are *de facto* extraterritorial, like the foreign concessions in China. It has sometimes been denied that the concept of territories lost to the Republic reflects reality, but when the *Préfet* of a *département* tells the police not to enforce regulations during Ramadan in areas with a large immigrant population (or population descended from immigrants), for fear of causing disturbances, even riots, the expression seems hardly too strong.

When the police disappeared, a few shops opened and there were more people in the street and the buses. Very few wore masks, even home-made ones. Though

many people in absolute numbers had died, most were old and about half in old-age people's homes; even if all the deaths ascribed to Covid-19 were additional to 'normal' death rates, the overall death rate would have risen for the year by 8 per cent so far, not the kind of figure that would make you notice anything without being told (albeit that the deaths were heavily concentrated in Paris and the north east of France). This was certainly not the Black Death. In the circumstances, it was difficult to persuade people, and keep them persuaded, that they were personally in imminent danger if they were not as careful as the government required them to be. All things considered, discipline held up remarkably well.

But when relaxation set in without any attempt to re-establish strict control, I immediately thought of an explanation (paranoid modes of thought are natural in crises). The government was performing a little experiment. It was allowing the relaxation so as to see whether the illness would spread and the deaths increase. If they did, it could blame the population for its indiscipline; if they did not, it would be able to claim that it had introduced relaxation responsibly, by degrees, whether things turned out well or badly. Or maybe everyone was just suffering from surveillance-fatigue.

As in Britain, the epidemic brought out everyone's inner know-all. Everyone suddenly became an epidemiologist, specialising in viral outbreaks. Everyone knew exactly what to do, it seemed, with the single unfortunate exception of the people whose responsibility it was to do something.

I listened to the President on the radio when he announced the reopening of schools and shops for the 11 May. I am no admirer of M. Macron, and am not sure that he would make an amusing dinner guest. But he spoke well and clearly, and said nothing that was ridiculous or nasty. No sooner had he stopped speaking, than know-all commentators began to tear what he said apart. They would have done so if he had said something different or even diametrically opposed. The lot of French presidents, and perhaps of politicians everywhere, is not a happy one: which, perhaps, is a certain way to get bad ones.

Meanwhile, the only contemporary French novelist who is world-famous, Michel Houellebecq, has delivered himself with characteristic acerbity 'the post-virus world' he said, 'will be just the same, only worse.'

Theodore Dalrymple's latest book is In Praise of Folly, Gibson Square, 2019, £9.99.

China's Revenge for the Opium Wars

ALISTAIR MILLER

What form will the much vaunted 'reckoning with China' take, when the current Covid-19 crisis is over? We are told that the anger 'goes right to the top', and our relationship with China will have to be 're-evaluated'. But in what way?

Few people doubt there will be some response to China's latest viral export to the West, its misinformation, its crude propaganda, not to mention its longstanding record of human rights abuse, industrial espionage, theft of intellectual property, and cyber warfare – if only to assuage the general public, who understandably feel sore at the human and economic damage that has been wrought. No doubt the Chinese will agree to new regulations concerning those hotbeds of cross-species viral infection, the notorious 'wet markets'; and there will be some new restrictions on Huawei's involvement in our 5G network, together with promises to enhance our own manufacturing capability of personal protective equipment and testing kits. But a

better bell-wether might be the outcome of the drama currently being played out at the world-leading British semiconductor firm Imagination Technologies Group, whose main investor (since its £550 million takeover in 2017 by a private equity firm) has been a Chinese state-owned fund, China Reform Holdings, which now wishes to engineer a boardroom takeover as a possible prelude to redomiciling Imagination to China. Will the government act to defend our national interest – or will private equity firms be given a free hand?

The question is indicative of a greater game of geo-political strategy that is being played out over decades and across centuries. In the case of China and the West, the rules of 'the Great Game' are tacitly acknowledged but never openly admitted. Crudely speaking, they are these: Western neo-liberals preach the virtues of free trade and global markets, and get rich by selling off our national assets; while Chinese communists feed our debt-fuelled addiction to cheap consumer goods, and

use the proceeds to buy up our assets, thus securing their dreams of imperial dominion. There is a certain beautiful symmetry to it, but both sides must be careful not to overplay their hands, or the ugly truth will be revealed, and the edifice come crashing down. Will it be business as usual in the Great Game?

It is easy to cast the Chinese as villains in the current crisis, but the Great Game is more complex and has roots going back centuries. The Chinese have long memories – and no event has been more formative of their view of us than the Opium Wars of the mid-nineteenth century. Looking back, the British do not come out of it terribly well. Seeking to address a trade deficit with the Chinese that saw our silver bullion reserves being drained, and piling up in China, the result of our insatiable appetite for Chinese silks, porcelain and tea, we stepped up our illegal exports of opium. The trade deficit was cured, but only by turning the Chinese into a nation of addicts. Naturally, the Chinese objected and tried to stop it, but the opium trade was forced on them by Royal Naval artillery – the origin of the term ‘gunboat diplomacy’. The resulting Treaty of Nanking, 1842, instituted free trade, but on British terms.

It is hardly surprising, then, that the Chinese are suspicious of Western arguments for the universal benefits of free trade – arguments founded on classical principles of ‘comparative advantage’ outlined by David Ricardo in the early nineteenth-century. According to these principles, all nations can trade to mutual advantage so long as trade barriers are eliminated, and markets are cleared at the rate of exchange which balances imports and exports. Richard Cobden, doyen of nineteenth-century liberals, even declared free trade to be a moral imperative equivalent to ‘the principle of gravitation in the universe’. Some modern conservatives still believe this to be true. But for the Chinese, painful experience tells them otherwise: it all depends *on whose terms* trade is conducted – i.e. on who has the gunboats. This, in effect, is the old mercantilist view, according to which the object of trade was to build up a balance of payments surplus and amass bullion. Indeed, it was a mercantilist approach to trade by the Qing dynasty emperors that caused the trade imbalance (and consequent denuding of Europe of its bullion) which triggered the Opium Wars in the first place.

Nowadays, classically trained Western economists know that mercantilism is self-defeating, for a pile of gold and silver is of no use to anyone unless melted down and turned into money that can in turn be spent on foreign goods. Since countries cannot simultaneously all run surpluses, all that happens is that the surplus countries amass bullion, while deficit countries are denuded of it, rendering the latter unable to pay for further imports. International trade seizes up altogether.

But what if, instead of amassing bullion, you amass foreign assets? Run a trade surplus, by producing your goods so cheaply that competitors are priced out of world markets, and by simultaneously discouraging imports by all means; and then instead of accumulating foreign currency reserves (the modern equivalent of bullion), which would drive up the exchange rate, making your goods less competitive and

correcting the trade imbalance, recycle the foreign currency by buying up foreign assets. Government bonds, businesses, utilities, telecommunications networks, property, football clubs, nuclear power stations, you name it. Moreover, there is a self-reinforcing effect as the inflow of profits, rents and dividends on your foreign assets further increases your trade surplus. So much the better if your purchases of foreign assets can be presented in the host country, not as the flogging off of their assets, but as ‘foreign investment’, ‘a vote

of confidence’, ‘coming to the rescue’ of industries you helped destroy in the first place by your dumping of cheap goods. Better still if your offers of generous grants, endowments and donations – to charitable organisations, universities, research institutes, health organisations, trade missions, even political parties – can be presented, not as crude attempts to win influence, but as motivated by altruistic goodwill.

If your aim is not mutual advantage but, say, power and influence, even world domination, mercantilism becomes a powerful tool. Indeed, properly managed, mercantilism is merely warfare conducted by other means – means so insidious that the host is quite unaware of what is happening, until it is too late. Or as Sun Tzu wrote in *The Art of War*, ‘The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting.’

The situation now, then, is basically that of the nineteenth century in reverse. Then, we enforced free trade on the Chinese with gunboats, and their opium



“You never like my boyfriends.”

addiction enabled us to redress the terms of trade in our favour. Now, it is we who are addicted to cheap Chinese consumer goods, and trade is conducted in the interests of the Chinese. But so long as our rulers benefit from fat consultancy fees for working to facilitate Anglo-Chinese trade, and get rich from asset sales, share deals and booming property prices; so long as our people remain addicted to cheap plastic consumer goods ‘made in China’; nothing will change. The Chinese need not so much as lift their little finger, or send in a gunboat, or supply a single chest of opium.

What is the endgame? Carried to its logical conclusion, we would become a nation of serfs and the Chinese a nation of rentiers. With all our assets, our property, our capital, owned by the Chinese, we would work long hours in sweat shop conditions

for subsistence wages producing consumer goods destined for the Chinese market. Meanwhile, our Chinese masters would lead a leisured life, living as good capitalists do off the profits, dividends and rents generated by their assets – the ones we used to own. The tables would well and truly have been turned. Geopolitically speaking, the Chinese would have achieved, peacefully, tacitly, insidiously, through their ownership and surveillance control of every aspect of our lives, what they never could have done militarily: world domination.

A thought experiment – or things to come? Something, at any rate, to think about next time you buy a cheap plastic toy at the supermarket.

Alistair Miller is a teacher

Living at No 23 Google Drive

MARY SIDNEY

Like most of us under lock-down I’ve become better acquainted with new technology. I now have an Instagram account I didn’t have before, or rather I did but didn’t know you had to use it from the mobile not the PC, so I could never get into it. People now contact me from all over the world on WhatsApp and Messenger. I don’t know why they don’t just use boring old email, or whether it is worth replying to people from whom I’ve heard not a word for ten years, but I always do. On Sunday I sat down to three Zoom sessions. They were all uneasy affairs. The one from my street bringing together four neighbours was tedious as we all discovered we had nothing to say to each other. A new etiquette is needed, as I found, like attending a formal tea party, it was difficult to leave without a very good excuse.

This new expediency has paradoxically cut into our increasingly quiet and restrained lives; we should be pottering about like pensioners, sometimes I only know which day it is because they are written on my blister-pack of blood pressure pills, but the new means of communication cause constant trauma.

To occupy myself further I decided to enter the *Grayson Perry Art Club*, a proposed Channel 4 TV programme. In the usual way you have to upload a photograph of your artwork, but this also required a three-minute video talking about your work and how it has been affected by the lockdown. I had a feeling of dread, then thought how silly I was, how lacking in confidence and adventure! It was not easy to find out

how to do it and there was no one around to help. On-line information is confusing but I made a preliminary film and most importantly sent it from my phone to my PC into my Paintings File. From there I could send it to Perry. I look horrible and seem to be sitting in the dark but I said what I needed to and proudly told a friend, who had just been told make a film for a job interview, ‘I just went into settings and fiddled about a bit.’

The Gods who hate the older generation so much must have heard because when I tried to move the final longer video from the phone to the PC it wouldn’t budge. A message said: ‘Document too big.’

Online information was depressing: Android lacks the ability to resize images. They all wanted me to download complicated and sometimes expensive apps. I tried a neighbour who is young, looks like one of Botticelli’s angels and is very bright. She called through the window that she was trying to set up a ‘conference call with people in Tokyo,’ so she would be busy for at least forty minutes.

Feeling increasingly worried, I phoned an elderly neighbour who is usually good in times of stress.

‘Can’t talk,’ she said sounding almost in tears. ‘Just got locked out of my Sainsbury’s account on line. It doesn’t recognise my password – I could be locked out permanently. Now I’ve lost my whole order. I might have to start a new account which won’t recognise that I’m on the priority list!’ Adding mournfully, ‘I’ve now got a problem that I didn’t have five minutes ago.’

We both knew it would be hers for the rest of the day,

if not the week. She did mention a computer support shop which was somehow still open. A youth with dreadlocks had been very good to her when she'd gone in with a new mobile she couldn't work. I phoned and he gave me an appointment within half an hour. Before I set out a friend rang to say she was having to set up lessons for her school classes on Zoom and she'd been spending so long on line that she'd got 'chills and pains all over by the evening'.

'I have to keep thinking,' she said, 'about times when I won't need any of these new skills to do what I like best about teaching but it seems a very long slog away.'

Running out of time, I logged off up the road puffing a bit, not as fit as I was two months ago when I swam every day. The road seemed to lengthen as the time got shorter. I caught a bus, something I haven't done for weeks, wearing my mask for the first time. I asked the young driver to put me off at the nearest stop to the shop. The only other passenger was an elderly black lady I call 'The Commodore,' as she wears the uniform of the sea-scouts with lots of badges and a peaked cap.

'We are all imprisoned,' she said defiantly. She's nice to talk to, it's now joyful to meet anyone in the flesh, but I suddenly realised the driver had taken me past my stop. It's a game they play. I dashed down the hill and got to my appointment just on time, breathless.

Inside two men sat behind glass, the one with dreadlocks I'd spoken to on the phone, smiling and welcoming his customer, an elderly woman more anxious than me. The other tense but expressionless like someone waiting for medical results which are probably terminal. He waved away any suggesting of mask or gloves, his expression suggesting he'd long ago given up fighting fate. He was like a balletomane forced to sell football tickets, obviously despising his public.

I fumblingly handed over my mobile trying to explain about the document.

'It's too big,' he said with quiet doom. In my youth those words could cause mirth, sympathy even envy, now they spelt disaster. He fiddled a bit and handed the phone back staring at the wall behind me. 'Try using your Google account.'

I wasn't sure what this meant so vainly trying to sound knowledgeable, asked if I could try a USB cable, mobile to PC?

'If you can't even do this, you won't be able to do that,' he said with a snort.

I wanted him to show me exactly where to press but his silence was implacable. I trudged back down the hill near to tears of disappointment, trying to keep what little bit I had learned in my head. I only had two and a half days to get this sorted out and I hadn't even started the oil painting, which is 91 cm by 60, with a pile of drawings and photos made in London last year from which to work.

The golden-haired girl who'd been talking to Japan came jogging past my house as I returned. She said she'd spent the weekend trying to get her parents on to Zoom. 'It was a bit tricky but Dad's OK at those things,' she said, adding that he'd been a nuclear physicist. She sat on my wall in the sunshine and twiddled with my phone. I went inside to the PC and within about two minutes the document was successfully uploaded via Google Drive. I was so pleased that I offered to give her a packet of cleansing wipes to go home with.

All I had to worry about then was painting a masterpiece and, what was really nagging at me, sending it to the TV company using the all new 'Wetransfer.com.' Like others of my generation, trapped on a digital wheel of fire, I knew that would be a nightmare, and it was.

Mary Sidney is a social commentator.

Haggard's Journal

A TUNNEL UNDER THE IRISH SEA

MICHAEL GREEN

Oct. 6: Jas. Hosepipe d. from The Stone. It fell off a high wall and hit him on the head. Plague raging in Constantinople. Signs of the Stagnation in Commerce everywhere. The Intelligencer says the popping of champagne corks in Change Alley has been replaced by the banging

of pistols as stockjobbers shoot themselves or are shot by their clients. How thankful I am that my own money is invested safely in a company for Buildg. A Tunnel Under the Irish Sea.

Oct. 7: Eli Bilgewater d. from The Gravel. This a.m. shot a most interestg. poacher, one of the most

unusual I have ever fired upon. A great, black-bearded fellow, he seemed impervious to my first charge of birdshot and led me a merry dance up hill and down dale before I finally cornered him in Long Meadow.

I was so pleased with the chase I told him I would pay him a shilling, if he would offer himself as a target again, there being a dearth of hares and rabbits this year. He said I was a fine old English gentl'n. and it would be a pleasure to be shot by me but he regretted business called him elsewhere. With which he fled.

Oct. 8: Gales. The sexton got drunk and fell into a newly-dug grave today. As he lay insensible, he was stolen by two body-snatchers and sold to an anatomist.

In a.m. called servants together and told them we must economise due to the Depression in Trade, which has caused rents to dwindle to almost nothg. 'No more of those expensive dishes,' I cried. 'Simple, cheap fare is the rule from now on. I shall set an example by not havg. a whore this week.'

At dinner Grunge brought in a strange dish which gave off a revoltg. smell. 'What is it.' I ejaculated, and he replied, 'It is a stew made from the intestines and bladder of a sheep, sir. Very cheap and nourishg. I obtained the ingredients gratis from the slaughterhouse where they give them away to the poor.'

He then poured a strange, colourless liquid into my glass and when I animadverted, 'Is it not a little early for spirits.' he said, 'It is water, sir.'

Oct. 9: Slept ill due to my dinner. Awoke from a nightmare to find Grunge standg. by the bed holdg. a newspaper.

I asked what he wanted and he replied, 'Sir, you are a ruined man. The price of stocks has collapsed.'

'I know, you fool! I cried. 'I suppose you are going to say my ten million South Sea shares are worthless? I knew that well enough.'

'No sir,' he said. 'It is your 20,000 shares in a Company for Building a Tunnel Under the Irish Sea. they are now worth only three halfpence.' 'Each?' I asked and he said, 'No, altogether.'

I asked Grunge what I should do and he said it was customary under these circumstances for a gentl'n. to take his own life. He had assisted sevl. former employers to hang themselves and he would be happy to assist me; indeed, he had a special rope in his room which he kept for such melancholy occasions or if preferred a silver pistol, suitable for use by the gentry.

However, I told him I preferred to drink myself to death and intended to start immediately, therefore let him bring in the port, with which I set to with a will and damnation to all the rogues on Change.

Oct. 10: Hail. Ebenezer Cartwheel d. from the Windy Convulsions. Bart. Wheeler hanged. His last words were, 'May you all rot.' There is much talk of the homeless mendicants which plague the land. In London some of them have taken to sewing loops of cloth in the backs of their coats. They then hang themselves up on the spikes of the railings in front of houses and sleep vertically.

Sevl. large houses in Pall Mall have been affected. Lord Chesterfield, on returng. home in the early hours recently, found half-a-dozen nomads hanging on his railings and played a tune on their heads with his stick. He reported the men's skulls gave off a bass note while the women and children had a higher tone.

Oct. 11: Rain. Fredk. Seedcake hanged for stealing a lamb. His last words were, 'Glug'.

In a.m. was much disturbed to see some mendicants occupyg. a grave in the churchyard. The Rector says that when he rang the bells this morning five dropped out of the belfry.

Oct. 13: Thunderstorms. Prudence Barnwell died from Gout in the Spleen.

Passing through the Park in a.m. I saw an old man sheltering under a tree, drenched by the storm. I approached and after hitting him over the head with the cudgel I use on poachers said, 'Away, idle Whig-voting homeless mendicant and seek work or I shall set the dogs upon you!'

He looked me in the eye and replied thus, viz: 'So, Haggard, you do not recognise the starving man who stole a shilling from you at the Fair twenty years ago. I went to London and made my fortune but never forgot the crime; I swore on The Good Book to repay you ten thousandfold. Today I came to keep my oath and give you £500.'

With a cry of dismay, I fell on my knees and began brushing water from his breeches but he went on: 'And this is the welcome I receive! No money shall you have, vile Haggard, it shall all be given to the homeless people, who suffer as I once did.'

With which he turned and strode away to town where shortly afterwards I heard the merry shouts of mendicants as he distributed his fortune.....

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Who Needs Whom?

BERENICE LANGDON

Do doctors need their patients more than their patients need them? I admit to feel jittery and uneasy if I don't see at least 15 a day. On the other hand, on occasions where I have felt stressed from home life, a full surgery has settled me down. The friendly smiles as people walk into the room, my complete absorption into their problems one at a time, and the thank-yous and good wishes for the day are like a balm.

I have been taking thank-yous on a daily basis for decades. Since I qualified as a doctor (and even as a medical student I was able to help the odd person) I have received a grateful thank you about once every 10 minutes on a working day. I accept them all gracefully. 'It's a pleasure. No problem at all.' Sometimes the symptoms, although impenetrable to the person asking, are perfectly clear to a doctor. I might know what the issue is and what to do about it without even thinking hard. It often really is 'no problem'.

I am aware that I don't please everyone. The patient who says loudly to her daughter in the corridor, 'We won't bother seeing her again.' Or the one who inquires nastily over the phone, 'What is your name? I'm going to make a complaint,' are also perfectly familiar. 'L-A-N-G-D-O-N,' I announce loudly. 'Don't worry about remembering. My name is documented in your notes and the practice manager knows me well.'

But these incidents are punctured by those who think carefully about their thank yous. 'You've really reassured me; you have a very calm voice.' 'You're never in a rush.' 'You were the only one who knew what it was.' These encounters become as memorable for me as they are for the patient. I forget so many days and consultations (at 30 a day you would too) so to have a memorable incident is a gift.

You may think your thank-yous feel inadequate. I feel like that too when I am forced into the role of a patient. I have been in tears with worry – a lump – a rash – and my doctor's calmness, assessment and reassurance has been invaluable. I remember each visit with absolute

clarity (and I know for sure that the doctor I saw does not remember it at all) and yet the only way I could reciprocate was to say 'thank you'.

In fact, the doctor who saw me probably deserved a particularly special thank you. There is nothing trickier than seeing another doctor as a patient. Sometimes, devilishly, they don't mention it and it's only when I pick up on their use of technical language; 'pulse oximeter,' 'hypertension,' that I realise. Sometimes its documented in the notes by a previous GP that has been caught out and vowed it will not happen again.

The name is altered from 'Mr' or 'Ms' to 'Dr' or a warning pops up; 'This patient is a cardiologist'.

Funnily enough specialists such as cardiologists or neurologists are in many ways the easiest to manage because they don't have a clue about anything in General Practice whether it's a toe nail infection or a rash. More baffling are the patients who are also GPs. Because I know, that they know, that I know, exactly the same as them, so why are they here asking my advice? And it's very difficult to then avoid saying, 'So what do you want me to do?'

But the most difficult of all are the medical students. Firstly, I just never know what they don't know. They can often be surprisingly ignorant – for someone just about to qualify. Worse of all there is a sense that they are testing me out; a toxic combination of the idolisation of our profession with the severest possible criticism. And after seeing me I am sure their unrealistic ideals of doctoring (garnered presumably from a recent up-to-the-moment communication skills module) completely collapse. And I sit there, trying to help them as best as I can, also filled with negative thoughts; as in, 'Who ever thought this idealistic snowflake was going to make the grade?'

Recently though I have had to ask for a lot of help myself. Off work due to Covid, I have had to experience things completely the other way round and I found out its *exhausting* being helped all the time; trying to appear cheerful and grateful while feeling demoted and devalued. And when I finally got back



"We love what you've done with the garden."

to work (after the requisite two weeks) all ready for action (and thank you) imagine my horror to find there were not enough patients to go round. I was expecting a solid morning of grateful patients but the receptionists could only find me six.

If the numbers can drop from full throttle to a dribble, simply because patients have a feeling they shouldn't bother their doctors because they are busy with serious patients (which isn't true, so please call) then what am I usually doing all day? I know I do a lot of reassurance, a lot of 'just in case' checks. A lot of 'we are going on holiday and thought we ought to bring her in' encounters. In fact, sometimes at the end of a session I have been incautious enough to remark, 'You're the only actual ill person I've seen today.'

But is my job this pointless? Can all of those babies, all of those worried, those tirednesses and those coughs really just take care of themselves?

My embarrassment peaks every Thursday during the NHS clap, as the only thing I have been doing all day is sitting in front of an empty appointment screen. And then, just to add to my feeling of inadequacy, I noticed

that even politicians apparently think GPs are useless. The three bigwigs lined up for the press briefing were asked recently who people with mental health issues should call first, they advised the Good Samaritans or alternatively 'a local mental health charity'. Not one of them mentioned GPs (not even the chief medical officer) even though this is bread and butter work for us.

I gain so much from seeing patients. I get my self-confidence and self-worth, my income and my interest in life. But do the patients really need me?

I saw just one patient today – to check for a lump – and was delighted to actually see someone face to face, rather than just talk on the phone. I opened my door ready in anticipation while I put on the plastic apron and the gloves. As I tied on my mask, I saw the doctor in the room opposite me and caught his eye. Also decked in bib and gloves he was tying a bow in his mask simultaneously with me. I had to laugh. Life is so bizarre right now.

Berenice Langdon in a GP

So You Thought We Had Left the EU?

ANDREW TETTENBORN

If you want to subvert a country's social institutions, here's one piece of advice: leave them in place. Just superimpose your own structures, and make sure the people who matter are on board with you, and leave the old system to wither away in splendid irrelevance. Augustus understood this after Actium in 31 BC: he meticulously preserved the republican magistracy of consuls, praetors and tribunes, merely ensuring that he and not they called the shots. The United Kingdom did the same in non-British India, with local rulers left to get on with it but told to watch the eyebrows of the British resident. For the UK, this is how the EU works: an ostensible commitment to democracy melds with measures to ensure that the decisions that really matter are made by those it trusts in Brussels.

But even after the EU disappears, contagion allowing, in December, another subversive force, the operators behind the European Convention on Human Rights will remain just as ruthlessly effective. In the last fifty years, with neither Parliamentary nor popular approval, this group has limited the rights of schools to punish, of Parliament to prevent felons choosing its members, and of the armed forces to take out terrorists abroad or decide whether they wish to recruit gays. It has reshaped

immigration law and limited the power of taxpayers' elected representatives to set social security levels. It has imposed willy-nilly the recognition of sex changes; adoption by unmarried couples; and gay marriage (and in certain cases abortion) in Northern Ireland. Although non-lawyers may not have noticed, it has rewritten the law almost *in toto* about the Press's right to state the truth about celebrities and others – not, as they say, to the advantage of the Press.

The values which used to mark this country have been effectively destroyed. This process is a remarkable instance of subversion with a combination of stealth and inadvertence, going back to the birth of the European Convention. The Congress of Europe which first met in 1948 aimed to unify Europe and to prevent the resurgence of fascism. Six of the more enthusiastic governments went on to form the nucleus of the future EU, but out of the larger organisation grew the Council of Europe and through it the Convention, adopted in 1950.

Britain helped draft the latter and then ratified it, though this was not so much from serious enthusiasm as from a feeling that it couldn't do much harm and that we shouldn't seem stand-offish. The rights in it

– privacy, the right to family life, freedom of speech, personal freedom, and so on – were unexceptionably worded, and aimed at suppressing Nazi practices in which we had never engaged. We saw it as a largely political document enforceable, if at all, only at state level, by political pressure exerted by a body known as the Commission on Human Rights on states seriously suspected of backsliding into fascism; court proceedings were regarded as a very remote resort. Indeed, at the beginning private parties could not use the Convention at all against a state unless that state agreed, and at the beginning only Ireland, Denmark and Sweden did.

Unfortunately matters since then have acquired a momentum of their own: first, the Court of Human Rights was set up on a more formal basis in 1959; Britain in 1966 accepted its jurisdiction, and the right of individual petition to it. Again, this was because it seemed fairly harmless and everyone else was doing it. Nevertheless, by then the cause had ominously been taken up by British academia and the high-minded intelligentsia, like the Liberal peer Lord Layton, who from 1958 urged the government to engage more with the Convention. Its promotion has remained a progressive mantra ever since; and it was inserted as part of our domestic law in the Human Rights Act 1998.

Secondly, the Court has become increasingly willing not so much to follow the wording of the Convention as to use it as a springboard from which to extend states' obligations. The right to life, for example, has morphed from a prohibition on state murder, to things like a duty to hold inquests in a particular form, and to compensate the relatives of those killed by the negligence of state employees. The right to privacy and family life, once thought of as aimed at random house-to-house searches, compulsory sterilisation and anti-miscegenation laws, now encompasses extensive controls on what newspapers are allowed to say about people, through the right to have a sex-change recognised by the state, to, in certain cases, the right to abortion. Thirdly, the Court from the 1970s began to adopt a progressive view of its own function. In 1978, it notoriously said – and has continued to say ever since – that the Convention was a 'living instrument', to be developed according to 'commonly accepted standards'. The result has been a practice under which once a majority of European nations take some, usually progressive, view on matters of serious public policy, like children's legitimacy or the right of prisoners to vote, then it is likely that outliers will be held to be in breach.

These developments have caused problems because the Convention is already an instrument in tension with democratic decision-making: by its nature it outlaws

measures otherwise constitutionally passed with popular support. This would be acceptable if it is read in the way it was in 1950, as a prohibition against specific forms of state abuse. Torture, forced sterilisation and wholesale suppression of press opposition ought to be seen as beyond the moral power of a majority to coerce a minority. But each nation has the right to follow its own path and apply its own values with democratic approval. If those values are eccentric or disliked elsewhere, they should be no business of human rights lawyers.

Unfortunately, the judges of the Human Rights Court are committed to developing it in a free-wheeling way, including as one of its functions ensuring that the institutions of one nation do not fall too far out of line with those accepted in most others. Far from tolerating or upholding national and social institutions, the contemporary Court is usually dedicated to questioning and suppressing them.

Moreover, not only is it doing this: it is quietly promoting and imposing on us new institutions and a new, egalitarian and non-judgmental morality of its own. What is it that justifies setting this up as a kind of superior law with at least a moral claim to override democratic decision-making? No-one is quite sure. Intellectual defences of modern developments in the interpretation of the Convention tend to swirl around high-sounding words or phrases such as references to autonomy, or dignity, or the need to protect the conscience of Europe – the use of any of which greatly helps any university student seeking a good mark in an essay on human rights law. As Noel Malcolm pointed out in his pamphlet *Human Rights and Political Wrongs*, these will not do. Words like dignity largely restate rather than elucidate the problem. Some are simply vacuous. There is no European consensus worth the name – think social attitudes in Hungary, Denmark and Britain – except among a limited class of liberal cosmopolitans scattered in the academies and well-meaning quangos of the continent.

In 2013 Lord Sumption perceptively remarked that the Human Rights Convention had quietly transformed itself from a 'charter against despotism' to a 'bill of rights for Europe'. There is nothing inherently wrong with bills of rights, but they should come from national sources and be informed by local social institutions. The Human Rights Convention does neither. Therefore, the United Kingdom has every right, and indeed a political and moral duty, to extricate itself from it, which can be done at six months' notice under Article 58, and start again.

Andrew Tettenborn is a University lecturer.

Thirty Pieces of Silver

BRIAN EASSTY

On the increasingly rare occasions when the church I attend digs out the *Book of Common Prayer* at Evensong, I always find the words ‘defend us from the perils and dangers of this night’ very evocative. I always think for a moment that I am standing in the same place and saying the same words as people for whom the perils of the night would have included the Luftwaffe or the First World War airships, the threat of invasion from Napoleon or the Great Plague. It is a bitter irony that, now that my generation is facing a similar peril, I am denied that connection with the worshippers of the past.

Instead, as the *Salisbury Review*’s own Jane Kelly has suggested in a blog, we have a state-sanctioned quasi-religious event. Thursday has become the new Sunday with the Clap for the NHS replacing Evensong as our health service’s attainment of the status of a national religion, something commented upon since the opening ceremony of the 2012 Olympics, becomes entrenched in ritual. Indeed this Thursday observance provides us with many of the features of an organised religious service. An appreciation of the fact that our lives are in the hands of an entity bigger than ourselves, an opportunity and even penitence and absolution for those of us who feel we have not sufficiently appreciated the NHS, and for a few minutes of fellowship to the extent that this Thursday observance has been criticised for giving people an excuse for relaxing social distancing.

If the uncertainty of the present time has led us all to seek our salvation from those whose business is the preservation of our bodies, one wonders where this leaves those whose duty is the health of our souls. The answer would seem to be with a massive missed opportunity. In his warning of the dangers posed by encroaching secularism *The Secular Terrorist*, Peter Mullen wondered what it might take to bring this country back to an understanding of the need for God. Recalling that, in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, the churches were full, he speculated that it might take an event of seismic horror such as a nuclear bomb detonated by Islamist terrorists to bring people back to the churches.

If the leadership the Church has given in the awfulness of this pandemic is any indication, such hopes are forlorn. The Church has been so irrelevant and made itself so invisible during this crisis that one cannot

imagine it gaining a single new member at the end of it. It has not even been sounding as if it wants them. Too often when clergy have been willing to lament this disruption to religious practice, the complaint has tended to be about the poor existing churchgoers who will miss it rather than it is supposedly for everyone.

It was never going to be likely that the Church was going to put up that much of a fight when the secular power decreed that the churches were to close. After all, it is hard to imagine a less turbulent heir to Thomas à Becket than Justin Welby. But its attitude is more reminiscent of the old student slogan: ‘Save police time, beat yourself up,’ with churches closed for Mass before the lockdown even began and for silent individual prayer soon after. Meanwhile its response to the government’s concession that funerals can take place is ‘Sorry. Not here.’

In Philip Ziegler’s excellent history of the Black Death, he reminds us that the Bishop of Winchester enjoined his flock to take part in thrice weekly barefoot parades of penitence in the market place. A Palm Sunday procession of parishioners keeping six feet apart and singing *All Glory Laud And Honour* was too much for today’s church to campaign for. But it would have provided some visibility, as would a queue of people outside a church waiting to get in to pray silently at as safe distance from each other as they would exercise in a supermarket. It would have indicated that these people think prayer is at least as important as food shopping, the kind of witness churchgoers have always been enjoined to make.

It has been left to backbench MPs to make the case the Bishops should be making, Jack Lopresti asking for churches to be open on Easter Sunday, Chris Loder for Christians who have worshipped in a particular church all their lives to have their funeral there, both asserting that churchgoers were just as capable of respecting social distancing as anyone buying vodka and cigarettes in Tesco.

But perhaps the biggest worry for the Church should be not that it will end this crisis with no new converts but that some existing Christians will have given up on it. If the Church acknowledges this concern at all, it is usually in the context of viewing churchgoing as a habit, which the lockdown will give people the chance to get out of. More likely is the suspicion that too few of the clergy

really believe what they preach. The apologetic style of too many vicars, amounts to a kind of ostentatious self-deprecation, a fear of assuming authority, as if their tacit message is: 'I'm not very good at this but it is all a bit weird, all a bit stuffy so I am sure you will agree there is no need to take it too seriously.' Too many of them are more concerned with being 'chilled out entertainers' like David Brent in a dog collar, or more often in an open-necked shirt, than spiritual mentors. We are told that this is necessary in order not to deter converts, but if church is really no more than a form of entertainment, what need is there for it to escape lockdown ahead of any other entertainment venue?

The problem with such abnegation of responsibility is that it cedes the field to more eccentric outliers in the Christian community, giving them more of a hearing

than they would otherwise merit. In an effort to find a pastor who was totally defying lockdown the BBC's religious affairs programme had to go to Virginia, where Ed Stourton interviewed an evangelical preacher who declared she 'was protected by the powerful arm of God'. One assumes her bombastic style and evident fundamentalism would appeal to few members of the Church of England but at least she believed in something more than social work and political correctness by other means, couched in a vague appeal to be nice. For if this crisis has shown that social work and political correctness is all that the Church has to offer, so many more outlets are available.

Brian Eassty is a retired teacher.

The Make-it-in-Australia Movement

DARYL McCANN

Last year, in my article 'Communist China Downunder' (*Salisbury Review*, Autumn 2019), I wrote that interactions between China and Australia had become strained. While the first phase of the Beijing-Canberra relationship, 1949-72, could be described as non-existent because we insisted on recognising Taiwan as the 'real' China, the second period, 1972-2017, was mostly friendly and positive. Seemingly, what was good for the People's Republic of China was good for the Commonwealth of Australia and vice-versa. All this was put in jeopardy in 2017 when Australia's Foreign Minister, Julie Bishop, mildly rebuked President Xi Jinping for his regime's militarisation of the South China Sea. Beijing's response was unprecedentedly shrill, and Australians did a double take. Friendly Panda was suddenly sounding like Red Dragon. Could it be that that we had been deceiving ourselves about the true nature of Communist China for almost half a century? Was that possible? Beijing's behaviour during the current pandemic has only confirmed our worst suspicions.

Today, as I write, the editor of China's *Global Times*, Hu Xijin, has described Australia as 'gum stuck to the bottom of our shoe'. This insult was the result of an official call by the Australian government for an internal inquiry into the origins of the novel coronavirus. Was it, perhaps, generated in the National Biosafety Laboratory inside the Wuhan Institute of Virology? A fair enough question, you might think, given the death

and mayhem unleashed on the planet by Covid-19. Not so, according to Beijing's envoy to Canberra, Ching Jingye, who simultaneously called a press conference and warned the Australian government that the people of China might 'lose their taste' for Australian wine and beef. The development that neither Hu or Ching appears not to be aware of yet is that Australians are fast losing their taste for the People's Republic of China and all things made in the PRC.

China's despotic regime produces the finest 'fake news' in the world, its *Global Times* taking out the prize for premium propaganda in the English language. Only a totalitarian-compliant outfit such as the *Global Times* could shamelessly and ceaselessly commend Communist China as a role model for the world in solving the COVID-19 pandemic without acknowledging that (a) the virus originated in China, (b) China silenced and 'disappeared' any local Wuhan doctor or health authority who tried to warn the people of China and the world, as early as December 2019, that the novel coronavirus was communicable, (c) it likely pressured the World Health Organisation to delay declaring the new virus a Public Health Emergency of International Concern until January 30, 2020, (d) it refuses to be transparent about the genesis of the virus, and (e) it continues to provide the world with unreliable statistics. Notwithstanding all this, the *Global Times* was boasting, on April 24, that the world could learn a thing or two from the regime's handling of COVID-19.

Zhi Xiuyi, a director at a Beijing hospital, was quoted as praising – as if he had a choice – China’s ‘ability to organize and shift its medical resources in a feat that other countries have found difficult to achieve.’ If only we were all ruled by a communist tyranny.

Although the Party Politburo treats its own ethnic minorities, such as the Tibetans and Uyghurs, as if they were an historical mistake, it plays the racist card for all it is worth in the West. Any criticism of Communist China is often characterised as anti-Chinese bigotry, the absurdity of which is demonstrated by the fact that most Australians sympathised with the Hong Kong protesters as recently as last year. Are not Hong Kongers, and we could add here the Taiwanese,

Chinese people? Still, most Australians went along with the PC diktat that we not refer to the China or Wuhan Virus as the China or Wuhan Virus. In late March, however, the mood turned a little less sanguine when *The Sydney Morning Herald*, no conservative newspaper, reported that back in January, while the world remained mostly uninformed of the danger lurking on our horizon, a Chinese government-backed property giant, the Greenland Group, secretly depleted Australia of anti-coronavirus equipment. The Wuhan Virus became the CCP Virus. Today, predictably

enough, Communist China is returning the favour by exporting to four continents defective medical supplies. A new report, by Soeren Kern of the Gatestone Institute, speaks of made-in-China ‘test kits tainted with the coronavirus’ and ‘medical garments contaminated with insects’. Slovakian Prime Minister Igor Matovik, to give another example of Beijing’s perfidy, revealed that ‘more than a million coronavirus tests supplied by China for a cash payment of 15 million Euros were inaccurate and unable to detect Covid-19.’

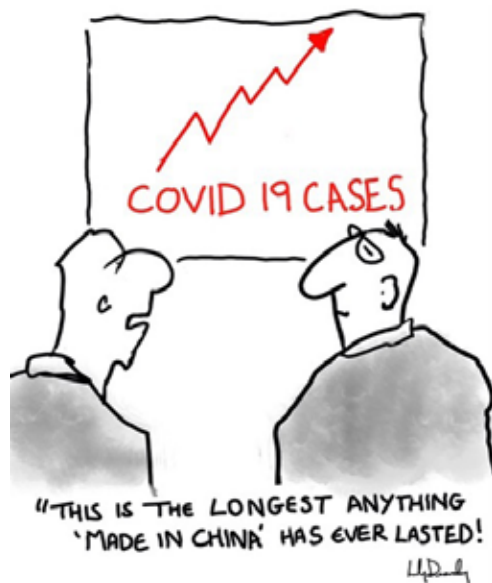
In the case of Australia, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, reported that during January the Greenland Group had bought and stockpiled three million surgical masks, 500,000 pairs of gloves, bulk supplies of sanitisers, antibacterial wipes, thermometers, hamzat suits, and sundry other medical purchases, before shipping them off to the Socialist Motherland. Australia, still suffering from an horrific bushfire season, had no idea it was about to be out of the fire into the frying pan. President Xi Jinping knew. What’s good for Communist China, clearly, is not necessarily good for

Australia. This happens to have been the theme of much of my work since as long ago as 1979 when I was an eyewitness to the Democracy Wall Movement. I had hoped the June 4, 1989 Tiananmen Massacre might serve as a wake-up call to Australia but no such luck. If Australia’s economy in the 1950s rode on the sheep’s back, as the saying went, for the past three decades or more it has ridden on the back of mining exports to the People’s Republic of China. Being a miner or mining engineer is not infrequently the profession of at least one relative or friend’s child. The mining industry in Western Australia, for instance, has transformed Perth from something of a provincial backwater into the most dynamic, go-ahead city in Australia. China’s imperialist-Leninism has proven a windfall for many Australians, but whether Australia as a whole is better-off for being included in the Communist Politburo’s plan for a ‘World of Great Harmony’ is another matter entirely.

Take education as an example. In recent years, an annual intake of 200,000 fee-paying Chinese nationals have kept Australian universities and private schools afloat, injecting some \$34 billion into the education sector each year. One of the reasons Australia avoided European and American levels of Covid-19 infection in the first quarter of 2020 is that our students return to school in early

February and to universities at the start of March. In other words, the proverbial horse had *not* bolted before Prime Minister Morrison imposed travel restrictions on Chinese nationals from February 1, 2020. These restrictions were originally presented as provisional but, as the peril of the pandemic worsened, open-ended restrictions were placed on travellers from China, along with every other country in the world as it happened. Communist China’s envoy in Canberra lambasted Morrison’s decision, and there was talk of young Chinese nationals going elsewhere in future to obtain a Western-standard education. The irony of this, of course, is that two months later Beijing itself introduced tough restrictions on in-coming visits fearing that infected foreigners would cause an uptick in Covid-19 amongst China’s population.

More and more Australians are going to point out to the boards of independent schools and universities alike that the educational institutions of our country exist for the edification of young Australians. I make that prediction because there has been a definite shift



in public opinion since the onset of Covid-19, starting with the Greenland Group scandal. If I had to give the phenomenon a name it would be the Make-It-in-Australia movement. This emergent force is neither a leftist red nor rightist blue but, rather, a populist red-white-and-blue (or the green-and-gold of our sporting colours). One manifestation of this is a new Facebook site called *Australian Made Products*. It has been gaining 100,000 new subscribers with each passing week and is, as I write, more than 1.5 million strong.

Australia's skies are now empty. Except for rescuing stranded Australians from the four corners of the world, all flights into and out of Australia are prohibited. Even the borders between our states, such as between South Australia and its neighbour Victoria, are closed. Qantas has gone into hibernation and the second airline, the locally-owned Virgin Australia, went into a death spiral. A Chinese government-backed investment group announced its intention to rescue the floundering airline, just as other Chinese government-backed predators have previously 'rescued' rural properties, city arcades, Port Darwin, universities and research centres, freight businesses and so on *ad infinitum*. There was a time when Australia would have welcomed billions of dollars of 'no-strings-attached'

investment from Communist China. Not anymore. If Australia cannot sustain two major domestic airlines, the consensus appears to be, then make do with one major domestic airline. Besides, going by the current mood in Australia, I am not sure a Beijing-backed Like-a-Virgin Airline would attract many loyal customers, notwithstanding the aggressive pricing war strategy it would employ to destroy Qantas as Australia's premiere domestic airline. And, yes, Huawei has no chance in Australia.

It is as if Australians have finally understood that we are on our own or, if not on our own exactly, an island of Western-style freedom wanting to extract ourselves from a Communist Chinese version of wartime Japan's Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere. Progressives and internationalists (if they are not one and the same) will fear that the Covid-19 lock-downs and self-quarantining have turned us into a nation of fascist xenophobes too ready to blame our ills (pun intended) on the CCP Virus. In fact, they would not be entirely wrong, though where they see *fascist xenophobia* the rest of us might just settle for *enlightened patriotism*.

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Common Purpose: Marxism's Freemasons

MARK GRIFFITH

What is the purpose in common? A curious group of people, disproportionately represented in the top ranks of the media, the civil service, and education, is gradually being brought out into the light of day after several decades of working quietly and effectively in the shadows. At face value, it couldn't sound more innocuous. It's a set of rather pricey management training seminars called 'Common Purpose'. Their statement (as you can see if you visit their website at <http://commonpurpose.org>) is 'We develop leaders who can cross boundaries' – surely harmless enough? When you consider that David Cameron (who promised a referendum on Brexit to nix Nigel Farage's UKIP movement, with no intention at all that it should return a vote to leave his adored Euroblob – leaders who can cross boundaries, remember?) is a graduate of Common Purpose, you might pause for thought. Cressida Dick is also an alleged Common Purpose graduate. She's the police officer, in charge of the Met who was accused of a 'cover up' and failure to act on a report containing

highly adverse findings about Operation Midland in which £11 million was spent investigating whether former members of the Cabinet, including a Home Secretary, as well as a previous chief of the Imperial General Staff, were involved in the ritual slaughter of a child in a paedophile ring. All these allegations were completely without foundation.

Could Common Purpose be connected to her success – despite that rather serious error of leadership – in dodging the consequences of such a total failure of common sense? She is now widely lauded on the Hillary Clinton principle that it is good a woman is finally doing that job, so she must be, *a posteriori*, good at the job. People who attend these seminars prefer not to discuss what the courses involve in detail (the so-called 'Chatham House rule'), but that's not so suspicious in itself. The claim, as ever, is that they help each other get senior jobs and promote others of their clique. Of course this accusation is as old as the fear of freemasonry, and would be very hard to prove. Changes by Tony Blair to British charity laws mean

that Common Purpose leadership seminars and courses can charge high prices, and the customer is typically an organisation in the public sector that pays with taxpayers' money. The founder, since creating it in 1988, was in charge until 2019. She is Julia Middleton, and both edited the magazine *Marxism Today* in the 1980s and started her career at the Industrial Society, getting into the management-training business of selling training to large firms (and the public sector) with her 1980s book *Quality Circles*. A more recent book is *Leadership in a Changing World*: a fine example of the art of titling something to win the argument before it's even begun (rather in the way that left-wingers un-embarrassedly call themselves 'progressives').

Who could disagree that the world is changing? Or that it must therefore need a different kind of leadership? How could anyone argue against progress?

Some might not see this as an urgent question – especially in all the excitement about a deadly new virus – but we must ask who was it in the media, the civil service, the education sector who spent three years doggedly working to overturn the Brexit referendum result? Who is it who still co-ordinates the daily slurs and attacks on the straw-haired duo, Boris and Trump, in the almost five years since Trump outwitted his opponents in late 2016. The campaign against these two men, against Brexit, for 'climate change', in favour of bizarre Frankfurt School sponsored notions like 'gender' separate from biological sex, shows no sign of stopping. Campaigners like Gina Miller and George Soros show no sign of giving up. I don't happen to see Soros (who by the way under Hungarian spelling should be pronounced 'Shorosh') as the evil genius or puppeteer many seem to. He is wealthy, one of the great financial traders of our time, one of history's most generous philanthropists, and a social activist who is willing to put his wealth into action behind his ideas. That doesn't oblige us to approve his ideas or agree with his causes and campaign groups, of course. People like LSE graduate Julia Middleton used in the 1970s to be called 'euro-communists' – rather as if attaching the prefix 'euro' made a term more modern, cleaner, cleansed of earlier negative associations.

If we now glance at that term 'euro-communist' again (a term that touches figures as diverse and separated in time as Antonio Gramsci in the 1930s and Peter Mandelson in the 1980s) it looks less innocent, less 'technocratic'. 'Euro'-prefixed things should be viewed as immediately suspect, and 'communist' isn't going to become a cleaner term to anyone with real

historical knowledge. It's the protean, shape-shifting side of 20th century euro-communism that deserves closer scrutiny than Soros's advocacy.

The Frankfurt School skill at rebranding Marxism like a type of chocolate or an airline, its focus on dissimulation, its use of legerdemain and trickery and PR – these are the dangers we should see in this movement.

We don't need to imagine that Middleton is still somehow pursuing the precise viewpoint her editorship of *Marxism Today* back then represented. The supposed 1980s threat to moderate Labour, Militant Tendency, had a strong, old-fashioned Leninist streak. I knew Militant members at the time, who like members of the WRP or the SWP, spent many rainy afternoons handing out propaganda sheets at factory gates. They shared the Bolshevik obsession with radicalising the proletariat, the traditional fixation on factories as the powerhouses of the post 18th century age – the places where according to Hodgkin/Marx doctrine the fruits of labour were stolen from labourers. The influence of this section of the left in British politics has hugely diminished. Yet meanwhile, Middleton's clever repackaging of certain leftist assumptions as something so apparently up-to-date, so seemingly 'Thatcherite' and of the 80s as management training, has gone from success to success. It's this adroit opportunism, the use of business networks and soft-sold Cultural Marxism that should interest us in Common Purpose and Middleton's long-term project. Her Lennonism ('Imagine there's no countries / It isn't hard to do / Nothing to kill or die for / And no religion too.') rather than her Leninism.

The clever Common Purpose use of bland corporate vagueness, a movement designed to sound boring, soothingly dull, the low-key secrecy – these should concern us. A movement that has strongly penetrated the senior ranks of British police forces even. Never mind George Soros, a man who uses his own money, and is at least frank about his goals (a sort of leftist slant on Karl Popper's liberalism). Much more important to look carefully at the quiet, deliberately grey network of Common Purpose – whose alumni have taken over the establishment of Britain almost unnoticed.

Mark Griffith is a financial trader whose weblog <http://www.otherlanguages.org> follows news on artificial intelligence, economics, and other subjects. He is researching a book on how AI will change the way people live.

The Church of England and the Stockholm Syndrome

DAVID KERNEK

Troubled, but perhaps not surprised, on reading that a Church of England vicar had spoken up in support of the BBC's decision to broadcast Muslim prayers on some of its local radio stations I wrote to him enquiring his reasons for doing so.

This was our ensuing correspondence:

Dear Vicar,

I very much hope you will not mind me writing to you, but I was concerned to hear that you, as an ordained member of the Church of England, have expressed approval of the decision by the BBC to broadcast Muslim prayers on a number of its local radio stations.

I was perplexed by this, since it is clear to anyone who has read the Koran that unreformed Islam is not compatible with the Judeo-Christian values on which our ways of life in the now largely secular West remain based. In a rational discussion about religious ideas, it could be argued that it is indeed inimical to those values.

Would you be able or willing to explain the reasons for the support you have given to the BBC in this matter?

Regards,

David Kernek

Subject: Re: BBC/Muslim prayers ...

Dear Mr Kernek,

Thank you for your email. Respectfully, I disagree with your reading of Islam. The vast majority of British Muslims, including those I number amongst my family and friends, are committed to a multicultural Britain in which different faiths and beliefs are honoured and upheld. As with the Qu'ran, there are parts of the Bible that we might deem inimical to our shared values in a rational 21st century society; but there is also much wisdom and beauty in both Scriptures.

Of course, there is an extreme fringe in Islam, as there is in Christianity – and indeed in almost every religion and ideology. But, just as I would not advocate cancelling *Songs of Praise* because some people use the name of Christ to promote hatred or violence, so

I see no reason for the BBC not to support British Muslims in their faith because of the actions and beliefs of extremists.

Yours,

Dear Vicar,

Thanks for your reply of April 5, which I've read with great interest and about which I've thought very carefully. I hope you won't mind if I pick up and look at one or two of the points you make. I do so as someone who not for one second condones the murders we have seen committed in the recent past at mosques, notably in Europe and New Zealand. There have been relatively few, but they are utterly unacceptable, even as reciprocation for murders committed by Islamic terrorists.

As the son of a Jewish refugee (from Nazi-occupied Austria in 1938), I have no time whatsoever for terrorism of any variety, since it was the tool used by fascists to seize power in Germany. That said, I hope you would agree that no religion, philosophy or political concept should be shielded from scrutiny or, indeed, humour.

May I first look at this statement?

The vast majority of British Muslims, including those I number amongst my family and friends, are committed to a multicultural Britain in which different faiths and beliefs are honoured and upheld.

That might well be the case, but it raises the question of an Islamic minority that has no such commitment. This would include the approximately 20,000 people – as at June, 2019 – identified by UK's security services as 'closed subjects of concern' who have previously been investigated but who it's believed could pose a threat in the future.

It's not unreasonable to suspect that such numbers mirror those in Germany, Italy and France where, along with Britain and other European nations, the ideal of a harmonious multi-cultural society remains very far from being achieved. This has not been in Britain an

enduring problem – an obstacle to multi-culturalism – with immigration, over the centuries, from Europe, the Caribbean and India.

You point out that *'there is an extreme fringe in Islam, as there is in Christianity – and indeed in almost every religion and ideology'*. I haven't studied deeply comparative theologies and philosophies, so it might well be that there are here and there bands of extreme Methodists, Roman Catholics, Reform Jews, and Buddhists. As far as I'm aware, however, few if any of those have been responsible for anything like the number of Islamic terrorist attacks across the globe since the 1970s to the present day.

In his final book, *Groupthink: A Study in Self-Delusion* (published March 19, 2020) the late Christopher Booker develops and updates the work published in 1972 by Professor Irving Janis (Irving Janis (1918-1990) research psychologist, Yale University & Professor Emeritus, University of California, Berkeley), who defined Groupthink as a process resulting in a 'deterioration of mental efficiency, reality testing, and moral judgment'.

Booker, a distinguished cultural critic, writes:

One of the more obvious examples of Janis's rules in action can be seen chequering the history of most organized religions. These by definition are belief systems which, once established, have often tended to become ruthlessly intolerant of anyone who does not share them. Such outsiders are labelled as 'heretics', 'infidels' or 'unbelievers'. To protect the established orthodoxy, they must be marginalized, excluded from society, persecuted, punished or even in countless examples put to death.

Booker notes that none of the world's great religions, and sects within them, have been immune to this tendency.

He goes on, however, to say:

But no religion has remained more consistently prone to it through the centuries than Islam. And of course, there is no more extreme example in our world today than the rise of Islamic terrorist movements such as Isis or al-Qaeda, which are possessed by a form of groupthink so extreme that it turns those carried away by it into merciless killers, prepared to not only murder at random anyone they can see as 'infidels'

(chiefly other Muslims), but even to commit suicide themselves in furthering their cause.

The predisposition evident not only in the Church of England but also in other institutions to turn a blind eye to political Islam and the sects that advocate it is profoundly worrying for those concerned about the threats to our freedoms and ways of life.

Finally, may I turn to the *'parts of the Bible that we might deem inimical to our shared values in a rational 21st century society; but there is also much wisdom and beauty in both Scripture'*?

This is true, as far as it goes which, unfortunately, is not very far. Is there much of consequence in either the Old or New Testaments that can be said to have an equivalence with this?:

Q9:29 - 'Fight those who believe not in Allah nor the Last Day, nor hold that forbidden which hath been forbidden by Allah and His Messenger, nor acknowledge the religion of Truth, (even if they are) of the People of the Book, until they pay the Jizya with willing submission,

and feel themselves subdued.'

Or, on a slightly less chilling note:

Q5:51 'O ye who believe! Take not the Jews and the Christians for friends. They are friends one to another. He among you who taketh them for friends is (one) of them. Lo! Allah guideth not wrongdoing folk.'

It might well be that many Muslims – here and overseas — are folks who are loyal to the core creed yet not approving of violence or even intolerance towards non-Muslims. But the key difficulty is that the majority peaceful and law-abiding Muslims have been and remain unwilling to acknowledge and repudiate the theological authorisations for intolerance and violence in their religious texts. The result is that Islam, unlike Christianity and Judaism, remains unreformed. It could be argued that the inability or unwillingness of Western institutions to accept this fact indicates its failure to test reality.

It's likely that we'll have to agree to differ, but if you have read this, thank you.

Regards,
David Kernek

Answer came there none ...

David Kernek is a freelance editor and writer.



L'Angleterre sans Frontières

MYLES HARRIS

In 2012 members of the Rochdale grooming gang were sentenced to be stripped of their British citizenship and deported after they finished their jail terms for raping and pimping young white girls.

That was eight years ago. Three of them who have dual UK Pakistani nationality and lost their appeals against deportation are still here and living back in the same town as their victims – to the great distress of the latter. Numerous appeals have been made to a succession of Home Secretaries, including the weak and powerless Priti Patel, to deport them, but it would appear the Home Office is determined by stalling as long as possible to allow them to stay.

It is an article of faith in Whitehall that immigrants' rights supersede those of the native British and to that end various means of assisting criminals such as the Rochdale rapists have been devised. One is legal aid. One of this group appealed on the grounds that the British government in deporting him was not paying sufficient regard to the safety and welfare of his children. Another, also funded by your wages, appealed to the European Court in Strasbourg that he had not received a fair trial because it was in front of an all-white jury. Both appeals were rejected out of hand. While it was unlikely that the appeals, themselves repellent in their casual cynicism, would succeed, they had a secondary purpose – delay.

The deportees employed a firm of lawyers 'Burton and Burton' who were severely criticised by the senior judge of the Immigration and Asylum, Chamber Bernard McCloskey, for failing to submit the necessary papers to the court and repeatedly asking for adjournments.

The judge said, 'Scarce judicial and administrative resources have been wasted in dealing with repeated unmeritorious requests by the appellants' solicitors for an adjournment. The upper tribunal has been treated with sustained and marked disrespect. The conduct of these appeals has been cavalier and unprofessional. The rule of law has been weakened in consequence.'

Nor was it only the appellants' lawyers who took part in gaming the system. McCloskey also criticised the government lawyers representing the Home

Secretary, saying that they had only produced a skeleton argument at the 'eleventh hour' and only after repeated requests from tribunal staff. 'It was,' the judge said, 'produced in egregious breach of the tribunal's directions ... A feeble and unacceptable excuse for this particular default has been proffered,' said McCloskey.

This is not surprising given Whitehall's attitude to asylum and immigration matters. A deep contempt for the British public permeates the corridors of Whitehall, it is almost as if because the mandarins know immigration is a burning issue for many ordinary people, they are determined to rub mass migration in their faces. They have succeeded.

There was talk of referring Burton and Burton to the Solicitors' Disciplinary Tribunal but, three years on, a search of the Tribunal's web site makes no mention of any such referral except to record that a number of Burton and Burton's partners have resigned from the company.

To anybody familiar with the immigration and asylum system, there is nothing unremarkable about this unpleasant story except perhaps the exceptionally disgusting nature of the men's crimes. Games like this are played out daily in our asylum courts, which serve only one purpose, to pay the lawyers and judges involved.

You know asylum and immigration appeals are a joke as soon as you attend an asylum hearing. However outrageous or insultingly ludicrous the appellant's claim might be, even if he or she has a history of being previously deported, it is highly unusual for him (it is usually a him) to be held in custody. Instead, as in any civil case such as an unpaid parking fine, a tax appeal or a country court order for an unpaid debt, the appellant is told that the decision of the court will be communicated to him by post in two to three weeks. The court then adjourns and everybody goes home, the appellant if he has any sense, to an address other than he gives to the court. This gives him time to run away if the decision goes against him.

It is all perfectly logical. What possible benefit would an efficient asylum appeals system be to

the legal profession, with appellants being swiftly dispatched to their countries of origin as soon as the falsity of their stories are revealed at the port of entry? Far better to keep them here and make as much money off the tax payer from them as you can. It is why amnesties are not looked on with favour by the legal profession. What farmer would like to see his prize cattle released?

Asylum farming extends to our so-called Border Force. Readers may be under the impression that its job under the Dublin Convention is to return asylum seekers to the first European country they reached, in the case of Channel crossers (1200 last year – more this year) to France. Not so. A border force representative interviewed on Radio 4 said her task was to ‘make sure asylum seekers were safely landed in Dover’.

In effect there is no border to the UK when it comes to asylum or illegal migrants. They arrive, a series of meaningless but expensive administrative and legal tests are applied, they are then provided with housing, state aid and their families allowed to join them. A few, very few, are deported, but not always those who most deserve to be. An honest asylum seeker is at much greater risk of being deported than a dishonest one. It is impossible to test the truth of a fairy story

but it is possible to check that of an honest account. Lies pay in the migration game.

There are two types of border in the UK, the external border, our frontier, and the borders to our private and commercial properties. The latter are secured by agreements and contracts, so you don’t find asylum seekers squatting on your lawn or come downstairs to breakfast to find a Nigerian ‘businessman’ helping himself to your bacon and eggs. But the external border has now been lifted, the second will follow.

It is on the point that the whole process hinges. Either we consider ourselves obligated to accept any individual from anywhere in the world to live here, however meritorious or unsavoury, or we apply the same principles as we do for land ownership within the UK. You cannot just walk into somebody’s house and start living there, but it seems in the case of the Rochdale grooming gangs, you are able to walk into Britain and take up residence, rape the inhabitants of the country you have chosen to live in, yet have a very good chance of avoiding deportation. If not why are they still here?

Myles Harris, Editor

An Experiment to Test the Theory of Global Warming

BRIAN RIDLEY

Two people meet, they shake hands, or they might hug, or even kiss, possibly wearing their PPE degrees as Oxford-educated MPs, and not a hint of Social Distancing. Politics and Economics, though diffuse enough, are possibly useful. But Philosophy? Very needful, I suppose, for some sort of comfort when things go wrong. The Classics MPs don’t need that; they know that the best on offer is comedy or tragedy, and how to take either with Stoicism.

But, beyond comedy or tragedy, there is The Plague, an entirely different drama. It has called up whatever Stoicism is in our Prime Minister to overcome it. In the rest of us it has called up a sense of disbelief and wonder. It was fine, reading about the Black Death in 1349 that killed perhaps a third of the population of

England. That population might have been clued up on gravity and mechanics, but woefully short on medicine. No NHS, for heaven’s sake! Given a population in those days of some three million, it meant that The Plague accounted for a million deaths! No doubt, the extreme paucity of people throughout the land did not call for any form of Social Distancing. Alarmingly, historians have plotted the Black Death’s presence for two or three centuries. Over this period it became endemic. It is what happens in the absence of a vaccine. Being modern and confident that this sort of thing shouldn’t happen to us, we might bravely put up with a year or two, rather than a century or two.

But the Black Death was not all bad. Fewer people meant a shortage of labour, so wages went up. The

Lords and Ladies in their mansions and palaces were isolated compared with the rabble, but, to maintain their household of maids, cooks and butlers and the labourers on their estates they had to fork out, much to their disgust. They were not alone, the Church too had to cope with a rise in the expectations of the masons and builders of its cathedrals and churches and their maintenance; also the monasteries needed labour for their extensive lands. There is no doubt that the Establishment was sorely hit. So much for the Black Death as the first Unite (Trades Unions please acknowledge).

Perhaps the current pandemic is not all cloud, but has a silver lining. The lockdown may be seen as something of an improvised experiment to test the cause of global warming. The reduction in transport by air, by train, by cars, though not lorries, must surely have contributed to a reduction of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. School physics tells us that therefore there must be a reduction in global warming. If this is observed, the culprit of global warming is, as assumed, mankind. But what if not? Given the complexity of the planetary climate, the result of our unplanned experiment is unlikely to be so beautifully cut and dried. But worth considering.

We have somehow survived the annual winter 'flu epidemic, as well as, previously, Asian 'flu, swine fever and whatever was killing off the elms. In the West, we sailed blissfully unaware through Sars, Mers and Ebola, but, it seems, Sars has caught up with us. They say it's something to do with eating wild animals. Surely, not the Brits, who, admittedly, eat grouse, pheasant,

partridge, quail, not to mention ground-based rabbits and hares? Even if you don't believe in IQ tests, there is no doubt that the Chinese are brighter than we are. Look at 5G, electronics, three hundred miles an hour trains. Can it be that this may have something to do with their having so-called wet markets, where one might pick up a juicy civet? Preferably not one that has dined off a cave bat, the suspected incubator of coronavirus. As long as we stick to non-carnivores (and, of course, stay at home) we should be all right. So, eschew ferret pie and weasel stew. Being British, I hope you never set hungry eyes on your dog or cat, though they are probably fine to eat.

No doubt we will survive. And tell our grandchildren one day how we fought the war with the virus on the beaches, the landing grounds, in the fields and streets, in the hills. We never surrendered. One thing is certain: social and economic life will change, and it will be up to us to make it better. For a start, being out of the undemocratic European Union is a plus – monarchy better than republic, first-pass-the-post elections and, consequently, an operating executive better than dither, compromise and coalition pragmatic, working common law better than ideological stuff. Keep all that, and we can't go far wrong. Get rid of the mental virus of political correctness, become able to be offended without dialling 999. We will survive and blossom like a cherry tree.

B K Ridley is a Fellow of the Royal Society.

A Quantity of Lowness

NIALL McCRAE

By the time you are reading this, the coronavirus outbreak should be ending, as will much of the draconian response of the authorities. Summer is here, two-metre social distancing is sliding away from our consciousness, and the country is back up and running. Jobs lost will hopefully be found, sooner or later.

Yet while offices and factories are getting a head of steam, in any workplace there is someone who seems to be in perpetual gloom. You may not see this, because he or she has gone off sick, just when all hands are needed on deck.

Post-viral depression is not contagious, but a solitary suffering. Twenty years ago I had an episode following a bout of flu. At the time I had no reason to feel low,

with a new job and a good social life, but my mood sank and didn't resurface for some weeks. Thankfully mine was a relatively moderate case. Covid-19, which probably infected millions of Britons (knowingly or not), is likely to have a more potent sting in the tail.

This is not a new phenomenon. The neuropsychiatric manifestations of influenza were first observed by Karl A Menniger in Boston, USA. He found that several patients struck in the Spanish flu epidemic became schizophrenic. However, in American psychiatric practice of the early- to mid-twentieth century, the label of schizophrenia was used very broadly. At the time there was no diagnostic category of depression. Many of Menniger's patients exhibited symptoms that would now be considered depressive. The *Medicine*

for *Nurses* textbook from 1945, written by W Gordon Sears, medical superintendent of Mile End Hospital, states:

There is a marked tendency for long-standing nervous depression to follow the condition which, in some instances, is sufficiently intense to render the patient suicidal.

The mechanism for a depressive sequel to upper respiratory infections is not known. It may be due to lingering effects of the viral toxins, an exhausted immune system, or inflammation of the brain. Perhaps some people are genetically predisposed to depression, and an environmental trigger fulfils the potential.

Post-viral depression is unlikely to strike more than a small minority of Covid-19 survivors (and well over 99 per cent have survived). Sufferers may not know what is wrong, and may blame themselves. Others will blame them, regarding them as malingerers, just as unsympathetic onlookers regard people with chronic

fatigue syndrome. It won't help that each of the post-virally depressed is an isolated case to those around them; this is not a shared or excusable condition.

Perhaps there is something in Will Self's fictitious satire on North London drug-addled eccentricity and psychobabble, *The Quantity Theory of Insanity*. In any community there is a mathematical quotient of mental disorder, which acts like particles at sub-atomic level, so that 'if an aberrant event occurs it doesn't then occur in another place or time because of the attention it subsequently attracts'.

Covid-19 provides an opportunity to study this affliction at population level: its incidence, course and demographic factors. But at present the public is blissfully ignorant of this mental hazard. It will hit some unfortunate victims very hard.

Niall McCrae is Senior Lecturer in Psychiatric Nursing at King's College London

Always Look on the Right Side

RICHARD STOREY

Is there a clear definition of a right-winger? For as long as I can remember, I have considered myself 'a man of the right' and, what is more, I have believed that I can determine whether others are or not. But recent conversations and questions have cornered me into a realisation: many I *do* consider my fellow rightists have different definitions to mine. Can we crystallise some quintessence of meaning for the right without just pragmatically jettisoning important theoretical considerations?

What frustrates me with conservatism in the Anglosphere is the confusion many of our American cousins have regarding traditional conservatism – theirs is too often based in very modern, classical liberal concerns, rendering anything like traditional European conservatism as something reactionary which, surely, passed away with Southern agrarianism. Likewise, neoconservatives are not the only ones to have presumptuously inserted *laissez-faire* economics into the creed of the right; American friends may seem aghast at this, but I have every confidence in the curious spirit of the US to rectify this with a bit of research.

Recent attempts to define the right have been found

wanting. Somebody has said that the right is whatever the left is not. However, this puts the responsibility to positively define the theory and behaviour of the right ultimately with the left; it reeks too much of the adage that conservatives simply conserve what liberals formerly fought for – conservatism conserves nothing, in short, nothing but what is permitted. A writer from the blogosphere, David Donovan alias The Distributist, whose YouTube musings I highly recommend, has made a Herculean effort to be objective about things, setting aside his own beliefs in order to define the right in such a way as to capture the libertarian, the fascist, the conservative etc. To summarise his work, we can describe fundamental right-wing beliefs as follows:

In terms of axioms, there is a meaning, a teleology to human existence which transcends the self; there are thus virtues or disciplined actions to pursue that meaning, to live a good life and meet a good death. As such, there is objective goodness and it is an end in itself – power or might are not necessarily right, but are only means to earthly ends. Echoing the don of radical orthodoxy, John Milbank,

communities exist to sustainably manifest those virtues and that shared meaning to life, enculturating a particular people in a particular place to that end and preserving those virtuous responsibilities qua customs across time, principally through families.

Practically speaking, even if the above is assented to, constraining forces are required to halt the entropic, degenerating nature of man; furthermore, the institutions designed to maintain such discipline become less observant *themselves*, according to Robert Conquest's *Three Laws of Politics*. Where we share a *logos* and an *ethos*, we will have to manage our shared *pathos*. Donovan aptly paraphrases G K Chesterton's *Orthodoxy*, which is worth quoting fully:

We have remarked that one reason offered for being a progressive is that things naturally tend to grow better. But the only real reason for being a progressive is that things naturally tend to grow worse. The corruption in things is not only the best argument for being progressive; it is also the only argument against being conservative. The conservative theory would really be quite sweeping and unanswerable if it were not for this one fact. But all conservatism is based upon the idea that if you leave things alone you leave them as they are. But you do not. If you leave a thing alone you leave it to a torrent of change. If you leave a white post alone it will soon be a black post. If you particularly want it to be white you must be always painting it again; that is, you must be always having a revolution. Briefly, if you want the old white post you must have a new white post. But this which is true even of inanimate things is in a quite special and terrible sense true of all human things.

And so, as hierarchies are inevitable – Robert Michels' iron law of oligarchy – the problem of politics and metapolitics remains the tendency of humans and institutions to corrupt. The responsibility for societal survival, vis-à-vis maintaining the virtues necessary for moral uplift, must therefore be undertaken at every

level of institutional hierarchies, to check and balance every other from degeneration – that is, from the promotion and pursuit of mere comfort and pleasure for their own sake, particularly when at the expense of said responsibility. To realistically expect such solidarity and shared purpose requires the alignment of the interests of rulers and subjects – all must have skin in the game to maintain accountability; thus, the tendency towards monarchy, with rulers' children benefiting from the common good of the body politic, and political systems which imperfectly mimic this arrangement; similarly unsurprising are tendencies towards nationalism and some degree of subsidiarity – that is, some decentralisation of political decision-making.

Finally, to prevent the corrupting influence of clandestine 'dark power', from within or without, such as bribery or the seductions of wealthy international forces, very orderly, clearly delineated and formalised rules, offices, functions etc. are necessary wherever the potential for the accumulation of power

is concerned. Essentially, the trend is towards maximising responsibility and minimising impunity.

Now, you may be thinking that this is all very Platonic, expressing beliefs or at least behaviour which indicates an implicit belief in objective truths; of course, this is in stark contrast to the individualistic spirit of modernity and the inevitable scepticism which has captured postmodernity. But notice something: the categories we can use to make sense of the left vs. right dichotomy, viz Platonism vs. scepticism, are fundamentally Western, European ones. We could of course say that there are people in any given human society who will tend towards some of the above concepts, and certainly there have been in the other great civilisations, such as the Islamic and Chinese. But that is hardly defining the right and is, in fact, imposing those characteristics of Christendom on to other civilizations.

Yes, Christendom. A general virtuous trend towards the shared *logos* as 'on the right', as they direct us towards Christ, who is the *logos* incarnate and seated at the *right* hand of God. The sinister/left was what deviated from this towards modern liberal secularising and, thus, away from a Christian cultural



framework, a collective effort to halt the degeneration of man – his relinquishing of the responsibility to do what is *right*.

Even our understanding of leftism cannot escape its origins: from William of Ockham’s nominalism, in the Middle Ages, developed the spiritual individualism of Lutheranism, and rather inevitably on to moral consequentialism (in stark contrast to virtue as an end in itself) and, thus, the modern liberal ethics of moral relativism. This is how we arrived at the hyper-individualistic view, prevalent today, that most and maybe all *collectively* imposed moral obligations are immoral, with genderless individuals defining their idiosyncratic meaning of life.

Much as Donovan is to be commended for trying to develop a theoretical framework for the empirical definition and future study of the right (something which would not even occur to most right-wingers), our concepts of political left and right are sceptic and Platonic respectively, and all of this conceptual baggage was born and developed in the particular context of Latin Christendom. I must conclude by agreeing with the underappreciated Fr Aidan Nichols, that the Anglosphere owes all its truly conserving and ordering institutions and traditions, ultimately,

to the Albion of Catholic England. From the attire of our judges to the rituals of our politics and military, the secularised Anglosphere lives on the skeleton of Christendom, and when we talk of ‘the right’, we are talking of approximations to that former order. We can no more escape that context than a fish can jump on land and start a new life.

So, is a pragmatic alliance of those religious and ideological communities possible under the above criteria, as Donovan suggests? Well, it certainly was possible in history, under the emperors and kings of Christendom, and pockets of this harmony are extant, but the question will always remain: Which *ethos* and *logos* will rule as King of kings? Christ, at the right hand of God, may be exactly what Muslims, Nietzschean and pagan alt-righters, neocons etc. need in the West, but will they accept him or shout ‘Barabbas’? With the acceptance of hierarchy on the right comes the problem of whether we can trust one another’s *ethos* to guide our rulers; but perhaps Donovan has provided points of agreement for future dialogue and communion.

Richard Storey, author of The Uniqueness of Western Law, and a fellow of MisesUK.

British Airways - a Pension Scheme with Some Aeroplanes

CATHERINE BLAIKLOCK

Sixty per cent of British people aged fifty-five have no idea what their pension is worth. A banker specialising in pensions told me that the average person spent less time thinking about it annually than they spent booking their summer holiday.

It gets worse. Those that do think about their pensions in their thirties think that they can save £100 a month and retire on the equivalent of £20,000 a year at today’s prices. Dreams of being a stylish, affluent, silver haired cruise passenger, touring the world’s exotic places, sipping Martinis in the sunset are likely to be just that, dreams. They are much more likely to end up like some indigent Greek pensioner,

shuffling around in a big woolly jumper and a pair of slippers in front of a single bar electric fire.

If it is bad at an individual level, it is devastating in the boardroom and catastrophic at the national level. Even educated middle-class people do not understand that pensions are ultimately a form of socialism and a form of socialism whose rules were set up under totally different conditions and are not only relatively new but very specific to affluent countries. In most poor countries, grandma still stays at home and helps mum with the children and peeling the potatoes in return for shelter and care.

Bismarck, never thinking people might live longer and longer, began the unsustainable rot in 1881,

when, under pressure from socialist opponents, he decided to start a pension scheme to help Germans over seventy years old, where retirement age was aligned with life expectancy. A normal person was expected to work until he died, retirement money being only available to those lucky few who managed to live significantly longer than average.

Britain followed. According to the *Daily Telegraph* 'The first old age pension was introduced by the UK Government in 1908, paying five shillings a week' (£14 today) at a time when the average life expectancy was 47. The pension was only available to men aged over 70.

The tradition lives on. A British Chief Executive recently confronted by union officials and employees threatening to strike because of pension cuts shouting, 'You have broken your agreements,' shouted back, 'No, you broke yours. You were supposed to die at sixty-five.'

However, it is not just an increase in life expectancy that has caused a pension crisis. Read the 2015 report of the Taxpayers Alliance 'The Real National Debt,' that is total government liabilities, dwarf what you are officially told about the national debt, liabilities so large that they amount to £320,000 per family of four, £8.6 trillion in 2014-15, equivalent to around five times our GDP.

More than half these liabilities are unfunded pensions, with some public sector workers such as the police having no fund, the money simply coming straight from the government purse. There are many others. The 'Universities Superannuation Scheme' like many pension funds, both public and private, has a massive deficit of £6 billion. In February 2018, university staff voted to strike, leaving students who had paid tuition fees with no education.

There was little difference between that clash and the one at British Airways, where staff threatened to strike in September 2017 over exactly the same thing; the closure of the company's final salary pension scheme. British Airways has since 2003 already given £3.2 billion to its employee pension scheme. Despite this scheme only covering 47 per cent of its employees, it still has a deficit of nearly £3 billion. (The total market value of British Airways shares is £3.2 billion.)

Pension fund liabilities are so bad that many famous companies are effectively bankrupt, the most recent being British Home Stores, which was sold for £1 to get rid of a £500m pension black hole.

Ironically, 'solving' the 2008 financial crisis by lowering interest rates to their lowest level in 50

years, has sown the seeds of the next crisis, which will require yet another financial 'solution'.

Martin Armstrong of Armstrong Economics, warns, 'Policies of low-interest rates will be the next crisis that destroys the pension system unleashing civil unrest on a scale not witnessed since the various revolutions of USA, France, and England.'

Mark Carney, former Governor of the Bank of England, recently raised interest rates. Not because the economy was so great or because he wanted to cool a rapidly cooling housing market, it made house price affordability even worse. He did it, because like the Americans, he had to 'normalise' interest rates, to try to sort out the pensions crisis.

Pension funds, especially government ones, keep a lot of their money in bonds. Bonds are considered 'safe' and equities 'risky.' Indeed, an old adage declares that you should have the same percentage of bonds in a portfolio as your age. The problem is that with low interest rates, ten-year government bonds yield 1.5 per cent while the average pension fund needs a return of at least 6 per cent to cover its costs and liabilities.

There, aside from our increasing life expectancy, is the crux of the crisis. Government bonds, 'have turned from a risk-free return, into a return free risk.'

Quantitative easing (money printing) has provided the money to buy all the increasing government debt in order to keep bond yields almost zero, something which resulted on one occasion in German ten-year bonds going negative for a period where buyers were paying the government to lend it their money – yet still pension funds bought these worthless pieces of paper. Some European pension funds are mandated by their governments to keep 70 to 100 per cent of their money in government bonds. Britain is not a lot better.

Add to this the fact that no one aged twenty five has any interest in pensions at all, that companies are liable for their schemes but have no control over the management of them and the board of trustees who run pension schemes can be made up of employees who have previously peeled potatoes in the staff canteen, and you have a recipe for disaster.

Sadly, there are no easy solutions apart from Grandpa going back to live with the children and help dig potatoes for Grandma to peel for dinner, as they do in Sherpa villages in the Himalayas.

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White Men Must not only Fail, they must be Seen to Fail

NIALL McCRAE

After the ‘Rhodes must fall’ campaign by students at Oxford University, a lecturer in those hallowed halls is worried that white male scientists will discover a vaccine for Covid-19. The university is taking the lead in tackling the pandemic, with Professor Martin Landray evaluating treatments for the virus, and renowned immunologist Sir John Bell developing an antibody test. But for Dr Emily Cousens, who teaches women’s studies at Oxford (she also researches ‘vulnerability and gender’ at Oxford Brookes University), the slogan would be ‘Oxford must fail’.

The prospect of her colleagues’ success so exercised Dr Cousens that she wrote an article for the *Huffington Post*, titled ‘I teach at Oxford, but I don’t want it to win the coronavirus vaccine race’. Cousens feared a ‘narrative’ of Great Britain defeating a foreign invader. ‘If my university is the first to develop the vaccine’, she wrote, ‘I’m worried that it will be used as it has been in the past, to fulfil its political, patriotic function as proof of British excellence.’ This would give nostalgic patriots a shot in the arm, and – heaven forbid – the vaccine would be given to British people first.

Yet Cousens was quite happy to heap praise on China, whose government is a model of international co-operation, excelling in transparency and disease control. Having a blind spot to the lies of a brutal totalitarian regime, Cousens was more interested in undermining the earnest endeavour of scientists at her own institution. Quite blatantly, she’d prefer people to suffer rather than face the shame of pale, male and stale experts having a ‘Eureka’ moment in the lab. Grievance studies on steroids.

Titania McGrath, the satirical social justice monitor on Twitter (a creation of comedian Andrew Doyle), must run to keep up. Cousens was asserting what many woke millennials believe, in their obsessions about the ‘patriarchy’ and decolonising the institutions. Peruse the *Guardian* website and you’ll find a flurry of articles on how Covid-19 is an unjust virus, because it kills black people

disproportionately. The government promises to investigate this disparity (while continuing to block release of the grooming gangs report due to ethnic sensitivities). The difference is probably explained by high-density living in urban hotspots, obesity and comorbidity, rather than discrimination. Less is said about over six-tenths of those dying of Covid-19 being male. If the gender mortality were reversed, you can bet that this would be another injustice requiring urgent investigation.

The context for the *Huffington Post* giving a platform to misanthropes such as Cousens is the danger that despite the economic carnage, despite the outcry about sparse masks and testing, despite the daily death toll, Boris and Brexit Britain may come out of this stronger. The opinion polls certainly suggest support for a government doing its best in trying circumstances.

But there is a broader point to be made about Cousens’ invective. Apart from a fleeting Twitter storm, mainstream media coverage was limited to *Guido Fawkes* and the *Daily Express*. This was just as well for Cousens, because universities are more concerned about reputational damage than freedom of speech. However, sanctions are not fairly applied, not only because of a persistent institutionalised bias, but because the most odious comment from a leftist radical is likely to get less attention from the BBC or broadsheets.

By contrast, a careless tweet by a student or lecturer of conservative viewpoint generates much more complaints and media attention, because such outrage has an impact. The virtue-signalling university acts, and the mob gets a scalp. I doubt whether Cousens will get any more than a quiet word from her department head.

The Free Speech Union is involved in numerous cases of academic staff or students who have been pursued, and sometimes harshly punished, merely for expressing an opinion that is contrary to the prevailing progressive dogma. Like the FSU, I wouldn’t suggest that Cousens be carted off to the

Tower of London. However, her offence was not a careless tweet but a cogitated attack on her university for the cause of her dehumanising ideology.

If she has done any good, Cousens has provided a clear argument in cases against scholars or students of socially conservative or libertarian bent. Tweeting some rational criticism of transgenderism or George

Soros, for example, cannot possibly be as bad as wishing that a deadly virus wins the battle against your academic colleagues and compatriots.

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Policing Madness

PATRICIA MORGAN

In my way each time I get off the bus in the town centre, or come out of a store and go to the bus-stop to go home is a tall, ragged and emaciated young beggar. This has happened multiple times before, to me and to many people I know. He pursues people, especially women, and stands in the way at shop doors and bus-stops. He looks as if he is dying before your eyes. At a residents' meeting, the police admitted knowing him. He is mentally ill, council-housed and needs around £100 perhaps every day or two to fund his drug habit. I reported my triple encounter and the police created a 'nuisance report'. Then again, in the time of Covid-19, I and other women are repeatedly accosted at bus-stops and when we have to queue to shop.

Obviously, an aspirational role model for other beggars: on the evening of the three encounters with him, my path was also blocked by another shuddering waif expectantly holding out his hand. Others operating under his aegis are the aggressive panhandlers and drunken rough sleepers around the railway exits where he also intercepts travellers.

A police presence on our streets is rare. What once was the borough's impressive Victorian police station with its iconic blue lamp is an Italian restaurant. The police now apparently have 'hubs' whatever and wherever these Hobbit holes may be. Is this from where those cars emerge that occasionally charge shrieking down the high street?

Do you want to be out in an uncomfortable and rather intimidating environment of low-level public disorder? According to the 'broken windows' theory, visible anti-social behaviour encourages further and more serious crime and disorder. Repeated exposure undermines people's feelings of security even more than the occasional high-level criminal event. It also deters them from confronting the casual rule-breaker, like the young vandal or litter dropper. A virtuous

circle of informal control exercised through everyday interaction in tow with legal sanctions, is what maintains the peace. When rowdy drunks, beggars and addicts become more obvious and incivility rises, it signals to citizens that they should not be there and so they stay away from public places.

Therefore, policing should target matters like vandalism, public drinking, drug-taking and begging to help maintain an orderly environment. When people feel safe and confident in public spaces, they are more likely to value and care for these. Police should engage with communities to prioritise issues of concern; have a positive public presence and skilfully operate a 'zero tolerance' policy. Otherwise, criminals are emboldened as citizens are demoralised. The significant decline in crime in New York City in the 1990s is credited to police commissioner William Bratton's and Mayor Giuliani's endorsement of these measures.

Evidence is irrelevant here, with obliviousness in Britain as to how crime has been reduced elsewhere and in our past. Indeed, Bratton studied the tactics of the Victorian police as they cleaned up one area after another. In 2018/19, almost half of people (47 per cent) in England and Wales said they did not see a foot patrol. Only 8.2 per cent of reported crimes resulted in a suspect being charged or appearing in court, 3.8 per cent for sexual offences and 6 per cent for theft. Some forces fail to investigate up to half of alleged offences. One in 50 of nearly 2,000 fraud offences committed daily are prosecuted.

This was happening as Merseyside Police investigated a trans-sceptical group for distributing stickers saying 'Women don't have penises' – citing a biological reality. The mayor of Liverpool, Joe Anderson, promised to work with the police to remove stickers and 'identify those responsible' for this affront to Liverpool's 'diversity' and 'equality'. Fox Fisher, a non-binary trans activist and filmmaker,

said: 'It's more important than ever that our allies take action against such disgusting and reductive statements.' Police now deal with thousands of purported 'hate' incidents, to which are now added escalating arrest levels for web trolls who might cause 'annoyance, inconvenience or needless anxiety'. As it becomes seemingly pointless to report assault or burglary, police chiefs urge the public to report more incidents of perceived 'hate': no evidence of hostility required.

Multitudinous media reports show police out everywhere enforcing the Covid-19 lockdown. This may be necessary in the circumstances but, like dealing with 'hate', it is easier supervising walks in the park than coping with muggers, burglars and abusive beggars. Would meeting the persistent demands for more funding mean better protection for persons, property and civic peace? Unlikely.

Endless resources are now diverted into pursuing 'diversity' as, like other civil institutions, police have adopted the liberal-left agenda. The pursuit of popularity or 'showing you care' means not only dancing on Gay Pride parades and painting cars and shields in rainbow and transgender colours. It is also riding with mob or media frenzies and fantasies, like those over phone hacking or celebrity sex offenders. One led to nearly £2 million being spent in a year on a fictitious 'Westminster paedophile ring'.

What may not be so obvious is how the police have effectively been landed with mental health problems. The dilemmas posed by mentally ill and drug addled accosters on the streets are the tip of an iceberg. Even if sectioned, where are they supposed to be put when appropriate residential facilities are so few?

The grand asylums going back to Victorian times were closed in the 1960s-1980s. These had become seen as places of incarceration and cruelty, rather than refuges to safeguard and help sufferers, where even psychotic murderer Richard Dadd was enabled to paint his famous fairy pictures. As part of counter-cultural trends, an anti-psychiatry movement played on how mental hospitals detained the sane and used electric shocks and lobotomies. Actually, for want of anything else, such 'treatments' were also used for problems like dramatically high blood pressure, and abandoned long before the 'torture chamber' trope gained credence.

The horror story would be worked up by post-modernists and the 'new criminologists' into how insanity and criminality are capitalist inventions for suppressing the people. This has helped to abolish many public order offences. The term 'moral panic'

emerged: used to smear concerns about crime and violence as right wing hysterical fantasies. How otherwise would even being mugged be seen as 'wrong'? In the socialist Utopia nobody would notice it or have anything to lose anyway.

Anti-psychiatry psychiatrist R D Laing regarded insanity as a response to an insane world. Rejecting medicine, he founded an anti-asylum at Kingsley Hall, with meditation, re-birthing, playing, and visits from mystics and celebrities. Regression to babyhood was encouraged, along with high-grade LSD to release buried 'traumas'. Mary Barnes, a schizophrenic who achieved fame in David Edgar's 1979 play *Mary Barnes*, regressed to infancy by smearing faeces over the walls, squealing for attention and being bottle fed. Kingsley Hall closed after at least two people jumped off the roof.

Susannah Cahalan in *The Undercover Mission That Changed Our Understanding of Madness* describes how psychologist David Rosenhan supposedly got himself and seven others admitted as schizophrenics to asylums with fake symptoms. They then behaved normally, but still got detained and treated with anti-psychotic drugs. To their *On Being Sane in Insane Places* was added the award-winning film *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* in 1975. All created the nightmare which passed for the reality of mental hospitals. Reforms might have been in order but, as the land could be sold for development, the hospitals were demolished. Policy-making became increasingly driven by faked or poorly conducted 'research', along with the emotive cases and dramatic screen images that fuel media hypes.

Taking the place of asylums has been 'care in the community', where my sick high street harasser reputedly resides. Living in the 'community' is often a lonely, unprotected existence. It has meant high rates of exploitation and abuse by those out to rob the deranged or deficient of benefits, occupy their accommodation and trade them drugs.

Otherwise, apart from occupying the streets they degrade, those with chronic, severe mental illnesses might still be in closed facilities – or increasingly prisons, the places less appropriate and more expensive than long-term psychiatric institutions. Freed from oppression? R D Laing *et al* flew over the cuckoo's nest to release one of vipers. Prisons, mental hospitals and police: all need to return to their original, limited and – once successful – purpose.

Patricia Morgan's latest book is The Marriage Lines (Wilberforce)

Life and Death in Time of Plague

LEONARDO PALMA

Here in Italy, one of our oldest civilisations, Red Cross workers go door to door like the plague doctors during the Black Death. They carry away the infected from the bleak heart of the deadliest outbreak since the Spanish Flu. In Bergamo, soldiers were sent to take out coffins and bodies from a ghost-town. Only sirens interrupt the silence, as the air-raids during World War II. ‘We take dead from morning ’till midnight’. Most of them are not even honoured. Mortuaries simply collect victims, and the priests who choose to stay with the infected and the dead to offer the comfort of the Sacraments are dying too. They choose the possibility of death in face of denying people the dignity of burial. Locked-down, people can only watch and mourn, looking at those white-figures carrying away a generation that was the living memory of the country. Nobody is crying because there are no tears left, only fear, 27,000 dead. A terrible body count, rising like a ticking clock. I took Thucydides from the shelf and I opened it to the chapter of Athens’ plague. ‘The inhabitants’ fear of the plague destroyed Athens, not the plague itself’. Because of fear, we may resort to the distortion of the principle of justice and ‘our thought hesitates with disgust in face of two blasphemies: deny God, or accuse him’.

Life in quarantine is frozen in the endless repetition of an obsessive present which has become anomic and alienating. So much to be lethargic. The outbreak reminds us that we live in an age of anxiety, among the ruins of times that faded away long time ago and of which we are just a distorted echo. What can generate an orphaned time if not the anarchic anxiety of my generation? Since the age of memory, I cannot recall anything but war, terror, crisis, recession. Events that touched my skin without burning it, but nonetheless leaving their scars in the folds of memory.

In face of all this suffering, isn’t God’s consolation too little and too far from us? Oftentimes, we find ourselves longing for a world where consolation is useless, unnecessary, so to spare our pain. ‘We want a world where there is no need of love’, wrote Brecht. However, as Pope Benedict XVI suggested in 1978, a world with no consolation would be bleak, a world with no love would be inhuman. Clearly, we can’t reverse death or suffering, nor change the world that generated it. But we can share the solitude generated by a broken love, birth in the loss of love. We can’t change what happens, but we can heal. If we could defeat suffering so as to make pain disappear,

then we would lose our humanity and, sometimes, we wish for it. Being humans is a burden. But without our humanity we would stop being humans, and the world would become inhuman. During Holy Week, Pope Francis imparted the blessing *Urbi et Orbi* in an unreal and empty St Peter’s Square. His words were like an echo broken by the



crying rain, as if the skies pity our sufferings. In that moment, Francis was like all of us, a white apostrophe inside a storm, like a leaf in a hurricane. In the bowed head of the Pope, you caught a glimpse of the silent strength of the Church and its difficulties. Yet, the old crucifix brought in to the square, the one which protected Rome during the Great Plague in 1522, seemed to whisper: *stat crux, dum volvitur orbis*. And then you saw it, the tearful Christ overlooking the Pope who was kissing his feet: a hymn to the astonishing senselessness of God’s pity.

Indeed, there is a sense of beauty in the tragedy of life, a deeper meaning which is not to be declared but discovered. Death is the mother of Beauty, wrote Wallace. Where does this apparently misplaced sense

of gratitude in the face of suffering comes from? We discover transcendence in loneliness, because we are haunted by the desire to go beyond the proposition 'I am'. *Ego sum* doesn't identify a material object in the sensitive world, nor outside of it. But it is to look into somebody's eyes and see that the other eye is looking out at you; that is an experience of transcendence in itself, the raw material of which faith and love are made. That part of that unintelligible metaphysical obscurity that we all face with this experience every day. Raskolnikov is freed from the torments of his inner prison thanks to the meeting with Sonja. 'I saw the mechanism of love', writes Borges, 'and the changing of death'. This made me think of the consolation of someone like Rilke, who fought the Enlightenment because too much light obscures the stars at night. Thinking of someone crying alone in her room, he comes forward, saying: 'Let everything happen to you. Beauty and Terror. Just keep going. No feeling is final'. This transience of life conflicts with the suspended time in which we are living. But time is a mystery as afterlife itself. Time is a stubborn illusion, but this doesn't make it less real. For atoms, suffering doesn't exist, it doesn't mean

that it hurts less.

Those who have died and will die from the plague have been deprived of life, but not of reality. The years that were given to them are *sub specie aeternitatis*, not *temporis*. Nobody will revisit them in the future because they are theirs. They won't revisit them in time but that time is theirs, forever. What is between past and future is not fleeting but eternally there. To Blake, eternity is in love with the production of time, and that's why the Homeric Gods love and hate the humans at the same time. Because we only live life, not death. We are beauties of one day, but we possess eternity in our present.

but now – for in any case fates of death beset us, fates past counting, which no mortal may escape or avoid – now let us go forward, whether we shall give glory to another, or another to us

Iliad, 12.326-8

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When We Walk Free Again

JANE KELLY

By the time you read this the effects of Covid-19 will be over and almost forgotten, and we may be disporting ourselves in the summer rain, but perhaps not. No one knows how this thing will end, but we conjecture, all the time. A bit like death; if only we knew exactly when, we would know what to do with ourselves now. I can only look forward to a time when depilating my legs will no longer be the highlight of the day, when I can go outside to paint plein air again and sit on a bus. When that time comes, according to the BBC and the Archbishop of Canterbury, we will be in 'a new normal'.

The hatred by the young towards the old displayed during this crisis, evinced by such Twitter sites as 'Boomer Remover' and the surprisingly frequent suggestion that the lives of old people should be sacrificed for the good of the economy, will be

forgotten. Instead 'Millennials' and Boomers will join youthful and arthritic hands in their love of WhatsApp, Zoom, Hangout and Instagram.

Children will also have changed too. Missing out on school they may suffer an increase in literacy. Radio 4 reported recently that 'watching TV may be educational'; of course if the parents are middle-class they might impose a learning regime including educational programmes if there are any, but at the start of April a teacher's union warned parents against imposing 'too strict a learning regime on children who may already be disorientated by the virus'.

Once children return, teachers will have to push back hard against any change of that kind. A fear that education is bad for you is deeply ingrained in our culture; when I was an infant in the 1960s my mother was ticked off for teaching me to read. No child was supposed to get ahead of the others. In

the 1980s a trainee teacher told me she was very worried about a Chinese boy in her class being so good at maths. She spoke as if his ability was a kind of misconduct. Since then there has been a gradual abolition of any subject deemed 'too hard' for British brains. In May last year a spokesperson for Ofqual, the UK exams regulator, complained that language exams were being, 'marked too strictly' which was putting possible students off.

Many pundits opine that as a result of the Chinese eating bat soup, UK survivors will want a kinder, more cohesive society, embracing a new kind of socialism where all people including shelf-stackers, cleaners and delivery drivers will get more recognition and respect for their service. Even prisoners, whose living conditions have never attracted public goodwill or the attention of politicians, will get cleaner cells. We will find ourselves in what used to be called a 'Christian society,' although that term is unlikely to be used.

On Easter Sunday Linda Woodhead, Professor of the Sociology of Religion at Lancaster University, told the BBC Radio 4 Sunday programme that as the church has declined in moral authority, the NHS has gradually taken over.

'It is now the source of our spiritual and moral guidance', she said, 'representing our best values.'

'Values' is the watchword of this new normal. Later that day Boris was released from hospital and with all the emotionalism of a new convert declared that the NHS is 'The best of our country, the beating heart of our country.'

Thursday may become the new Sunday as families troop outside in the evening to clap and bang dustbin lids the way people once went off to Evensong.

What would the Edwardian men who put the NHS in place have thought if you'd told them they were creating a monolith that would one day replace the Christian church is hard to imagine. I think you might have met with blank faces if not a suggestion that you might like to perhaps visit that nice Dr Freud in Vienna.

Perhaps Boris will now give the NHS a large, grateful dollop of extra funding but if the love is to go on, there may have to be a culture change there too, at least in the training of nurses. People might start to remember what many of them outside intensive care units were really like. In a London hospital in 2010, they were like angels; hardly anyone ever saw one and didn't expect to. If you did it was not necessarily a good thing.

While humans wait anxiously inside, the natural world is a lot happier. On the daily walk one notices

for the first time the deafening screech of bird song, usually muffled by the noise of traffic, burgeoning wild flowers along roadsides and tow-paths, normally destroyed by local councils every Spring. There has also been a stay of the usual slaughter of song birds migrating to Europe.

It's unlikely that Nature will go on burgeoning happily when this crisis subsides. No politician of any hue has put any pressure on the World Health Organisation to stop the Chinese using wet markets with the concomitant destruction of endangered species, including pangolin, civet cats and rare bats. That idea is even considered 'racist' by the Left. Better red and dead than risk that accusation or upset the Chinese Communist Party. A vaccine may soon be found, hopefully before the next pandemic, a much better alternative to asking anyone of a non-European race to change their ways.

For a short time, then birds and animals will thrive and Nature will revive before her final end. Once any possible charge of racism is out of the way, Extinction Rebellion and Greta Thunberg may also reappear from under their synthetic down duvets and start howling at America and Europe again.

When this is over, I might become depressed being one of those who enjoy a state of national emergency. If we were in the last war, I'd be happily driving lorries or organising soup kitchens for night workers. There is something reassuring in the increased *bonhomie*; usually in England there isn't any, which I find rather bruising. Living alone I benefit from the increased friendliness of almost everyone, who seem to forgive whatever it is that they usually dislike about me, and I am much more tolerant of them.

But if World War II is anything to go by, most British people will forget all about the virus and the lockdown and go back to dour, unfriendly 'normal' the day after the restrictions end. After that, apart from the Labour Party complaining about broken promises, they won't want to hear a word about it for at least five years. After that there'll be a flurry of poems, novels and films about the great lockdown, starring Jake Gyllenhaal or Ryan Gosling as Donald Trump.

The Tories as the only strong centre party will be in office for years. The Church of England or 'Momentum at Prayer' as it will be renamed, will be even more in the wilderness, but the monarchy, like the Queen, will live forever.

Jane Kelly was a celebrity interviewer for the Daily Mail.

Conservative Classic - 78

THE NEW TOTALITARIANS, ROLAND HUNTFORD

JAMES MONKTON

Back in the late twentieth century, Sweden was held up as the perfect model of successful state capitalism and functional socialism, a positive Utopia where government and people lived in affluent harmony. In 2005, dear Polly Toynbee wrote in *The Guardian* that Sweden ‘is the most successful society the world has ever known’. Roland Huntford’s long obscure book from 1971 pulls back the curtain on that cosy image to reveal a more disturbing vista where political intervention in ordinary people’s lives was both excessive and troubling, not least due to the ovine compliance of a people willing to be cossetted by a nanny, Big Sister welfare state dogmatically intent on a comprehensive social engineering *grand projet*.

As *The Observer*’s Scandinavian correspondent, Huntford was ideally placed to examine Sweden’s hybrid corporate-socialist state in action. Reading *The New Totalitarians* today is an eye-opening experience, not least because half-a-century on we can discern many of the more malign features of current western governance that were practised in 50s and 60s Sweden. In so doing we can witness how easily western societies can slip into a dangerous conformity and a nascent totalitarian mindset. The book is a classic warning of the ascendancy of *Homo bureaucraticus* and the reign of the technocratic, managerial classes.

Huntford argues with barely restrained disgust and a plethora of evidence that Sweden had placed economic security above all other considerations to such an extent that its governmental doxology resulted in ‘an aversion to individuality, an instinct for the collective, a suspicion of parliamentary institutions, a worship of the State, and a preference for government by bureaucrat rather than politician’, so that by the post-war era democratic politicians had ‘lost their significance in Sweden, supplanted by a form of technocratic oligarchy, which is apparently unassailable because its tenets are universally accepted’. State departments and state-sponsored organisations became so prevalent that the Diet, the national parliament, was rendered little more than an irrelevant, constitutional nicety.

Reading today of the unrelenting level of state control and interference in themed chapters retains the ability to take the breath away of those who believe in individual liberties. In ‘The Corporate State’, Huntford discusses

the ‘popular organisations’, mass movement interest groups, such as unions and employers, ‘that dominate national life’. These supplanted democratic procedures and bypassed parliament, which was reduced to ‘empty oratory about generalities’; as Sweden’s most famous PM, Olof Palme, said at the time: ‘Our democracy is a democracy of the popular organisations’. These bodies, linked closely to the state, provided a bureaucratic training ground for the political elites. Huntford argues that the Swedes happily convinced themselves that this system amounted to the highest form of democracy. It certainly helped them in their desperate pursuit of consensus and abhorrence of confrontation, something that served them well economically in World War II in their malodorous neutral accommodation of Nazi Germany: Huntford shows how being compromised morally was deemed preferable by the Swedes than being compromised financially.

The judiciary’s main role was to ‘realise official policy’; it was not there to protect the individual citizen but as a servant of the State. The extraordinary penetrative power of political *apparatchiks* meant they were able to rule the country, provided they were loyal party members of the Social Democrats. They were aided by the all-pervasive ABF (*Arbetarnas Bildningsförbund*) – the Swedish Workers’ Educational Association that supervised ‘the political indoctrination of the rank and file’ (Huntford offers numerous comparisons with the Soviet system). The Swedes accepted all this in return for the highest recompense of economic security, Huntford arguing that not having been occupied in World War II, they never learnt the lesson ‘that principles must sometimes be put above material comfort’. He writes that ‘they have been conditioned to believe that their material security is the gift of the State. They regard political servitude as a necessary condition and a fair price for its continuation’.

Education, the media and welfare (‘taught at school like a religion’) all piled on the crushing conformity required of the people, amongst whom any deviance, eccentricity or individuality was beyond the pale. The average student was prized over the gifted one (who would likely join the country’s brain drain as an adult). The long chapter on education reveals its purpose was

not to promote learning, but social engineering: ‘Not the advancement of knowledge, but the manipulation of society [was] the highest of aims’. Academic freedom at universities was practically non-existent. History, being an inconvenient reminder of the past and traditions, was side-lined as a topic, just as the importance of family was deliberately undermined by welfare policies. Textbooks and professorial appointments were state sanctioned. The youth emerged from the system with a ‘homogeneity of opinion’ – as was the intention. Virtue-signalling dissent was always channelled safely outwards, especially in anti-American and anti-Israeli agitprop. All was done in the name of the collective.

There is no doubt that the economic model had considerable success (Saab, Volvo, Aga and – with delicious woke hypocrisy – Bofors). This owed much to a pragmatism that eschewed nationalisation *per se* – the Swedes had taken a look at Britain as sick man of Europe – but instead directed and implemented a tight national policy that controlled industrial strategy. The people were kept contented by rising living standards

that were mandated by the monolithic ruling party, the Social Democrats, for political success in the polls. But all this came at a cost that was not economic, but an administrative intrusiveness into daily lives that thwarted individual aspirations as a matter of unfeeling course. Thus, parents lived in fear of government officials taking away their children at the arbitrary stroke of a pen: it was ‘a daily occurrence’ for police to forcibly enter a home and ‘remove children without recourse to the judiciary’. And without a murmur of discontent from fellow citizens.

Huntford’s conclusion is damning: ‘The Swedish experience suggests that the choice before us is between perfection and personal liberty. The Swedes have chosen perfection.’ He ends ominously with: ‘The Swedes are a warning of what probably lies in store for the rest of us’. With the supremacy everywhere of *Homo bureaucraticus*, it seems that Abba are not Sweden’s greatest export after all.

The author would like to thank Martin Bysh for bringing this important book to his attention.



Roy Kerridge

Back in the 1950’s when our Queen ascended to the throne, a children’s magazine was launched, the *New Elizabethan*. This was at a time when Sir Francis Drake was a schoolboys’ hero. Boys then began to hope that they too could become pirates and conquerors in Outer Space, fighting little green men. However the short lived *New Elizabethan* presented an unlikely hero to its readers. This was Nigel Molesworth, the Curse of St Custards, a jaded, cynical semi-literate schoolboy. His ‘self-penned’ badly spelled adventures had long before appeared in *Punch* and his boarding school had a pre-war flavour. Presumably its real name was St Cuthberts. Molesworth stories were written by Geoffrey Willans and phrases in Molesworthian style still pop up here and there, ‘as any fule kno’. They were once strongly featured in the rock fans’s bible, *The New Musical Express*. Nigel Molesworth himself was drawn by Ronald Searle, then at the height of his powers. His Molesworth pictures were better drawn than many of his St Trinians cartoons, which began in simple style, with dots for eyes and developed slowly. I greatly

appreciated the dark rings around Nigel’s eyes, signs of his unbearable weariness with school. Although Nigel referred to day-school boys as ‘oiks’, his readers nearly all came from oikdom, as did most of the readers of school stories.

My own eyes ached as I sat through interminable grammar school lessons, my mind switched off and my eyes contemplating shrimp like floaters and spots that soared up and down against a background of white London sky seen through a classroom window. Soon I devised my own schoolboy cartoon character, one who corresponded strangely to a schoolboy picture of GK Chesterton.

Ronald Searle’s decline as a cartoonist began the same way as the decline of ‘Trog’ the once brilliant of the *Daily Mail* cartoon strip, Flook. Both artists made the discovery that if you draw a round cartoon eye with the pupil as immovable dot in the centre, you create an expression of ludicrous inanity. Flook and Molesworth ended their days as fish-eyed imbeciles, all traces of former wittiness banished. Popular children’s stories today are frequently illustrated by Quentin Blake,

whose spidery pen and ink drawings superficially resemble those of Searle. Blake's pictures are greatly admired by grown ups, a sign that so-called children's literature now has to be forced on children. Molesworth stories were as unknown to parents as were the tales found in comics such as the *Beano*.

Their fate is that of the New Elizabethan age itself. Politically our poor Queen's reign has been spent in getting in and out of Europe. I well remember how pleased I used to feel whenever De Gaulle said 'Non'. Obviously de Gaulle did not realize that British politicians had become imbecile, and thought that a plot to dominate France was afoot. When the French suddenly realised the truth, they were quick to welcome us to their club and to destroy our fishing grounds and apple orchards.

What are we to make of the new anti-Semitism? I am told that an American President, one of the Bushes, once issued the following statement: We in America strongly believe in anti-racism, anti-sexism, anti-ageism and anti-Semitism. He quickly retracted the last part but a valuable point had been made. The phrase 'anti-Semitism' belongs to a different and earlier age to anti-racism and all the other antis (or ant-eyes, if you are an American). Anti-Semitism and racism/anti-racism cannot easily co-exist. Nowadays the former is merely an attitude or an opinion, the latter an evil comparable to witchcraft. An anti-semite, like a person suffering from colour prejudice, can easily change or modify his or her views. Somebody labelled 'racist' is doomed, if not to hell, then at least to unemployment.

It is as well that white anti-racists never read the Bible, or God himself might be declared racist, with results that no man can foresee. Even Jesus once said that 'Salvation is of the Jew'. Of course, any translation of the Bible can mislead, since the translators of the Gospel of St John appear not to have realized that most Biblical characters are Jewish. In my opinion the phrase 'the Jews sought to kill Jesus' ought to read 'The Jewish authorities....' Leaving such quibbles to the able pen of Peter Mullen, how can we get rid of 'racism' and anti-racism. Anti-racists seem to believe that only white people can feel animosity to anyone else. Hitler is regarded as the ultimate racist but to my mind Hitler was a pitiful man before the demon came upon him. Did he have Jewish ancestry of which he was ashamed, or was he merely an early example of the post-war English tendency to feel that the only goal in life is to become as one with the working class (or Saxons)? His dream became the world's nightmare.

He began as an outsider perhaps influenced by passages in the Old Testament, a Purified Germany,

his promised land. I cannot blame Bible writers for the universal tendency to tribalism. Despite all, the Old and New Testaments are the foundation of Western civilisation. Peter Mullen would no doubt advise us to read *Philippians* 4 verse 8.

I am often asked if I am a racist, and I usually answer 'Probably, Why' It is not a self-label I would use personally. One of the reasons I am accused of racism is because I use the word Negro. As a boy I listened avidly to Uncle Remus stories read aloud to me by my mother. Uncle Remus became my hero, a feeling that was reinforced by my delight in the Walt Disney film *Song of the South*. In this film Remus was played sympathetically by the Negro actor James Blasket. My mother had been similarly affected by reading *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Many were the conversations we held on the subject of wonderful Negroes. Another of my mother's heroes was the singer Paul Robeson. So, if the term Negro is good enough for Martin Luther King, it is good enough for me.

Cannot the anti-racists see that to rid the world of names such as Negro, Eskimo or Red Indian is to rid the world of romance? Why should we lose all these entrancing people and retire to a sullen boredom where everyone is the same in the name of anti-racism?

In modern England there is little chance of meeting an Eskimo or a Red Indian, let alone causing offence to one. As for Negroes, I now use the term only for American Negroes, scarce on the ground over here. Others I refer to as West Indian or African, if they are not English; I deplore the use of the word black in this sense, it still sounds insulting to me.

Incidentally, the average white reader's idea of a black is not an African, since each tribe is a nation of its own, but a Negro whose ancestors have been slaves in the New World. Negro promiscuity, in which Paul Robeson keenly participated, may have come about partly because the African style of marriage was lost during slavery and the English style seldom caught until Emancipation if then.

Among village Africans, of almost all tribes, if a man feels attracted to a woman, he does not tell her so. Instead, he tells her father and they begin to bargain over a bride price. A dear friend of mine was sold for a bottle of whisky but most women are more expensive. Once a man acquires a wife, he might begin saving up for another. Some highborn West Africans are affianced at childbirth, the couple becoming friendly as toddlers. Slavery swept all this away, and no new model was presented. It is a wonder that so many Negro marriages are happy.

Strangely enough, many prominent white people who devoted their lives to helping people of African descent are now regarded as self-evident 'racists'.

I am not only thinking of Walt Disney who conceived Mickey Mouse as being like ‘a Negro boy’, although Disney ought to have made it more clear that Uncle Remus and his stories were set in Reconstruction times. Sir Harry Johnston, master linguist of African tongues and lifelong friend of Africa, his tombstone engraved in the Baganda language by an African King, is commonly referred to as a racist. So is Joel Chandler Harris who recorded Uncle Remus’s stories, Tar Baby and all.

By the lights of anti-racists, both men are racist. Sir Harry believed that if Britain gave up her Empire, Africans would evolve backwards into apes. Joel Chandler-Harris often spoke nostalgically of plantation life and ‘the discipline of slavery’. He felt upset to see former slaves cast adrift as vagrants, often to land in prison. In both these writers, the love of Negroes can be felt in all their pages. Nothing is simple, but words such as racist or anti-racist need never be used.

Farewell to Roy

ROY KERRIDGE 1941-2020

MERRIE CAVE



It is difficult to convey the essence of Roy’s original and magical spirit to those not fortunate enough to have known him; he didn’t belong to the modern world but understood its inhabitants perfectly. A journalist since he was a teenager who never learned to type, he could be spotted in Fleet Street during its last years from the white plastic bag he always carried. Michael Wharton, the satirist, described him as ‘the strange diminutive genius with an interest in many congenial matters from Celtic myths to what Borrow called the “affairs of Egypt”’ while Darcus Howe, the Jamaican activist, declared him ‘mischief interminable’ because Roy had written *Black History*, a book challenging the whole edifice of anti-racism and multiculturalism. Incapable of writing a stodgy sentence, Roy exemplified the best kind of writing, like someone talking to you but wearing his learning lightly. Open any of his books at random and you will find a memorable extract: ‘Remembering his mother’s words “the Bible is beautiful literature”, Roy, the small boy, listened avidly. How wonderful to have a lesson where you didn’t have to worry about knowing it. It made learning so much easier.’

After Art college, where he perfected his individual style, mostly in cartoons of animals, Roy first struck gold in ‘A Teenager in Brighton’ for the *New Statesman*, but he soon realized that he was a cultural conservative for he hated the hedonism and drug culture of the sixties among other things. Being a lavatory attendant at one time provided him with interesting copy so he was able to re-start his career and editors, particularly those of the *Spectator* and *Telegraph*, soon realized that he had an amazing gift for talking to *anyone*. He was always at home in any sort of home so his friends comprised a cross section of society from aristocrats to hippies and his unceasing wanderings around London and beyond produced colourful articles. I like to think that the *Salisbury Review* was a ‘home’ because he contributed articles and reviews from the beginning (1982), but latterly only for us in his inimitable column. ‘Most of our readers, and most of our writers too,’ opined Roger Scruton, ‘would be certified as insane by enlightened egalitarians. You only have to read a few paragraphs of Roy Kerridge to see their point. Here is someone who wanders around London as though completely responsible for his own life, observing human beings as though they were also responsible for theirs.’

His extraordinary experiences and family come to life in his books: ‘I have planted my life in a fictional flower bed’. His Polish grandfather, Adolf Gerson, an enthusiastic Marxist, had been an aide of Alexander Parvus, one of Lenin’s agents then in Denmark; he and Roy’s Danish grandmother emigrated in the nineteen-twenties to London, where Adolf took to the Engels side of Marxism, running businesses and owning valuable property in Kensington Gore. Both his parents were fervent communists although Eric Kerridge, a university historian, left the family when Roy was ten; his mother Blanche ‘a sensitive girl, ‘sought by revolution to rid the world of poverty and oppression’ and worked for the *Daily Worker* in the forties and fifties, but later left it and the theory behind, like millions of others. All this is described in *Stalin’s Schoolboy*.

‘English boy ecstatic at the prospect of an African stepfather, but disappointed and finally appalled at the outcome is an unfamiliar tale, and not an easy one to tell’. But these uneasy family experiences brought Roy an encyclopaedic knowledge of the various ethnic groups living in Britain, described superbly in *Subjects of the Queen*. Meanwhile his mother brought up six children in very difficult circumstances and often in poverty. Not for nothing did Colin McInnes, the novelist, greatly admired by Roy, call her ‘Mother Courage’.

Roy was a keen traveller mostly in Britain and Ireland and always absorbed the local ambience in the pubs. His wanderings produced many books (over 30) like *Bizarre Britain* and his deep knowledge of flora and fauna always adorned his narratives. His first book came out at 14 when his grandfather took him to Tenerife, before mass tourism had shattered the landscape. *In the Deep South* described his travels in the US and his brilliant introduction to *Uncle Remus*, published by the Surtees Society in 1992, shows how the Brer Rabbit stories may have world-wide origins.

‘Heaven lies about us in our infancy’. Roy never lost the magic and wonder of childhood which is why children enjoyed his company, so my grandchildren loved his visits to our house. From his huge fund of every kind of folk tale and obscure nursery rhymes, while often drawing animals at the drop of a hat, he would keep children and their parents amused for hours. He used to turn up at Hatfield House and similar venues for charity fetes and entertain a circle of children. Although he much enjoyed gossip, he was always astute but fair in his judgements on country matters. I warmed to his story about Eric Hobsbawm, whose house the Kerridges often visited in their communist days, where the servants wore white gloves.

As you might imagine, Roy had no interest in money and possessions, but was generous with the little he had. When he inherited money from his grandfather, he blew the lot on taking his two sisters, passionate about the Civil War, for a pilgrimage to every town in England and Wales which had a connection with it. That holiday was the highlight of their lives.

But Roy’s most distinctive talent lay in noticing the unnoticed and finding beauty and goodness in the unexpected byways of our mad world. We loved him for this.

I have been writing several obituaries lately and feel like the author of these lines.

*As those we love decay, we die in part,
String after string is sever’d from the heart;
Till loosen’d life, at last but breathing clay,
Without one pang is glad to fall away,
Unhappy he, who latest feels the blow,
Whose eyes have wept o’er every friend laid low,
Dragg’d lingering on from partial death to death
Till, dying, all he can resign is breath.*

(James Thomson, afterwards author of Rule Britannia)

Eternal Life

PETER MULLEN

KARL BARTH (1886-1968)

*When the angels sing for God, they always sing Bach,
When they sing among themselves then they sing
Mozart.*

Pope Benedict XVI described the Protestant Karl Barth as ‘The greatest theologian since St Thomas Aquinas’. Hans Frei remarked, ‘Had Barth not been a theologian, he would have been more widely recognised as one of the towering minds of the 20th century.’ Even more shocking, Barth was at best ignored and at worst despised by most

other theologians. We must go back in time for an explanation.

Philosophical understanding in Europe for the first 1500 years AD was based on Christian metaphysics: that is to say Christian doctrine formed what R.G. Collingwood called ‘the absolute presuppositions’ of European philosophical thinking. It is important to understand what absolute presuppositions are and what they are not. They are not propositions susceptible to verification or falsification. They are the primary underlying convictions which must be taken for

granted for any coherence, let alone progress, to take place in our understanding. Absolute presuppositions change over time, not because a particular philosopher disproves them but because they are presuppositions and not propositions. It is not possible that they can be proved or disproved. They were the unquestioned bedrock of thought until they were changed by historical and cultural changes.

This is what happened about 500 years ago when philosophers like Francis Bacon and René Descartes began to think quite differently from their predecessors. Instead of regarding the existence of God and the truths of Christianity as formative for thought, they regarded thought from the individual perspective as the starting point for the acquisition of all knowledge. This was a radical shift in perspective: a fundamental change in the character of absolute presuppositions. Descartes typified this change by placing himself as individual consciousness at the centre: 'I think, therefore I am.' In his *Meditations* he did advance two arguments which he believed proved the truth of God's existence, but he began not from God's existence but from his own. Of course, the followers of Anselm would reply, 'But surely God's existence is more certain than mine!'

Descartes' starting point is not as reliable as he thought it was, for it assumes what it sets out to prove. As C H Sisson said, 'The *cogito* begins to look like a conjuring trick.' For *I* think, therefore *I* am is no more informative than, 'Bananas taste nice, therefore bananas exist.' Wittgenstein once stumbled upon a Cambridge seminar just as the leader was saying, 'Cogito ergo sum'. Wittgenstein's very audible comment was, 'That's a bloody stupid place to start!' Descartes did not start, as Aquinas, Anselm and the other Medieval philosophers had started, from God's existence: he regarded individual human consciousness as the only reliable perspective.

This was the beginning of the historical process which we now describe as *secularization*. We can see how very successful secularization has become when we compare the teaching of St Paul: 'Be ye not conformed to *this* world' (Romans 12:2) with Archbishop Rowan Williams's instruction, 'The church has a lot of catching up to do with secular values.' Williams and his tribe simply invert the teachings of St Paul. Most theologians of the last 200 years have been increasingly on the side of secularization. They have been described – as indeed they describe themselves – as *liberals*. Now if by 'liberal' we mean someone who has a broad mind and shows toleration, then these 'liberal' theologians' toleration did not extend as far as Karl Barth.

They regarded Barth as an unpleasant reactionary, a throwback, a stubborn character who would not go

along with all the *progressive* thoughts of the new *Zeitgeist*, that is of the liberals themselves. Arguing from the human perspective, they weighed God in the balances and found God wanting. Whereas Barth said, 'It is not the right human thoughts about God which form the context, but the right Divine thoughts about men. God must be allowed to speak for himself.' This is why most modern theologians have no time for Barth who insisted, 'Theology must be theologically defined.' The humanistic framework cannot contain theology. Thus, the Protestant Barth believed much as the Catholic St Thomas believed – which shows us why Pope Benedict regarded the two men equally.

Today's theological division is not between Catholics and Protestants but between traditional Christians and the secularizing theological establishment. As Garrett Green says, 'Against the entire modern theological establishment, Barth refused on principle to provide a philosophical or anthropological foundation for theology.'

Barth insists that 'Modern theologians fall prey to the absolutism by which the man of the age makes himself the centre, measure and end of all things.' And for most modern theologians – Williams is their star exemplar – Christianity is only secular values preached in a churchy tone of voice – socialism and environmentalism with hymns. Barth's most eloquent description of it is 'A quasi-religion for scholarly non-believers.' And nowadays most of them aren't even all that scholarly.

So if the Christian faith is not social work in a scarf and hood – or even a mitre – what is it? According to Karl Barth, it is to know that we are sinners. St Paul says: 'All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God' (Romans 3:23). And that is an interesting phrase, for sins are in Greek *hamartia* which is a word borrowed from the games: *hamartia* are the arrows that fall short of the target. So when St Paul says all have sinned and fallen short, he is doing it for emphasis, repeating it because the issue is of supremely important. It is the issue of our life not just in this world, but for all eternity.

Moreover, our sins are the result of Original Sin. This has nothing to do with Adam's apple. We didn't 'catch' Original Sin from Adam, as if it were coronavirus. Original Sin is simply my natural tendency to do what is not good for me or anyone else. To explain this in terms that even the theologians should be able to understand, St Paul puts it all in words of one syllable: 'The thing I would not, that I do, and what I would, I do not' (Romans 7:19). So we're all doomed? It looks like it, for 'The wages of sin is death' (Romans 6:23).

But here comes the gospel, the good news: the wrath of God which is our just punishment falls on Jesus Christ who, '...was wounded for our transgressions, he

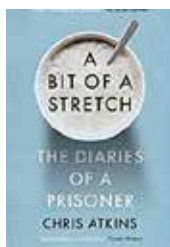
was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed (Isaiah 53:5) And when this happens it is not a case of God's punishing *someone else*. For Jesus Christ *is* God, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity incarnated. And the truth is that 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself' (2 Corinthians 5:19). Effectually. God said to the angels and archangels, 'They can't do it for themselves. There's nothing for it but that I'll have to go down and do it for them.'

All we have to do is own up. When it is said 'That

man is a sinner and worthy of death' all I have to do is reply, 'I am that man.' That is what is meant by *faith*. Faith is not some sort of occult form of hoping for the best: it's accepting God's diagnosis and owning up. That is the meaning of Karl Barth's theology so no wonder the bishops don't like him

Barth's monumental work, *Church Dogmatics*, contains many volumes of systematic theology. But you can find the essence of his teaching in two much shorter and beautifully-expressed books; *A Shorter Commentary on Romans* and *On Religion*.

ARTS AND BOOKS



Doing Time

Jan Davies

A Bit of a Stretch: the Diaries of a Prisoner, Chris Atkins, Atlantic Books, 2020, £16.99.

Chris Atkins was charged with tax fraud in 2014 and two years later found himself in court convicted of assisting in a fraud of over £1,000,000. He had spent years making documentaries, but in Wandsworth he was just another prisoner. He describes his stay there in the form of a diary which makes compelling reading.

When I was a defence solicitor in London in the 1980s I regarded Wandsworth as one of the more unpleasant prisons to visit. There were prison officers patrolling the grounds with large Alsatian dogs which I sometimes thought came too close. 'No need to worry, miss,' said one of the warders one day noticing my obvious nervousness. 'They are trained to chase anything in trousers that runs.' Thereafter I always took good care to wear a dress if I was visiting.

Chris Atkins describes in detail the brutality of induction, the lack of any purposeful activity for prisoners and the effect of almost always being in 'lockdown' for 23 hours a day. As I am writing this, the UK is in lockdown generally, but lockdown in prison is far more frightening. When he arrived, he was placed initially on a wing known as Beirut. 'It's basically Porridge infrastructure meets One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest personnel and is awash with the most terrifying individuals I've ever seen.' There

was no education and most of the time prisoners were 'banged up' in cells due to the lack of prison staff to supervise. Prisoners would sign up to an activity, any activity, in order to get out of their cells. Thus Muslim prisoners would sign up for Alcoholics Anonymous, even though they were teetotal.

The induction leaflet given to new arrivals was misleading: it said prisoners could visit the library once a week, but no prison officers knew this or could say where the library was. After some time in the prison, Atkins eventually discovered the library, which had 'gone to some effort to avoid drawing attention to itself'. The only periodical it contained was a copy of *The Economist*, which, he was told, had not been nicked because it had no TV guide.

I can remember, when I was working in London, that prisoners would sometimes tell me how they had been able to learn useful skills such as plumbing or electrical work in prison and take City and Guilds exams. Now, from what I can piece together from my clients, it seems to be all anger management courses and assertiveness training. Atkins notes the courses available with titles aimed at sounding exciting, but there was not enough funding for the mental health services that actually saved lives. Fifty per cent of inmates he says are 'functionally illiterate' and 30 per cent have learning difficulties. This was my experience with my clients too for many cannot read or write with any fluency. In 2016 119 prisoners nationwide killed themselves.

Chris Grayling, the former Justice Secretary, deserves a special mention for daft ideas. He vowed to 'stop jails being like holiday camps' so one of his bright ideas was to ban books for prisoners. He also tightened up the IEP (Incentives and Earned Privileges scheme). Each prisoner is labelled according to his perceived level

of dangerousness. It is complicated, and Atkins says that successive government ministers all try to fix the system by making it more complicated. Michael Gove, who succeeded Grayling as Justice Secretary, had a good reputation with defence solicitors and doubtless with prisoners too, simply because he did not hesitate to undo some of Grayling's wheezes.

Anyone who is under the delusion that our prisons are holiday camps should read this book. On average two hospital appointments were missed each week because of the unavailability of any officer escort. I believe much the same would be true of dentist appointments. The filth in the showers, the casual violence and the general chaos make sad reading. If we are going to lock people up, we should at least be doing something constructive with them. As it is, prisoners spend far too much time in their cells and there is a high level of self-harm.

There was, says Atkins, no shortage of visiting academics and focus groups, usually horrified at the conditions they found and insisting that 'something must be done'. But then 'They'd promptly bugger off and absolutely nothing would change.' There are few votes in reform. Short-term prisoners being released without accommodation, with a list of homeless shelters and just £47, are bound to reoffend.

But he also describes the Listeners' scheme: some prisoners are trained by the Samaritans to provide, not facile solutions to those unable to cope, but 'to steer into the pain'. Everything else he encountered in Wandsworth had been banal and inconsequential, 'but the listening is suddenly deadly serious'.

Governments of whatever political hue have two priorities: to look as if they are tough on crime and to save money. So we should not expect that any reforms in our prisons will happen soon.



Britain Wrought in Stone

John Jolliffe

The Stone Mason: A History of Building Britain,
Andrew Ziminski, John Murray, 2020, £20.

This book is a selective study in the use and restoration of stone throughout English history, by an unrivalled and often engaging expert in his craft. It comes with the subtitle *A History of Building in Britain*. This has no doubt been foisted on the author in order to make it sound more comprehensive. A 'history' it is not, though the author plots a roughly chronological journey through the

buildings of Britain from Neolithic times to the present. Rather it is a unique personal selection, starting with the prehistoric remains of the West Kennet Barrow, perhaps 4,000 years old, and the nearby stone rings of Avebury and Stonehenge, where Sir Christopher Wren scratched his name on his way to providing the tie beams in Salisbury cathedral. Ziminski is a true craftsman, often working in remote places made obscure by the passage of time. It will be of great significance and value to anyone at all interested in the prehistory of the subject, as well as in the surviving riches of church architecture from the Saxon era onwards. (There is not much about secular buildings in this book)

It is not surprising to find him three hundred feet up the spire of Salisbury Cathedral, or in Bath, carefully removing centuries of grime from the monumental remains of the Roman baths. He also takes us to observe repairs to the tomb of Edward II in Gloucester Cathedral, and on a close examination of the west front of Wells Cathedral, completed roughly between 1220 and 1240, where the masons' spacious building yard still survives at the base of the central tower, high above the fan vaulting of the nave. The west front is a remarkable achievement of the sculptor's art, though it is possible to find fault with the cramped and hunched composition of the sections nearest the ground

He is also an adventurous explorer, often in his canoe *Laughing Water*, for example to check up on the abutments of ancient bridges. He is particularly good on the bridge in Bradford-on-Avon, built so that the owner of the vast tithe barn could avoid paying tolls on the wagons that brought the corn in from arable areas to the north, and which came in over the main bridge. Later, he gives details of the great age of canal building in the nineteenth century, having also surveyed a few of the great Somerset church towers, on his way from Glastonbury to the quarries of the glorious golden stone of Ham Hill. He lingers lovingly on the purely decorative carvings of grotesque animal heads, as opposed to the gargoyles which acted as drains to carry water off a roof, from the French word *gargouille*, as in gargle.

But besides churches, he also takes in the engine houses, mills and aqueducts of the industrial revolution, providing a richer view of the past than what is learnt at school. However, it is sometimes a struggle to know where we are, and better maps would have been helpful for those unfamiliar with the areas described. He hardly ever gives dates, but this is not a guide book, and there are no photographs; it is a series of sketches of the author's devotion to the craft of which he is a past master, and the details of which are often fascinating because they are so intelligently observed, both the materials themselves and the skill which he has acquired in using them.

The book is divided roughly to cover the three main

geological types of stone used: sarsen, as in the Grey Wethers at Lockeridge; limestone, all over the place; and marble. They of course partly decide what was built where, though there are exceptions as in the well-known case of Stonehenge, where the stone was probably brought from Wales by the Bristol Channel, and up river as far as Amesbury. There is enough there to be getting on with, and he does not mention the great band of red sandstone which runs up from Exeter to West Somerset, under the Bristol Channel, and reappears in the materials for the cathedral of Hereford, all the way up the Welsh borders and on to Chester, Lancaster and Carlisle. It would need another book to cover all that, and one can only hope that one day the author, or one of his disciples, will produce one. Meanwhile, we should be profoundly grateful for what we have got in this dedicated and always delightful study.



The Essence of Courage

Jane Kelly

The Volunteer, Jack Fairweather, Penguin Random House, 2019, £7.99.

Christmas Eve 1940: farmer and former Polish army officer Witold Pilecki, 39, was dying of starvation in Auschwitz. In the infirmary his blanket was heaving with lice. The prisoner to his left was dead, the one on his right, ‘motionless, his face covered in a crust of lice that had burrowed into his skin’. Outside, men at roll-call were randomly beaten to death for infractions such as a missing button, and were kept standing all night in freezing temperatures. Some were brought to the infirmary ‘comatose, covered in spittle, foaming at the mouth, gasping out their last breath’.

Pilecki could have been at home with his wife and two children, instead he had chosen to be arrested and felt lucky to have been sent there. For two years before he escaped, he refused offers to try to free him.

‘Who in their right mind would do such a thing?’ a fellow prisoner asked him. He explained that he and the Polish underground saw Auschwitz as the ‘Centre of the German effort to crush resistance’. They feared the camp, established in June 1940, ‘would continue to expand.’

As chief recruiter for the Secret Polish Army in Warsaw during the German invasion, he had set up a networks of fighting cells, but as the Nazis tightened their grip he had begun to realise that it was a different kind of war; there was a larger plan for the enslavement

of his people and the extermination of the Jews. He staked his life on organising resistance and gathering evidence to gain Polish Underground support for an armed revolt, and persuade the Allies to bomb the camp.

In extraordinary detail, using hundreds of survivor testimonies, translated from Polish to English for the first time by a team of researchers, Fairweather explores what drove an ordinary man to such extremes of resistance. But it’s also a bitter tale of collective failure; he didn’t succeed in persuading the Poles or the Allies to act to save millions of lives. After the war Polish communists accused him of ‘foreign imperialism’. He was murdered, dumped in an unmarked grave and his reports suppressed until the end of the Cold War.

Those reports collated by Fairweather now bring ‘The camp’s horror to light,’ in excruciating detail. They show us the characters trapped in that nightmare world; ordinary, young, old, good and vile, with many of their Auschwitz ID photos, drawings done after the war, and biographies. This includes information about the hated ‘kapos’ who ran the camps for the Germans. Men like Alois Staller, 35, a former Communist builder from the Rhineland who had been sent to the camp for putting up anti-Nazi posters. Once there he chose the perks of extra food and no labour in exchange for controlling the prisoners. Ernst Krankemann, an obese barber from Berlin, who had been in a lunatic asylum before the war, carried a knife up his sleeve to stab people during roll-call, and rode on top of a giant roller beating prisoners as they tried to pull it along. Leo Wietschorek played the harmonica after particularly violent murders. One block had a one-armed kapo who claimed to be a baron from Latvia, who liked to fell prisoners with one blow of his good arm. Pilecki’s reports reveal how they were essential to the whole system.

‘As soon as we are no longer satisfied with him, he is no longer a kapo and returns to the other inmates who will beat him to death his first night back,’ wrote Himmler. The most popular method of getting rid of them was slipping them typhus-infected lice.

Despite them and the SS, Pilecki managed to rally people to support each other, share food if they could, warn people if they were selected for death that day, get access to a radio, and set up an intricate network of contacts, some of whom were released and took details to the outside. Infiltrating an SS records office led to the discovery of the ‘Starkebuch’, a daily record of arrivals, transfers, releases and deaths. Pilecki’s cell began making a written copy at night, smuggled out by camp surveyors. By March 1942, he calculated that 30,000 Poles had been registered of whom 11,132 were still alive. The figure included 2,000 Polish Jews who were mostly dead. Of 12,000 Soviet POWs only a hundred were alive.

One of his contacts on the outside, Napoleon Segieda, recruited by SOE in London, got Pilecki's information to London in 1943 after a journey lasting six months, including a spell in a Spanish concentration camp on the way back. During that time Auschwitz was expanding from brutal prison to mass killing factory, using medical experiments, phenol injections, then gassing. Some of the most exciting writing comes later with the Warsaw Uprising, in the summer of 1944. After a nail-biting escape from Auschwitz, Pilecki returned to Warsaw, three agonising years after he had left his family. He then led a resistance group fighting house to house to drive the Germans out, and Russian mercenaries fighting for the Nazis, ahead of the Soviet advance which he and his friends also dreaded.

It's a dark but engrossing read. You often feel you are there with Pilecki, but Fairweather isn't always so convincing when he attributes thoughts and words to him: 'He likely felt dismayed by anti-Semitism among the locals'. Fairweather has chosen to write in American English – has anyone worked out how much more lucrative that is? We get 'chafing' to describe feet stripped of flesh exposed to the bone and even 'Hazing', a form of initiation in US college fraternity groups to describe Polish youths harassing prisoners arriving at the death camp. The book is not without nuance, but Fairweather accuses Churchill of ignoring 'genocide,' when the concept was not defined or given a name until 1948.

Perhaps Pilecki, the supreme Polish patriot, would give a wry smile if he knew that discussions about turning *The Volunteer* into a Hollywood film are underway. He will no doubt be played by Tom Cruise, and an excellent Polish bio-pic made in 2006 will continue to be ignored.



Mao's Doctor

Anthony Daniels

Walking the Tightrope: Memories of Wu Jieping, Personal Physician to China's Leaders, Olivia Cox-Fill, Skyscraper Publications, 2020, £20.

Intimate memories of world-historical figures are always fascinating, though of course they cannot be used uncritically as historical sources, memory being fallible and subject to all kinds of deformations. Doctors are both better and worse placed than most to reveal

the character of their important patients: better because few see such figures in all their nakedness, both literal and metaphorical, and worse, because they are sworn to professional secrecy.

Born into the family of a wealthy industrialist, Dr Wu Jieping became an eminent urological surgeon who had studied in America under the Nobel Prize-winning oncologist, Charles Huggins. Fundamentally sympathetic to the Communist regime, or at least to its proclaimed ideals, he was drafted in as doctor to eminent figures such as Chou En-Lai and Chiang Ching (Madame Mao), spelt in the book as Zhou Enlai and Jiang Qing respectively.

The author is an Irish doctor who studied Chinese and befriended Dr Wu as China was beginning to open up to the world, recording his reminiscences over a period of thirty years. He did not want his confidences published during his lifetime because he feared to be accused of revealing state secrets. He died in 2011, and one wonders why it took another nine years to publish the book.

As a purely literary artefact, the book is not a success. It is not a straightforward chronological narrative; Dr Wu's words being interspersed by the author's commentary in a different typeface. For those unfamiliar with the details of modern Chinese history, a more straightforward structure would have been better. Moreover, the author's style leaves something to be desired.

Wu was born in 1917 and therefore lived through a tumultuous epoch in which millions were displaced, massacred, tortured or starved to death. A child of privilege, he nevertheless managed to survive the Japanese invasion and occupation of China, as well as the civil war, in tolerable comfort. In childhood, he had associated and played with children in the international concessions; it was when he went to America to study that he discovered the wounding racism of the time, which surely would have marked anyone on its receiving end. Together with the obvious and rampant corruption of the Kuomintang, this – understandably, but mistakenly – made him somewhat starry-eyed about the promises of the Communists.

He was dedicated to his profession, and no doubt it was this that saved him from the worst cruelties of the communist regime, during which Mao's personal resentments became state policy and the formerly privileged became the targets of retribution, whether personally-deserved or not. No one could accuse Mao of not thinking big: for him, the sacrifice of millions of human beings in pursuit of a supposedly noble end meant nothing, the life of a human individual (with the exception of himself) being of no more account than that of an ant. It was the anthill that counted.

Dr Wu's attitude to the regime was ambiguous. When

he saw the leading figures, including Mao, close-up, he was aware of what an inhuman snake pit they had created, and how their protestations of egalitarianism were false, indeed could not have been more false. Mao played the peasant though he had never been one; his personal conduct was disgusting. Like Bertolt Brecht, he could not even be bothered to keep himself clean out of consideration for others; like Hitler, he had been rejected by an institution of higher learning or training, and allowed his rancour to fester for the rest of his life. He wanted to be the *only* intellectual in the country, if not the world, and ruthlessly, repeatedly, devised ways to achieve his ambition.

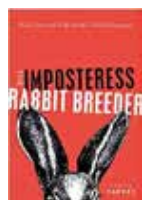
Dr Wu fully recognised that the egotistical imposition of Mao's half-baked ideas caused tens of millions of deaths and untold suffering, all of them and it avoidable, yet could not bring himself to condemn the regime unreservedly. History being a seamless robe, there is no doubt that Mao's Chinese revolution was a stage in the process of China becoming the greatest power in the world. But this is a little like saying that Nazism was a stage in the progress of Germany to the present Federal Republic: no doubt true in a sense, but not a retrospective justification for what the Nazis did.

The surgeon had an uncritical regard for Chou En-Lai, regarding him almost as some kind of self-sacrificing saint. Certainly, he was a much more attractive figure than Mao, being cultivated, courteous, worldly-wise, cosmopolitan, sophisticated and so forth. But he became a kind of butler or major-domo to Mao, the acceptable face of murderous tyranny, a man who, with consummate political skill survived the twistings and turnings of policy. Is any of this truly admirable? He was as principled as Talleyrand, but in even worse times. According to Wu, however, it was he who prevented Chiang Ching from become the leader post-Mao, and – if so – he performed a signal service to his country and to humanity as a whole.

Although he was not really qualified to be Madame Mao's principal doctor, she insisted upon him, and at the time she was Lady Bracknell with machine guns at her disposal. The portrait of her that Dr Wu paints is unforgettable, and perhaps it is the combination of utter ruthlessness and personal frivolity and shallowness that appals the most. At one point she tries to seduce him, and he is lucky to have survived his refusal. Probably acquiescence would have proved even more dangerous, for she would probably have disposed of him afterwards as a criminal disposes of evidence.

Dr Wu's personal life, in so far as he had one, appears not to have been a success. He neglected his first wife (and mother of his children) for his work. His second wife soon committed suicide. His third marriage, being founded more on mutual convenience than love, was

happier, but caused a rift with his children who in effect considered the third wife an uneducated adventuress of inferior social class. That millions should have died in the name of egalitarianism, and for snobbery to have survived so undiminished! What a lesson!



Rabbit Woman

Celia Haddon

The Imposteress Rabbit Breeder: Mary Toft and Eighteenth-Century England, Karen Harvey, Oxford University Press, 2020, £16.99.

In October 1726, in the town of Godalming, an agricultural worker called Mary Toft started giving birth to rabbits. Lots of them, in bits, one after the other, with longish intervals between. When the first rabbit bits emerged from Mary they were shown to local women by her mother-in-law. Next, a local doctor and 'man midwife,' John Howard, was called in. He installed Mary in the bedroom of his house, delivered eight more bits of rabbit and wrote excited letters to 'Persons of Distinction' in London.

Mary Tofts became an instant celebrity. Newspapers got hold of the story, eminent doctors came to examine her, and King George I himself took an interest. The first London doctor on the scene was Nathaniel St Andre, 'Surgeon and Anatomist to his Majesty'. He saw for himself the delivery of a piece of a skinned rabbit torso, and then later the hind part of a rabbit, with Dr Howard acting as midwife to the births. Despite the fact that Mary laughed out loud twice during his visit, St Andre was convinced these bits of rabbit were coming from her womb, though there was no afterbirth.

Nowadays it may seem absurd that anybody, let alone a doctor, could believe a woman could give birth to rabbits. But to Dr St Andre, and the other doctors it seemed, at the least, a possibility. There was a long standing and reasonably respectable theory that what a woman saw or felt during pregnancy could have a physical imprint upon the subsequent child. The effect of emotions such as shock or fear or anger, could give a monstrous shape to the foetus. This is what had apparently happened to Mary. Her story was that, while pregnant, she had been chasing rabbits in the field and this had led to the passing of a 'substance' and various animal parts. The vision of these rabbits had entered not just her mind but from there to the foetus in her womb.

For doctors, therefore, Mary offered a chance to examine and perhaps prove or disprove this theory. Dr Nathaniel St Andre (unluckily for him) was first

into print. He gave a lurid and detailed account of what he had seen with his own eyes, focussing more on the rabbit bits than Mary's body, and also adding five witness statements, including one by Mary herself. 'All these facts were veryfly'd before his Majesty,' he claimed, and added that he had found milk in one of Mary's breasts. His account implied that the births were genuine.

The next doctor, Cyriacus Ahlers, a German surgeon from the King's household, was more suspicious. Nevertheless, he too wrote five pages, in his account, of *Anatomical Description of the several Parts of the Sixteenth Rabbit*. Other eminent doctors, with good qualifications for the time, were so interested that Mary Toft was taken to London. There she was prodded and examined not just on the outside of her body but also internally and painfully, while increasing numbers of doctors waited around for the next bit of rabbit.

The newspapers had a field day, not least because there was a prurient flavour about the whole idea. Initial reports suggested the rabbit births were a genuine and fascinating freak of nature. There were accounts of other strange births, pamphlets and ballads about it (most of them suggesting a hoax), and even a theatrical comic reconstruction. One writer even claimed that these rabbit births were a sign that the end of the world was nigh. Hogarth did a satirical engraving showing a swooning Mary Toft surrounded by the credulous doctors.

Once the hoax was revealed (Dr Howard was overheard planning to buy more rabbits), the newspapers happily switched from wonder to condemnation. The fascinating births were now a fascinating hoax and Mary Tofts, no longer the mother of rabbits, was now a criminal and the subject of lewd jokes. The prophecy of the end of the world produced a counter-pamphlet with the title *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Wonderful CONEY-WARREN* and a pornographic account was published claiming to be written by Mary Toft herself. Even the poet Alexander Pope produced verses, one of which went:

*The surgeon with a Rabbit came,
But first in pieces cut it.
Then slyly thrust it up the same,
As far as Man could put it.'*

In all this excitement and publicity, little notice was taken of Mary herself. After confessing it was a hoax, Mary was put in Bridewell prison but was released eventually without being charged with a crime, perhaps to spare the doctors the embarrassment of a court hearing. Her explanation was that her mother-in-law had initiated the whole affair.

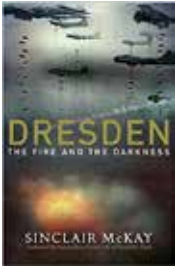
Karen Harvey, a professor of cultural history at

Birmingham, describes how this illiterate and poor woman was first exploited and then punished by doctors, magistrates and the press. At her death in 1763 the record of her burial still described her as 'the Imposteress Rabett Breeder'. Mary's rise into celebrity and subsequent fall into notoriety then obscurity has its equivalent in today's world too. Nasty Nick from the *Big Brother* programme some years back springs to mind. No doubt his obituary will recall this unpleasant nickname.

Moreover, we should not scorn those early doctors, and not just because credulity still flourishes among the educated, as well as the uneducated. The true irony of this story is that the medical world before 1726 was in some senses perfectly correct in believing that the emotions of a pregnant woman might affect the baby in the womb. We now know that the physical and mental condition of a mother-to-be can switch on or switch off the genes of a foetus in the womb and this effect may even in some cases pass to the next generation. Maternal distress, for instance, releases stress hormones which affect the development of the foetus and predispose the subsequent child to increased fear and learning difficulties. After the 1998 ice storm in Canada, when electricity failed for up to six weeks, the children of women pregnant at the time subsequently showed signs of slower mental, linguistic and play development.

Professor Harvey's book is an academic study, rather than a straight-forward account. She has quarried out information about the culture at the time – the medical world, the world of rich courtiers and noblemen, the condition of the poor both male and female. It is rich in footnotes and in the specialised language of cultural studies, which make it sometimes a little difficult for the general reader. I would have liked the chance to read some of the contemporary documents in full, perhaps in an appendix. After a slow start setting the social scene in Godalming, the book picks up pace when it gets to the detail of Mary Toft and her rabbit births. The story still fascinates.





Cremation From the Air

Brian Eassty

Dresden: the Fire and the Darkness, Sinclair McKay, Penguin Viking, 2020, £20.

In 1945, the people of Dresden believed that their biggest threat lay in the East with the Red Army encroaching ever further on German territory and ready to exact a terrible vengeance. The city was beginning to fill up with refugees from Silesia, where the Russians' presence had already been felt, and on 13th February, explosives were placed on the main bridge over the Elbe to delay their advance

The futility of that precaution showed that any attack from the air would leave the city undefended. Dresden's anti-aircraft guns had been moved further east in January but they could not have put up more than a token fight against the sheer scale of the onslaught – three waves of bombers, the largest of which consisted of over five hundred planes in a line 120 miles long.

The bombing of Dresden, one of the most controversial military operations in living memory was, at best, a stain on the Allies' mostly ethical conduct of the war, at worst, a war crime. Churchill did not mention it in his history of the war – much to Air Chief Marshal Harris's annoyance, who saw only that his crews had the highest mortality rate of the services and expected not just acknowledgement for them but thanks. Goebbels, in what must have been the penultimate gasp of his propaganda machine, exaggerated the number of the dead by a factor of ten to a quarter of a million. Others like David Irving, when still a respectable historian, and Kurt Vonnegut, who witnessed the bombing as a prisoner of war, inflated the casualty figures many times in their writing.

Sinclair McKay's book is a valuable contribution to any re-assessment. He is admirably even-handed but his love for the city illuminates throughout. What a jewel the Allies chose to destroy that night, for there were few areas of cultural life in which it did not shine. In art, the Romantic Caspar David Friedrich had lived in the city and depicted it, and later Otto Dix worked at the Dresden Academy of Art. The Nazis admired Friedrich but loathed Dix and his students, so Dresden had the dubious honour of being obliged to stage an exhibition of 'degenerate' art before the better known

one in Munich. Bach had performed in Dresden's Frauenkirche and three of Wagner's operas had been premiered in the city, where he studied and improbably befriended the Russian anarchist Mikhail Bakunin.

Dresden, the Florence of the North, had been such a favourite destination for English and American visitors that many inhabitants felt their residual affection guaranteed it some protection. When Lord Dartmouth visited in the mid-eighteenth century with the future Prime Minister Lord North, he described it as 'a sort of little London' though, confessing that he had 'been at three balls a night,' made it sound more like Bath. It was certainly on a par architecturally with either city and McKay takes us on a tour of its treasures in one of his early chapters, all the more poignant when he records their destruction later. Similarly, the book includes photographs of the city as it was, to compare with the most famous image of the aftermath of the bombing, as emblematic of Dresden's devastation. In Richard Peter's image, a statue representing 'Goodness' on Dresden City Hall appears to stare out over a section of the city in which no building appears more substantial than a two dimensional flat on a Hollywood backlot.

McKay takes pains to convey the sheer speed with which this destruction was accomplished. A chapter on the first raid is called simply 10:03 PM after the time when the bombing began and, although he visits each of his landmarks and describes the devastation each undergoes, he still maintains a sense that this was happening instantaneously. He is helped by assembling a large cast of characters of all backgrounds whose fates he follows through the night and rightly credits the Dresden's extensive Stadtarchiv archive for providing many of his witnesses.

McKay is fortunate that one of the great diarists was writing in Dresden at the time: Victor Klemperer, a Jewish academic who managed to live in the city until the end of the war, one of the few untouched by the Nazi's random malice, kept his diary *To the Bitter End*. Its unique perspective on life in Nazi Germany was preserved by a gentile friend Annemarie Kohler, who hid it at great risk to her life, so posterity owes her gratitude, for Klemperer's story enriches McKay's tale. On the day of the bombing he was delivering a message to other Jewish homes telling them that they would be leaving for the camps the next day. In the chaos after the raids he and his wife felt exhilarated to seek help and medical assistance as freely as gentiles for the first time in years. Ironically this terrible destruction brought compensations for them. Klemperer eventually revived his academic career when Dresden became Sovietised, but he summed up that era in the equally pithy title of his later diaries: *The Lesser Evil*.

McKay is keen to hear the voices of all who were involved in the events of that night and he paints a sympathetic picture of the bomber crews. These were often educated men who would deal with the stresses of their job by writing poetry, or who would prefer enjoying the cultural delights of Dresden to destroying them. Theirs was a very different role to that of the fighter pilots whose swashbuckling single combat earned them some glamour. A bomber crew member was expected to carry out specific orders and return, and McKay suggests that the men were more concerned about the distance to Dresden than the destruction they were about to wreak.

Obviously the thinking behind these orders is a major concern of this book: the strategists reasoned that a sustained bombing campaign would destroy morale, concentrate the German people's anger with the Nazis and lead to a breakdown of order. Hitler showed a casual callousness to his own bombed-out cities. He never visited one. Not for him wishing to look Cologne or Hamburg in the face like the Queen Mother in the East End. Churchill was sceptical that the human spirit could be reduced to rubble as easily as bricks and mortar and he was right. The clean-up operation was managed with surprising efficiency and McKay reports that, despite sustaining huge damage, the railway was soon running, albeit with services which were 'subject to unexplained delays of several hours', not an unusual event today in the UK.

The Soviet Germans brought about the long-term reconfiguration of the city with their usual predilection for vast estates of brutalist architecture but McKay ends his account of this dreadful atrocity on a more hopeful note. In 1959 Dresden was twinned with Coventry and after the end of the Cold War former architectural glories in the centre have been restored; the rebuilding of the Frauenkirche is a triumph. The work of the Dresden Trust, a British charity, has played a valuable part in the process of reconciliation.



History's Back Stairs

Merrie Cave

Last Days in old Europe, Trieste '79, Vienna '85, Prague '89, Richard Bassett, Penguin, 2019, £9.99.

The best sort of memoirs are the backstairs of history; gossipy conversation giving life to political events, unlike some turgid politicians' biographies. Richard Bassett was *The Times* correspondent based in Vienna

during the 'eighties towards the end of the Cold War. An unusual journalist, he is an accomplished musician and an architectural historian so his book is crammed with recondite details and anecdotes on architecture, literature, nostalgic Habsburg stories, beautiful railways and food. One of his funniest memories is his description of the bizarre reburial of ex-king Nicola of Montenegro in his former capital, Cetinje which looked like a 'Lehar operetta'.

Before his stint in Vienna, a part-time teaching job in Trieste gave him plenty of time to savour the legacy of the old empire, while his personal charm enabled him to make friends, particularly with those who remembered its last days, some of them still living with Biedermeier furniture and art treasures. Geoffrey Banfield had a front seat in the stalls throughout his life. An ace pilot in the First War, he spent two hours talking to Franz Josef eager to hear about the war in the air. Countess Korwin, his landlady, (Blanka)'s tempestuous life included imprisonment and torture by the Communists in Albania, and a devotion to England sprang from her long affair with the appeasing Sir Neville Henderson whom she first met in Belgrade. He wrote to her in 1939 insisting that 'les Allemands ne voulaient la guerre'. Blanka took Bassett to Zagreb to see her sister Christa who, like some Habsburg survivors, still lived in splendid comfort in Tito's Yugoslavia.

Later Bassett went to Ljubljana to work on his thesis about Plecnik, a Slovene architect who had developed his own style and believed that the Southern Slavs should have buildings which reflected their different heritage. Bassett landed a job as a horn player in the State Opera House, 'a masterpiece of Central European neo-rococo'. Ljubljana had an Austrian atmosphere but very different from the sophistication of Trieste and Zagreb and he was sharp in spotting the subtle psychological and linguistic differences in regions sometimes only fifty miles apart. At that time no one believed that Yugoslavia would survive for long without the ailing Tito.

The highlight of a summer in Graz, in another distinctive region of Austria, was meeting Zita, the last Empress of Austria who had just been allowed back, because the Republic clung to the anti-Habsburg laws of the 1920's, not even allowing her to return for her daughter's funeral. 'Give my love to England', she told Bassett 'and especially to the Isle of Wight where I learnt English'.

Vienna, another place, another ethos, confirmed Blanka's criticism of its superficiality but Bassett took advantage of generous perks for journalists: free entry to museums and exhibitions and two free stalls tickets most days for the State Opera, and enjoyed

some Schloss hopping, for most of the old families had managed to hang on to their castles and libraries and spoke of the Habsburg Empire as ‘if it had vanished a few weeks earlier’. But they were realistic: ‘If you have been occupied by the Red Army once, you cannot pretend it might not happen again.’ The Habsburg traditions lingered on in the balls in beautiful romantic venues like the Schwarzenberg palace; when I was there in the ’eighties I saw pensioners waltzing at tea dances. Vienna was in the front line of the Cold War but even its dangers were worn lightly, with only a few exceptions: a Romanian diplomat asked Bassett whether he would like to visit his country and a week later he read that he had been defenestrated in a Viennese suburb.

Except for the UK, Western Europe mostly ignored Central European human rights so when Bassett visited Budapest to cover Princess Margaret’s visit there, he was impressed by the Hungarians’ love of royalty and devotion to Mrs Thatcher’s fortitude in standing up for the Hungarians and other beleaguered nations. Both Poland and Hungary were the countries most eager to embrace change.

‘Poland was the best education for understanding Eastern Europe’, Bassett says, and he came to love and admire the Poles, especially their beautiful old fashioned manners. In contrast, in his first twelve hours in the country he was pickpocketed, dragged from his bed and threatened with expulsion by an arrogant and ignorant apparatchik. As the political temperature started to rise, he was soon tearing from one crisis to the next, chasing stories in Gdansk, East Germany, Berlin and Prague as well as the Balkan capitals.

He understood early on that Gorbachev realized that Russia could not compete with Reagan’s star wars and that an orderly retreat from Eastern Europe was imperative so he did not share the *Times* Foreign Desk’s insistence that Czechoslovakia, along with East Germany, would never fall. In Prague he befriended Shirley Temple, then the US Ambassador who had been there in 1968 and who demanded that her hotel porters open the doors for any demonstrators outside. In Leipzig he got a photographer to take a picture of the most important railway junction in northern Europe empty, a ‘symbol of the entire revolution.’ In Prague, where thousands were demonstrating in Wenceslas Square, he became friendly with ‘Ottokar’ who was part of the Communist reformist apparatus with a hotline to Moscow, so he was confident in dismissing various stories about a military intervention as provocations. Later ‘Ottokar’ told him that Comrade Gorbachev had instructed the Central committee that he was ordering all Soviet military personnel to remain in their barracks. The Soviet diplomat who delivered this

message was the son of the Soviet official in the Prague embassy who advised Brezhnev to send in the tanks in 1968. Some invisible hands were already scratching the Cyrillic script on Biedermeier buildings to reveal old street names, symbolising a return to the rest of Europe. His friend Ottokar became head of the International news agency telling his shocked workforce ‘that he wanted to make the agency free, open, independent and free from government interference.’ The liberation of Eastern Europe was now complete except for Romania, and this event he missed because of appendicitis.



Frozen Stiff

Alexander Adams

Land of Wondrous Cold: The Race to Discover Antarctica and Unlock the Secrets of its Ice, Gillen D’Arcy Wood, Princeton University Press, 2020, \$27.95.

Land of Wondrous Cold is an entertaining, informative introduction to Antarctica, that theatre of mankind’s purest self-created triumphs and travails. Nowadays, Antarctica produces widespread anxiety, for annual oceanographic reports of ice-shelf formation and dispersal show worrying signs of climate change. Years ago, the public avidly scanned newspapers for news of explorers lost in its icy wastes. Now Gillen D’Arcy Wood presents a new survey of South Polar exploration in the early Victorian period when exploration was in the national interest along with the pursuit of whaling and sea-skin trades.

Usually polar exploration is portrayed as the ultimate test though polar regions are *tabulae rasae* – undiluted intellectual and physical challenges with no diseases or hostile natives or obdurate civilised peoples to hold up the explorer. *Land of Wondrous Cold* is the story of the competing expeditions of 1837-41 led by Jules Dumont D’Urville (1790-1842), Charles Wilkes (1798-1877) and James Ross (1800-1862) that set France, the USA and Great Britain in a race to be the first to set foot on Antarctica.

The young naturalist James Hooker had a berth on Ross’s expedition, as an assistant surgeon. Hooker was fascinated by what he recorded but awestruck by the conditions. D’Arcy Wood writes: ‘When they tried to go ashore [at Kerguelen Island], they routinely capsized and were dunked in the freezing water. On the beach at Christmas Harbour, the officers conducting magnetic observations at the portable observatory

were forced to lie flat on the sand to avoid being blown away.' Hooker's observations of fossils and distribution of species provided early evidence of continental drift and eras of global climate change. Likewise, specimens of the southern beech in Patagonia, Antarctica and Tasmania are remnants of the single landmass of Gondwana before continental drift separated these regions.

Little-visited, Kerguelen Island is really part of the submerged Kerguelen Plateau 'one of the largest oceanographic features on Earth', abundant in fossils from the Cenozoic hothouse era. Sediment in icebergs indicates past ice patterns. Refreshingly, the author mixes stories of exploration with new scientific conclusions, which gives an understanding of the continent in deep geological time, putting pioneer discoveries into perspective.

Hooker avidly studied flora and fauna, trawling sediment from the seabed, rich in life that naturalists had declared could not survive such cold. He discovered that it was microscopic diatoms that were the plant food source for macroplankton and krill and thus the foundation for the marine ecosystem. 'Here was the vegetable base of Antarctic life, the herbage of the ocean on which all the charismatic Animalia of the higher orders depended, including the great whales.'

Some expeditions put into South American ports before heading to Antarctica. The explorers' meetings with indigenous Patagonians prompts a discussion of prehistorical migration down the Pacific coast of the Americas, starting from the Aleutian Island archipelago linking Russia to Alaska, called the Kelp Highway, as seaweed has provided a rich marine ecosystem for coastal peoples. The Patagonian (or Tehuelche) peoples, many of which are now extinct, were famous for their tall stature, hardiness and the extreme poverty of their subsistence-level societies. Absence of wood for fire and tools (excepting driftwood), shortage of cultivable arable land and the harsh climate of Tierra del Fuego created conditions that left Europeans surprised that human life could be sustained at such high latitudes.

The narrative is like polar literature: terrible cold, fickle pack ice, stygian gloom, unparalleled isolation and the fear of death. The dangers they faced provoked religious awe among mariners. Mirages brought illusory hope; optical effects perplexed; fog and blizzards disoriented. Nature taunted them in the familiar shapes they spotted in weathered pack ice. During fine weather, sailors were intrigued by bergs that resembled houses and churches; during storms, this ice resembled floating cliffs, able to dash ships to pieces. When one explorer presented data on the relentless winds of Adelie Land (the windiest place in

the world), it was considered so outlandish that it was revised downwards.

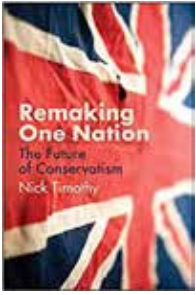
D'Urville took great risks to enter the pack ice. During his second season he managed the first landfall of the Terra Australis Incognita. The heroics of the French pale in comparison to the shambolic American effort. Wilkes's five ships, barely seaworthy, were unsuited to ice and notoriously fierce Southern Ocean storms. One was sunk in a storm and another two nearly lost to ice. The commander, just as unfit, had a mental breakdown, unhinged by his fluctuating temperament, poor judgment and refusal to delegate. Lack of trust between Wilkes and his officers undermined the fleet. Wilkes's character flaws and incompetence were enduring. Despite two court martials, for massacring civilians and starting a diplomatic incident, he died a Rear Admiral.

Ross's expedition, the most competent and collegiate of the three, charted new coastline, made landfall and very nearly attained the Magnetic South Pole. The mariners discovered an erupting volcano, which Ross named Erebus after his ship. Ross found that Wilkes's mapping was so inaccurate that it was almost not mapping at all. 'The French were the first to sight Antarctica and land, while the Americans charted the greatest stretch of coast and established its continental dimensions. The British, meanwhile, who were the last on the scene, travelled the farthest and saw the most.'

Despite the scientific value of specimens and observations, the gains were modest. The losses of men and money deterred navies and monarchs from sponsoring expeditions for decades. The loss of the Franklin expedition in 1845 in search of the Northwest Passage also blunted the popular appetite for polar exploration.

An enormous reserve of ice in Antarctica regulates global temperature. The ice core of glaciers contains air bubbles which give samples of atmospheres of past centuries. Glaciologists and meteorologists working in Antarctica are at the forefront of climate science. D'Arcy Woods summarises the current assessment of climatologists, outlining the implications for sea levels should even some of the massive store of Antarctic ice melt.





The Secret Dismemberment of England

Alistair Miller

Remaking One Nation: The Future of Conservatism,
Nick Timothy, Polity Press, 2020, £20.

Many readers will be familiar with Nick Timothy's regular column in the *Telegraph*. His judgements are perceptive, he has genuinely conservative instincts, and his experience at the heart of government enables him to speak with authority. So we look forward to his thoughts on the future of conservatism; and also to discovering why, while he advised Theresa May, first as Home Secretary and then as Prime Minister, the conservative principles he now espouses were not put into practice. Why did immigration, which Timothy now argues is so damaging to the social cohesion of our country, reach record levels?

There is no direct answer, only that ministers never tried to control immigration, which does little to enhance the author's credibility or integrity. But in the introductory chapter Timothy's frustration as policy advisor in getting anything done in the face of vested interests, and the debacle of the 2017 election, is gripping. Timothy claims that he was unfairly vilified for the disastrous 2017 'dementia tax' manifesto, and that the election campaign was mishandled by others. As May's 'toxic' advisor, he paid a price as he saw his own character assassinated. But why did he choose to serve a politician who lacked the qualities needed for the job? Some of May's early speeches were good but only because Timothy wrote them.

Timothy's critique of modern liberalism, which fills the first two-thirds of the book, is a *tour de force*. He argues that the original values on which liberal democracy was founded have mutated into ideological forms of 'ultra-liberalism'. On the right, this involves a libertarian elevation of personal freedom above all other values: that we are atomistic individuals seeking to satisfy our individual desires, and that all problems can be solved by markets. This view ignores our social nature and undermines the public goods, rooted in family, community and nation, on which the market is founded. On the left what Timothy terms the 'cultural liberalism', more commonly known as 'cultural Marxism', of liberal society is the means of oppression of marginalised groups, and must therefore

be deconstructed. Though the two ideologies are distinct in theory, they often intersect in practice, in a shared belief in the abolition of borders, and mass immigration, though for different reasons. Moreover, 'rarely does one side overturn the other's advances', so that 'the liberal ratchet' continuously 'propels ultraliberalism forward', eroding the institutions and traditions that draw us together. This 'unholy alliance' of ultraliberal left and right, helped by a complicit class of 'liberal technocrats', is wreaking havoc on the social fabric of our nation.

The combination of globalisation, unregulated markets, new technology and mass immigration has produced a marked redistribution of income and wealth in the developed countries from labour to capital, and to the rich. In the UK, there has been a dramatic 'hollowing out' among lower and middle-income groups, exacerbated by increased housing costs, fuelled by immigration, foreign investment in property, and an ill-conceived 'Help to Buy' scheme. Long-term private investment has been neglected in favour of quick returns to transient shareholders; high-tech companies vital to our future have been sold off to foreign buyers. Vocational training has been neglected, resulting in skills shortages; poorly regulated utilities, increasingly foreign-owned, have exploited the consumer; and the de-industrialised regions have been left to sink. Britain's 'ultraliberal' policies have created 'a low-productivity, low-skill, low-wage economy'.

But the damage done to our society has also been cultural. Here, Timothy rehearses the arguments of David Goodhart in *The Road to Somewhere*, that the nation is governed in the interests of a liberal elite of affluent internationally-mobile 'Anywheres', who are comfortable with mass immigration, whose benefits they reap in the form of 'cheaper services provided by nannies, plumbers and waiters from foreign countries'. The 'Somewheres', who lack these opportunities, remain rooted in traditional communities, value their sense of local and national identity and have most to lose from mass immigration. The problem is compounded by the left-liberal ideology of multiculturalism and identity politics, which encourages minorities to maintain their cultural identities, while casting the majority population, the insular and prejudiced 'white British' as the problem. Meanwhile, the reality of multiculturalism means increasingly segregated communities and schools dividing on ethnic lines. Naturally, white people are 'as attached to their ethnic and cultural identity as any other group' and when faced with 'the reality of rapid demographic decline', many 'feel a sense of loss', a sense felt most acutely by the white working class.

Timothy concludes that we need a revival of civic liberalism and describes the kinds of measures needed to address the economic and social damage wrought by

ultra-liberalism. He argues that speeches about ‘British values’ ring hollow because they fail to address the fundamental question that multicultural ideology has rendered taboo, that the shared sense of patriotism and national identity is in large part *ethnic and cultural*, and grounded ‘deep in our history’.

But then Timothy says that we must ‘respect and understand differences in ethnic and cultural identities’; our patriotism must be expressed in ways that allow for our ‘great diversity’; and our national identity ‘must be inclusive and pluralistic’ but also ‘distinctly British’. New immigrants should be required to ‘attend courses about life in Britain’ and white Britons should be designated as a protected group.

This volte-face would be laughable if it were not so tragic. But Timothy’s evasion is all too predictable for, like Goodhart, he cannot bite the bullet for fear of being labelled a racist and put beyond the pale. Easier, for a visiting professor with political ambitions, is to take refuge in the usual platitudes. Instead of ‘white British’, which is a tick box on a census form, should we not be using the word ‘English’, which designates the culture and identity of the majority population, and a thousand years of our history? But on all these questions, Timothy is silent. He warns of the dangers of populism and illiberalism, but perhaps a new populist party may be the only solution. Whether liberal democracy can be saved remains to be seen but that is the price we may have to pay for Timothy’s and many others’ refusal to face the truth.



Sucking up to Putin

Martin Dewhirst

From Russia With Blood: Putin’s Ruthless Killing Campaign and Secret War on the West, Heidi Blake, William Collins, 2019, £20.

Perhaps even some regular readers of this journal still do not realize that the Cold War, sensibly defined, is again in full swing and that Russia is still in a neo-Soviet, not post-Soviet, stage of development (or decline). If Heidi Blake were not the global investigations editor at *Buzzfeed News*, this blissful ignorance would no doubt continue. Reading her page-turner, I found ample confirmation that Putin embodies Coronavirus (*korona* is one of the Russian words for *crown*), and it wasn’t long after the outbreak, before caricatures of Putin wearing a crown were circulating (anonymously) on the Russian internet.

In some ways, Putin(ism) has been and still is *even more* dangerous than Covid-19 because the former has been raging for more than twenty years and succeeded in ending or ruining the lives of millions of people in various countries. Is it just possible that the more recent pestilence will finally end this long-standing Pernicious Putinist Plague?

Blake’s well organised and troubling account ‘places the fifteen suspected assassinations we uncovered at the centre of a much wider campaign of Kremlin-sanctioned killing around the world’. We might find that well over half the known victims were themselves crooks, but some were definitely not, so the question arises why, ‘Six months after announcing the review, the [British] government quietly closed down all fourteen reinvestigations without explanation. ... No reasons were given.’ Another example of the all too traditional policy of appeasement? Blake is reluctant to speculate – perhaps because even she thinks that the Cold War is over. So we may have to wait for a full and trustworthy account of the attempted murder of Mr Skripal’ and his daughter in Salisbury before we get a satisfactory answer to this question. However, Blake makes two helpful suggestions. First, the steep decline in learning Russian language in the West since the alleged end of the Cold War: can one understand Russia without a really good knowledge of Russian? Secondly, the melodramatic increase in the even greater dangers of militant anti-Western Islamists. A possible third explanation, is that Putin has been, and still is, ruining rather than running Russia, so the longer he stays in power, the better for the rest of the world. Being a Russophile, I find this very painful.

This supposition Blake supports by providing an amazing collection of fatuous comments about Putin and ‘his’ Russia uttered by leading British and American politicians, presumably based on what their advisers and speech-writers told them. In the USA this applies both to Republicans and to Democrats. In the UK both Conservative and Labour politicians are guilty: Tony Blair, Gordon Brown, David Cameron and Theresa May in the Index, but preferably read the whole book. This colossal failure of judgement goes back to the time when ‘a senior FSB [the main successor to the KGB] officer approached the head of MI6, Sir Richard Dearlove, in London and asked him to help arrange a high-profile meeting between Blair and Putin to burnish the latter’s presidential credentials ahead of the [2000] election.... Thus Britain had its hand in smoothing Putin’s ascent.’

Perhaps that was when things started to go wrong for the West and right for the Kremlin? Could Blair’s ill-fated trip to St. Petersburg mark the start of the New Cold War? We can do business with Putin, but we can’t do *honest* business with him. Heidi Blake shows that Putin’s ‘Secret War’ against the West is now an *open* secret.

Film

Mr Jones

Director Agnieszka Holland

Merrie Cave

This is the story of how between 1932 and 1933 Stalin in an act of genocide tried to wipe out the population of the Ukraine by starving ten million of its peasants and small landowners to death, and the efforts, leading to his death at the age of thirty, of a solitary Welshman Gareth Jones to expose what became known as the Holdomor, (Ukrainian *killing by starvation*). Although a crime similar to the Holocaust in its vile intent many modern socialists are still locked in denial as to the awful reality of the Holdomor or it ever happening.

Jones was a bright Welshman who had learnt Russian from his mother, a governess in Imperial times. Several more languages at Cambridge under his belt landed him a job as foreign affairs adviser to Lloyd George, the ‘Welsh Wizard’. Deeply suspicious of both fascism and communism, Jones fled from Frankfurt to Berlin in Hitler’s plane, a coup which brought him instant fame; afterwards he planned to interview Stalin.

Norton brings a youthful if naïve determination to the part while Kenneth Cranham displays the magnetism of the Welsh wizard who admired Jones’s tenacity and his penchant for getting to the heart of things but threw cold water on his plans to interview the dictators; looking the other way and swallowing lies was *de rigueur* for politicians in the thirties.

He set off for Moscow to investigate the ‘economic miracle’ but also to look up an old (journalist) friend whom he discovers on arrival, had been murdered. But Ada Brooks an American journalist, whose belief in Soviet Utopia was wearing a bit thin, gives Jones his friend’s notebook. All the foreign press pack were clustered in Moscow soaking up official news rather than going out in the field, the doyenne among them Walter Duranty of the *New York Times*, excellently played by Peter Sarsgaard, who personifies the cowardice and wickedness of the Soviet apologists. He won the Pulitzer prize in 1931 for his reports from Russia and it has never been revoked. The teetotal and clean-living Jones meets this loathsome creature at one of his debauched parties and their exchange provides one of the best moments of the film: ‘You are really rather dull Mr Jones. Well, I’m standing opposite a completely naked Pulitzer Prize winner. My life can’t be that dull can it?’ Duranty knew that millions had starved to death but maintained that you can’t make an

omelette without breaking eggs; it was rumoured that he was blackmailed to lie because of his immoral lifestyle.

Jones gives up the idea of interviewing Stalin and decides to investigate the Five Year plan in the Ukraine – he had sniffed a big story in his friend’s diary so he takes a train to Kharkhiv where he escapes from his minder in a first class carriage and lands up in a cattle car stuffed with starving people who fight over his left-over food. Arriving at Stalino (formerly Yukshova) station, he faces ‘famine on a colossal scale’, a picture of Dante’s hell, and witnesses much of it. In the spring of 1933 people were dying at a rate of 10,000 a day while the government was exporting grain. The train stations and cities were full of refugees from the country, all looking for food, and Jones sees them collapsing in the street or just lying there. He sets off walking at random in the country seeing very few people but many dead bodies while the atmosphere apart from the snowy weather is pregnant with menace. Taking refuge in the occasional hut, he finds starving people on the point of death, corpses being piled up on carts, some still breathing, and sleeps on dirt floors with starving children. Cannibalism was rife; an orphan was defined as a child who had not been eaten by his parents.

Back home his reports were ridiculed and ignored while Lloyd George chided him for upsetting international relations so he was reduced to taking a freelance job on a local paper in Wales although he did contrive to break into Randolph Hearst’s castle there and persuade the magnate to print his story in one of his papers. Malcolm Muggeridge was the only other British journalist to record the truth at that time; as an idealistic socialist he was embittered by what he had seen: ‘one of the most monstrous crimes in history; so terrible that people in the future will scarcely believe that it ever happened’.

The malevolent features of Soviet life are well depicted: being followed immediately you arrive, having to bribe to get a hotel room, the squalor of communal flats, sitting in the train with a minder with gold teeth and a vodka bottle. The haunting photography reflects the vastness of that tragic country wrapped in silence with endless grey skies.

I didn’t think that the occasional readings of *Animal Farm* enhanced the film but rather interrupted the narrative especially as the actor didn’t look like Orwell at all, but this is a minor quibble. It is wonderful to see a film which doesn’t insult but stimulates your intelligence and sends you back to books and discussion with friends. It took screen writer Chalupa, whose grandfather had lived in the Ukraine during the famine, fifteen years to make; perhaps others should imitate that example and produce informative films like this one.

David Twiston Davies 1945-2020

David Twiston Davies who has died recently, worked for the *Daily Telegraph* for over 40 years, mostly as Chief Obituary writer. With Hugh Massingberd he was responsible for the great improvement of that section and belonged to a select group of journalists rapidly disappearing, like Frank Johnson who never went to University, getting their experience from real life on local papers and whose writing was all the better for it. Born in Montreal, David was particularly interested in the history of the British Empire, compiling the *Daily Telegraph* book of Imperial and Commonwealth obituaries, but concentrated on those ‘magnificent old boys who are dropping off like flies’ compiling several volumes of military and naval obituaries. But he did not overlook eccentrics and interesting lives which others may have ignored: ‘at the end of the day, the valuable ones are those nobody’s heard of and whom if you hadn’t done them, nobody would.’

After his retirement David contributed lively book reviews for the *Salisbury Review*, several of them delightfully off beat like the one on the Travellers Club. He and his wife Rita came to our occasional *SR* lunches in Oxford, and above all I will always miss his wise advice and sparkling erudition on books and personalities mostly relayed on our long telephone conversations. He was terrific fun to be with, a real character of robust, traditional views who was never afraid to say what he thought, unlike so many in this age of slavish conformity.

Merrie Cave

IN SHORT

In Praise of Folly, Theodore Dalrymple, Gibson Square, 2019, pb £9.99

‘One lesson I have distilled from life is that everywhere is interesting.’ Essays like those of Hazlitt or Orwell are rare and this collection makes a delightful bedside book. Don’t be put off by the title and cover; it bears little relation to the contents, although Dalrymple is much taken with ‘the folly of eminent people’. A firm believer in original sin, his stories are crammed with his sharp observations larded with his black but gentle humour. A keen bibliophile, Dalrymple finds most of his material from visiting second-hand book shops, alas now uncommon, mainly in Wales and its borders. Each chapter is an excursion into some aspect of the human condition like death or heredity illustrated by a rich cavalcade of characters, some from the nineteenth century and many undeservedly obscure, like anti- and vivisectionists, judges, surgeons, theologians, as well as writers like Conan Doyle, D H Lawrence and Dylan Thomas. An index would have been useful.

Not a religious man, Dalrymple nevertheless likes the sermons of the English divines and enjoys visiting in Brecon the grave of Henry Vaughan, who was content to live and die where he was born. Not far away near Camarthen, he becomes intrigued with the ‘Wonderful little girl’ Sara Jacob, who took to her bed in 1867 when ten years old, became a quasi-saint and *apparently* survived without food or drink for two years. In an atmosphere of religious superstition, she was monitored by doctors and nurses but eventually she died of dehydration and both the nurses and doctors and her parents were charged with manslaughter, but the case against the medical team was dropped – a clear

case of massive injustice, cosying up to professionals while ignoring primitive ignorance and credulity.

The Lancet began dramatically. Thomas Wakley, a capable doctor, had a practice near King’s Cross but in 1820 he unwittingly let a thug into the house who beat him up, leaving him for dead. When he recovered, he found the house on fire and his practice never recovered so he tried medical journalism. As well as editing *The Lancet* (continued by his descendants until 1909) he was the MP for Finsbury and the coroner for half of Middlesex.

My favourite story is the contradiction between Dylan Thomas’s sublime poetry and his failure as a human being. He and his wife Caitlin, by-words for stormy marriages, lived in the beautiful ‘Boathouse’ in Laugharne which was given to him by the historian Alan Taylor’s wife Margaret, unbelievably in love with Dylan who was detested by her husband as a sponger, thief and liar. Dalrymple thinks that Thomas was the last genuine bohemian because this style of life has become unremarkable, as there are so many of them. He is fascinated by their reunion in the grave and thinks of the inscription over the gate of a cemetery in Guatemala. ‘Through this gate, all quarrels are forgotten, all sins forgiven.’

Sylvia Wood

Evangelical Experiences & Other Essays, Roy Kerridge, Custom Books, 2020.

Holiday-makers in Eastbourne a few summers back were surprised to see two coaches decant black worshippers from the Mount Zion Spiritual Baptist Church, including

many children and a ‘bishop,’ into the sea for baptism. The children, aged between eight and thirteen, dressed in white robes, hadn’t been to the coast before and were terrified as they were dipped under the water three times. As they emerged, soaking, ‘Drums pattered and the church sang a spiritual song, all about ‘that happy paradise’. When one small boy was ‘carried ashore completely limp, and all seemed shaken by their dipping,’ some of the ‘white onlookers’ were upset for the children and ‘a woman cried, “Disgusting!”’

That kind of ritual is not to everyone’s taste but writer Roy Kerridge was in his element describing it. In this book of five intriguing essays, three are about black Christian churches in the UK.

In, ‘Angels Are Rocking,’ he describes the activities of the Mount Zion church as ‘A spectacle of colour, dance and fantasy. Whether Trinidadian, Grenadian or Jamaican, members of this fellowship seem to vie one with another over who can wear the most flamboyant robe and turban.’

Blinking, balding, a cross between a childlike imp and a gentle uncle who might entertain you with his cartoon drawings on a wet day, Roy was hardly flamboyant himself. His talent was to watch others ostentatiously enjoying themselves with the more ‘verve and zeal’ the better.

His obsession with observing the culture and lives of the British black community came from his complex childhood. He grew up in a Communist household in London where his mother remarried a West African activist. In an article in 2011 he recalled that as a boy, when a friend asked what communism was, he replied: ‘It means that you like Russia more than England, you don’t like God and Empire, but you do like folk tales and folksongs. You like primitive people better than white people, so you stick up for the Indians not Cowboys’.

In his writing, as in most things, Roy’s politics are

unexpected. Brought up on the extreme Left, seeing himself near the bottom rung of society, once working as a lavatory cleaner, by adulthood he had moved to the right, but was no stuffy conservative. In the essay, ‘Who are the Carlists?’ in his whimsical way he identified an unwelcome change he felt had taken place under Margaret Thatcher: ‘...a self-satisfied New Orthodoxy, that of the Carlists.’

‘The Carlists’ were supporters of Prince Charles, ‘sensible hard-headed men of the world,’ approving only of the *Book of Common Prayer*, who called people who didn’t support their views on the church ‘Anglostic,’ and scoffed at fragile human feelings. He was on the side of Princess Diana, whom he saw as ‘kind hearted’.

True to his roots he was unimpressed by the cold, fox-hunting, grammar-school educated, heartless ‘Carlists,’ and mistrusted their distrust of ‘political-correctness,’ and their contempt for ‘The Nanny State’.

‘I am prefacing all my future remarks with the phrase, “Speaking as a member of the politically-correct underclass...”’

In that essay he wrote that he had two sorts of friends, ‘Literary,’ whom he met at *Spectator* parties and ‘Civvy,’ near his home in the then rather seedy Kensal Green. The former admired Enoch Powell, the latter liked evangelist Morris Cerullo.

‘Of the two ranters,’ Roy preferred Powell but didn’t really care for either of them. Both were far too angry and self-important for his taste, on the side of the Cowboys not the Indians, and they sent him straight to sleep.

His work gives a unique view of England’s post-war underclass, but I wish he’d pinned them down with a few more dates. I wanted to know exactly when the remarkable events he describes were happening.

Jane Kelly

The

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