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The Caribbean Press

PREFACE

I have contributed a regular weekly column to Stabroek News for over 20 years. It has been an interesting challenge and a pleasant occupation. If I had been a different sort of writer the number of words written in this form might have produced, say, 10 good novels. More than one friend has told me my time would have been better spent that way.

I have made a small selection of 100 columns from those I have written over the years. A special concern has run through these pieces. I have wanted to place the joys and cares, the sorrows and delights, of Guyanese in a wider context than Guyana. In Guyana I think we stifle our lives too much in local worries. Guyana, for instance, is caught in the same trap as scores of other poor and vulnerable countries. Struggling in this trap, we are certainly not uniquely wounded. We should try to see ourselves in a universal context. It has happened before, and it will happen again, that men suffer from the pains of maladministration and the frustrations of bureaucracy. It is true elsewhere and in other times that people lie and cheat and scavenge for money and that others are brave and open-hearted and talented. Love and hate exist beyond the seawall. Tears are salt the world over. In other lands brightness also falls from the air.

I have a suspicion that people like to have writers they read confine their work to a particular subject. But I have not been a columnist of anything in particular – not economics, not sport, not business, not religion, not social commentary, not literature nor art nor drama, not international affairs. And not politics, though how men govern and misgovern other men must always be a topic of interest.

When one thinks about it, the concept of "Government" is a strange one for it assumes as its fundamental premise that certain men and women – human like you and me – can and should be allowed to take upon themselves the right (duty?) to direct the rest of us what to do, presumably for our own good. On the face of it that is a very unreasonable premise

and a remarkably arrogant presumption.

Why should flesh and blood men and women, with feet of clay like anyone else, presume to think for us and act for us and push us around and mollycoddle us and punish and reward us as if they were inherently superior beings? It doesn't make sense does it? Yet unless there is Government with strong executive power the lives of men in general soon become, as Thomas Hobbes pointed out long ago, "*Solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.*" The fear of anarchy is deeply ingrained in every society. All countries from time to time experience events which heighten their people's yearning for stability at any cost. In our own case the civil war of the early 1960s, out of which independent Guyana was born, had I believe a far more profound and longer-lasting traumatic effect than is generally realized. It seems to me, then, that the following passage from Nadezda Mandelstam's great book *Hope Against Hope* has a deep relevance for countries, including ours, that have known bitter turmoil.

> *"There has been a time when, terrified of chaos, we had all prayed for a strong system, for a powerful hand that would stem the angry human river overflowing its banks. This fear of chaos is perhaps the most permanent of our feelings - we have still not recovering from it, and it is passed on from one generation to another. There is not one of us - either among the old who saw the Revolution or the young and innocent - who does not believe that he would be the first victim if ever the mob got out of hand. "We should be the first to be hanged from a lamp-post" – whenever I hear this constantly repeated phrase, I remember Herzen's words about the intelligentsia which so much fears its own people that it prefers to go in chains itself, provided the people, too, remain fettered."*

How do men sail safely between the Scylla of limitless dictation and the Charybdis of back to the jungle anarchy? It is a riddle that mankind has spent thousands of years trying to

solve. It is a riddle that from time to time needs to be addressed.

However, I do not feel compelled to write much about politics or government. There is a good poem by Louis MacNeice called 'A Fanfare for the Makers'. These lines from that poem sum up a little of what I like to write about:

"A cloud of witnesses. To whom? To what?
To the small fire that never leaves the sky.
To the great fire that boils the daily pot.

To all the things we are not remembered by,
Which we remember and bless. To all the things
That will not even notice when we die.

Yet lend the passing moment words and wings".

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1. DUEL IN MERCY WARD

Benjie and Beepat arrived in the ward at Mercy about the same time. This ward was for chronic, not exactly terminal, cases. One or two used to make a kind of recovery and totter out into the land of the living. But generally when you went in there you only came out on the long journey. Benjie was wheeled in one morning, Beepat the same afternoon, and ever afterwards Benjie made his seniority a point to emphasise and exaggerate.

"*I was here long, long before you come in making trouble*," Benjie would say.

"*You old fool*," Beepat would respond. "*We come in the exact same time.*"

And that would be good for an hour or two of satisfying, acrimonious debate. "*No concept of time*," Benjie affirmed. "*No concept of backside*," Beepat advised.

But that was just a very small bone in the huge pot of contention that Benjie and Beepat soon began to cook up. They argued about everything. They drove the nurses to distraction. They were in next-door beds at first but they soon had to be separated. They still found ample ways to meet and quarrel and suck teeth at each other's views.

They made as many as possible in the ward take sides, which added to the confusion. The halt and the lame and the nearly blind, not to mention the dying and the nearly dead, were summoned to make a choice. It was World Cup Final every day, Benjie's team against Beepat's team, and you better have helmets because bouncers bound to fly.

Everything was a case of competition between Benjie and Beepat. They had some big rows about politics - how the other one's party was full of vagabonds and fools. They had some big rows about religion - how Hindus have so many thousands and thousands of Gods they even have a God for water snake and carrion-crow and how Christians like cannibals, wanting to drink the blood of Jesus Christ. And they had some big rows about race - how Indians mean and sly and can't

take their liquor and how black people only like to fete and play with women. But somehow in these rows you had the feeling they were rowing for rowing's sake. It was Beepat so Benjie had to say one thing and it was Benjie so Beepat had to say the other thing. But they didn't seem to want to put their heart in it. Politics, religion, and race really were not worth getting worked up about. Life was too short.

Cricket was the cause of more important rowing. Right at the beginning they made a mistake and in one argument both said, while the other was also saying, it, how Kanhai was the greatest batsman in the world. So from then on they had to forget Kanhai in the rowing and row instead about who the second best was. And if Benjie selected a team not one man could be the same as in the team Beepat selected. And if a man had a good cover-drive for Benjie, no, he only had a good hook shot for Beepat. And when they were listening to Test Match cricket there were always three commentaries - Benjie's commentary which was giving one view, Beepat's commentary which was giving a view as if it was a different game, and the real commentator's commentary which, to tell the truth, wasn't half so interesting or quarter so scandalous as Benjie's and Beenpat's commentaries.

But even cricket wasn't the biggest thing. What Benjie and Beepat really put their hearts into were rivalries that could be decided definitely and specifically right there in the ward on a daily basis.

Like the rivalry to see who was the most popular patient in the ward. This amounted to seeing who could get the most visitors to come at visiting hour. The story started when one of Beepat's cousins and five nieces and nephews happened to come and visit at the same time when his old brother and sister-in-law were there. That made eight people around Beepat's bed. And Benjie only had two people visiting him. So Beepat made a big thing about how some people so bad-natured they don't have any family or friends left to visit them while some other people at least could say a lot of friends and family still think highly of them and show their devotion.

Well, you can imagine Benjie's response. It only took about three days before ten people turned up around Benjie's bed at visiting hour and only four by Beepat's bed that same day.

Benjie didn't forget to rub the salt in the wound, and what could Beepat say? He stayed quiet and planned his own counterattack. He sent word out by his cousins and by his cousin's cousins. I am sure I don't have to describe all what happened then: more and more people coming in to visit Benjie and Beepat. Benjie drew from all over town and up the East Bank; Beepat drew from the East Coast mostly but as far away as Crabwood Creek too. Benjie even sent out and hired a bus to bring visitors in one day after competition was going about a month. By this time only a few of the visitors were actually getting in to see Benjie and Beepat, but that didn't prevent both of them getting a count of how many had turned up to visit and then each announcing, like an election official, the total number that had tried to pay a visit to their beloved Benjie/Beepat. It was a hard battle and visiting hour was an exciting time for the whole ward until a stop had to be put to all the nonsense, Matron cracked down and Benjie and Beepat had to find another contest in which to test wits and belligerence.

One day Benjie decided he was going to outdo Beepat by dressing up really nice. He got his relatives to bring his best suit, which they never thought he would wear again until his funeral, to put on when he got up to sit in his chair. He insisted. He got them to bring his white flannels from the old DCC days, still looking good. He got them to bring a tie which they had to go back to the store to replace four times before Benjie was satisfied with its colour, flamboyance and sheer class. He found the strength not just to sit down in his beautiful attire but to walk, no, parade, past Beepat's bed very early every day and very late every night. He wore two medals he had won long ago that his children had kept safe.

Beepat pretend not to notice. He took a few days to respond. He summoned his relatives and friends to preserve ancestral pride. One day they came with suitcases. They pulled across the bed screen and there was much activity and soon sounds of praise. Beepat emerged resplendent! The first day it was a kurta of fine cut, charcoal gray no less, with a red rosebud at the breast, Pandit Nehru in the flesh. Four days straight it was more suitcases and a different costume. To cap it all one afternoon behind the bed screen there was extra ex-

ultation. Like a stage curtain the screen was pulled and there stood Beepat, a full sherwani of dazzling blue adorned him! And so Beepat matched Benjie, parade for parade. You nice up, I nice up better. Benjie called up reserves and changed his shining suits. Endless clothes.

As usual it was Matron had to put a stop to the nonsense. Otherwise it would have been top hat and turban, watch chain and jewel, cummerbund and golden sandal and fashion show on Sunday afternoons and general applause and confusion in the ward. So it was back to basics. Re-emergence of the well-washed old pyjamas and the threadbare vest. But Benjie and Beepat satisfy. It was sweet to remember. The long-ago weddings, the family reunions, the days and nights of importance and revelry. Ah, sweet to remember, how it was good to look nice and everything fine. People in the ward remembered their times too.

That ward is more often than not a place of anguish and despair where people at best lose their grip on life and quietly fade away and at worst die in a hopeless, lonely agony which shakes the soul to think about too long. But in the era of Benjie and Beepat a little more of something like a last vital spark was preserved a little longer in all those hopeless, discarded cases. It wasn't much and it wasn't for long but it was something and it was for a while and in life can you be sure that in the end there is much more than that? I don't know.

And that leads directly to by far the intensest rivalry between Benjie and Beepat. Neither of them was going to be the one to die first. That was the ultimate contest between these two obscure but determined representatives of the life force, Benjie and Beepat in deadly competition. Benjie, you could say, would rather have died than pass away before Beepat. And Beepat felt exactly the same way. They put their last surge of will power into this battle to the last breath not to be first to go.

They kept an eagle eye on each other to see what signs of wear and tear might be appearing - further wear and tear, I should say, because you can imagine that Benjie and Beepat were both worn and torn a good bit already by the time they were brought in to the ward at Mercy. If one of them coughed an extra amount in the night the other started up at once and

the next morning was sure to make a comment. They kept an eye on each other's bowel movements. Nothing they would have liked better than to get a sight of each other's urine samples to see if they were clear or cloudy. They each had ancient village remedies to supplement the despised hospital medicine and they both made sure the other knew a new and extra-potent cure was being smuggled in which would give the recipient an edge in the struggle to survive.

Twice they had to take Beepat down to the operating theatre.

"He gone now," Benjie said. *"Old Beeepat gone. I don't know how he last so long, he was so sickly- looking. But now he gone."*

But Beepat returned both times and continued the fight to the death. Once Benjie in his turn had to be given blood and saline, right there in his bed. A doctor and some nurses bustled about setting up the apparatus and plastic bottles and Benjie in truth looked gone, lying with his eyes closed and a deadly waxen look in his face. It was Beepat's turn to intone the last rites.

"Benjie could never make it now. When you see those bottles hook up like that in a man, that is the end. The end. He can't make it any more. It was only mouth when he said he was feeling so good yesterday. Now look at that face, moon long pass coconut, it could be in a coffin already."

But Benjie pulled through.

One morning at the crack of dawn Beepat was amazed to see Benjie trying to do what appeared to be push-ups on the floor by the side of the bed. The word went round that Benjie was feeling so good that he had decided to begin a regime of light exercises every morning and evening. It was good psychology, and had the effect of shaking up Beepat and putting him on the defensive for a while. But it turned out to be counterproductive. After a couple of mornings Benjie couldn't make the grade and had to put the get-fit regime in cold storage. In fact he had a bad relapse and couldn't even get out of bed for a few days, which gave Beepat the chance to make a special effort to walk around the whole place and show how strong he was.

It would be good to tell how the story ended with Benjie and Beepat walking out one fine day, good for a few more

years rowing. But, in truth, life isn't like that, not for you, not for me, and not for Benjie and Beepat. The day came when Benjie began to go down. It was Diwali and Beepat had got some clay diyas and put them glimmering around his bed. It looked beautiful. Beepat was very proud. Normally Benjie would have had some comment to make, but he was silent and still. Beepat was surprised. From that time Benjie couldn't get out of bed anymore. He tried hard one or two more times but he couldn't raise himself to take the bait. Beepat began to get silent.

Benjie had a bad case of sugar and it had got to the time when the doctors couldn't even slow down the ravages of the disease. The legs were going bad. They had to operate and cut and try to keep the rest of Benjie whole. But the sickness was too far-gone and Benjie was too old. You can't only live on strong will. In the last month they cut him down four times, but he still hung on. The first time Beepat made a joke at Benjie's expense, but after that he didn't make any more jokes. Every time they cut Benjie, Beepat grew more quiet. The whole ward grew silent: no more Benjie and Beepat rowing. The time for that was over.

When they cut Benjie for the fourth time they brought him back up to the ward with one leg cut off just above the knee. He was hardly living any more but he was still alive. Beepat lit a diya in front of the greatest of his Gods before he lay down for the night. During the night you could hear Benjie's breathing across the ward. The diya by Beepat's bed flickered out and he fed it with oil. Beepat lay awake late and then he composed himself to sleep. It was strange. When the nurses made their second morning round, when the birds had just begun to sing, they found that Beepat's sleep had eased into dying. It was recorded that his heart gave out, after respiratory troubles, and he died at 11:02 a.m. Benjie lasted until just before high noon.

2. CRICKET: A HUNGER IN THE WEST INDIAN SOUL
London Metropolitan University
Inaugural Sir Frank Worrell Lecture
2 June, 2005:

I cannot very well explain to you what a great honour it is to have been invited to give the inaugural lecture in what is bound to become a famous series in honour of a very great man, a very great West Indian and one of the greatest and most influential cricketers in the long and glorious history of the greatest game ever invented.

A game invented, I should say, not by man but by God, as an old man explained to me a long, long time ago as I was watching a village game in St. Augustine, Trinidad, from under a samaan tree when I was a boy – and ever since then I have known the old man was right: a sublime game, a sacred game, a game of transcendental beauty and value in that beloved homeland of ours, the West Indies.

You will not need to be told that West Indies cricket has fallen into difficulties. Up to a few days ago I was in deep mourning after the painful and less than honourable losses to South Africa and to Pakistan in the One Day Internationals. Now, I feel a lot better after we beat Pakistan conclusively in the first Test, - except that I saw the empty, accusing stands at Kensington and knew that a canker is burrowing in the heart of the rose.

Problems of weak and sometimes blundering administration, team indiscipline and disunity, strife between players and management, bitter sponsorship battles, an erratic shuffling of the captaincy – and moneymaking creeping insidiously into the game as the primary concern on all sides – all have brought about a general malaise which has undermined the team's confidence, purpose and performance and diminished our pride in the team although not, I believe, our abiding loyalty.

This lecture will not be about all that. That is temporary. We need to remember that every age is not golden and some are even made of lead. But now more than ever we should recall the deeper sources of inspiration which inform the history of West Indies cricket. In our eras of greatness, when West Indies took the field, ghostly presences walked with the players representing commitment to a higher cause, loyalty to the proudest of traditions and attachment to a long line of heroes – and the twelfth man in the team always answered to the name of courage. Such inspiring presences seem almost to have vanished these days. But, you will see, they will emerge again soon enough from the shadows.

I am awed by the responsibility given me this evening. The only credentials I have for delivering this lecture are my love of cricket and my love of the West Indies. As a tennis player I became good enough, and was extremely proud, to captain the West Indies in the Davis Cup but when asked by an interviewer what my desire would be I could do nothing else but say that if given the choice by some benign deity between winning Wimbledon and winning a Test match for the West Indies by scoring a century at Lords I would choose the century at Lords. It is a game that has entered my dreams and has lifelong captured my imagination.

As for the West Indies, I have close connections by ancestry, birth or adoption with St. Kitts Nevis, Antigua and Barbuda, Trinidad & Tobago and Guyana but it is by deep conviction and commitment that I am West Indian. I love the West Indies. I wish we were a full-fledged nation. I hope that day will come.

Perhaps I do have one other credential to give a lecture on cricket. It is that a great-uncle of mine, Major A.E. "Bertie" Harragin, once hit the immortal W.G. Grace for six sixes in an innings. It was in the first match of the West Indies tour of England in 1906, a game against W.G. Grace's Eleven, when my uncle Bertie, to our family's eternal credit, had the temerity to hit the Grand Old Man of cricket for six towering sixes in a flashing innings of 50. I like to think of that wild colonial boy smiting the revered W.G. out of the ground no less than six times on a summer's afternoon as a distant foretaste of the independence which lay in our future as a people.

Certainly my qualifications as a player to give this lecture are nil. The most I can say is that when I was a boy I was quite a good leg-break bowler who, it turned out, could only bowl googlies which unhappy fact soon enough became known to every batsman who ever faced me. My other claim to non-distinction was that I was one of those West Indian schoolboys, of which I have a feeling there may have been many, dismissed as a batsman in a way which the laws of cricket do not define. In that particular innings, coming in at number 10, I had been playing and missing for about four overs, first awkwardly swishing on the offside, then even more awkwardly not making any connection on the leg side. A ball came which I left alone, quite expertly I thought, but when I looked up to my horror I saw the finger of the umpire, who was also our games master, a strict disciplinarian and lover of the game, decisively uplifted. I protested, of course, and requested an explanation. "*Don't argue, McDonald*," he said "*Be on your way. You're out for ugly batting*." It was an early and striking indication for me that the game has an aesthetic dimension which is all-important.

Can one tell the moment when one falls in love? That moment when first love crystallises and never is forgotten? I remember the crystalline instant when I first fell in love with cricket and would thereafter be eternally enraptured. I was a schoolboy at Queens Royal College in Port-of-Spain in the late 1940s and when intercolonial matches were played we were given half-days off and we would walk down to the Oval to see Trinidad play. There came a day when I was watching Trinidad play Barbados and Frank Worrell was batting. As time passed a realization built up in me that I was receiving a gift beyond price, a blessing that would not fade. And then Wilfred Ferguson, the wonderful and popular Fergie, sent down a lovely leg-break and Frank Worrell, all grace and perfect balance, with a dancer's marvellous, adroit step, late cut the ball most delicately to the boundary in a pure and gleaming flash of genius. I still have the image in my mind. It was the moment when my love and reverence for cricket crystallized forever.

It may or may not be a coincidence that just about that time I had discovered a love for poetry which would never

leave me. And from that time I have associated Frank Worrell's peerless late cut with Gerard Manley Hopkins' eternally beautiful poem 'The Windhover' which about then had also transfixed me. Worrell and Hopkins – they both helped to shape my young soul.

Let me read the first few lines of that poem and imagine yourself at the Queens Park Oval on a golden afternoon:

"I caught this morning morning's minion, king-
dom of daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon, in his
riding
Of the rolling level, underneath him steady air, and striding
High there, how he rung upon the rein of a wimpling wing
In his ecstasy! Then off, off forth on swing,

As a skate's heel sweeps smooth on a bow-bend: the hurl and
gliding
Rebuffed the big wind. My heart in hiding
Stirred for a bird, – the achieve of, the mastery of the thing!"

Those lovely words that sum up anything greatly and naturally done.

Does that not remind you of batting at its glorious, Worrellian, God-given best – *"the achieve of, the mastery of the thing!"*

From the start, therefore, Frank Worrell stood for the beauty and poetry of cricket. As the years passed I grew to learn how much more he meant to West Indian cricket and cricket as a world game.

To put it simply, there was a hunger in the West Indian soul which Worrell above all came to express through his mastery of all that cricket involves and through his leadership. Through his intelligence, his unerring sense of values, his example, his calm not to say serene authority he inspired West Indians of every stripe and colour in all walks of life and lifted up the whole game to a new level of excitement, popularity and world–importance, illuminating it anew when it had been fading almost into decadence.

It was perhaps inevitable as indigenous intellectual authority gained the upper hand conclusively everywhere in the

West Indies, and political independence loomed, that the white mercantile-planter class would be dislodged from automatic domination and leadership in the game. What was not inevitable was that a man of exactly the perfect temperament, intellect, character and charismatic leadership qualities should have emerged to break the mould and make the transition seamless and inspirational. He was the perfect leader of men and he believed in the West Indies with his whole heart. Here is C.L.R. James describing with what absolute sureness of touch Worrell brought out the best in the West Indies team he captained.

"The West Indies team in Australia, on the field and off, was playing above what it knew of itself. If anything went wrong it knew that it would be instantly told, in unhesitating and precise language, how to repair it, and that the captain's certainty and confidence extended to his belief that what he wanted would be done. He did not instill into but drew out of his players. What they discovered in themselves must have been a revelation to few more than to the players themselves. When the time came to say goodbye some of the toughest players could only shake the captain's hand and look away, not trusting themselves to speak."

Talk about the right man in the right place at the right time! And so he stepped with supreme assurance onto the world stage. Worrell became captain of the West Indies at a time when cricket was losing its way. Caution was the order of the day – batsmen playing for safety, bowlers bowling defensively, captains seeking to avoid defeat at all costs. It is clear that Worrell decided to restore to Test cricket in 1960 the spirit and the fervour of the game he loved. We know what happened. Richie Benaud, the Australian captain, met him halfway, the greatest Test series ever played transformed expectations, and the West Indies even in losing inaugurated a cricketing renaissance. When the West Indies visited England in 1963 the Lord Mayor of London summed it up, "*A gale of change has blown through the hallowed halls of cricket*." Who can doubt that Frank Worrell is indelibly one of the greatest, most transforming figures in the history of cricket?

How might one convey what Frank Worrell stood for and

what he wanted our cricketers to absorb into their very beings and thereby set an example to all West Indians? How might one convey what it takes to be builders of a team and builders of a nation?

There is a word which has a meaning for West Indians beyond the ordinary dictionary definition. The word is respect. Nuff respect is an expression which recognizes achievement at the very highest level, recognizes pride, excellence, superior performance and gallant behaviour which is uniquely admirable. It is a concept which, I fear, in all its West Indian ramifications and special meaning has been losing its relevance in West Indian cricket and West Indian teams in recent times. If West Indian cricket is to return to its moorings nuff respect must be shown again with the fervour which Frank Worrell and our other founding fathers of the concept taught with such absolute conviction – respect for the history and traditions of cricket, its deeds and heroes; respect for the laws of cricket, never to be denied or circumvented; respect for the umpires and officials who are given to be guardians of the laws; respect and loyalty and love as in battle for team mates; respect also for opponents for they are after all joint legatees of the great game and its traditions; respect and love of country, in the knowledge that nowhere else will defiance or surrender register so profoundly in the people's psyche; in the end respect for oneself as player and participant, keepers of the shrine, a responsibility not to be taken lightly or forgotten.

When one enters a temple, a church, a mosque one has to behave in a certain way, one has to show nuff respect. When you enter cricket for the West Indies it is like that. Not just a hunger for runs or wickets or money or fame but a hunger in the soul for something greater than personal benefit or achievement. It should be recognizable without definition. For a long time it was.

Our West Indian leaders have been struggling hard to shape our Caribbean region into a single, valid economic and, eventually perhaps, political space. For long they have recognized cricket as a vital means to achieving the holy grail of unity, come-together effort, common identity and solidarity. At their Inter-Sessional Meeting in the year 2000 it was plainly stated,

"Heads of Government reiterated that cricket occupies a special place in the economic and social life of the people of the Region and that every effort must be made by all stakeholders to encourage the continued development of the game." A recording secretary's unembellished prose, it is true, but surely in no other part of the world is a game of such supreme value that concern about its future is reflected in the regular deliberations of Heads of Government.

Of course, the Heads of Government should not have limited the value of cricket to the economic and social life of the people of the Region. They will certainly have known better than that. The value and importance of cricket in the West Indies extends deep into the cultural and psychological domain of the people.

We must always begin with C.L.R. James's famous comment: *"What do they know of cricket who only cricket know? West Indians crowding to Tests bring with them their whole past history and the future hopes of our peoples."*

It means a great deal to be a cultural leader in the world - to be prominent in the arts, in literature, in music, in theatre, in architecture, in film, in style and fashion, in scholarship. And cricket as much as any game represents an international cultural experience of abiding significance. To play an important role in cricket gives us stature in the world. There is pride and self-confidence when we compete strongly among the best anywhere. And we feel diminished when we do not.

Who can doubt that cricket is central to what keeps us together as West Indians? C.L.R. James instructed us in this in *Beyond a Boundary,* the greatest book ever written about cricket. He pointed out, by example, that English people have a conception of themselves breathed from birth. King Alfred and the burnt cakes, Richard the Lion Heart, the Crusaders, Shakespeare, Mighty Nelson, the Iron Duke and Waterloo, the Charge of the Light Brigade, the few who did so much for so many – these and such as these, C.L.R.. points out, constitute a national tradition.

For West Indians our icons to a remarkable extent are cricketing icons: imperious Challenor, "Furioso" George John rolling up his sleeves as if to hurl an iron spear, the leaping Constantine, Headley in all his glorious, defiant genius, *"Those*

two friends of mine, Ramadhin and Valentine," the silken elegance of Stollmeyer and the obdurate defiance of Allan Rae, the indescribable magic of Rohan Kanhai, Sobers the greatest cricketer who ever lived, Hall with crucifix blazing in the sun and Griffith inseparable from the other end, the great Gibbs who could spin a ball on marble ground and make it bounce on feathers, the three immortal W's, Worrell in Australia and the Tied Test and little Joe Solomon caught forever in that famous picture throwing down the last Australian wicket, Roy Fredericks hooking Lillee and Thomson again and again to the boundary at Perth, Holding of the whispering death, Greenidge of the thunder bat, Clive Lloyd and his magnificent pride of fast bowlers, Viv Richards the Master Blaster, Ambrose and Walsh saving our pride again and again, the ever reliable and faithful Chandrapaul, Brian Lara whose princely deeds will never fade despite all controversy. These and a hundred others, these are our Knights of the Round Table. And in their exploits we weave a good part of the nation's historical fabric, our own Bayeux Tapestry beyond any price.

Our nation is not fully formed. It needs its heroes and brave traditions and its sagas. I cannot believe that this tradition, this legacy, passed on from hero to hero, is at an end. Yet there are those of the younger school of commentators and scholars who clearly think so. This is what Hilary Beckles, Principal of the University of the West Indies, Cave Hill campus, and distinguished new generation scholar of the game, has forthrightly written:

"Today's cricket hero now wishes to be identified as a professional craftsman with only a secondary responsibility to the wider sociopolitical agenda carried out by his predecessors. He does not wish to carry the burden of responsibility for nationalist pride, regional integration and the viability of the nation-state. He sees himself as an apolitical, transnational, global professional aiming to maximize financial earnings within an attractive market, and is principally motivated and guided by these considerations."

Hilary Beckles continues:

"The logical implication of this self-perception is that the cricket hero wishes to distance his performance and psychological state from the considerations of the 1950s and 1960s, from the political project of nation building. These post-nationalist players want to function as "pure" entrepreneurs within the market economy of sport, and with a minimum emotional or ideological bond to the psychological needs of nation-states."

The thought that this may be true shakes me to the core of my belief in what cricket stands for in the West Indies. In the writings of W.B. Yeats there is a wonderfully eloquent phrase: he speaks of *"a community bound together by imaginative possessions."* Yeats used this phrase in the context of discussing the importance of a National Theatre for his beloved Ireland. Yeats also wrote of theatre as an institution for transforming those isolated from one another into the unity of one audience. And he wrote that it was impossible for a nation to exist if they were *"no national institutions to reverence, no national success to admire without a model of it in the mind of the people."*

When I think of cricket and the hope of West Indian nationhood the words Yeats spoke so eloquently strike with me a chord that sings. Economically, we are much divided and sometimes seem tempted to go our separate ways. Politically, we remain suspicious of each other and therefore cannot so far summon the will to come together in the many ways we must know are necessary for practical nationhood. But cricket, there I have always hoped we are different and better and more confident and more together. Truly cricket is supremely an imaginative possession which binds our Caribbean community together. If it is no longer to be so we have lost something of infinite value.

When we look around the world it indeed seems that life is only about economics, about getting and spending in the marketplace, about who comes off best and who gets the most. But of course it is not so. The historian, R.H. Tawney, author of *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, had a longer and better view of man's ultimate concerns when he wrote the following:

"The most obvious facts are the most easily forgotten. Both the existing economic order and too many of the projects advanced for reconstructing it break down through their neglect of the truism that, since even quite ordinary men have souls, no increase in national wealth will compensate them for arrangements which insult their self respect and impair their freedom. A reasonable estimate of economic organisation must allow for the fact that….it must satisfy criteria which are not purely economic."

One reason I know that he is right is my lifelong experience with West Indian cricket. There is a hunger in the souls of West Indians for this great game which needs to be satisfied and is part of our yearning for a more fulfilled life. When that hunger is less satisfied and that yearning less fulfilled it is an unhappy and restless time – as it is now. Our administrators and players must always remember that. They must never imagine that they are merely corporate managers, or in the case of our beloved cricketers, merely players who win or lose another game and make what they possibly can out of doing so. They are custodians who inherit and pass on what Derek Walcott named "*the bread that lasts*."

From the very start – the wonder of Frank Worrell's late cut, the inspiration of Manley Hopkins' gleaming lines in 'The Windhover' - I have associated lovely cricket with beautiful poetry. Over the years, more often than I can count, tears have come to my eyes when I have seen displayed such surely God-given signals of man's instinct to create perfect works of art. And I think of Derek Walcott's great lines in his poem written for Joseph Brodsky, 'Forest of Europe:'

"what's poetry, if it is worth its salt,
but a phrase man can pass from hand to mouth.

From hand to mouth, across the centuries,
the bread that lasts when systems have decayed."

Poetry, of course. And, in the West Indies, cricket also. The bread that lasts. I have felt that all my life. If the spirit that evokes that feeling has faded in the younger generations and cannot be revived it will be a terrible loss for West Indian cricket. It will also, I believe, depress and undermine the hopes I am sure we all have for ever-closer unity and identity and, eventually, nationhood.

Vice-Chancellor, ladies and gentlemen, I thank you again. I will never forget this great honour. It is a highlight of my life.

3. JOCK CAMPBELL
An Essay after reading *Sweetening Bitter Sugar: Jock Campbell – The Booker Reformer in British Guiana, 1934-1966*

In my last months at Cambridge University, in early 1955, I was offered a number of jobs including one by the Shell Oil Company to work for them in Trinidad where I had been born and lived as a boy and gone to school. I had decided to take up this offer when out of the blue I was asked if I would be interested in a job in British Guiana with Bookers. The job sounded interesting and I went up to London to meet the Chairman of Bookers, Jock Campbell, for an interview over lunch. It is nearly fifty years ago but I remember that meeting as if I was there earlier today.

I had already met a number of very remarkable men including my tutor at Cambridge, the future Regius Professor of Modern History, Geoffrey Elton, the dedicated and daunting English lecturer, critic and editor, F.R. Leavis, the celebrated economist Arthur Lewis of St. Lucia and an astonishing sportsman named Dennis Silk who later became President of the MCC – but now I found Jock Campbell easily the most charismatic man I had encountered in my life.

It is impossible to convey by simple description the force and compelling attractiveness of a truly charismatic person. How can you exactly describe an emanation of energy, a unique aura that goes far beyond physique and appearance and words uttered? The word derives via ecclesiastical Latin from the Greek *kharisma* meaning a divinely conferred power or talent. That captures something of the essence of what is involved since it infers that the charismatic person attracts and deserves devotion. I was a Jock devotee from the very start.

Jock Campbell's eloquence made the heart beat faster and my young undergraduate mind and soul responded to his fervour. That first meeting lasted for a long time, well past the cheese and liqueur part of lunch, and by the end I was

completely and utterly converted to this extraordinary man's vision of how practical good could be done in this world. I have been in the Guyana sugar industry for nearly fifty years and I have never stopped looking upon what has to be done not just as a job, though of course it is that too and has to be done well, but also as a sort of crusade. The Jock effect has never really worn off.

I remember him at that meeting as restlessly enthusiastic, inspired with convictions that he could hardly contain. I recall to this day how one expansive gesture scattered green peas all over the table! I was enthralled by the man and the story he told and the ambitions he held and wanted to explain. Jock told me then of his early days in British Guiana and his shock at the terrible conditions he saw at first hand on his family plantations and his determination to introduce root and branch reform as soon as he had the authority. He described the steps he had already taken to reorganize completely the chaotic shambles of the sprawling Booker empire in British Guiana into separate companies with Boards and well defined areas of operation and responsibility – Bookers Sugar Estates, Bookers Stores, Bookers Shipping, Bookers Rum and Bookers Industrial Holdings. He had put in train and was determined to carry through a revolution in the whole ethos of Bookers, how it was run, what it would try to achieve, how people throughout the whole organization must be made to matter. He told me of the Commonwealth Sugar Agreement – I found out later that he was its principal architect – which provided a secure basis on which to build improved conditions for those who worked in sugar.

For the first time, and I was to have the concept elaborated often in the future, Jock gave me a glimpse of his belief that Bookers had to exercise a fourfold responsibility: to shareholders who provided the investment and deserved a return; to employees who were the company's lifeblood and deserved decent remuneration and ever-improving life conditions; to customers without whose satisfaction no business could exist; and to the community and country in which the business operated since the ultimate test of a company was how much it contributed to the enrichment and modernization of the whole civic body. Nowadays, the concept in the business

world of balanced responsibilities may seem well worn but fifty years ago it was new and revelatory. If any concept held sway then it was the imperative of maximizing profit which Jock rejected completely.

Now, fifty years on, I find Professor Clem Seecharran's book on Jock Campbell magnificent. Because I held Jock in such esteem, and still hold his memory in high honour, if this book had fallen short in telling his story I think I would have been the first to be critical. But it measures up exceedingly well to the man and what he tried to do and what he achieved. It is a book of immense significance in telling the story of Guyana at a particularly important juncture in its history – the era just prior to Independence. But for me it is also a book which tells the story, and fills in countless interesting details, about the life of an extraordinary man who was my friend and mentor in an unforgettable period of my life.

I joined Bookers, in 1955, at a time when the Jock Campbell revolution was in full flow. I found myself in the middle of a process in which Bookers was being completely recreated. In this process the sugar industry in British Guiana was transformed from a rundown, unprofitable, inhuman, parternalistic and plantocratic expatriate family concern into a rehabilitated, forward-looking, productive and dynamic enterprise basically run by Guyanese for the much improved good of Guyanese and Guyana.

Sugar production grew from 170,000 tons to 350,000 tons. Estates were consolidated and factories modernized. Drainage and irrigation facilities and the whole infrastructure of field works were completely revamped. Agricultural practices and applications were overhauled in line with current world-class technology. The first sugar bulk-loading terminal in the Caribbean was established to replace the drudgery of loading sugar in bags.

And the people side of the industry was simply revolutionized: remuneration vastly increased, the old logies eliminated and 15,000 new houses in 75 housing areas built with roads and water supplied, medical services upgraded to cater for all sugar workers and their families and the scourge of malaria eradicated, Community Centres established on all estates and welfare, sporting, cultural and library activities

expanded, training and education immensely stepped up, a world-class Apprentice Training Centre established, a cadet scheme and scholarships introduced and all along Guyanisation pressed forward until the time came when the industry was being run almost entirely by Guyanese. It was an era of tremendous growth and change for the better in the sugar industry and indeed throughout all the enterprises making up the Booker Group in Guyana at the time.

I cannot forget that wonderful time. All that was being done was captured in a phrase Jock Campbell as Chairman used in all his key addresses: "*People are more important than ships, shops and sugar estates*." We tried to act in the belief that business could not possibly just be about making money if only because that would be soul-destroyingly boring. Business had to be about making the lives of people better and more fulfilled. People in any case always came first however you considered what you were trying to do in business. Creating profit was vital but not just for its own sake but for good, everyday, ordinarily human, immediately flesh and blood, life-enhancing purposes.

Working in that old Bookers with Jock Campbell was marvellously exhilarating. There was a feeling of fervour and achievement – even in a small way of being involved in making history. Getting things done in a good, progressive cause was the essence of the job, not simply maximizing efficiency and making profits which were to be seen as necessary means and never as ultimate ends. I remember the clear purpose, the hard but satisfying work, the extraordinary leadership, the good humour, the enthusiasm and high spirits, the overall intelligent humanity of the operation, the camaraderie and the sense of fulfilment.

Clem Seecharran's book is a big book in every sense – well over 600 pages in length, brimmingly rich in original research, scholarly detail and precious interview material, above all large in purpose and achievement. I am sure it will be considered an absolutely essential text in understanding a crucial era in Guyana's history and as time goes on I believe it will be regarded as a classic in the nation's intellectual journey.

You can get a good idea of the scope of the book from glanc-

ing at its Contents which sets out the results of the writer's ten-year scholarly odyssey in eight main parts:

I believe that every step of the way the reader will be challenged and fascinated by the author's findings. I confess that most fascinating to me are the chapters on Jock Campbell before he got personally involved in Guyana simply because these details of his ancestry, his childhood and youth, his years at Oxford and before he came out of British Guiana for the first time (to break off a love affair at the behest of his parents) are substantially new to me – as indeed is much of the material in the important chapters telling the story of the years in Bookers leading up to the time he became Chairman in 1952 and took charge of his life's work.

Nevertheless, the central core of Professor Seecharan's seminal book are the chapters on Jock Campbell's impact on the Guyana sugar industry, and therefore on the history of the country in the pre-independence era of Dr. Jagan and Mr. Burnham and I suppose these are the chapters which will be read with the most avid interest. In this respect it may well be that Professor Seecharan's analysis will be considered controversial by many, especially the politicians. In this book Jock Campbell's contribution in radically reforming the sugar industry in Guyana is seen as absolutely vital, far more far reach-

ing and fundamental than political leaders of the time gave him credit for. In any such controversy, I am sure of one thing – Jock Campbell was not forced by any politician into doing the good that he did: his astonishing achievements in restructuring and humanizing the industry were conceived and carried through with great determination out of an inner desire to change and improve the lives of hundreds of thousands for the better. Having said this I would be the first to say that Jock himself saw things a little differently. In a letter to me in February, 1984, after Dr. Shahabudeen had published his book *From Plantocracy to Nationalisation,* Jock put it like this:

"I suppose I could claim that if I could not get the confidence of shareholders and bankers I could not do all the things I wanted to do. But the truth is that Guyanese pressures forced the pace; and enabled me to gain acceptance of reforms that never would have been accepted in a quiescent Guyana."

I am particularly pleased that Professor Seecharan in his book frequently captures Jock Campbell not only as a man who conceived and carried out great tasks as a captain of industry, business philosopher, a major figure in the world of sugar and an important player in Guyana's history but also as an individual who intensely believed in the importance of small causes. This trait in Jock especially appealed to me. In fact I think it is a mark of true greatness in a person.

It was Jock who showed me the passage from Boris Pasternak's *Dr. Zhivago* in which Strelnikov, caught in the in the huge ebb and flow of the Russian Revolution, amidst the tremendous events taking place all around him, the giant turns and turnabouts of history, suddenly realizes that the small concerns of individual men and women are what count in the end:

"And in order to do good to others he needed, besides the principles that filled his mind, an unprincipled heart – the kind of heart that knows of no general causes, but only of particular ones and knows the greatness of small actions."

Understanding the importance of small causes, appreciating the greatness of small actions: that is the essence of compassion in the exercise of power and that is what Jock Campbell most certainly and most deeply understood.

I remember him as the man who told us in no uncertain terms that no person is ever redundant, only jobs, and we were never to forget that. I remember him as the man who often reminded me, and others, that it was important to pay attention to one man's grievance as well as to Three-Year Plans. And I vividly remember him as the man who when he retired as Chairman asked me to keep an eye on six old pensioners who had given him good service in his younger days and make sure every Christmas to send them a card and a gift on his behalf – which I faithfully did until one by one over the years they died. And so it came to one last Christmas I only had one card and one gift to send and my last communication from Jock was a Christmas card of his own, scribbled in his distinctive hand, wishing myself and family the blessings of the season and, in a postscript, thanking me for again doing him the small service of sending that last old pensioner his greetings and gift for work done so long ago and still so well remembered.

In a letter to me once he quoted approvingly a saying of the American Irving Howe: "*There is utopia and utopia. The kind imposed by an elite in the name of an historical imperative, that utopia is hell. It must lead to terror and then, terror exhausted, to cynicism and torpor. But surely there is another utopia. It cannot be willed into existence or out of sight. It speaks for our sense of what may yet be.*" Jock Campbell himself had a profound sense of what should be attempted and what might be achieved in the cause of a better society. All his working life he strove pragmatically to improve the lives of people whom his decisions touched.

I remember it all so vividly. I see now more clearly than ever that we lived and worked in an exceptional time for an extraordinary man. I am more pleased than I can say that in Professor Clem Seecharan Jock Campbell has found a historian worthy of his remarkable personality and achievements and in *Sweetening Bitter Sugar* a classic book which preserves his legacy for new generations.

4. REMEMBERING MARTIN

On December 13th, two years ago, Martin Carter died. You know how it is when suddenly there is low voltage and the lights flicker low. So it was when he died the soul-light of the nation dimmed. Without his presence it has become that much more difficult to see the truth clearly in the surrounding gloom.

I wish to remember Martin in this column and to do so I reproduce the greater part of an article I wrote on the first anniversary of his death. All I wrote then I feel even more certainly as time passes and his greatness as a poet and a thinker grows more deeply entrenched in our consciousness and in the history of Guyana.

It seems hardly any time at all since Martin died and it seems a long, long time. When death seems like that it is because every day the death is still heavy in our lives and because simultaneously the time before the death seems agonizingly far and irretrievably lost. It is the feeling anyone has when someone close and deeply loved for a long time dies and you know at once and forever with a thud of dreadful loss that the world for you will never be the same again, never so good, never so true, never so comprehensible. Some essence, some pith, has gone and will not return.

Martin's death was one of those rare deaths when the loss is seen to grow heavier as time passes. Heavy for the nation it certainly remains. He was Guyana's greatest poet. That is simply said but somehow not half enough is said in saying it. In his poems he always told the truth about himself and his people and the world so we all came to trust his words beyond all others. Why do you think Martin Carter was, and is, quoted by every sort of person in every kind of situation? The truth is that his poetry verified all manner of things.

There is a poem by Rainer Maria Rilke about an antique marble torso of the god Apollo the beauty of which impresses on the onlooker for all time the need to change one's life forever. *"Du must dein Leben andern"*, the poem's central line pro-

claims, "*You have to change your life*." To this day I read Martin's poetry remembering he once told me about that poem and that line.

I never recognized in Martin a revolutionary figure in the generally accepted sense of a harsh and ruthless breaker of moulds. Perhaps he did not want to show that side of himself to me when I first met him soon after I arrived in the country in 1955 to work in Jock Campbell's Bookers. However, he always had a calm certainty that structures superficially strong which did not fit the basic needs of ordinary people were doomed and I remember him often spelling out his feelings eloquently about this when we spoke together in those days long ago. Seamus Heaney's lines sum up what I remember of Martin's convictions on this score:

"What looks the strongest has outlived its time,
The future lies with what's affirmed from under."

He was modest and dismissive of his role but of course I knew he had been one of those who were foremost and most creative and inspiring in conceiving and bringing forth the birth of a new kind of Guyana. Years later I copied out in my journal some words of Ines Hernandez in her "*Open Letter to the Chicanas*" which reminded me of the kind of revolutionary the Martin I had met in those days seemed to be:

"To be revolutionary is to be original, to know where we came from, to validate what is our and help it to flourish, the best of what is ours, of our beginnings, our principles, and to leave behind what no longer serves us."

And I often felt when I experienced Martin in his moods of embittered loss of faith that what led him into his despairing depths was his unsparing knowledge that the people for when he had written his poetry and composed his lucid, farseeing editorial-essays seemed to find it impossible to leave behind what no longer could possibly serve them with anything but desolating ill — mutual racial hostility, class division, raw political animosities and almost brutish individual incivilities. He saw that his people could not seem to exorcise the de-

mons of divisiveness and it made him despair.

Certainly in all his utterances he never ceased to bear witness to a reality from which the public might want, or might be persuaded to want, to turn away. He wanted no one ever to flinch from truth. That is to be a hard taskmaster and is what it takes to be a true poet.

I cannot remember Martin, nobody could possibly remember Martin, without remembering his wife Phyllis, generous-hearted to a fault, brave for Martin throughout his great life. He would have been less without her who can doubt it. Tim Hector of Antigua saw the integrity of the poet and the man shine through above all in the love of his wife:

"It was rare pleasure to be at their house, and you knew in the Profoundest way that he and his wife had created a home and a habitation, with little or no models to go by. It was their own creation. There was no affected stylization about the relation between Martin and his wife. Each day it was spontaneous, natural, entirely free of imitation, with its own intimations of a love deep and abiding."

When Martin died I thought about the man I had known for so long and tried to capture for myself the aura which surrounds him, the unique impression which all who met him felt in his presence. It was not just the effect of the unforgettable poetry he had written. I cannot find better words that I used then to express may sense of Martin's presence:

"There was an unique ***seriousness*** *in Martin which captured one's attention and love. It was a deep seriousness about his tasks in life, about life itself, about life's meaning, that went beyond anything I have felt in anyone else I have known. The task of the poet is sacred, one's integrity is sacred, the loyalties of love and friendship are sacred, the rights of men are sacred and are too often abused, the wonder of the world is sacred and why is it that it is so often neglected?*

A counter-aspect of his abiding seriousness about such things was the bitterness and despair he felt and often expressed about the brutishness of men, the extraordinary superficiality and hollowness of public affairs, the spiritual desolation that seems to have

entrenched itself everywhere, the plunge of the world into hatred and ignorance. All this I write may make him seem a heavy and humourless man. Far from it. He could laugh and carouse with the very, very best of the laughers and carousers. But there was that core of seriousness about the sacred, the sacredness of the word, the sacredness of the works of man in the world, that never left him and that I will never forget."

And now for this column two years after he died I will add one memory. It is of dining one night with Martin in the company of Miles Fitzpatrick, David deCaires, Lloyd Searwar and Rupert Roopnarine. It was not long before he died. Martin had not fully recovered from the stroke he suffered but still he could be eloquent and now he gave us a magnificent burst of talk in praise of the Irish poet Yeats. He ended by calling for someone to read Yeats's poem 'Among School Children' which he said was perhaps the greatest poem ever written. Miles went to get Yeats's *Collected Poems* from his library and Rupert found and read the great poem most movingly. And forever I have this picture of Martin in his seat leaning forward thumb pressed to his cheek and forefinger at his forehead tears coming to his eyes as the poem came to its marvellous end.

"O chestnut-tree, great-rooted blossomer,
Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole?
O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,
How can we know the dancer from the dance?"

5. THE COMFORT OF ALL THINGS

Lately I made a visit up the great Essequibo to rest the body, refresh the mind and remind the soul of the beauty in this world. We should travel more in our land. We are blessed to live in a country where the glories and fascinations and variety and sheer amplitude of nature are so bounteous. Indelibly engraved in my memory of wondrous places are the marvellous savannahs of the Rupununi and the mountainscapes in the far distance as sunset deepening to gold makes them magnificent. A poem wrote itself in my mind.

'The Golden Barns of God'

Life has been long and good
but it is not forever.
I will not come again to the savannahs
out of the green, beloved trees
root-red streams we passed, the silvered banks
I will not see again this far horizon
where the great rock silos rise
thunder of the Gods around them.
Is there meaning in what we are and do?
Ah, the end and purpose of all creation!
Endless time has brought this to my eyes:
the wild winds throwing the birds
the air becoming marvellously bright
the large sun sinking to the very
edge and end of the world
the golden barns of God ablaze.

How variously lovely is Guyana! Indeed, I do not have to go far to see the beauty. Most afternoons I take a book and sit beneath the green canopy of trees in our garden by a flower-embowered fountain amidst a grove of hibiscus and bougainvillea and red and yellow exora with curious orchids

climbing on a nearby trellis of green wood.

Then there is beauty enough for the day bestowed by Nature or by God, take your pick, as the light goes from bright to silver-blue to golden to a darkening crimson to purple to pitch. And sometimes the wind rises bringing rain and that also is beautiful because there is nothing sweeter than the smell of sudden rain on parched earth and grass. And always there are the hummingbirds. They come at dusk and hover and dart among the flowering plants. Counterpoint to their quick, brilliant, silent shimmering is the rustle and caterwauling of the green parrots settling in the tops of the trees overhead. Sometimes when there is a moon I wait for its light to silver the whole garden before going inside.

But for a different, larger beauty travel up the Essequibo and stay a few days and star-filled nights and forget about the rest of your life for a while. We were there not long ago, my wife and I, staying with her brother and his wife at their lovely place on the bank of the Essequibo just below Bartica. In that quiet haven, which they have developed step by sensible step into a perfect river home, life slows to an unfrenzied balance after the pace and hustle of daily getting and spending. The body relaxes and the mind composes a deeper view of what is important. I have a place there where I sit and read on a niche of white sand between rocks in the shade of a tree on the river's edge. The sounds of wind in the forest trees and wind on the water blend into a sense of what it is like to be at peace. The hours pass and the shadows shift beneath the tree and the flooding and the ebbing tide moves the shining of the water into a myriad of shapes and colours. And it has been like this for ten thousand years. And I am privileged.

Gratitude for such beauty and extraordinary peace gradually focuses the imagination and a poem which tries to express the wonder and the thanks emerges.

'The Comfort of All Things'

I went out for an evening swim alone
a perfect pendant of lightning blazed
deep in a far thunder-head as I walked.
I was astonished how it lit the world
revealing smallest details I would have missed
now they really exist. I pick a stone up,
feel it, smell the wet dirt, rub it clean
its shape is marvellously unique
I wrap it in a gold leaf I have also noticed
walk on, wind rising over the wide water
the ancient lantern of the moon aloft
for aeons gone and to come, the river washing
and retreating, swaying in the vertigo of time.
Immensities surround me, infinity of sky
swimming a long way out, full of peace
I think how old I am compared with the stars.

6. PAINTING THE WIND

When I travel up the Essequibo I feel I touch an immortal world. Today I recall what I once expressed when, not for the first time, the river clarified life's daily problems and concerns into a true perspective.

I have no purpose other than to say there is great beauty in this world and that it gives me pleasure to try to express it and that it is especially good to know that in Guyana such beauty is near at hand. We dash from moment to moment without reflection but we should halt and sometimes spend a different sort of time.

Every so often I go with my family up the Essequibo for an unforgettable, life-enhancing, few days. We stay in a small and lovely house, whose ownership we share with friends, embowered in the green forest set on a niche of bright sand on the edge of the great river. The peace and beauty of this perfect place cannot be imagined, it can only be experienced. Friends, seasoned travellers around this multi-marvelled earth, who have been there with us have said they know of nowhere which excels, and very few which equal, this place in its unique, uncorrupted loveliness.

There is boating and swimming and wave-running and expeditions near and far and forest ventures and parties in other river-homes. But I care these days simply to spend the time sitting and reading, watching the river change and the sky grow light then luminous then dark again and then watch the astonishing splendour of the stars at night. Storms come and go and they toss the river as if it were the sea. I love the storms. And by now I have seen scores upon scores of dawns and dusks and not one is the same in how they colour the sky and the river that is more like a sea where that bright beach and green forest curves. I have seen more colours there than scientists say exist. I remember once on two successive days there was a dawn so explosively red it seemed a volcano had burst, followed by one whose sky was silver-pale and veined with lightest blue. One evening on a recent visit huge, leaden-

coloured, ominous clouds hung over the house. I had just read a poem which described a sky "*the colour of the desperation of wolves*" and as I looked up at those clouds about to fall on us I knew what the poet meant.

I find there long hours of slow-moving time to read. Is there anything better, more soul-satisfying, at my age anyway, than an amplitude of time, with no commitments in prospect, no business to transact, to read books you have looked forward to reading, saved up for the right interval of unoccupied hours, treasuring the thought? This is not a mere reading of books, it is the long-drawn-out savouring of one of the great pleasures of life. I find a place in the shade of a tree by the river-rocks on the beach and set down a comfortable chair and ahead of me stretch as many hours as I like for the enjoyment of books and the pleasures of reflection.

I read the pages more slowly than usual, often turning back to reread passages because their beauty or relevance registers with special impact in retrospect as the book progresses or simply because some expression of an insight is so remarkable that I want to remind myself more than once of how it has been written. Often also my eyes lift off the page simply to look at the great river and the immense sky which arches over it to see with ever-renewed wonder how their moods and patterns everlastingly change and I think how each moment is unique and eternal. Sudden shifts of wind or cloud-shadow change the texture of the water from brocade to silk to satin to rough cotton. Progress with my book is slow. But why should I worry about that? There is no need to hurry. There are no deadlines. As it gets too dark to read I set aside my book and look up at the stars.

Night after night I have sat beneath the stars on the bank of the great Essequibo and have been for hours wrapped in wonder. Here at night the stars are as big as in Van Gogh's mad skies. They burn with a wild freedom you do not see in town. Gradually a feeling of exultation and an expansion of the mind takes hold which is hard to explain. There is an essay by the 18th. Century Englishman, Joseph Addison, entitled 'On the Pleasures of the Imagination' which has a passage which comes near what I have felt many nights up the Essequibo:

"We are filled with a pleasing astonishment, to see so many worlds, hanging one above another, and sliding round their axles in such an amazing pomp and solemnity. If, after this, we contemplate those wild fields of ether, that reach in height as far as from Saturn to the fixed stars, and run abroad almost to an infinitude, our imagination finds its capacity filled with so immense a prospect, and puts itself upon the stretch to comprehend it. But if we rise yet higher, and consider the fixed stars as so many vast oceans of flame, that are each of them attended with a different set of planets, and still discover new firmaments and new lights that are sunk further into those unfathomable depths of ether, so as not to be seen by the strongest of our telescopes, we are lost in such a labyrinth of suns and worlds, and confounded with the immensity and magnificence of nature."

Nowhere else on earth could there be a better place to be a great painter or a great photographer. Up the Essequibo I have wished so often that I possessed the art of a Ron Savory or a Bobby Fernandes to do justice to the infinite beauty of the changing sky and river scenes and forest in the wind. Horace in his treatise *Ars Poetica* wrote that poetry should reproduce the qualities of painting and more than anywhere where I have tried to write poetry it is by the Essequibo I have felt the truth that all art is one and takes at such times a powerful cue from nature.

There are days on the Essequibo of brooding clouds, filled with thunder, and brewing squalls and lashing rainstorms marching up the immense reaches of the river, followed so often by a serene calmness in the air, when I have so deeply felt what soul-satisfaction it would give to be able to paint the wind. If ever there was wind that deserved to be painted it is Essequibo wind, how it moves the caravans of clouds, how it roughs up the shining coat of the evening-water, how it makes a green tumult in the crowns of the forest trees, how the birds ride the heavens on it. Please God, if I am born again with the powers of an artist, let me go again to the Essequibo and read the books I love and this time paint the wind.

7. I TRY MY BEST TO BELIEVE

Christmas is a time of joyful preparation. Over the centuries this has tended to become the shining-up and decoration of homes, the stocking up of food and drink for family and fiends, joining in the merry round of parties.

The joyful preparation for the coming of the Christ child has been submerged in the festive welter even though good priests in their Advent sermons keep reminding us about the fundamentals of this season of redemption and God's love.

The priests fight a losing battle against commercialization and the impulse to indulge and have fun. They also increasingly battle a growing tide of God-denial which is emptying Churches and trying mightily to suck dry the wells of belief.

Religions have blood-soaked histories which justify the scorn which hard-core rationalists like Richard Dawkins, author of *The God Delusion,* pour on them. But Professor Dawkins and his fellow atheists go further than condemning the cruelties, hypocrisies and inconsistencies, not to say frequent lunacies, of all religions. They reject contemptuously the concept that there is a God. They can find no evidence that God exists, they look almost with horror upon any belief in an afterlife as a childish delusion, they find faith in the revelations which underpin all religions absurdly misguided, and to them the coming of Christ in all His glory at Christmas is simply a beautiful fairy tale.

In particular, the hard-core rationalists point out that the explanations given for the origin and development of human life by the theory of evolution, plus the inexorable march of science, make completely unnecessary the existence of an Originator or Ultimate Explainer and Protector which mankind required through most of history to make sense of all that was going on around them.

Anyone reading Richard Dawkins' *The Blind Watchmaker,* for instance, will find it hard to deny that he completely destroys any faith there may be in what used to be for centuries one of religion's most powerful arguments for there being a

God – look at the wonders of nature and the universe and mankind itself: surely there must be a Creator responsible for all this glorious complexity just as if you were to walk across a field and find a beautiful golden watch in perfect working order you surely must assume there is a Watchmaker and a supremely gifted one at that. Well, read Dawkins if you want to understand why this reasoning in finding a way to God's existence is utterly flawed.

I get tense and fearful when I get ready to read Richard Dawkins and his fellow atheists. I get this way because, like most of us, I have immortal longings in me and these authors set out to destroy conclusively any basis for such longings. I want to believe in God. I like to think that morality, the tremendous gulf between good and evil, is based on a higher ordering of things. I hope to experience after death some explanation, absolutely unknowable in our present state, of how and why it all has happened. So desperately limited is a life's span, brief as a stray leaf falling, that I find it comforting to have faith in a credo which includes all these things. But these men of the highest intelligence and learning are entirely convincing in their logic and in their dismissal of such soft beliefs. I suffer when I read their books.

It takes time to recover from consulting these crusading rationalists. And one never can afterwards attain the serene certainty in all those marvellous stories learned at a mother's knee. But I fall back on the sense that men are somehow much more complex than rational beings pure and simple and that rationality is only one element in the human experience. In the end, for instance, I believe that the tremendous feeling of gratitude for the wonders of life, for life itself, which so often inspires me requires an object, someone or something, to be grateful to. And in my confusion between uncertainty and faith, as always I resort to the truths of poetry and I recall and say over again the poem written by Paul Celan, a Jew born in Romania who spent much of World War 11 in Soviet labour camps and whose inmost spirit was ravaged by both the horror and the beauty of the world:

'Psalm'

No one moulds us again out of
    earth and clay,
no one conjures our dust.
No one.
Praised be your name, no one.
For your sake
we shall flower.
Towards
you.
A nothing
we were, are, shall
remain, flowering:
the nothing, the no one's rose.
With
our pistil soul-bright,
with our stamen heaven-ravaged,
our corolla red
with the crimson word which we
sang
over, O over
the thorn.

And this year again on Christmas Eve I will go to Midnight Mass and, despite everything the brilliant calculators say, I will pray and I will try my best to believe.

8. TRUE VALUE IN A NATION

Not long ago I wrote a column throwing freezing water on the usefulness of manifestos or indeed any master plan. However, as the season of campaigning grows towards ripeness, I wish to put forward a little manifesto in the form of an article which I wrote some time ago and which I believe remains as relevant as ever. I think it will be my only contribution to the debate.

In the background of all our lives there exists a fundamental and dominating lie. It is that material success counts more than anything else — indeed, that nothing else counts but material success.

People are not simply, or even principally, thinking machines. Most people absorb much more information from sense impressions and emotions then they do from abstract symbols. The world is not only, or even most importantly, material. Scientific reason can never be more than part of the story. Human beings are concerned most of their thinking lives with values whereas scientific reason, as Ludwig Wittgenstein, that most exacting of philosophers, kept ramming home to anyone who would listen, cannot cope with questions of value at all.

We are still being brainwashed into believing that economic growth is the main measure of success. This is a deadly miscalculation of what to be human really means. Despite efforts at the UN and elsewhere to change the success—indices of nations from the purely economic still in every country, G.N.P. remains the official index of a nation's wellbeing. But this is an obvious absurdity. For instance, if a natural disaster strikes, bringing untold misery, the immediate impact leads to growth in G.N.P. as industry reacts to repair the physical damage. If crime flourishes G.N.P. grows as police forces expand and more prisons are built. On the other hand, a woman will work in her garden for years, creating an oasis of peace, order and beauty — no G.N.P. measures that. And a couple — or indeed, a single parent — will raise children to lead lives of

honest endeavour, compassion and public service — G.N.P. does not measure that devotion.

G.N.P. is not and never can be a measure of success or contentment. It is merely a measure of activity, good or bad. A high level of G.N.P. can contain immense evil. A low level of G.N.P. can contain incalculable good. Take one obvious example: many cities ravaged by crime, drug-taking, and a complete breakdown in family life are considerably "richer" than much "poorer" places elsewhere where there is substantially more stability and everyday contentment.

And when national success is measured in materialistic terms, is it any wonder that individuals take their lead from that and become accustomed to measuring their own success in similar terms? Making more money, accumulating material goods, these become the leading, and even the only good in life. Who are we to doubt the judgement of the State which says that economic gain is the ultimate objective? Over and over again our political masters — in Government and Opposition — as they debate the fate of the nation reach for material indices to indicate how brilliantly well or disastrously badly the nation is doing. And matching them in private so do we judge our own affairs — our wealth or poverty seen only in money or material terms.

How do you measure the contribution which intangible virtues make in any society: integrity, tolerance, courtesy, the concept of duty owed to others, a shared civility, magnanimity, goodwill and forbearance, regard for the aged, concern for the disadvantaged, gentleness with children, love of freedom, intellectual passion, truth and openness in all relationships not least in business, respect for high standards in all we try to do, an instinct to preserve the earth unsullied? Perhaps it is because such virtues are incalculable that they are not counted in the sums that dominate the lives of nations and our own lives nowadays. That fundamental mistake will ruin the world. Such virtues are the very definition of humanity at its best and when society mocks or neglects them it will in the end most certainly fail.

A long, long time ago I was asked, I think by the then Chairman of Bookers, Jock Campbell, to meet a visitor to Guyana. His name was Kenneth Boulding and he was a very distin-

guished economist. I cannot remember what he was to do in Guyana at the time but I remember he was a most remarkable man. I was astonished to find, for instance, that an economist could recite from memory long sections of Wordsworth's great poem 'The Prelude'. I loved talking with him about the future of the world. He made a great impression on me but, sadly, our paths never again crossed. But when he died I noted his obituary quoted one of his typical observations. "*No money value is usually placed on an honest man but in a very real sense when honesty decays a true capital value of society declines*." No truer word was ever spoken. Unfortunately, however, leaders with the vision of a Kenneth Boulding are few and far between in the world today. So look around you — however high G.N.P. climbs, the true capital values of society are everywhere in precipitous decline.

The true purpose of all our political endeavours is to reverse that decline.

9. ENCOUNTERS WITH GENIUS: CHEDDI JAGAN AND SONNY RAMPHAL

Hardly a month or even a week went by in my working life without one or other or both of these men appearing in the world's headlines. It was exciting to play a small part in their big lives.

• For everyone it was like a death in the family. Even those who opposed him all their lives felt the shock of a sort of bereavement. Not before was there ever, and not since will there ever be, such an overwhelming flow of publicly expressed mourning. On the day of Cheddi Jagan's funeral Georgetown, who never voted in a majority for him, came out to honour him. At Buxton they halted his cortege on its way to Berbice to pay due respect. Flying up to the obsequies, circling over the villages and sugar estates all around, I saw the streets and habitations all abandoned, deserted, ghostlike, all the men, women and children gone to Babu John. In the family of any nation there are quarrels but these are set aside when such a revered elder figure in the family dies.

I found myself more shaken by Dr. Jagan's death than I thought I would be. That morning at 3.00 a.m. my wife and I were wakened out of sleep to be told. We sat and held hands and talked of our memories of him and said a prayer. H was never anything other than civil and generous in his dealings with me though often what I wrote could not have at all pleased him and surely even at times greatly vexed him, especially when I wrote approvingly of Karl Popper's complete repudiation of Marxism in his great books *The Open Society and Its Enemies* and *The Poverty of Historicism.* He never bore me the slightest malice. While I was Director of Marketing in the sugar industry we quite often talked the business of sugar but it was our talks on other matters I remember best. He would ring me out of the blue to discuss something I had written or said on the radio or to ask for more information on a subject I had discussed. He sought knowledge voraciously.

Sometimes he invited me to State House just to chat and we would sit and the conversation was very easy between us. One of those times I like to remember he wanted to talk about the great American Black Renaissance poet Langston Hughes and I gave him some poems from Hughes's *Weary Blues* which he liked very much. My overwhelming feeling about Dr. Jagan was of a good man through and through, generous-hearted, deep-souled.

I have a particular memory of Dr. Jagan which I treasure. It was on no great state occasion, at no momentous political event, during no gathering of the eminent and the famous. He was at Rose Hall estate to give out house lot deeds to about fifty sugar workers. It was pouring with rain but he did not think of cancelling and they did not think of not attending. When it came to his turn to speak an aide handed him a speech, I suppose, but he gave a smile and did not take it. He then spoke from the heart to those few sugar workers and their families in the falling rain and I have never heard words so clear and powerful and suitable.

Not a long speech, no rolling periods. No ideology, but simple words spoken in a straight line to their heads and hearts. How their ancestors had suffered much in slavery and indenture. But now through years of struggle and sacrifice a different time had come, a better time, a prouder time. But they should know it was a time when they must bear responsibility, they must take care of what they had won, they must show they were worthy of the efforts of those who had gone before. Now they must look after their house lots and improve them, they must leave things better for their children. He trusted them. He had always trusted them. They must remember what he said.

It was not really a speech. They had gathered around him and he was telling them the truth. I swear they will never forget what he said. And somehow on that quite insignificant occasion I knew I had got a glimpse of genuine political genius and what this man meant to the mass of people who loved him very much.

Whirling around in my head is what remains after age has taken its toll of the vast amount of poetry I have read in my lifetime. Often lines surface and I cannot for the life of me

recall from what poem they come or who authored them. When I heard President Jagan had died some lines came as if summoned but I could not remember their source and since then I have not traced them. I wish I could remember the whole poem and who wrote the lines. The summoned lines captured for me then and still do something of Dr. Jagan's fighting heart and the flame he lit for countless others. *"He was one who in his life fought for life/Who wore at his heart the fire's centre."*

• In the last three decades of the 20th century Sonny Ramphal was at or near the centre of world affairs. He was the chief architect of the Lome Convention, that imaginative partnership between rich countries, the European Union, and poor countries, the A.C.P. group, which promised so much for a fairer world until it fell foul of the free market fanatics of a more selfish time. As Secretary-General of the Commonwealth he participated in countless international crises and debates and in particular powerfully assisted in the birth of a democratic, apartheid-free South Africa. He was the indispensable common denominator – no one else belonged to them all – in the work of the five great international Commissions which formulated a comprehensive vision of a better world: the Brandt Commission on Development; the Palme Commission on Disarmament and Security; the World Commission on Environment and Development; the Independent Commission on International Humanitarian Issues; and the South Commission on the major problems facing Third World countries. He was the dynamo in them all. It was an almost unbelievably unique summons to duty. Imagine the time, the researched knowledge, the daily stint of hard work and thought, the fervour devoted to these five great blueprints for humanity.

These will continue to have relevance as long as men aspire to shape a real community of nations. Who can doubt that for this indefatigably undertaken body of work alone he should have received a Nobel Peace Prize. He would certainly have been Secretary-General of the United Nations except that he was too brilliantly gifted and had too much of a mind of his own for the liking of the big powers. In the Caribbean region he has been (and continues to be) prolific in his contri-

butions to the ideal of West Indian nationhood. In his work as Chairman of the West Indian Commission in 1991/92 he produced a road map, *Time For Action*, for the coming together of all West Indians, and a strengthening of their external influence, which stands to this day beckoning for fulfilment.

Our paths crossed often in these past few decades. In particular I worked within touching distance of Sonny when he played a key role in negotiating the Sugar Protocol as an integral part of the Lome Convention. And in 1991/92 I worked as editorial assistant for the West Indian Commission and in the compilation of its report *Time For Action.* Those were exhilarating times. The gifts I observed at first hand – and which gave rise to his multitude of achievements as a regional and world statesman – amounted, I am sure, to genius: his extraordinary ability as a negotiator, the splendid elegance of his writing reflected in the eloquence of his oratory, the capacity to take endless pains and tenaciously hold on until the job was done, the persuasiveness of vision which made doubters into believers and believers into fervent apostles. And something I have found without fail in all the exceptional people I have been lucky enough to know – being with them made life and the world more exciting, simply more fun if the truth be told.

10. THE OLD AGE OF MY PARENTS

Growing old, I do not miss the rampagings of youth. Let those rest in the memory of other times. Age has its quieter compensations which delight as much and one wishes they would go on forever.

But I dislike the signals age sends to provoke me – how impossible it became to get down to a low backhand; the eyes inexorably dimming; the thickening waist and unsightly slacking muscles; the blotches and freckles appearing on the skin; the frustrating need to limit the intake of beautifully spiced and crisp and fatty food; the inability to leap up stairs two or three at a time for the sheer animal joy of it; the increasing urgency in seeking answers to the big, perennial questions Why am I here? What is it all about? which never mattered a jot when I was young; the sudden aches and strains that come out of nowhere as simple, lifelong gravity takes its toll and pulls you down from the bright sky where once you had soared so easy and so free.

I remember long ago how sad it made me to witness the signs of aging in my parents. The sadness came not only from the thought that after old age came death and the death of my parents was a fearful and heart-rending event to contemplate. The sadness came also, and with even more immediacy, from comparing the age-signs that had come upon my parents with the shining evidence of youth in them I remembered so well when I was a boy. Then they had the beauty and the confidence and unsullied good health that spoke to me of everlasting happiness. I saw my father on the playing fields lithe and quick and brilliant in his anticipation and timing. I saw my mother dressed for dancing spinning and laughing to show her children before she kissed us and left for the party. Their youthfulness had no blemish and surely it would last forever.

The signs of their ageing threatened my contentment. Rumble of thunder in the far distance. Intellectually I knew they were not immortal but now I saw that it was true. The years

pass and the imperfections and the falterings grow. Their health needs more and more attention. Their lives restrict into customary routines. They were so strong and capable and there was nothing bad they could not put right. But now your father's step slows and one day you visit and he puts out his hand to be helped from his chair. Your mother's wild red hair thins and greys and sometimes she seems bewildered.

What does not change is the love you have for them. Indeed, it grows the greater because you can measure better all you owe them and the gratitude you feel amplifies the love you have always had. And then again knowing that they are old now and closer to being gone forever mixes anticipatory grief into what you feel and if you sit quiet and do not get on optimistically with life the feeling which is mostly love can become almost too much to bear.

My father died twelve years ago and my mother died ten years ago. I miss them very much. I miss my father's wisdom which lasted until the end. I miss my mother's joyfulness which lasted until my father died. What I have written I remember feeling as the years passed. There was so much I should have told them about how I felt but never did. I read a poem by David Woo and it struck me hard as poems often do.

'My Mother's Hands'

Now that she's ashamed of their ancient burls and gibbous
knobs –
"Don't be ashamed!" I helplessly cry -
I find myself staring at the raw matter of their
decay, nails crumbling to the opalescent grit
of their lunulae, liver spots speckling the blue dorsal vein
with its throbbing blue limbs, as if the leopard,
symbol of lust in Dante, lay panting, enfeebled,
in the dark wood.

I can't bear that these hands won't always be here,
though I barely noticed them when they were still dexterous,
commanding me to come here, do this chore, listen to this
sweet story, come here, sweetheart, come here.....

Now a scythe like rod planted within the same index finger
gives it an incongruous come-hither look that forces
passersby to point to themselves, thinking
she's beckoning to them, an optical illusion, of course,
like the Beauty and the Crone.

"This hand is not the crux and matter of you," I want to say,
but know she'd laugh and ask, "Is it what's the matter
with you?" or – worse – look away in pain, saying,
"It doesn't matter, it doesn't matter."

And so I hold on tight as she sits in her wheelchair, as if
to guide her somewhere, anywhere, until I kiss her goodbye,
by the glass paperweight that my father gave her
when they were young: clear, abstract, voluptuous,
with five sparkling air bubbles clutching
a bouquet of clouds.

11. MEMORIES OF FRIENDSHIP

Every moment in our lives is embedded in the extraordinary architecture of our minds. It is astonishing how an old song heard momentarily, a sudden taste from yesteryear felt on the tongue again, a glimpse of an ancient picture or fading letter, can recall memories in an overwhelming flood. I was sorting out old papers and memorabilia in my study and I came across a snapshot of a friend from long ago and the memory banks in my mind lit up and he, and the friendship I had with him and others, came vividly to life once more.

Fundamentally, I suppose, man is a solitary creature. What goes on in the deepest parts of a man's head and heart is ultimately unknowable to anyone else. And certainly in the real crises of life, including death, man finds himself very much alone. Yet in between times men are pre-eminently social animals. Some of the greatest satisfaction we ever get we find in the fellowship of others.

A long time ago, it may be nearly 45 years, a group of us used to meet on Sundays to partake of mutton curry, drink Houston Blue Label, and talk and argue endlessly. We ranged over all the mysteries and despairs while rum flowed and the curry pot passed round. Everywhere in the world, in every age, countless similar groups come together with convivial regularity to relax and take a steam and have a gaff and taste the sweets of the companionship between men. It is an immemorial activity. It is one of the best things in life.

At the core of our group those many years ago were Makepeace Richmond, Sonny Rodway, Gig Delph, Terry Lee, Neil Savory, Roy Dookun, Bertie Taitt and myself. Others came and went but these were staunch. Our gatherings were full of good humour, good fellowship and endless talk and sharp argument. A less stereotyped group you could not wish to meet. Those Sundays were a good thing in our lives. Of that multi-natured group only Roy and I remain. We still remember and laugh a lot in remembering.

The snapshot which brought back my memory of those Sundays was of H.L. "Bertie" Taitt. He was one of those people whose image and personality and style can be summoned up immediately and exactly no matter how many years pass.

He loved music and I could never follow him or Sonny Rodway into the complex depths of their knowledge of that subject. He also loved tennis and there I could match him. He loved to plan intricate strategies against his tennis opponents. Who could ever forget Bertie Taitt plotting the overthrow of a steady baseliner?

"You see, just float the ball deep into his backhand, advance upon the net, calculate the probable angle, and cut off the return. Just tuck it away when he tries to pass you. Tuck the volley away. The man isn't a genius you know."

And on court, his string-thin body alert on stilt legs, full of determination, he would do exactly that – except that all too often he would tuck it away for a loser into the net and then the damns and blasts would flow. But always he would be undeterred as he pointed out how the theory was all right only the execution was sometimes a little wayward. I delight in the memory of Bertie Taitt and his marvellous tennis strategies.

I said he loved music and tennis. But then he also loved anything worth an argument and that after all includes pretty well everything in the world. With Bertie in the group disputation was inexhaustible. He was unshakeable in his dogmatisms. Furious arguments raged around his outrageous dictums obstinately maintained against all–comers. It would have been infuriating except that he was our friend Bertie and you made allowances – which, when you think about it, is the basis of all friendship and, indeed, of all love. You make allowances because the man is infinitely more than the sum of his faults and foibles.

Once, exasperated beyond endurance, I said to him that he brought to mind a famous saying of one of my old schoolmasters at Queens Royal College in Trinidad, Grant Elcock Pilgrim, greatest of men if you use the word great rightly. Mr. Pilgrim was accustomed to say to boys in his class who ventured definitive answers without too much factual knowledge: *"When you learn, you know; when you don't learn, you don't know*

and then you guess like a fool." I challenged Bertie with the quotation. But he was quite unabashed. "*I don't see how that applies to me. I never guess,*" he said, "*I always know*." What could one do but laugh and take another Houston and ice in a big tumbler. I delight in the memory of Bertie Taitt, old dogmatist and friend.

It is a long, long time since Bertie Taitt sat on my veranda and took a rum and helped himself to mutton curry and dholl puri and laid down the law on this and that. It makes me sad to think how quickly time goes by and ends. It is long, long ago but I cannot forget. Such times, such men, are among the best things that happen to anyone in a lifetime.

No one can be sure what prospect beckons after death, if any at all. But one might suppose that if there is something it will be more perfect than what we now experience. However, not, I think, so perfect as to satisfy my old friend Bertie. "*Now, God*," I think I hear him say as he sips a glass of nectar on the high balcony of heaven, "*Now, God, it's quite simple. If you do it this way I'm sure you'll find it works better.*" And leaning forward intently he will continue: "*Let me explain, God, before these, excuse me, fools confuse you*." And, right or wrong, the ensuing discussion will I know be stimulating and entertaining. When the time comes it will be worth joining if only to hear Bertie say once more, "*Now, Mackers, what do you have to say that might lead us from darkness into light?*"

12. WELL-REMEMBERED FRIENDS

In a recent column I remembered my old friend H.L. "Bertie" Taitt, one of a group of us who regularly met for rum, curry lunch and unending talk more than forty years ago. After I had sent in the column, another memory of Bertie came to mind and I cannot resist telling the story.

Bertie once, I emphasise once, managed a Guyana tennis team to play in Surinam. He proved to be an eccentric and unsuccessful manager.

Early in one match a youngster on the team hit a forehand not just out but sailing out over the fence enclosing the court. On changing ends the youngster addressed Bertie standing grimly by the umpire's chair:

"Skipper, is wha ah do wrang deh eh?"

Bertie recalled his response. *"I was speechless, speechless. Managers must inspire their charges. How could I tell the young man, this leading aspirant in our ranks, that a complete lack of talent combined with an obvious inability to learn the rudiments of the game had given rise to this obscenity of a stroke, this desecration of tennis. I remained silent. Perforce."*

After the team returned home, the President of the Guyana Lawn Tennis Association insisted that Bertie must produce a Manager's report on the tour. Bertie insisted there was no need. In this clash of wills there could be only one victor. Bertie explained his reasoning to our group.

"No report was necessary. Every match was calamitous. We achieved nothing. It would have been embarrassing to add that, however, the rum was good and the cream of Guyana's tennis performed exceptionally well at the cocktail parties!"

Thus do memories of old friends come back fresh as this morning's wind on the seawall, vivid as the hummingbirds that dart momentarily among the flowering trees at dusk. Beside the snapshot of Bertie Taitt which brought back my memories of him there was one of Gordon "Gig" Delph, another old friend well-remembered.

When a good friend disappears, the world stops for a moment and then goes on. But in that moment we think so many things – the times one had, sweet days gone by, images of friendship printed on the mind. For a moment, also, his sudden silence tells us what shadows we all are and what shadows we pursue. The shadows are as numerous and as fleeting as on a moonlit night – power and the fruits and fears of power, deeds of great renown, fame and fortune, possessions that soon grow dry as dust, the domination of people and self-regarding, tall ambition. All shadows, every one of them, that disappear like a morning mist. Gig pursued his shadows too, as all men do, but his were other shadows. His shadows were the love of family and friends, laughter and making life seem good, the pleasant passing of a holiday with talk and humour and old memories and a steam or two, kindness and a hospitable home, a glorying in children. These are passing shadows too, but shadows of a kinder day than those which darken most men's lives.

The general mistake most of us make is that we squeeze the pleasures of friendship and laughter, food and drink and exercise and love, into the narrow margins of one's days which we then fill with ambition and the worship of career and things and money and claiming power over others. My friend Gig never made that great mistake. He put ambition at the very edge of life and filled his days with family and friends and fun.

More than 40 years ago we began to play tennis together. A group of us met regularly to play, sometimes for fun, sometimes for hard practice in preparation for tournaments. After the games we would sit and talk, laugh and dispute and set the world to rights for hours. Nothing out of the ordinary, I know, but the memory of that good fellowship has never left me. I think perhaps it is in the enjoyment of the company of friends that we find an easy harmony that surely must be one of the best things in the whole of life. Gig was in his element in our group, he revelled in the company of friends. He shared his enthusiasms with a lovely zest for life. He was expert at carpentry and fixing bikes and playing dominoes and making kites and mauby-brewing with special tinctures. He lightened life when it was heavy.

In the tennis, Gig was a quick-eyed, first-class sportsman. He was also a fine cricketer and footballer and athlete. But if ever the ruthless, latter-day obsession with winning at any cost was alien to anybody it was alien to Gig. Winning was good if it didn't hurt the other man too much and if everybody still had fun. I was his captain once or twice in the Guyana tennis team long ago and I remember there were times when his good-humoured acceptance of defeat irritated me. He could have won more matches than he did and made fewer friends. But afterwards, when the stupid rage for winning died in me, I saw him again in my mind's age raising shouts of joy at his own good shots and his opponent's too, or saw him laughing at some disastrous error on either side, and I knew in my heart he had got it right. "*Skipper*", he would say, "*today, I'm hurling thunderbolts. Nothing can stop me!*" and he would clench his fist and bounce on his toes and smile. I remember that so well.

I remember long ago when I was a boy my father held a dead bird in the palm of his hand and said the beauty all had gone – to see it like that and describe it alive, alive and flying, was to see ashes and try to tell about fire. You cannot describe for others the living friend you had. No one can know my good friend Gig except those who knew him alive, alive and flying, laughing and showing you the sweet of life, joking away the sour.

Pictures flash through the mind. Gig with his old father, I remember, the old man a terror in his time, a beater of sons, but now old and lonely except for Gig and Gig brought him everywhere, to the tennis games and to the homes of friends, so that he would have the company and listen to the jokes and not be lonely. And another memory comes of how when Gig came to lunch he would give my young son a big and long hug and how the little boy always knew he meant it and was never shy. I have no idea what exactly such things tell you about a man except quite simply that his heart was open and that his soul was sound.

I don't know where Gig is journeying now. There is an Australian aboriginal folk-song about Christian immortality that goes like this:

"The god-men say when die go
sky,
river flow.
The god-man say when die we
fly
Just like eagle-hawk and crow:
Might be, might be, but I don't know."

I wish I knew. If there is anything, I know all will be well with my old friend Gig. I don't think he much liked poetry except for a tag or two of Shakespeare, but when he died I said for him some lines from a very great poet who was quite sure where the journey of good men ended:

"Flesh fade, and mortal trash
Fall to the residuary worm; world's wildfire leave
but ash.
In a flash, at a trumpet crash,
I am all at once what Christ is, since he was what
I am, and
This Jack, joke, poor potsherd, patch, matchwood,
immortal diamond
Is immortal diamond."

It is strange. So many years have gone. There they are still, my old friends. Hummingbirds in the dusk. I can still see Bertie so clearly in my mind's eye: *"Now listen carefully. Let me explain!"* And Gig: *"Skipper, see me here. They haven't got a chance. I hurling thunderbolts today!"*

13. MAKEPEACE

Let me write now as the spirit moves me, and as memories crowd the mind, about a good man through and through and a citizen of incomparable quality. He was a good, reliable, interesting and necessary friend for nearly fifty years. Our lives did not run together every day or every week but Makepeace was there, he could be called upon, he was instructive in detecting pretentiousness and uncovering fallacy, he set the standard of how "to live in truth". Once when real trouble loomed in my life for a while he was one of the first at my door, his presence and support strongly and calmly assuring when confidence was shaky and the future uncertain. What is completely and firmly upright is easy to lean upon.

It is hard to maintain perfect integrity. That involves throughout a life unswervingly making thousands of decisions which opt always for telling the truth, choosing difficult right over easy wrong, giving up tempting personal advantage in favour of what one knows is honest, rejecting popular causes which lead a country astray and exposing ignorance, bad faith, half-truths and hypocrisy as a matter of course whatever the personal cost or majority opinion. In the nearly fifty years I knew Makepeace Richmond I never knew or heard of him failing the many tests of integrity.

That may give the impression of a severe, humourless, even harsh, man unrelentingly disapproving of human weakness, uncongenial in his determination to be right and do right and take credit for it. He was in many ways the conscience of his country but it is ridiculous to think of Makepeace in such terms, a sort of Cato the Elder, Censor of his times and his people, stickler for a stricter and simpler life, single-mindedly set on stemming the tide of current un-Roman slackness.

His company and his conversation were simply too interesting, entertaining and utterly dismissive of pompousness to categorise him as a sober-sided Cato the Censor. His letters to the press were famously entertaining as well as famously disapproving of falsehood, fatuous bureaucracy, bul-

lying authority and drivelling and turgid excuse-making – letters compressed to the essential, cutting to the heart of the matter, scornful of pretence, devastatingly truthful. All editors must yearn for such a correspondent – a short letter from Makepeace worth a hundred columns and a month or two of editorials. His short, ironic letters were one of life's pleasures.

He was our family dentist, wholly professional, sternly insistent on punctuality, ridiculously inexpensive, master of the art of gagging the mouth with instruments while teasing you with deliberately outrageous remarks impossible to refute except by incomprehensible gargle. *"So you agree that Lendl was better than Sampras." "Strange how completely wrong Einstein turned out to be." "Would you not agree, Ian, sugar is a sunset industry?"*

As well as my teeth and root canals, Makepeace and I had tennis in common. He loved the game. He played virtually to the end of his days. He kept marvellously fit. He was always trying to improve. *"How is the backhand coming along, Makepeace?" "Terrible, terrible, I can't seem to get it right."* Well, deep into his eighties, he could be forgiven. But there were days when the swing was sweet and grooved. Once, long ago, playing doubles against him I remember coming into net and he passed me clean as a whistle, a perfectly placed shot down the line. *"You see, nothing to it, just give me the slightest opening!"* I can still see the small smile of contentment.

I regularly got notes from Makepeace which I looked forward to opening. We didn't have poetry, one of my great loves, as a mutual source of interest and enjoyment but we exchanged communications on any number of other subjects over the years and decades. I have always been fascinated by the huge mysteries of infinity and the origins of the universe and the start of life and the end of time and the possibility of God and the ultimate question which the great philosopher-theologian Paul Tillich used to ask his seminarians: *"Why is there something when there could be nothing?"* Makepeace also was fascinated and he regularly fed my interest in such mysteries with articles and views he found and shared with me. We once discussed whether the mind of man would ever evolve to the point when he would know the First Cause and the Final End and we agreed, no, such mysteries would re-

main eternal, more is the pity. We would have liked to think that answers might be forthcoming.

I will miss him. Very many will. Well, at seventy-two I must get used to losing old friends. But that realization does not make the losses when they come any easier to accept. What such losses do is create a surrounding emptiness, old echoes gradually replacing young voices, a deficit in uniquely shared memories in friendships matured until they deeply matter. This last week the deficit significantly increased, the emptiness became more noticeable.

14. OUR AGEING AND OUR UN-CHANGING SELVES

There is an entry in my father's diary which moved me deeply when I read it after he died. The entry was made in his eighty-fourth year and on this day he recorded his sense of being two different selves. One he can easily define – it is his body grown old and now much broken down, limbs weak and steps hesitant, thinned hair and muffled hearing and dimming eyes, the pains of illness taking an increasing toll, night agues and fears more frequent now, all litheness gone and sleekness of the skin, the felt fragility of bones getting closer and closer to escaping the bonds of flesh, a general decrepitude which dishonours what the human body in its perfection can be.

The other self my father feels just as vividly and even more deeply but it is not so easy to describe. All he can say is that it is the same self he has always been. It is himself every moment he has ever been. It is himself when he was a little boy running in front of his mother on the grass to try and catch a bird that landed for a moment in front of them. It is himself as a young man with friends in a sailing dinghy in golden sun with the wind in his hair and all life good and stretching into the future forever. It is himself in the plenitude of career achievement and athletic vigour. It is himself breathless before the wonders of new worlds discovered. It is himself with his beloved every step of the way, then nearly 60 years long, changeless in the grace of their love and the blessing of their children. That self has always been the same and now he can write in his diary and say it is still not intimidated by the other self which changes and grows old and decrepit and will soon die.

It is true what my father wrote. There is not one of us who does not feel the two selves that we are – the changing body, the unchanging core of self. As I near my seventy-eighth year of whatever strange journey this is I feel the truth of the two selves strongly. The aging body, so much fuller now of frailty and deterioration, mocks the past resilience and spring that I knew. But whatever does not change is powerful in me and

feels life as gleamingly beautiful and sweet to experience as it ever was.

Perhaps it is in sport that my sense of the two selves is strongest. With delight I see the current young champions in their agility and quicksilver flair and their strength and endurance and sometimes their astonishing, perfect beauty and there is part of me which remembers the life in sport I had and feels the excitement and the fire and the mastery as if they had not gone at all but happened only a moment past and the wearing-out, awkward-old body is then quite forgotten and the changeless self performing wonders is all that really matters.

Aging and changeless selves, both, I have always loved poetry. I discovered the poetry of Czeslaw Milosz about twenty-five years ago when he won the Nobel Prize and ever since his writing has made a strong impression on me. He published his first book of poems in 1933, the year I was born.

Milosz was born in Lithuania in 1911 and lived through times of evil almost incommunicable to those who still keep faith in the basic goodness of man. He spent the years between 1939 and 1945 in Warsaw when, as he wrote, "*Hell was spreading through the world like ink spilled on blotting paper.*" How, he wondered, could one write poems among the ruins and stench of universal, inconceivable carnage. He found a way. It was at this time he wrote the extraordinary words: "*Probably only those things are worth while which can preserve their validity in the eyes of a man threatened with instant death.*"

Milosz died when he was 93 years old and until he died he was writing poems of great power "*as if a tiger had sprung out/ and stood in the light, lashing his tail*." Where did he go on wresting this poetry from in his old age, from what endless source? There is something in him that did not fade towards nothingness. "*In advanced age, my health worsening*," he begins a prose poem, "*I woke up in the middle of the night, and experienced a feeling of happiness so intense and perfect that in all my life I had only felt its premonition*."

There is a poem by Milosz which I read the other day and it reminded me of both my aging and changeless selves. It is a poem which he wrote when he was a lot older than I am now.

'An Honest Description Of Myself With A Glass Of Whiskey At An Airport, Let Us Say, In Minneapolis'

My ears catch less and less of conversations, and my eyes have weakened, though they are still insatiable.

I see their legs in miniskirts, slacks, wavy fabrics.

Peep at each one separately, at their buttocks and thighs, lulled by the imaginings of porn.

Old lecher, it's time for you to go in the grave, not to the games and amusements of youth.

But I do what I have always done: compose scenes of this earth under orders from the erotic imagination.

It's not that I desire these creatures precisely; I desire everything, and they are like a sign of ecstatic union.

It's not my fault that we are made so, half from disinterested contemplation, half from appetite.

If I should accede one day to Heaven, it must be there as it is here, except
that I will be rid of my dull senses and my heavy bones.

Changed into pure seeing, I will absorb, as before, the pro portions of
human bodies, the colour of irises, a Paris street in June at dawn, all of it
incomprehensible, incomprehensible the multitude of visible things.

15. THE POETRY OF WAR

In accepting the Nobel Peace Prize recently, President Barack Obama gave a magnificent speech justifying just wars. I am sure it will be included in future anthologies of great orations.

One of the tragic, eternal facts of human life is that there will always be wars – some the hideous, misguided choice of evil men and some "wars of necessity" but war all the same since the horror and indiscriminate agony caused by war is not changed by what designation war is given.

It is equally a fact that the brutality of war has inspired some of the greatest of mankind's works of art – paintings of battle and destruction, music to stir the soul, some of the most powerful and moving prose and poetry ever written. It has been pointed out that hawks, those fierce and warlike birds of prey, do not sing. But war-poets most eloquently do. Certainly, for instance, remarkable works of the human spirit are inspired by wars in which good legitimately confronts evil. But, sadly, great poetry and music does not flow only from battlefields where just causes prosper.

Sadly, war itself, even the cruelty and agony and violence of war, seems to hold a fascination for writers. Why this should be so I do not know. Perhaps war fascinates only male writers, I have heard that said, and if so that would be an interesting revelation of human nature. But we would still be left with the disturbing puzzle that war sets the soul of man humming with something that sometimes seems like fierce joy. Perhaps it is because war brings human beings to the very edge of precipices where nobody would want to be but which writers exult in exploring, those limits where character, for good or ill, is tested to destruction. For the poet seeking themes, where are bravery, cowardice, fear, loyalty, betrayal, anger, hate, sacrifice, love and anguish distilled to greater potency than in war?

The *Iliad* is one of the greatest poems ever written. It is the story of the war waged by the Achaean princes against Troy

for the purpose of recovering Helen, wife of Menelaus, whom Paris, son of King Priam of Troy, had carried off. A long, cruel, bloody, brutal, senseless, violent, destructive war full of desperate battles, fearful pillaging, heroic combat and numberless tragedies – for what? But it produced the *Iliad* and for thousands of years the *Iliad* has enthralled succeeding generations of men with its plangent, seductive, noble fury and beauty.

Here is a passage from book four of the *Iliad* in the marvellous translation by the English poet Christopher Logue:

'Go Close'

Slip into the fighting.
Into a low-sky site crammed with huge men,
Attractive men, brave, loyal, fit, slab-sided men,
Men who came face to face with gods, who spoke with gods,
Leaping onto each other like wolves,
Screaming, kicking, slicing, hacking, ripping,
Thumping their chests:
"I am full of the god!"
Blubbering with terror as they beg for their lives:
"Laid his trunk open from shoulder to hip –
Like a beauty queen's sash."
Falling, falling.
Top-slung steel chain gates slumped onto concrete,
Pipko, Bluefisher, Chuckerbutty, Lox:
"Left all he had to follow Greece."
"Left all he had to follow Troy."
Clawing the ground, calling out for their sons, for revenge.

Sparks from the bronze, lit splinters from the poles:
"I am hit."
"Take my arm."
"I am dying."
"Shake my hand."
"Don't leave me, Don't let me go."
"Goodbye little fellow with the gloomy face."
As Greece, as Troy, fought on and on.
Or are they only asleep?

They are too tired to sleep.
The tears are falling from their eyes.
The noise they make while fighting is so loud
That what you see is like a silent film.
And as the dust converges over them
The ridge is as it is when darkness falls.

Silence and light.

Mankind has not nearly ended its long love affair with war and violence. No man is more reverenced in myth or history than the warrior Achilles, famed for his fury and his bravery and his cruelty. Infinitely more music has been written for him than for all the gentlest saints combined. The hawk dips and soars in the high air and plunges on its victim and many more have seen splendour in that sight than have seen horror. Do not be surprised if even now the words are forming in the soul and mind of an Afghan, an Iranian, a Kurd, an American, a Palestinian, an Israeli – name indeed any nationality in the peace-conceived United Nations – which in time to come will issue in the terrible but memorable music of war poetry.

16. POWER IN PERSPECTIVE

I remember long ago saying to that warm and intelligent human being, Winnie Gaskin, Minister in the PNC government at the time, that I wasn't interested in politics, that I grew bored by its petty complexities, that I loathed its sour and unbrotherly antagonisms, that I had better things to do than get mixed up in all the unsavoury maneuverings that went into lusting after political power. She was a good friend and I could tell her these things, but when I said them she lost her temper a bit with me. She said I could not be more wrong. Politics was everything in life, especially in a country like Guyana. She said if I opted out of politics I was opting out of the mainstream of life and work and achievement. She said she was disappointed in me, that such an apparently intelligent man could be so unaware of reality. I think she even used the scornful phrase, "mere dilettante" to describe me, though she was too warm-hearted a person to be scornful for very long and we remained firm friends despite my lukewarm political nature.

I suppose the fact is that I have always tried to keep out of the way in politics. To tell the truth I have never been very interested in those who have got to the top of the slippery political pole and how they got there. My general, no doubt craven, attitude has been perhaps too much along the lines of what Cardinal Newman once wrote to Lord Acton: "*It does not seem to me courage to run counter to properly constituted superiors – they bear the responsibility and to them we must leave it. There are plenty of other things to do in the world which will not interfere with them.*"

I have also tended to think – against a great deal of evidence I must admit – that these other things are fundamentally more important than politics. I learned Samuel Johnson's lines when I was a schoolboy and though much has changed since those far-off, dreamlike days the lines still contain a proportion of truth:

"How small, of all that human hearts endure,
That part which laws or kings can cause or cure.
Still to ourselves in every place consigned,
Our own felicity we make or find."

I have always been inclined to let constituted authority get on with what seems to me their remarkably thankless tasks while I amongst my friends and other citizens go on with the rest of life so abounding in joys and sorrows, challenges and checkmates, which have nothing to do with politics. Again I tip my hat to the Cardinal: "*There are plenty of other things to do in the world which will not interfere with them.*"

There is perhaps one hang-up I have about politics. It always seems such a humourless business. People in the world of politics seem to take themselves over-seriously. I think, in fact I know, that in private politicians are often humorous and self-deflating as anyone else – but somehow the public face of politics is stony, solemn, and insufferably self-important. I truly wonder why this should be so. Perhaps there is just the hint of a reason in George Orwell's perception that jokes are, in essence, "tiny revolutions," and therefore the professional politician's reflex is to view them with great suspicion.

There must always be a need to deflate to some degree the pretensions of anyone in power, however benignly and intelligently for the time being that power is being wielded. The reason for this is that history has no more certain lesson to teach than that power in the end corrupts. The use of that celebrated phrase reminds me again of Lord Acton, that most serious and learned historian of the 19th century. When Mary Gladstone in 1881 said to him that she feared that the newly enfranchised workers in England might not use their power wisely, Acton replied somberly that it was not a question of a particular class or even a particular sort of person not being equipped to govern – the fact was, he said, that **nobody** was fit to govern!

That may be too much a counsel of despair in a world which now has no hope unless it gets good leaders. Yet the trace of wisdom in it should make us view all power-seekers with a calculating and careful eye. And also with a thought for the

saving irony of time – time which in the end puts all power in perspective. Please consider, for example, the history of the Sun-King's heart, one of my favourite historical curiosities.

Louis XIV of France reigned from early manhood to decrepit age, demigod of the world's greatest nation at the time, surrounded by every pomp and circumstance, not only enjoying all public and ceremonial power but also exercising absolute power over individuals and the state to a degree unknown before or since. Contemplate what happened when he died.

His heart, as was customary with the Kings of France, was separated from the body. It was pickled and placed in a silver, jewelled casket. There it reposed for most of the 18th Century in the royal family monastery at St. Denis. When the revolution broke out in 1789 the casket was rescued and carried about in the baggage of émigrés until it found a resting place in the palace of the Harcourts at Nuneham Courtney in England where it was kept in a snuffbox and shown to house-guests as a curiosity.

One day, Canon William Buckland visited. Canon Buckland was Oxford's first Professor of Geology, a great scientist and a great eccentric. He indulged his scientific interest to the point of cooking and eating a vast number of creatures including mice, moths, crocodiles and bluebottle flies. When he visited Nuneham and was shown Louis XIV's heart in the snuffbox he calmly observed: "*I have eaten many strange things, but never the heart of a king*" – and promptly popped the blackened and hideous thing into his mouth, chewing and swallowing it before his outraged host could intervene to stop him!

Thus history swings this way and that, raises up and casts right down, and today what is the pomp and power of the whole wide world tomorrow sinks to rest in strange obscurity through incalculable whim.

"Is it not passing brave to be a King
And ride in triumph through Persepolis?"

Yes – but for every Sun-King who walks the path of glory a Canon Buckland lies in wait, a chuckle in his throat.

17. VOYAGING IN THE MIND

"for what else is there
but books, books and the sea,
verandahs and the pages of the sea
to write of the wind and the memory
of wind whipped hair
in the sun, the colour of fire."
- Derek Walcott

As I get older, the attractions of foreign travel and the lures of encountering new places and fresh faces are fading. I associate holiday less and less with adventure and more and more with peace and quiet. When I was young I looked forward to visiting different countries - I estimate I have visited about forty in my life - and keenly anticipated the possibility of exotic experiences and the enlivening acquaintance of strangers. Now I can much better understand my father who at the age of about 75 entirely ceased travelling and was content quietly with my mother to turn the pages of the sea in their wind-filled house on the north coast of Antigua. I think of my father and mother in their last years in their home in Antigua and a line from Homer comes to me: *"There is nothing so good and lovely as when man and wife in their home dwell together in unity of mind and disposition*."

However, when I travel now one kind of adventuring still never palls. It is voyaging in the golden realm of books. I spend days browsing in bookstores and reading the books finally purchased in the wonderfully uncommitted hours which really is what a holiday quintessentially means. In places like London and Toronto these days some of the bookstores encourage you to sit and read and they have coffee shops where you can spend time between browsing. I like this civilized development - one can spend hours and hours happily this way and I do.

There is so much to put down so that one remembers. The 16th century playwright, Ben Jonson, from quite young kept a book in which he copied down passages which especially pleased him and which he found particularly "*apt, wise or rightly formed*." He called the book which he made out of such passages *Discoveries.* We should all keep such a record.

• I read with complete delight the autobiography of E.O. Wilson, the great naturalist. When he was elected a member of the Harvard University Society of Fellows, he, as with all fellows before him, was given the following charge: "*You have been elected as a member of this Society for your personal prospect of achievement in your chosen field, and your promise of notable contributions to knowledge and thought. That promise you must redeem with your whole intellect and moral force You will seek not a near, but a distant, objective, and you will not be satisfied with what you have done. All that you may achieve or discover you will regard as a fragment of a larger pattern, which from his separate approach every true scholar is striving to descry."*

Wilson's great work was on ants. Environmentally, ants are a far more important species than man. "*If we were to vanish today, the land environment would return to the fertile balance that existed before the human population explosion. Only a dozen or so species, among which are the crab louse and a mite that lives in the oil glands of our foreheads, depend on us entirely. But if ants were to disappear, tens of thousands of other plant and animal species would perish also, simplifying and weakening land ecosystems everywhere."*

• William Safire, one of my favourite columnists though too conservative for my liking, died recently. He left a legacy of clear and cogent journalism. Remembering that he wrote "*the most fun in breaking a rule is in knowing what rule you're breaking*", here are some Safire rules for clear writing:

1. No sentence fragments.
2. It behooves us to avoid archaisms.
3. Also avoid awkward or affected alliteration.
4. Don't use no double negatives.

5. If I've told you once, I've told you a thousand times, "Resist hyperbole!"
6. Avoid commas, that are not necessary.
7. Verbs has to agree with their subjects.
8. Kill all exclamation points!!
9. Never use a long word when a diminutive one will do.
10. Proofread carefully to see if you any words out.
11. Take the bull by the hand and don't mix metaphors.
12. Don't verb nouns.
13. Last but not least, avoid clichés like the plague.

• In plays notice how the scenes get shorter and the action speeds up towards the end. In childhood afternoons extend for seeming years but for the old years flicker past like brief afternoons. After eighty, the playwright Christopher Fry, pointed out, you seem to be having breakfast every five minutes. And what is particularly mortifying is how much time is wasted: as Lord Byron entered in his journal, "*When one subtracts from life infancy [which is vegetation), sleeping, eating and swilling, buttoning and unbuttoning - how much remains of downright existence? The summer of a dormouse.*"

• Getting old has its disadvantages and knowing that one is in the last act, if not quite the last scene, of the play is not pleasant to think about too closely. But the great Russian novelist Alexander Solzhenitsyn, in a prose poem 'Growing Old', has a more appealing view:

"How much easier it is then, how much more receptive we are to death, when advancing years guide us softly to our end. Aging thus is in no sense a punishment from on high, but brings its own blessings and a warmth of colours all its own...there is even warmth to be drawn from the waning of your own strength compared with the past- just to think how sturdy I once used to be! You can no longer get through a whole day's work at a stretch, but how good it is to slip into the brief oblivion of sleep, and what a gift to wake once more to the clarity of your second or third morning of the day. And your spirit can find delight in limiting your intake of food, in abandoning the pursuit of novel flavours. You are still of this life, yet you are rising above the material plane...growing old serenely is

not a downhill path but an ascent."

• And then there is some hope of immortality. For the deeply religious that is a certainty which it must be good to experience. For those with children there is the smaller but still triumphant satisfaction that one has found a way to outlive mortality. Thomas Hardy put it exactly in his poem 'Heredity':

"I am the family face;
Flesh perishes, I live on,
Projecting trait and trace,
Through time to time anon,
And leaping from place to place
Over oblivion.
The years-heired feature that can
- In curve and voice and eye
Despise the human span
Of durance - that is I;
The eternal thing in man
That heeds no call to die."

18. A MATCH FOR THE AGES: THE ADELAIDE TEST, 1993.

I almost missed the last, palpitating moments. When McDermott and May had taken Australia to within a few runs of beating the West Indies in the Fourth Test Match and I couldn't sit in one place anymore and my hands felt cold as ice, I told my wife I couldn't take the tension any longer, it was ridiculous to feel like this about a game, and I was going to bed. I will always be grateful that she convinced me to keep the faith and go on watching in agonized excitement.

To tell the truth I had given up. McDermott and May were playing with raw courage and demonic resolution as had Langer and Warne before in lifting Australia from the dead of 70 odd for 7 to within sight of victory. The great Ambrose had bowled himself and his mighty heart to the point of exhaustion. No one else seemed quite up to the supreme task of dislodging one last Australian wicket. It had become clear that the umpires were simply not going to give any more l.b.w. decisions in favour of the bowler so that batsmen could shuffle across into line without fear of extinction. (I want to be magnanimous in victory and not sound a sour note but I cannot resist observing that while all umpires are human and therefore make mistakes it does seem that these Australian umpires are more profoundly human than any others).

The last chance seemed to have gone when Ambrose, summoning up one last great burst, induced a slightly lofted push from McDermott and Richardson at mid-off covering ground incredibly flung himself forward and nearly made the catch to beat all catches –but not agonizingly quite. Australia now had only 3 runs to make to win. Richardson entrusted the ball to Courtney Walsh. Perhaps some of us disloyally remembered how he had been hit for sixes in the past in the last overs of limited-over Internationals we had lost – but we also remembered that he had been alongside the great Ambrose in that triumphant charge on the last morning of the famous Test against South Africa last year. Now May drove his third delivery confidently for one. One to tie, two to win,

McDermott facing. I could hardly bear to look but I did and saw some of the very greatest moments of cricket.

Walsh bowled too short which gave McDermott the chance to paddle the ball hard towards a gap on the leg side. "*That's the match*", the commentator said. Except that it wasn't quite. Cricket is a great and subtle game and full of ironies. Desmond Haynes was having a dreadful tour, his batting leaden-footed and unsure, and in the field this match he had looked old and slow. Yet now he made a play which saved the series and which will remain vivid always in our cricket history. Young again, quick as a flash, he leapt to his right and made a brilliant stop of McDermott's hard, match-winning hit. Glory be to him! The next ball, Walsh, our spearhead at the last, our tall warrior, our *spes ultima*, found some extra pace and venom from memories of the long line of our great fast men who had nurtured him, some extra luck from the deep reaches of heaven, and produced a ball which followed McDermott's reluctant glove like some sleek and homing missile, kissed it gently as if to say goodbye to all Australian hopes and passed on to Junior Murray who collected it like a jewelled gift. Glory be to Walsh! Glory be to Murray!

Glory be to all of them! Australia had her heroes too but others must speak for them. Every single man of ours was a hero. Leave no one of them unpraised. A full account must be written of this epic match by our storytellers. But let me in this fragment of a memory which will never leave me at least name their names: captain Richardson, the great Ambrose, Hooper, Lara, Bishop, Benjamin, Simmons, Arthurton, Haynes, Walsh and Murray. A roll call our grandchildren will know by heart. Under a captain who has grown so much surer of himself and his men, they urged each other on, they drew inspiration from each other, above all they never gave up, they made that last effort beyond even the call of duty which is what wins battles and matches. Praise all of them. Shower them with praise.

Afterwards was the time for celebration. Some of the team sank momentarily to their knees in thanksgiving. There was unbelievable joy in all those shining eyes. Hero embraced hero – high-fives were not enough. The captain looked dazed with relief and pride. The great Ambrose held a stump aloft which

because he held it on such a day will in time to come grace some West Indian museum of treasures. I hope the ears of all of them as they celebrated caught the faint echo of the great shout which went up all around the West Indies.

Rohan Kanhai, legend and now coach who has helped mature this team, came leaping on the field and they hugged him in victory. He raised two fists to the heavens. Surely he must have remembered another occasion 32 years ago at Brisbane when the excitement also overflowed and he was there among the heroes of that hour – except this was sweeter because this time we had not just tied the match, we had **won,** won by a single famous run which in all the long history of cricket makes this Test Match unique.

A few hours later, I was in my office, worn out by lack of sleep and ragged with spent emotion (*"All for a game?"* a man from Mars might ask and I must refer him to C.L.R. James – *"What do they know of cricket who only cricket know? West Indians crowding to Tests bring with them the whole of past history and the future hopes of the islands"*). By a coincidence which I will always treasure, Joe Solomon came to visit me in my office. He too must have remembered as none of us can ever forget Brisbane 32 years ago. Who can forget the plain account in Wisden, cricket's great almanac, of his deeds at the climax of the tied Test, deeds which have earned him an undying place in West Indian history:

"The man who sent them into transports of delight and tied the match was little Solomon when Kline smoothly played the seventh ball of that fateful last over towards square leg. Meckiff at the other end was well launched on a run, but he never made it. With little more than one stump's width to aim at, Solomon threw the wicket down, as he had done some Dozen minutes earlier from farther ways to run out Davidson and give his side the chance to save themselves."

Now he was in the room with me, shrewd and unassuming as ever, and we were talking about another match and its end which will be as famous as that match long ago and its unforgettable end. Down through the years, as West Indians talk of Hall's last over and Solomon's side-on throw, so we

will speak of that save by Desmond Haynes and the ball Walsh bowled to touch McDermott's glove and reclaim victory after all seemed lost.

It is the time now for those who will imbed this glorious match in our folk memory and in the history books – the chroniclers, the singers of songs, the troubadours. As I watched the jubilant confusion on the field at Adelaide I longed to see a ghostly group of West Indians emerge from the mists of time – Kitchener and his men as they had walked across the green turf of Lords in 1950 when at last we beat England at their holy of holies, singing "*Cricket, Lovely Cricket*," dancing themselves and their song and their team and their land into our communal memory forever.

As I danced myself and shouted and swung my wife joyfully around in front of the TV set at four in the morning after Walsh had bowled and McDermott had touched and Murray had caught the last ball of that great and agonizing Test match, let me at least record some lines which calypsoed into my mind out of some old Sparrovian memory:

"After the Old, is we Young Brigade,
That victory dem heroes made:
That glory, it could never fade,
One run we win by in Adelaide.
O man, one run we win by in Adelaide!"

19. FIRST BEYOND COMPARE

Our greatest heroes are those we saw through youthful eyes. Youth is the time of hero-worship, a time when we see eternity in a blade of grass at Bourda or at Lords. I saw Kanhai when I was a very young man cutting a ball to the boundary. I see that stroke still and forever after he has shone for me as the greatest batsman I have seen. But I never saw George Headley and yet in my mind, lodged there simply through the praise and universal judgement of those who saw and knew him, he has always stood for me first in the line of West Indian cricket heroes, first beyond compare.

He is very likely the greatest batsman who has ever lived. He is very certainly the greatest batsman the West Indies has ever produced. And, because cricket is our national game more than any other, he must be reckoned the greatest sportsman in our history. And, therefore, since sport counts for so much in our land, we must place him high indeed among our greatest men of all

He scored a century in every four Test innings that he played – no other West Indian batsman has come near that. He allowed the bowler fewer maidens proportionate to the runs he scored than any batsman who has ever lived. He was the prince of versatility. As the occasion demanded – one day he would be Hyperion lavish at his court: another day careful as a friar in his cell. They all say he read the game supremely well. His greatest fear was irresponsibility. The ball he feared the most in a Test innings, he told C.L.R. James once, was the loose ball which came after he had been tied down for a couple of overs. *"You have to watch you don't go at it greedily and make a stupid mistake."*

In the end it is not for cold statistics that the cricket world so deeply respects George Headley, nor is it for that his countrymen have rightly praised and honoured him. It is for something that goes well beyond all that. It is the nature of his achievement and the character he displayed that has never been surpassed. To put it very simply, if from the lists of all

the cricket champions you had to choose one man to bat for your life, the man you would choose would be Headley if you had any sense and you loved life. For consider two things that put him head and shoulders above even Bradman. The first is that he is unmatched in his record on wet, unfavourable wickets. An analysis has been made of his performance on really sticky wickets when no one else could do a thing: in 13 such innings he passed 50 seven times and averaged 40. In 15 comparable innings on sticky wickets Bradman passed 50 only once and averaged 17. Where the going was difficult Headley has never been surpassed. Secondly, Headley always had to score his runs under the pressure of knowing that if he failed the team failed. No other great batsman has ever had to bear this pressure to the same extent. Rightly they called him Atlas for when he batted all his West Indies world was on his shoulders.

Everyone who has written about Headley confirms that he had the three attributes of a great batsman to a supreme degree – he saw the ball exceptionally early; he was superlatively quick on his feet; and he was a marvellously quick wielder of the bat. And he added a fourth virtue that not all great batsmen have enjoyed to the full – absolute and utter concentration. The story is commonly told how when Headley went out to bat he would not have recognized his father, his mother, his best friend or his wife if he had looked at them straight in the face: his mind was focused only and utterly on what he had to do out there beneath the sun where the bowlers were preparing.

They said he picked up the ball out of the bowler's hand supernaturally quickly. In some writers' opinion he sometimes seemed to move into position before the ball was delivered, it was such an instantaneous thing. He had all the time in the world.

When I was very young I sometimes sat with the grownups in my great-uncle Bertie Harragin's home in Port-of-Spain. Uncle Bertie was legendary in our family, one of Trinidad's most renowned cricketers and sportsmen in his day. Once one of the grownups, speaking of George Headley, said something which puzzled me, not yet at the stage of understanding metaphor. "*Nobody half as quick as Headley. The bowler bowl, grass*

grow while Headley wait." It stuck in my mind. "*Grass grow while Headley wait.*"

In cricket, as in all of life, old men lament that today cannot compare with their day. I am taking that line myself – a sure sign of age. The past seems always more golden than the brassy present. In those days of long ago there were always greater men and more heroic deeds. And, just as we, growing grey and sceptical, bemoan the far-off times, so will our sons and grandsons in their turn sigh as they get old and say that their present also is nothing like the good old days. And yet it does not need this high gloss that memory always brings to times gone by to make the name George Headley shine brighter than all the rest. He is honoured by every generation in its turn. "*Only one mek so*", an old cricketer said to me when Headley died. Yes, that is true. His fame is steady as the Northern Star.

20. THE GENIUS OF BRIAN LARA

Think what you like of him as a captain who lost more matches than he won, a leader who signally failed to carry West Indies cricket back to the Promised Land of renewed worldwide pre-eminence in the game which means so much to the well being of our personal and national psyches.

Think what you like – and certainly those who think what they like have been saying what they think in no uncertain terms. But let us never forget the joy and sometimes even the sense of absolute wonder which the genius of Brian Lara's batting gave us and all the world for 17 years. His bat unfurled a glorious art which nobody else could match. Who is not sad that we will never again see him coming down the pavilion steps to start an innings which we knew could very well contain the best batting the game has ever seen. Keep your memories of Brian Lara batting fresh. We will never see its like again.

In his honour I reproduce a piece I wrote in profound admiration when he made 375 in Antigua to break the world Test record for the first time.

***

One of the great writers on cricket, R.C. Robertson-Glasgow – probably only C.L.R. James and Neville Cardus are greater – wrote once about another extraordinary left-handed batsman:

"Frank Woolley was easy to watch, difficult to bowl to and impossible to write about. When you bowled to him there weren't enough fielders; when you wrote about him, there weren't enough words. In describing a great innings by Woolley, and few of them were not great in artistry, you had to be careful with your adjectives and stack them in little rows, like pats of butter or razor-blades. In the first over of his innings, perhaps, there had been an exquisite off-drive, followed by a perfect cut, then an effortless leg-glide. In

the second over the same sort of thing happened; and your superlatives had already gone. The best thing to do was to presume that your readers knew how Frank Woolley batted and use no adjectives at all."

I am inclined to take his advice in writing about Brian Lara. Just one adjective I am tempted to use – simple. Lara makes batting look the simplest of arts. Except for a little while on the last morning, when he was nervous after a restless night, in that record score of 375 there was no strain. It looked easy, simple, inevitable. Yes, that is how batting was meant to be before original sin came into the world.

Nothing, of course, is inevitable — in life or cricket. But from early in Lara's innings of 375 something special seemed likely. The commentators spoke of him being chastened by criticism that he had been irresponsible in the previous Test in Barbados. There he had made a quick-fire 64 and was out pulling at a ball not short enough for the purpose. To universal dismay the West Indies had been defeated at hallowed Kensington. Now West Indies had lost a quick wicket and after Lara came in another wicket went down one run later — 12 for 2 and trouble looming. That first morning's play saw a Lara in whom determination to prepare for a long, long stay could not have been made clearer. He got rid of all the swash and buckle in his batting. The celebrated back-lift was six inches shorter than normal. In defensive strokes his head was bent that much lower over the blade of his bat. In aggression he remembered the old saying by which Headley and Bradman swore that you are not likely to get out if you hit the ball along the ground. His bat did not flash, it shone with certainty. And the point he was determined to make turned into a world record.

This innings was not like Lara's 277 against Australia. It was not as carefree and scintillating. It had its origin in carefulness and responsibility and never lost that basic connection. As if to challenge himself in an art which is too easy for him, Lara quite often creates complications and attempts the unusual and even the flamboyant. Now in over 12 hours batting he cut nearly all of that out. He kept his brilliance sufficiently in check to ensure that his score was always moving

along very satisfactorily but with no risk of losing his wicket.

The concentration exercised was a monumental achievement. I made sure I watched every single ball of that immortal innings and I was constantly surprised how quickly Lara's score seemed to be progressing without any extravagant effort whatsoever on his part. He was, of course, bringing to bear a gift which is only bestowed on one or two batsmen in a generation — the ability to place shots precisely where fielders are not. If you look carefully you can see how with the most subtle of grip-changes Lara can adjust the angle from which ball leaves bat and how consummately therefore he finds the open spaces. The long time he batted so chancelessly, the gaps he found to unerringly, if the outfield in Antigua had been half as fast as at Bourda or Kensington Lara's score would have been 450.

Well, he scored enough for glory. We older ones will have to get used to that 375. Sobers's 365 stood for so long — it is part of his legend and a piece of our history. The new number will become the most important statistic in the game — though, with many more Test teams and so many more Test matches year in and year out, it is unlikely to endure as long as the astonishing 36 years which the Sobers world record lasted. Lara himself will certainly contemplate breaking the record again. Who knows, these are very early days, but young Chanderpaul who honourably partnered Lara as he gained the prize may be a contender when to his extraordinary concentration and excellent leg-side play he adds power and placing on the offside.

However, Lara's 375 is not just a statistic. It will be woven into our history as a West Indian nation as was the 365 Sobers so imperiously fashioned when he was a stripling 21. It will become mythical. Stories will accumulate about how Lara's score was made, how the three-day drama passed. Thousands will swear to grandchildren still unborn how they were there to see the great deed done until the Antigua Recreation Ground slowly takes on the dimensions of a giant stadium to hold all who will convincingly tell how their hearts stopped and raced a dozen times that final morning, how at last they saw Lara swivel on his toes to pull that record-breaking ball square and flourish his bat in triumph as the world title passed

to him, how the police rushed to guard him like a national treasure from the encroaching, adoring crowd, how Sobers came with dignity to embrace him and how Lara knelt and kissed the pitch beneath his feet – I was there, I was privileged, we will say, as indeed we will have been as the years go by and Lara's deeds transform reality into the greater truth of myth and legend which all can share.

It was perfectly fitting that Gary Sobers, the old record holder, was there to walk on the field and give Lara a hug. He was full of grace and graciousness as he lost his record. He must have felt some small pang at least of regret and mortality – how time passes, how the wind blows away the deepest footprints in the sand. But he was all grace and consideration in the other's hour. I thought of the wonderful story told about Sobers by Trevor Bailey:

"It is easy to give one's wicket away but it takes an artist to do this as well as Gary did for me in a Benefit game in the 1960s. He decided he had provided sufficient entertainment and had scored enough runs so he got out. Nothing unusual about that. It was the way he did it which typified both the man and his craft. He waited until I sent down a ball of good length which pitched on his leg stump and hit the middle as he played a full forward defensive stroke, deliberately and fractionally down the wrong line. He made it look a very good delivery – it wasn't a bad one! But he played his shot so well that the wicket keeper and first slip – though both county professionals – came up to congratulate me. I knew instinctively what Gary had done. But no spectator realized it was an act of charity; only Gary and myself"

There will never be a greater cricketer than Sobers. As a batsman on the offside he cleaved the field as now Lara cleaves it and on the onside he pulled as lethally as now Lara pulls. He had the ability, which Lara has, of converting a defensive stance within a split-second into perfectly timed and placed aggression. Even looking at the slow replays I cannot quite analyse how this happens – something to do with extraordinary reflexes and wrists that turn from parry to cuff in half an instant. Now, after he had congratulated Lara, Sobers was interviewed and said the best thing about Lara's batting any-

one said all week: "*if you watch him bat you never see him use his pads. He hits the ball with the bat and that is how the game should be played*." Strong, forthright, clear, convincing words about what the best batting means. It is how Sobers used to bat, it is how Lara bats now – with only one thing perhaps to add: how there are days when such men as these play with so fine a fettle and pitch that neither would need bats, but a stump, a walking stick, a wand would do and still leave the pads unmarked all day.

In the play *Amadeus* there is a scene where the highly talented and very hard-working court composer, Salieri, is shown to have produced a good piece of music after considerable labour. His young assistant, Mozart, comes into the room and Salieri plays the piece of music proudly for him. Mozart smiles and praises it but then wonders whether it might be improved by just a few modifications. Mozart goes to the piano, plays the piece, tries this and that, then says "*What about this*?" And he plays the piece changed forever by his genius. Salieri's hard-won composition has been transformed into one of the world's immortal melodies. Most Test batsmen, even the best, are Salieris. And then a Sobers, a Lara, comes along and says "*What about this*."

21. LICKET

I suppose it could be said that in the last couple of weeks we have had a feast of cricket. There was the concluding series of matches in the West Indies versus Australia One-Day Internationals. This was followed closely by the absurdly named World Championship of Cricket also played in Australia. And in the midst of all this we also had the final of the Caribbean One-Day Cricket tournament played at Bourda on Phagwah day.

The big disappointment was losing to Pakistan in the semi-final of the so-called World Championship. In this match our batting without Greenidge and Gomes suddenly seemed remarkably fragile. And yet I think the real reason for this unexpected loss may simply have been that Clive Lloyd's heart wasn't in it but miles away with his sick wife. Certainly there seemed to be something absent-minded about our play as if the concentration and driving force essential at this level was no longer finding a focus in the team. When we played New Zealand shortly afterwards it was heartening for the future to sense that Viv Richards in his first fixture as the new captain had at once imposed his own brand of determined authority at the helm. It looks, thank goodness, as if there will be no weak interregnum in West Indian cricket leadership but instead a smooth transfer of power.

With the West Indies out of contention I was pleased that India won the tournament for the simple reason that for once in this kind of cricket the art and craft of slow bowling made the vital difference. That alone deserves a special medal. I should also comment on Guyana's victory over Jamaica in the recent One-Day Final. However, I find little to say about this undistinguished match. A deep mystery was why Seeram, who is a potential West Indian No. 4, was put to open for Guyana and the point of greatest significance in the match was that young Carl Hooper showed further signs of the sort of application and level-headedness which one day is going to give him an outstanding Test career.

But, to tell the truth, all this limited-over cricket served up recently has not provided, for me at least, a feast at all – not even a decent meal. It has been like a lot of takeaway portions from the nearest Chinese restaurant, some more tasty than others, but none really satisfying. Limited-over cricket is convenience food, but you can't really get your teeth into it properly.

The fact is I have always had serious doubts about one-day cricket. It lacks the depth, the mystery, the subtlety, the art of real cricket. In many ways it is not cricket at all. It is a much more superficial game altogether. An entirely different name should be found for it. It might be called "tip-and-run" or "slog-and-heave". If a name at least rhyming with the real thing is preferred perhaps the word "Licket" could be used signifying the crude nature of the great majority of strokes played in this inferior game. Or "Ticket" might be appropriate, denoting this game's fundamental raison d'etre which is crassly commercial. Or perhaps "Quicket" since in the end quick scoring is the be-all and end-all of this parody of the real thing.

I find "Licket" enjoyable enough if I am in the mood. I enjoy it like I enjoy yet another so-called novel churned out by Robert Ludlum or like a film thriller with Clint Eastwood gunning down the villain in the last reel. But one-day cricket bears as much resemblance to real cricket as such quick-fading diversions bear to great literature or great cinema. There is not the same force, pleasure, pain, complexity or character. Many of the chief glories of cricket simply cannot flower in the strictly limited confines of the one-day game. It is like trying to grow a great tree in a small pot. And while bougainvillea might blaze and be beautiful in a small space it cannot ever take the place of a forest tree in all its glory.

The slow bowlers' true art, which can only be matured and displayed in long spells of thoughtful and varied application, is missing. A great batsman cannot build a really great innings since such a thing is made up of patience as well as panache and day-long judgement as well as an hour's brutal stroke-play. There is no real strategy, only tactics. Everything has to happen too fast. There is no time for contemplation, subtle manipulation, and planning. There is no opportunity

for long-term crafting of a match over a period of days which is what real cricket is all about. It is the difference between the instant thrill of quickie sexual gratification and the varied, complex pleasures of a slow seduction. The fast bowlers have to give their all in a mere handful of overs. More often than not the last 10 or 15 overs of any innings is full of swiping and wild scrambling. It is, at best, good knockabout stuff. There can be no nobility in this minor variant of the greatest of all games.

I am not denying that limited-over cricket can be exciting. But that is the whole point – all, at best, it can be is exciting. It does not have the scope to be anything other or more than that. The whole essence of the thing is a nail-biting finish and if there isn't one the proceedings lose any purpose. As a result if a one-day game of cricket quickly becomes a foregone conclusion there is absolutely nothing more boring in the whole of sport. Real cricket is quite different. It provides much more varied and substantial pleasures. Even within a dull drawn game there may be great treasures of batting and bowling as well as subsidiary dramas and crises which give considerable and lasting pleasure and satisfaction. You can look for no such thing in limited-over cricket. Everything is sacrificed to an exciting climax.

One of the more depressing developments in the modern world is how instant this and instant that have become the dominant fashion. It is, of course, part of the rapid growth of the consumer society which is being set up as one great model all the world must follow – more and more and more of less and less and less that really has substance and value and lasting significance. Limited-over cricket is part and parcel of this terrible trend. In its own way it is as much a sign of the times as fast-food outlets. I hate the thought but I fear the limited-over cricket may be on its way to displacing real cricket just as surely as McDonald hamburger shops are swamping real restaurants in the so-called developed world.

22. ENCOUNTERS WITH GENIUS: MAUREEN "LITTLE MO" CONNOLLY

For a short while one summer day out of nowhere in my life she flashed like a comet across my sky.

My first competitive game of tennis was played in the Trinidad and Tobago Junior Championships when I was 12 – and my last at the age of 52 when Roy Dookun and I, more than a hundred years old, won the Guyana National Doubles title for the last time. I hugely enjoyed my forty-year career in tennis – the excitement and honey-sweet of victory and the gall of disappointment in defeat, the stress and exhilaration of intense competition which is a sort of addictive drug, the "*fellowship of the playing field,*" the tremendous honour of representing and leading your country, the rivalries so sharp in memory and the countless friendships, the poetry of the game at its best suddenly encountered.

Over the years I had a measure of success – captain of Cambridge University and later of the Guyana national team in the Brandon Trophy regional tournament and of the West Indies team in Davis Cup play. I played at Wimbledon in the 1950s. There were no official world rankings then but when I was playing my best tennis, about 1952 to 1956, I immodestly think I may have ranked as high as number 40. But the closest I ever got to winning a major Championship was not in my own right but as a kind of assistant or acolyte to an extraordinary champion. Vicariously, I feel I won a tiny bit of one Wimbledon Singles title.

In 1952 at a pre-Wimbledon garden party for players at the Hurlingham Club I met Maureen Connolly and we got on well. She was only seventeen but had won the US Ladies Singles title the year before. I found her fame, and her form, very attractive. I was surprised to learn that her first love had been riding horses but her parents couldn't afford to give her a pony so they gave her a tennis racket instead. Fate turns on such small hinges. I think I caught her attention more than I probably would have done by speaking about the horse my mother loved when she was a little girl – its name was Beaucaillou

and it took my mother trotting in a buggy everywhere in Trinidad long ago.

Towards the end of the party she said she wanted a practice partner during the Wimbledon fortnight – she never practised against other women and hoped I was good enough to beat her. Early the next morning we practised on the grass courts at the Queens Club. I was good enough to beat her. (In those days it was said that the worst man in the Wimbledon draw should be able to beat the Ladies Champion. I don't know if that applies today). As a result she was happy to continue our practice sessions. On the fast grass courts of Wimbledon she felt that Louise Brough, a good volleyer, would be her main rival so she asked me to come to net as much as possible – which I did and was a little worried to observe that her passing shots were not very effective. We would meet to practise in the mornings during Wimbledon whether or not she had a tournament game in the afternoon. So when Maureen Connolly won the Championship, the first of her three Wimbledon Singles titles, I naturally took credit. It was the closest I ever came to tennis greatness, in more senses than one.

When she won the final – quite easily against Louise Brough – I sent flowers to her dressing room and suggested we meet for a celebratory drink later. She replied that she would like that but, this is something that still astounds me, first she had to go to the Queens Club and practise her serve which she thought had been very poor in the final that afternoon. How could she be serious, having just won Wimbledon? But she was. Summoned, I went but couldn't help feeling that this was taking things a little far.

But perhaps that is what genus is. I have read lately that anyone who practises any thing – writing, composing, furniture-making, painting, any musical instrument, any game or sport – for 10,000 hours will become good enough to be considered a genius at that activity. Repeating again and again and again and again the moves and combinations and calculations which yield the best possible result makes instinctive what starts out being laboriously considered and weakly preformed. The brain connecting with the body-circuits becomes hard-wired to achieve perfection. I did not know about this

theory when I met Maureen Connolly but I think now she may be a confirmation of that theory's truth. Certainly she was a practice fanatic. In our morning sessions, long after I had had more than enough and was fed up, she wanted to hit and hit and hit and hit. She was seventeen but she had been playing since she was ten so perhaps she had already reached her 10,000 hour quota. And then again there was that business of going out to practise her serve after winning Wimbledon!

Maureen Connolly went on to win nine major singles championships including the grand slam in 1953 – the only woman to win all four major singles titles in the same year. In 1954, two weeks after winning her third Wimbledon singles title, while riding one of her beloved horses she had an accident and her right leg was crushed beyond repair, thus ending her tennis career at the age of nineteen. She died of stomach cancer in 1969. I thought back to that summer time when our paths crossed and I felt very sad.

23. THE MARVELLOUS POETRY OF MAD JOHN CLARE

John Clare, the English nature poet, born in 1793 and died in a madhouse in 1864, was the most poverty-stricken of any major poet who ever lived. He could not afford to buy paper so he made it by scraping clean layers of birch bark. He made ink by mixing *"bruised nut galls, green copper and stone blue soaked in a pint and a half of rain water."* Some of his manuscripts are made of discarded envelopes stitched together and one of his greatest poems was written on the back of a handbill for a local election.

John Clare was a casual farm labourer but at the village school he attended as a boy he acquired a passion for reading which built a fierce need in him to become a poet, a completely extraordinary ambition for a peasant in 19th Century England. Stunted by malnutrition he worked as a weeder and haymaker, stacking bales, and occasionally found other employment serving in a pub, plowing, looking after animals, as a militiaman, working in fencing and hedging gangs, scouring out fish ponds and labouring in a lime works.

Yet all this time the passion for poetry never died in him.

"I could not stop my thoughts and often failed to keep them till night, so when I fancied I had hit upon a good image or natural description I used to sneak into a corner of the garden and clap it down, but the appearance of my employees often put my fancies to flight and made me lose the thought and the muse together, for I have always felt anxious to conceal my scribbling and would as leave have confessed to be a robber as a rhymer."

When he got the chance he wrote down what he saw with indelible clarity: it is what it is. Here is John Clare, casual labourer, starting with one of his favourite phrases "I love," in a wonderfully clear and simple sonnet:

'Emmonsails Heath in Winter'

I love to see the old heath's withered brake
Mingle its crimpled leaves with furze and
    ling
While the old heron from the lonely lake
Starts slow and flaps his melancholy wing
And oddling crow in idle motions swing
On the half-rotten ash tree's topmost twig
Beside whose trunk the gypsy makes his bed –
Up flies the bouncing woodcock from the
    brig
Where a black quagmire quakes beneath
    the tread;
The fieldfare chatters in the whistling
    thorn
And for the 'awe round fields and closen
    rove
And coy bumbarrels twenty in a drove
Flit down the hedgerows in the frozen plain
And hang on little twigs and start again."

"Awe" is a dialect term for hawthorn berry, "closen" are small fields, and "bumbarrel" is a long-tailed bird. The effect, as one modern poet, John Ashbery, has said, is of "*re-inserting me in my present, of reestablishing now.*"

When John Clare began to be noticed by patrons and editors he was valued first and foremost as a freak. The title page of his first book described him as a Northampton peasant. He was, very briefly, a sensation. But the break for him hardly lasted. Each succeeding book of his – *Poems Descriptive, The Village Minstrel, The Shepherd's Calendar* and *The Rural Muse* – can be seen now to have been better then the previous one – but each sold fewer copies. Fashion abandoned him to his life of extreme poverty and hard manual labour. And his life was made even worse because he had once been noticed as a writer:

"I live here among the ignorant like a lost man in fact like one whom the rest seems careless of having anything to do with – they hardly dare talk in my company for fear I should mention them in

my writings and I find more pleasure in wandering the fields than in musing among my silent neighbours who are insensible to every thing but toiling and talking of it and that to no purpose."

Gradually he went mad. "*I had a variety of minds about me and all of them unsettled*." He began to see spirits of hideous description moving about on the ceiling of his room. He suffered long depressive spells alternating with manic episodes. On July 8th, 1837, he was admitted to Dr. Allen's lunatic asylum in far away Essex. There he thought sometimes he was a prizefighter, sometimes that he had written Shakespeare's plays and sometimes that he was Horatio Nelson on the high seas. In July, 1841, he escaped and walked the hundred miles back to his home, so hungry on the way that he ate grass. But he had quite lost himself in madness. By the end of 1841 he was readmitted, this time to the Northampton General Lunatic Asylum. He remained there for the rest of his life in complete obscurity until he died of a stroke in 1864 at the age of seventy.

Nearly a century passed before John Clare's poems were rediscovered and given their full due. Moreover, manuscripts were found which showed that some of his greatest poems had been written in his early years in Northampton lunatic asylum. From time to time, before night fell for good, the clouds of madness parted and a marvellous light poured through. One poem written then seems to me, as I have come to read it again and again, the most heart-rending poem ever written.

'I Am'

I am – yet what I am, none cares or knows;
My friends forsake me like a memory lost:
I am the self-consumer of my woes -
They rise and vanish in oblivion's host
Like shadows in love- frenzied stifled throes –
And yet I am and love – like vapours
    tossed

Into the nothingness of scorn and noise
Into the living sea of waking dreams
Where there is neither sense of life or joys
But the vast shipwreck of my life's esteems;
Even the dearest that I love the best
Are strange – nay, rather, stranger than
    the rest.

I long for scenes where man hath never
    trod,
A place where woman never smiled or
    wept,
There to abide with my creator, God,
Sleep as I in childhood sweetly slept,
Untroubling and untroubled where I lie,
The grass below – above, the vaulted
    sky.

24. WHAT IS A GOOD EDUCATION?

It is unanimously agreed that a nation will make little progress if it lacks a sound educational system and if it fails to provide sufficient funds to improve educational facilities. Finance Ministers in every country stress the point when budget time comes around. Every UNDP report emphasizes the link between improving education and accelerating development. (Those reports, by the way, do not suggest what is to be done when a poor country makes a supreme effort to improve education only to have rich countries snatch away the trained educators and the best educated emerging out of this supreme effort).

But what is a good education? It is certainly not cramming unassimilated facts into untrained minds. It is certainly not forcing the children through those cramming factories which churn out "extra lessons."

A good education begins with encouraging the young child to love reading and comprehend what is being read and teaching him or her to write clear English and calculate with numbers. It proceeds by enlisting the interest and imagination of the growing student in a variety of subjects from which he or she will gradually come to choose the one or two which better suits his or her liking and talents. At University a good education should reach its formal end by stretching, developing, provoking and strengthening the intellect so that the mysteries and challenges of an adult career and life can best be understood and mastered.

Interwoven in the education of the growing child must be awareness of the moral grounds of life. Virtue and values do not reside in the intellect. This is a larger subject that can be dealt with in this column but to get a sense of the matter let me quote from a speech given by a friend, Dr. Ralph Thompson, poet and a leading private sector industrialist in Jamaica, at a symposium on education on October 11th, 2000.

"Given the advances in technology, I have to ask myself is my greatest need as a business for computer programmers, research scientists and industrial engineers? Or did the greatest shocks and setbacks occur when a highly paid and competent financial controller was caught embezzling the company, when a purchasing officer was found taking "kickbacks" from suppliers, when a director used insider information to trade in the shares of his company quoted on the stock exchange, when a union officer promoted class warfare and workers did not have sufficient background in logic or economics to distinguish between truth and self-serving propaganda and went on strike for three weeks."

To return to the learning process, it starts best with a love of reading. Nonreaders, who will naturally be non-writers, suffer a tremendous handicap since the capacity to internalise any subject increases or diminishes to the extent that a person can or cannot express himself or herself clearly. At the opening last month of the Book Foundation's admirable and well-organised Book Fair, the first in Guyana's history, I said the following which I deeply believe:

"If one had the power to give a child a single gift and no other, the gift to choose would be a love of reading. That is a gift which incomparably combines immense usefulness with lifelong access to intellectual stimulation, emotional delights, spiritual inspiration and unceasing entertainment. The usefulness comes in the huge head start a love of reading gives a child in his or her education. A child who loves reading is going to learn faster and better than his or her peers who do not and is going to be able to retain and organize and express what is learnt much more usefully and with infinitely more effect than those whose minds are closed to books. I guarantee – all the top students in Common Entrance, CXC and Advanced Level examinations and at University are constant readers and love books."

By the time the young man or woman reaches university the mind should be ready to be stretched and sharpened, its capacity rigorously and variously tested. The university must be the guardian of intellectual life. Noel Annan, Provost of Kings College, Cambridge, and later Vice-Chancellor of the

University of London, provides a definition of the university's function which I like:

"They exist to cultivate the intellect. Everything else is secondary. Equality of opportunity to come to the university is secondary. The matters that concern both dons and administrators are secondary. The need to mix classes, nationalities and races together is secondary. The agonies and gaieties of student life are secondary. So are the rules, customs, pay and promotion of the academic staff and their debates on changing the curricula or procuring facilities for research. Even the awakening of a sense of beauty or the life-giving shock of new experience, or the pursuit of goodness itself – all these are secondary to the cultivation, training and exercise of the intellect. Universities should hold up for admiration the intellectual life. The most precious gift they have to offer is to live and work among books or in laboratories and to enable the young to see those rare scholars who have put on one side the world of material success, both in and outside the university, in order to study with single-minded devotion some topic because that above all seems important to them. A university is dead if the dons cannot in some way communicate to the students the struggle – and the disappointments as well as the triumphs in that struggle – to produce out of the chaos of human experience some grain of order won by the intellect. That is the end to which all the arrangements of the university should be directed."

And at the formal end of the whole experience, after university, on the verge of full maturity, if the education really has been good, the emerging adult will have learnt just about enough to know that he or she has arrived at the very beginning of knowledge and how it is to be applied and understands that learning never ends until the brain dims forever and goes out.

25. THE TONGUE SET FREE

There is an exact relationship between how language is used and how power is exercised. Good governors use language that tries to reflect truth and is clear and understandable. Bad governors use language that hides, manipulates, or cosmetises the truth and is customarily obscure and cliché- ridden to the point of meaninglessness.

Since human nature at its weakest is what it is, people quite often prefer what is cosmetic and obscure to what is true and clear and so bad governors can and do get by quite well for quite long. This is so true that even good governors are sometimes tempted down the road of high-sounding but feckless rhetoric. Fortunately, however, since human nature at its best also is what it is, people in the end prefer truth and want to understand clearly what is affecting their lives and so bad governors do not prevail forever.

History shows this and quite recent history shows it most clearly of all. The official use of language in the old communist empire grew so corrupt in the end that the rottenness infected the empire through and through, weakening it irredeemably. And do not scoff at the claim that something as abstract as the misuse of language can bring down a government or even an empire. When the language used by those in power deteriorates to the point where it bears no relation to reality, no relation to truth, society simply cannot function properly. Laws become meaningless, rules need not be obeyed, political exhortations are ignored, all functions of the state are undermined, and men seek their own solutions outside the charade of official promulgations.

Even terror hides its terrible truth in hideous verbiage, in language supremely misused and corrupted. George Orwell pointed this out long ago in his magnificent essay 'Politics and the English language'. People were imprisoned for years without trial, or shot in the back of the neck, or sent to die of scurvy in Arctic tundra waste: that was called "pacifying unreliable elements." Such phrases are used if one wants to name

things without calling up mental pictures of them. The supporters of Hitler/Stalin did not say plainly *"I agree with him killing off his opponents because he gets good results by doing so"*. No, they said *"While freely conceding that the German/Soviet regime exhibits certain features which humanitarians may be inclined to deplore, we must, I think, agree that a certain curtailment of the right to political opposition is an unavoidable concomitant of transitional periods, and that the rigours which the German/Russian people have been called upon to undergo have been amply justified in the sphere of concrete achievement."*

Thus does a society, through language's debasement, inexorably sink beneath a mass of lies, evasions, unspoken fears and hatreds and public/private schizophrenia.

There was, of course, never anything in Guyana remotely resembling such terror. However, when one thinks back with a shudder to the days when Guyana sunk to its lowest point, late 1970s to 1985, it seems so clear now that what was being said and written at the highest level of Government was language contrived to defend the indefensible - the need to mobilize the people as grounds for party paramountcy, the goals of proud self-sufficiency and self-reliance to explain the ban on flour and the empty shelves, the need to focus and advance the development effort to excuse stifling freedom of the media.

Indeed, I have no doubt at all that the political and economic decay which overtook Guyana at that time was accompanied by a parallel decay in the arts of expressing ourselves clearly, concisely, properly, truthfully. An effect can become a cause, reinforcing the original cause and producing the same effect in intensified form. Thus the decay in Guyana caused deterioration in the teaching and use of language and that deterioration intensified the decay of the state.

I believe, in fact, that President Hoyte when he came to power, fully recognized the dilemma and the problem. I think he saw the danger to the state which language's debasement threatened. I think he meant it completely when he launched the Guyana Prize for Literature in 1987 and said that we must give as much status and scope to our makers of words as we do to our makers of things. Here indeed he wrought change. Certainly what he achieved in giving more space for Guyanese

to speak more freely, more truly, must always be applauded and Governments since then have reinforced the achievement. What Guyana must never again relinquish is, in Elias Cannetti's words, "*the tongue set free*." Never.

I end this column on a personal note as I recall as I often do a friend and great Guyanese. No one in the Caribbean, very few anywhere, have written more clearly and passionately, with more power and truth, than Martin Carter. When he wrote about the strong and weak there was never the slightest hint of gush or lies or slickness. His work is lit with the purest of light: there are no shadows of outworn rhetoric in his sentences. His absence weighs heavily on us. No one has more hated and despised language's debasement in the nation than Martin. May his work and his example never be forgotten.

26. WHEN DID NOTHING CEASE TO BE?

I am deeply fascinated by any news about the creation, the structure, the size and the ultimate fate of the universe. It is not a very practical fascination but I will quite happily spend hours reading about the latest theories. For instance, I have just seen that Dr. Paul Steinhardt of Princeton University has proposed that our universe was "dormant" until struck and activated by an offshoot of a hidden parallel universe. I can't wait to read more about this.

And cosmologist Alexander Vilenkin of Tufts University has recently rejected Einstein's theory that our universe is a sphere, believing instead that it is flat and infinite which he finds disturbing since, apparently, it means that eventually, somewhere, there is going to come into existence another Alexander Vilenkin, indeed an infinite number of Vilenkins, and this, says Professor Vilenkin, *"I find vaguely depressing*." Well, I do not. I want to know more about this theory of serial immortality.

However, of all the unfathomable questions that men have asked since men could ask questions, the one I find most deeply baffling and absolutely unanswerable is that which my young son asked me once years ago: "*Dad, what was there before everything began?*" It is an extension of the question that philosophers have asked for thousands of years: "*Why is there not nothing?*" Why, indeed? Concentrate for a while and think about it.

Trying to find an answer leads to more questions and there are always as many questions as answers. It is evading the question to reply with a take-it-or-leave-it decisiveness, "God". However, I did tell my son that most people believe that before anything was, there was God. But my son had assumed God and included Him in the "everything" of his question: "*No, I mean what was there before God and everything?*" Was there a Super-God? But, then, what was there before super-God? and so on. He got the point. "*So, Dad, what was there?*"

We went outside to look up at the night sky. The weather was fine and wind was blowing the branches of the trees across the firmament packed with stars. The stars - they were so bright they seemed to hum and shiver with light like a horde of golden bees. We should sometimes stop to give thanks for our privilege. There are millions upon millions upon millions of children in smog-ridden cities who have never seen the stars -and millions upon millions upon millions more who never ask questions except to ask for food.

I pointed out some stars I knew and explained that all the stars we saw were countless millions of miles far off yet they were very near - if we measured out a thousand miles to the end of the universe, in proportion these stars we saw now would be one inch away. The universe was so vast we could not conceive its size and it was filled almost without limit with stars bigger than ten times our sun - fields upon fields of shining stars beyond the imagination.

There was wonder enough in that. But, more wondrous still, there had been a time, about 15 billion years ago wise men claimed, when all this vast universe of shining stars had been contained in a speck, something much smaller than a speck ("a micro-speck" my son, schooled in modern terms, volunteered) which, for some reason no one had yet worked out, had then exploded - though "explosion" could not begin to describe the immensity, the miraculous energy, of the event - and what we saw this fine night was the universe still exploding, but more slowly now.

This was a fine tale but it did not give the answer to three important questions: what was the universe exploding into, where had the micro-speck come from, and, finally, what had been before the speck itself was? And now I had to admit that these were questions which nobody had ever answered though many had tried and many more were still trying. They had so far decided that time itself did not exist before "the singularity," which was when the universe started, and when time does not exist then questions about before and after make no sense and should not be asked - which didn't go very far in satisfying my son's curiosity, nor indeed mine.

In the end you have to try and describe what timeless nothing is - not just empty space or anything like that - no, a void

empty of emptiness itself for all eternity. I tried to describe real nothingness but try it yourself and see how impossible it is. It is impossible because in describing anything you are describing it relative to something else, so when you describe nothingness you immediately presuppose something and that frustrates your purpose. "Absence of anything" won't do because the mind lingers on the "anything" which exists and you're back in the solid world again.

The concept of "nothing" slips forever out of the mind's grip. The imagination comes nearest. Let it ride out to play in a non-world of all that never was and never will be until the imagination develops its own vertigo and swoons. And when it recovers it finds again only the miracle of what has somehow come to be. In complex equations the mathematicians describe how the universe began. But what breathed fire into those equations to let us see the blazing stars at night?

Gottfried Liebniz, born 1646 and died 1716, perhaps the greatest mathematician who ever lived, argued that there were only two absolutely simple concepts, God and Nothingness. From these, all other concepts can be constructed, the universe and everything in it, arising from some primordial argument between the deity and nothing whatsoever. And then, in an extraordinary leap of the imagination, Liebniz observed that what is crucial in this thought is the **alternation** between God and Nothingness and for this the numbers 1 and 0 will suffice. Thus, nearly three centuries early, as he contemplated the ultimate reality of things, did Leibniz prefigure the world of the computer. I find this fascinating

I stayed beneath the stars long after my son had gone to bed, to sleep and to dream not of nothingness I hope but of the limitless shining universe. The answer to his question, so far as I could tell, is that before anything was, there was nothing. However, it seems nothingness contained a potentially which waited upon its time to appear in that glorious burst of light which began it all and will never end. And that, I know, is where more questions start on some other star-filled night. And I also know the most important thing is that the questions must never stop. If questions are not asked nothing ever releases its potential. Once, an infinity ago, a question was asked and nothing ceased to be forever.

27. WHAT THE EARTH SWALLOWS IS SOON FORGOTTEN

The *Stabroek News* feature 'History This Week' is providing readers with a most valuable series of vignettes from Guyana's past. The staff and members of the History Department of the University of Guyana are to be warmly congratulated for undertaking the work and supplying the pieces so regularly. They add up to an important contribution in making Guyanese aware of their heritage and their heroes.

I look forward most to the pieces on people – for instance, George William des Voeux, the great magistrate, marvellous Herbert Moshett, one of the great pioneers of Guyanese art and recently the feature on Eusi Kaywana by Estherine Adams. There is so much wonder in any life – so much interest and excitement and achievement, so much agony and failure too, everything so vivid if only we knew the details. But in Guyana, and in the wider West Indies, we hardly bother to remember. "*What the earth swallows is soon forgotten*," Isaac Singer wrote. He could have been a West Indian.

This is an extract from the obituary, in The *London Times* of July 30, 1996, of a man I consider a remarkable West Indian:

"When, on a day in the summer of 1937, the Secretary of State for Air, the Earl of Swinton, paid a visit to Squadron Leader Arthur McDonald at the Biggin Hill Experimental Flight station and told him and his two fellow pilots standing by their gauntlet biplanes: 'I hope you young men realise that the whole future of this country depends on the results of what you are doing here', he was not exaggerating. What was at stake was the future of the air defence of Great Britain. And the experimental programme led by McDonald in 1936-7 proved beyond the shadow of a doubt that the principle of radar interception of incoming aircraft, without which the RAF could not have won the Battle of Britain, was possible."

My father's elder brother had an extraordinary life. He lived to 93 and packed his life with exploits. He was a very vivid personality. When he was age 86 I remember him ask-

ing me to crew for him in a yacht race in which he was competing but I told him I was too old to keep up with him. His father and mother were Antiguan and he was born and brought up in Antigua. When he was a young man he decided to join the Royal Air Force. He rose to become Air Marshall Sir Arthur McDonald, one of Britain's top air force commanders. When Pakistan gained independence he was seconded to become the Commander-in-Chief of the Pakistan Air Force. Twenty-five years later, celebrating their beginnings, the Pakistanis did not forget but sent a Presidential jet to bring him back to visit in high honour. Arthur McDonald had another career – in his spare time he was one of the world's top yachtsmen – he had practised enough off Antigua's windy coasts. He captained Britain in the 1948 Olympics and on behalf of the athletes took the Olympic oath at those Games.

In deep historical terms, however, probably most remarkable was his work as a test pilot in the 1930s. Britain was developing a secret new technology and the time had come to test it operationally. I have my uncle's letter in which, years later, he described the event to my father. He and another pilot had flown from an airfield outside London to conduct the first trial ever made of the new technology simulating actual flying conditions. He describes the extraordinary flush of feeling he experienced when on the experimental monitor in front of him the blurred blip appeared — a commercial airliner rising out of Schipol airport in Holland miles away out of sight — and he knew the trial was a success. That was in 1936 — the first interception ever made by radar.

I give this thumbnail sketch to make a simple point. I don't know if my uncle's name will be recorded in West Indian archives, but I think it should be. And I do not doubt he can be counted a West Indian achiever. Over the centuries how many thousands of Spanish, British, French, Dutch, to name a few, were claimed for their countries though they lived the greater part of their lives far from homeland? In our turn, we too have our outreach in reverse — as Guyana knows so well.

Generally, however, we make a custom of forgetting. We do not record, and therefore never learn, the stories of hundreds, thousands, of Guyanese and West Indians who have lived valuable and even marvellous lives. We are not good at

remembering the contributions of the generations before us. Yet it is part of slowly creating a real history for ourselves that we should not forget what men and women have done before us, that we should take some minimum of care to record their lives, their trials and distinctions, so that the national memory lengthens, so that we are not left decade after decade with a growing blank behind us.

Could I suggest that the UG History Faculty consider seriously a project which I think it would be well equipped to undertake and which would be of inestimable value to Guyanese, especially young Guyanese, and to succeeding generations. The project is to compile and publish a *Dictionary of Guyanese Biographies.* This project would have as its starting point A.J. Seymour's similarly named *Dictionary* in two volumes which A.J.S., as one of his many immense contributions to the literary and cultural life of the country, compiled with the help of his wife, Elma. This work should be revisited, extensively revised and supplemented and republished. Annual supplementary volumes could then be published as more historical information comes to light and as Guyanese deserving entry die and qualify for recording in the D.B.G.

I go further still. Might not the History Faculty contact its counterparts in other West Indian countries, inform them of its plans for a D.B.G., encourage them to do the same if the task is not already being undertaken, and aim in the years ahead to publish a *Dictionary of West Indian Biographies* which in time might come to be an essential part of the scholarship of the region? I am sure the necessary funding could be obtained for the work. It would help define our nationhood. And what our forebears bequeath to us would have some fitting monument. The earth will not, after all, have swallowed them without remembrance.

28. WHAT REALLY IS IMPORTANT

When I was with GuySuCo there was an occasion when I found myself growing irritated because my secretary was urging me to find time for an interview with an old man, a pensioner from the old sugar times, who had been trying to see me for a couple of days. The excuse I made was that I was just back from an important meeting on GuySuCo's Five year-Plan and had to write up my notes and there was little time between that and another important meeting I had to attend with a visiting trade delegation. "*Try to put him off*', I said. "*Or get someone else to see him*." I was, to put it briefly, full of myself and my importance.

But my secretary was far too good a secretary to be fobbed off with such pomposities and very soon I was interviewing the old man. And a very absorbing experience that turned out to be. For one thing, his talk about his long career in the sugar fields held me fascinated and reminded me how much that we think we know so well now was known even better long ago. And, for another thing, the particular grievance the old man had, and which he explained with care and precision, badly needed looking into and putting right and not only for his sake. When this was done a few days later and I saw the old man again, he expressed his thanks with dignity and a sense of the fitness of things. It was a good experience for me. The old man had made his case. And I mused on the lessons we should try to learn every day of our lives.

The truth is that most of us, if not all of us, are pompous in the extreme about our jobs. We magnify our self-importance, puff the terrific contribution we are making. But is it really so? Or rather, do we get the perspective right when we consider how we are performing?

Do we dismiss much too easily the insights of others whom we feel are poorer than ourselves in intelligence, education, status or job position? We are fools if we do. I once read in a book written by Adrian Moyes, published by Oxfam, called *The Poor Man's Wisdom* about technology and the poor. The

argument was that too much attention is lavished on the "technologies of the rich" and too little use made of the existing skills of the poor. It is true that local technology is by no means always best but local knowledge of local conditions usually is. Two brief illustrations taken from the book struck me. A 1970 survey in Ghana showed that the ordinary farmers' knowledge of soils, from a practical point of view, was superior to that of University and agricultural extension staff. Secondly, a study of the Hanunoo people in the Philippines revealed that the average adult could identify no less than 1,600 species of plant – some 400 more than was spotted by a systematic botanic survey. We do ill if we neglect the kind of ingrown knowledge and local skills which are to be found everywhere.

But I come back to the old pensioner whom I interviewed, fitting him in between Five-year Plans and visiting trade delegations, and I think I've got the focus on work, on life, a little clearer. Try to remember the importance of small causes. There should be time for the old pensioner who hobbles into the reception area and asks for an interview about getting a new pair of spectacles as well as time for the trade delegation selling vital fertilizers or machinery or seeking a big marketing contract. How to get the perspective right – that is the test of management – perhaps even the art of living itself.

There is a passage in Pasternak's great novel *Dr. Zhivago* which one should be careful to remember. The passage is about Strelnikov, caught in the huge ebb and flow of the Russian Revolution:

> "And in order to do good to others he needed, besides the principles that filled his mind, an unprincipled heart - the kind of heart that knows of no general causes, but only of particular ones and knows the greatness of small actions".

29. WHILE THE WORLD BURNS

It is reported that as many as 20,000 politicians, officials, international functionaries, journalists and activists attended the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, better known as the Bali Conference. That is a very great number of Neros assembled in one place complete with their fiddles.

I cannot understand why the outcome of this conference has been "*hailed by governments as a success*." Which governments? And in what way can "*a deal to start negotiations to adopt a new climate pact*" be counted a success? Anyone can declare an intention to do something – but will it be done? Such deals are fundamentally meaningless. James Connaughton, Chairman of the White House Council on environmental quality, speaking for the greatest Nero of them all, is quoted as saying triumphantly, "*We now have one of the broadest negotiating agendas ever on climate change*." Well, hurrah, then, we have agreed an agenda. And Angela Merkel, Chancellor of Germany, is quoted as saying that Bali represented "*an important basis for a good result*." Well, hurrah again, Bali achieved the basis of a good result. Not therefore a good result. In other words (words!) Bali was a draftsman's paradise, as such conferences usually are, where the purpose always in the end becomes to stitch up a luxuriant fig leaf to cover complete nakedness.

Shakespeare said it all about such windy, grandiloquent, useless conferences when he wrote the dialogue between two noblemen, Glendower and Hotspur, in the play Henry IV, Part One:

> Glendower: "*I can call spirits from the vasty deep!*"
>
> Hotspur: "*Why, so can I, or so can any man. But will they come when you do call for them?*"

Indeed. What we have seen at Bali is not a new thing. Throughout history rulers have believed (or pretended to believe) that the announcement of good intentions is the equivalent to the solution of problems. What is perhaps new in our age is that this tendency has hardened and crystallized into a way of life for multitudes of experts, advisers, consultants and other important people who live and work and find their motivation in a sphere remote from the real world.

There exists in the world today two entirely separate spheres of activity. One is the sphere of rhetoric, impressive prepared speeches, mutual back-slapping, declarations of good intent, and agreed communiqués. The other sphere is the sphere of reality, cold hard facts, military and economic strength, tough commercial negotiations, payment by results, cash down and the bottom line. Each of these spheres function quite separately, has its own apparatus of power and influence, administers its own procedures and proceedings, sets its own objectives and achieves its own successes. They are quite self-contained. There seems to be little, if any, spillover from one sphere into the other.

Progress is only made when a way is found to connect the sphere of good intentions with the sphere of practical results. Failing that, the spirits of doable compromise and real progress will always remain imprisoned in the vasty deep of interminable talk-shops.

The Bali Conference could only have been judged a success if it had achieved two things leading directly to the reduction of greenhouse–gas emissions the increase of which is already causing disasters brought about by global warming and climate change and the acceleration of which, unless halted, will in a couple of ticks of historical time lead to worldwide catastrophe, a great if not final extinction.

Above all, the conference should have agreed time-tabled targets for cutting the emissions. Europe to its credit is prepared to set such targets but America, the greatest culprit, will not do so while George Bush is President and perhaps not even beyond that rapidly approaching day. So no targets were set.

There is another way of acting against disastrous climate change. Since tropical deforestation causes 20 percent of

greenhouse – gas emissions, steps to reduce, halt, reverse this process will obviously be very valuable to the world as a whole. So there should have been agreement to give incentives, a "preservation dividend," to careful developing countries, like Guyana, for not deforesting our land.

Copenhagen in 2009 where a deal, and not just a deal to agree a deal, is to be hammered out is just around the corner. By the time Copenhagen comes around talking while the world burns will not be enough. By then Nature will have taken another few steps along its own determined way to solve the problem – the eventual elimination of that rather stupid species, mankind.

30. THE DEATH OF ICE

I take no pleasure in causing concern, especially when that concern comes closer to our Guyana home than to most homes in the world. After all, we have quite enough big worries already – gun crimes accelerating brutally by 50 percent in a single year; another general election looming with the Opposition more and more agitated.

But consider the following, taken from an article 'The Coming Meltdown' by Bill McKibben, author of *The End of Nature*, in the *New York Review of Books*, January 12, 2006.

• Arctic sea ice is disappearing. Last summer there was 20 percent less of it than normal. This process may well have reached a tipping point beyond which there is no recovery. Instead of blinding white ice that bounces sunlight back into space there is open blue water soaking up the sun's heat and accelerating melting.

• In the Siberia tundra the vast permafrost has begun to melt, releasing into the atmosphere formerly frozen methane which, like carbon dioxide, is a heat-trapping greenhouse-gas. The methane is bubbling up so abundantly in some places that puddles of standing water could not freeze last year even in the depths of the Siberian winter.

• Examination of 6,000 soil borings across the U.K found that warmer temperatures (growing seasons now last eleven days longer at that latitude) has led to dramatically increased microbial activity in the soil. This means that much of the carbon long stored in the soil is now being released into the atmosphere. The quantity involved is so large that it is negating all the work Britain has done to switch away from coal to reduce carbon in the atmosphere.

• Lonnie Thompson, scientist at the Ohio State University, preeminent in exploring tropical and subtropical glaciers and

decoding the information trapped in their ice, told the American Association for the Advancement of Science in February, 2001, that the snows on the summit of Kilimanjaro are fast disappearing and would all be gone in twenty years. Soon enough that magnificent, heart-stopping view will be lost to mankind.

• In a presentation to the American Geophysical Union on December 6th, 2005, James Hansen, NASA scientist and one of the world's foremost climate modellers, had this to say:

"The Earth's climate is nearing, but has not passed, a tipping point beyond which it will be impossible to avoid climate change with far-ranging undesirable consequences. These include not only the loss of the Arctic as we know it, with all that implies for wildlife and indigenous peoples, but losses on a much vaster scale due to rising seas."

It is not only what I read in this and other articles and books. Last November my wife and I were visiting my sister and her husband at their lovely windswept home on a cliff overlooking the sea in Hodges Bay, Antigua, where my grandparents once lived and my parents after them. In the 1940s and 1950s my grandfather kept in a ledger a meticulous record of temperature and rainfall. He entered up the statistics every day. In the last three years or so my brother-in- law has resumed that meticulous daily record and when we visited I took some time to compare these new figures with the figures entered decades ago by my grandfather in that precious old ledger. I found that compared with 50 years ago the average daily temperature in any given month is three to four degrees Fahrenheit higher now than it was then. Warming at that rate makes one sweat both literally and metaphorically.

Bill McKibben's sombre article is among other things, an elegy on the death of ice, that cold and shining and often so beautiful element. He writes:

"We are forced to face the fact that a century's carelessness is now melting away the world's storehouses of ice, a melting whose momentum may be nearing the irreversible. It's as if we were strip-

ping the spectrum of a colour, or eradicating one note from every octave. There are almost no words for such a change: it's no wonder that scientists have to struggle to get across the enormity of what is happening."

In the face of crisis, threatened by great tragedy, people demote rivalries and differences (which suddenly seem petty) and close ranks against a common, overwhelming challenge. Perhaps, pray God, this will happen around the world and also here at home.

31. THE RUDENESS OF BEING LATE

A few experiences lately of public figures who should know better arriving late on occasions when they have agreed to assist in the proceedings prompts me to repeat a column I wrote a while back. Why will such personages not learn that being late, sometimes very late, is a waste of people's time and upsettingly rude to keep others waiting? Why not be on time?

***

My father was a gentle, calm, and wise man. "*He never raised his voice except to give encouragement nor raised his hand except to greet a friend.*" But in his gentleness he was also strong in his convictions. The principles by which he lived his life were not subject to compromise. Games, for instance, which he loved, must be played hard and to win but the spirit of sportsmanship was to be obeyed absolutely. Once, when I was about twelve years old and beginning to do well at tennis, in a fit of pique I cast down my racket and stamped about in a temper. After the game my father met me, took my racket and looked into my eyes and said very quietly that if I behaved like that again I did not deserve ever again to play games. More than sixty years have passed but the look from his steady grey eyes and the quiet words I have not forgotten.

My father had strong views on the value of time. As I grew older I often got into conversations with him about the importance of not wasting time. He tried to make me as aware as he could of the fact that the passing hours none of us would ever have again must be spent constructively, honestly, considerately of other people, enjoyably too and always used to full effect. Those passing hours gradually added up into a lifetime and that lifetime would be judged, by man and God, according to how the hours had been measured, idly or in fruitful commitment.

My father expressed his concern for giving full value to time in a series of propositions which he took very seriously. "*Of all treasure, time is the most precious*," "*Procrastination is the thief of time*," "*Punctuality is the courtesy of kings*" are three I recall in particular.

Procrastination was a deadly enemy of efficiency and achievement. If you had something to do, "*just do it*" was my father's mantra long before the Nike swoosh. Incompetence could generally be equated with procrastination. Every day had its tasks and serial postponements of such tasks quickly led to a pile-up of work which could never then be done properly. My father loved to quote the stamp Prime Minister Churchill put on the memoranda he issued during the Second World War: "*ACTION THIS DAY*." How else can anyone succeed?

My father abhorred unpunctuality. It wasted time, it denoted inefficiency, it was disrespectful and discourteous in the extreme, it was a mark of the lackadaisical and the slapdash. More than fifty years of experience in Guyana and the Caribbean and of becoming accustomed to our special concept of delayed punctuality has still not allowed me to forget the strength of my father's conviction on this issue and so sometimes in his honour I make a point of arriving on time at events and meetings and even when, as I often do, I attend "late on time" with nearly everyone else, my spirit still gives a quiver of regret, remembering my father.

He would have approved some years ago when the citizens of Ecuador synchronised their watches and clocks and embarked on a Campana Contra la Impuntualidad, a national crusade against lateness "*Inject yourself each morning with a dose of responsibility, respect and discipline*").

This may seem a hopeless cause, as it would also seem to be in Guyana. But it is a serious matter, nothing less than an attempt to change a culture of lateness and delay. The social psychologist Robert Levine, who has devoted decades to studying people's ideas about time, suggests that cultures can be divided into those which live on "event time," where events are allowed to dictate people's schedules, and those which live on "clock time," where people's schedules dictate events. Countries that live on clock time are more successful economi-

cally than those which do not. In the case of Ecuador one study showed that chronic lateness cost the country US$2.5 billion a year, a considerable amount when the G.D.P. of Ecuador is US$24 billion. So it was worth embarking on the crusade.

It is unlikely to have been successful. Conversion from an ingrained bad habit is very difficult. Moreover in a country where nobody is ever on time it becomes rational to be late since there is no point in getting to an event or a meeting on time if no one is going to be there. And in Ecuador it had become customary for the higher-ups to show how much more valuable their time is by always arriving late – so would they now lower themselves to act differently? Well, even the then President Lucio Gutierrez, infamously unpunctual, vowed to participate in the crusade. His determination was somewhat spoiled in its effect when his spokesman, going on television to announce this vow, was quite a bit late. Nevertheless the Presidential commitment was welcome.

It is some time since the crusade against lateness was launched in Ecuador. Perhaps Guyana should enquire as to what happened. If reports are favourable then perhaps Guyana should also consider embarking on its own Campana Contra la Impuntualidad with a view to converting the whole Caribbean.

32. TUTORIALS IN LIFE

There have been a handful of men who have made a deep and unforgettable impression on me: my father, first and always; Jock Campbell, Chairman of Bookers in the 1950s and 60s; Martin Carter, whose poetry time as it passes burnishes to a yet brighter gleam. And I have been reminded of another when, sorting through some old files, I found a letter in his handwriting thanking me for one I had sent him on his 90th birthday.

N.G.L. Hammond was Professor Emeritus of Greek at Bristol University and an honorary fellow of Clare College, Cambridge University. He was the world's foremost expert on ancient Macedonian history. His three-volume *History of Macedonia* is the definitive publication on the subject. The last book of his I received, published in 1997, was *The Genius of Alexander the Great* in which he judges Alexander as "*the man who did more than any other individual to change the history of civilization.*" A week before Professor Hammond died in his ninety fourth year he delivered the final proofs of his new book, on Aeschylus, to his publisher.

When I was at Clare College, Cambridge, in the early 1950s Nick Hammond was my tutor. Not my course of studies tutor, who was another extraordinary historian called Geoffrey Elton, but my "moral tutor," the person whom I could consult about life and the many challenges it held for a very inexperienced young man. I believe his role was also to make sure that one did not depart too radically from the hallowed regulations and traditions of the College but I cannot say I remember him intruding at all aggressively in my life even though I was as wayward as most undergraduates sometimes become. I came to look forward tremendously to the "consultations" which after a while became simply long conversations with him about everything under the sun.

I remember the time I was coming up to my final year but had also been elected to captain Cambridge at tennis and wanted advice whether I might not have to sacrifice the cap-

taincy for the sake of the studies. I can capture his words to this day: "*Well, McDonald, a good Cambridge degree is without doubt what you are here for and it will be an important task and an achievement which will last you all your life. But, even though I am a rowing man myself, captaining Cambridge at anything is a responsibility and an honour you cannot possibly think of turning down. So*", a smile, "*both must be done*." A pause and another of his joyful smiles. "*And, in any case, you will certainly find at your age that twenty-four hours in a day gives you ample time to do both these things well if you are truly resolved – and also, if I may say so, leave enough time for quite a lot of fun!*"

I apologise for the self-indulgence of these private memories. The real purpose of recalling Nick Hammond is to try and distil from those conversations I had with him so many years ago something of the essence of what he believed was a good education.

• He strongly believed in the need to "stretch the mind." Obviously, the harder you exercise it, the fitter the mind becomes. He suggested I try. Attempting the difficult was an important part of university education. The student must direct his attention towards what, at first, is beyond his grasp but whose compelling nature and fascination draws him on. Simplification, levelling down, giving the mind easy passage would never bring out the capacities which lie undiscovered in most people. You must always judge yourself capable of achieving what at first might seem unlikely intellectual feats. Education in its true sense was all about that. And, he told me, I would find how often what seems obscure at night is crystal clear when morning comes. The challenged mind does not rest.

• Time away from the desk. This was as important as anything. He was pleased that I was half-fanatical about playing tennis and training for the game and full fanatical about cricket and following that game. He said the ancient Greeks, right in this as in so much else, valued the trained body as much as the cultured mind.

• But time away from the desk did not mean only sport. Early on he told me "*The Fitzbilly coffee is the best in the world.*" He was referring to the coffee shop at the Fitzwilliam Museum and Art Gallery and that indeed became one of my haunts amidst great paintings and the world's treasures. He recommended me to membership of the Arts Theatre and, learning of my love of poetry, introduced me to a lecturer he knew who belonged to the University Poetry Club. He never seemed to doubt that pursuit of such interests was an essential part of a young consciousness growing out of shadow towards the sun. He was disappointed that he could elicit in me absolutely no interest in politics and I joined none of the political clubs nor the Union where world figures came to join the debates. "*Every young man*," he said, "*should aspire to be Prime Minister of his country*." He said that single-minded politicians were some one of the strangest and potentially most important persons I would ever meet. But he never persuaded me.

• I could go on quite a long time about Nick Hammond and what he tried to teach me and presumably all the students he supervised. However, there is only space for one more thing. I must, he said, as much as I was able, seize the opportunity to make contact with the masters of their field. For instance, go and listen to John Saltmarsh lecture on the economic history of the Middle Ages. A subject dry as dust? Not in the hands of a genius. And he was right. It was not the last time I found myself, on his advice, "*contaminated by excellence*," an infection from which one always hopes never to recover as long as life lasts.

Marvellous visitors came to Cambridge and I made a point of attending their meetings and lectures and readings and recitals: Pandit Nehru, our own West Indian Arthur Lewis, the philosopher William Quine from Harvard, the excessively young and brilliant critic and wit Kenneth Tynan, the guitarist Segovia, to name some whose aura haunted me afterwards. And there were the poets, most memorable of whom was Dylan Thomas. He came in very drunk but when he began to read he steadied himself and the words came out like music.

I still hear how he spoke, in utter silence, the final words of James Joyce's story 'The Dead' and I knew then without fail that getting words in the perfectly right order was mankind's most sublime gift:

"Yes, the newspapers were right: snow was general all over Ireland. It was falling on every part of the dark central plain, on the treeless hills, falling softly upon the Bog of Allen and, further westward, softly falling into the dark mutinous Shannon waves. It was falling, too, upon every part of the lonely churchyard on the hill where Michael Fury lay buried. It lay thickly drifted on the crooked crosses and headstones, on the spears of the little gate, on the barren thorns. His soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead."

Professor N.G. L. Hammond, Nick Hammond, my tutor all those years ago, I am sure he rests now in the Elysian fields at peace with those he loved but in restless debate still with those he most revered. He helped so much to make Cambridge glow and gleam for me.

33. TRADITION, DRAMA AND LOVE

Tradition gathers around Christmas. Pageants and homecomings and longed-for preparations repeat themselves year after year into beloved lifetime rituals. Last year my family and I broke a tradition and did not attend Midnight Mass at Sacred Heart - to our deep regret because it half-looks now as if we will never get the chance again. That beautiful ceremony in that old and lovely Church, filled with flowers and light and history, will always remain part of our family folk-memory.

So much was lost when a spark caught the manger's straw last Christmas and the whole ancient building flamed into nothingness. From what I read the reorganization of the Catholic Church in Guyana does not require the replacement of Sacred Heart. It does not weigh heavily enough in the calculations that it stood for so long ministering to generations of the faithful while it gradually turned into an iconic landmark in the geography and history of the town. The Church in its age-old wisdom - which knows that man does not live by maximum efficiency alone and certainly also knows that an enhanced life of the spirit does not derive only from streamlined organization - should find a way of allowing Sacred Heart to rise again a perfect copy of the old, beloved Church.

Christmas is also about the unique drama of a miraculous birth intended to save all mankind. It does not mark some gentle, festive, reassuring and comfortable everyday event. It involves an occurrence that shook the world and shakes it to this day. This is why I have a special liking for Ted Hughes's Christmas poem 'Minstrel's Song' which gives some feeling and sense of the tremendous drama, strangeness and searing impact of this birth that restarted history.

'Minstrel's Song' by Ted Hughes

I've just had an astounding dream as I lay in the straw.
I dreamed a star fell on to the straw beside me
And lay blazing. Then when I looked up
I saw a bull come flying through a sky of fire
And on its shoulders a huge silver woman
Holding the moon. And afterwards there came
A donkey flying through that same burning heaven
And on its shoulders a colossal man
Holding the sun. Suddenly I awoke
And saw a bull and a donkey kneeling in the straw,
And the great moving shadows of a man and a woman -
I say they were a man and a woman but
I dare not say what I think they were. I did not dare to look.
I ran out here into the freezing world
Because I dared not look. Inside that shed.

A star is coming this way along the road.
If I were not standing upright, this would be a dream.
A star the shape of a sword of fire, point-downward,
Is floating along the road. And now it rises.
It is shaking fire on to the roofs and the gardens.
And now it rises above the animal shed
Where I slept till the dream woke me. And now
The star is standing over the animal shed.

Above all, at the beginning and in the end, Christmas is about love. We are to believe, and it is no bad belief to have, that it is God's infinite love for mankind which caused Christ's coming. An overwhelming gift of love came upon mankind and still and forever gives us hope that evil will be withstood. Through the centuries Christmas has come to stand for many things beyond its original meaning - not least, in recent times, a wonderful opportunity to make money. But still Christmas has never lost what is at its heart - God's gift of love and mankind's reciprocal love for Christ and his mother. At Christmas all gifts should be gifts renewing love.

It is why I read the great love poems at Christmas time especially - the poems of love of God and the poems also in

which love is shown in this world in never-ending images of passion and loyalty and beauty. Every year there are some different poems to add from the year's harvest but always one is there which I do not forget as the years go by and end and begin again. It is George Mackay Brown's marvellous song translated from an old troubadour's sheet:

'Song: Rognvald to Ermengarde' by George Mackay Brown

The winds embrace you, my lover
And the quiet stars bless,
Noons touch you with ardour
And dawns with tenderness.

All these are my brothers,
They abide: I fare on.
I shall not see your like again
Beneath the enduring sun.

O mould with me a timeless love:
That we, the time-accursed,
May mock the sad and fleeting hours
And bid death do his worst.

But the hours embrace you, my lover
And the grave seasons bless,
The years touch you with wisdom
And death with gentleness.

Bless this great land of ours. Bless its people. Bless the children especially. Bless their future.

34. PAINTINGS WITH NO DEATH IN THEM

It is a sign of getting old, intimations of mortality pressing closer. I was sorting out in my library the voluminous papers and countless books I have accumulated with a view to throwing out the clutter, distributing to libraries and schools what might be of use or interest to others and deciding what blessed and beloved core of especially valuable memorabilia and correspondence and precious books must be kept to the end. The soul begins to yearn for the essentials.

Such a sorting exercise proceeds by fits and starts. There are constant interruptions as some paper or letter or book stored and lost for years comes to light and brings back memories and leads to extensive rereading.

Two nights ago I came across a slim file of correspondence with Aubrey Williams and, with it, a long, beautifully illustrated article about his paintings. There came back to me a rush of memories, the impact Aubrey once had on me and, it goes without saying, on numberless others in the time of his great, creative presence amongst us. Let me recall.

I have no formal knowledge of the art of painting and will not try to put into its correct artistic perspective the work of Aubrey Williams. Clearly he is one of our very greatest artists and his preeminent place in our cultural history is secure. All I will say about his paintings is that they always moved me profoundly - there is something in their light and colour and curious forms that never failed to remind me that man's heritage is ancient and the earth he inhabits more ancient still. The spirit of great forests, burning suns on old savannahs, and man in worship before his age-old Gods enter and fill his canvases.

But that is subjective. Scholars and practitioners must place him where he rightly belongs - which is surely in the pantheon of great artists of the twentieth century. I only want to recall a few memories of Aubrey Williams as I knew him. I did not meet him all that often but he was the sort of man once you had met him you could not possibly ever forget him.

In the last letter I wrote to him, when he knew and I knew he was dying, I tried to express to him a little of what I felt in my heart:

> *"We haven't been in direct touch recently but you are very much in one's consciousness all the time. Like Wilson, like Martin, you are THERE, an inspiration, a symbol of the enduring greatness of art and literature which you and I and others believe in, a master of the spirit for us all."*

Once in London years and years ago I visited him in his home at 101 Greencroft Gardens. We drank a red Hungarian wine he had discovered and was proud of - inexpensive but good - and talked for incalculable hours. I remember he explained to me in long and serious detail how he had found a valid way to make a link between great music and painting. Having no knowledge of music and little of painting, I could not follow him more than a few steps. I hope he wrote down somewhere what he said to me then. Of course he painted the great Shostakovich sequence of paintings so perhaps he had no need to write.

At some stage on that same occasion he took me into a small back room, perhaps his workshop or one of them, and on entering I was struck with what I can only call awe. The room was full of glorious bird-paintings, glowing as if alive, on easels, on the walls high and low, stacked on the floor and in corners. The surfaces of a few had been cancelled with great X marks - they seemed beautiful to me but he had found something wrong. I will never forget thinking as I walked about stunned that it was as if there had been an explosion and that it had scattered genius in a hundred shining pieces around the room.

Another time, when Aubrey was visiting Guyana, he came to dinner at home. I remember him eating red wiri-wiri peppers almost by the handful. He had just came back from a trip to renew acquaintance with his beloved forest and he told me he had made an astounding discovery. He had found "*the most beautiful tree in the world.*" He was in a rapture. The way it towered toward the sun, the way its great branches curved

and swept in the air, the crown of green, vine-entangled foliage which in the wind made a sound like the unfathomable sea. He and three friends had linked hands in a circle around the vast trunk, embracing the tree like a mother, and he explained how he had felt the power of the great tree entering him, reinvigorating him, like a transfusion of fresh, wild, ancestral blood. He was bursting with joy at his discovery. You could not forget his happiness - his face lit and wreathed with joy lines and the lovely hissing sound of his laughter.

The third time I recall was in the Lama conservancy where I had taken him for the fishing which he loved. Watching him fish, I wondered how such an ardent, energetic man could be so still for so long. Fishing of that intensity is more than fishing, it is communing.

He brought up a lukanani, flashing in the sun on the end of his line, and that is another time I wish there had been a tape-recording of what he said. He showed me the lovely colours of the lukanani and told me how with the merest touch of death these colours at once began to fade. He would give his soul to be able as a painter to "*capture colours which had no death in them*." He was trying, he had tried all his life, but so far he had failed. He did not think any painter had ever succeeded. The colours the painter knew were right and truly alive had always faded, however fractionally, by the time he got them onto canvas. Turner was probably the greatest colourist there had ever been but even Turner's marvellous sunsets and magical seascapes had not been what Turner had hoped to paint. Aubrey himself thought he was getting nearer and nearer paintings which, as he put it, had no death in them. I like to think this quest never ended and that he got close enough at last to that central fire of creation to feel he had succeeded as well as it is given any man to succeed in such a quest.

When Aubrey died I wrote it down in my diary. Once, after an evening Mass in Notre Dame in Paris, I watched an old priest go around putting out the tall candles that lit the altar. The candles stood as tall as men. As the priest one by one snuffed out the holy flames the shadows lengthened in the great Cathedral. So our world darkens with such a death as Aubrey's.

35. PLANNING FOR THE GOOD LIFE

Having retired after 52 years in the sugar industry, including working closely with Governments and regional institutions along the way, if there is one thing I have learned it is the extreme frailty of all grand plans.

In my experience, master blueprints have a terrible track record. For one thing, any plan known to man as soon as it is finished immediately begins to be overtaken by the dynamic of events. And the longer a plan looks into the future the less likely it is to have any relevance to how things actually turn out. The poet Goethe sums it up when he dismisses all such academic exercises in his wonderful words celebrating the unexpected: *"Grey, grey, my friend, is all your theory but green the golden tree of life*."

In every case the infinite fallibility of human beings means that any long-term plan begins to go haywire in its execution as soon as it is promulgated. At the heart of all strategies is that fatal flaw.

It is not really surprising, therefore, that every country in the region is littered with the burnt-out corpses of plans not implemented and reports unread except by scholars long after events have turned out very differently. One only has to think of that supreme repository of theory and discarded blueprints, the CARICOM Secretariat, to despair that any regional or national blueprint will ever serve a useful purpose however well meant or assiduously constructed.

Having said that, it would be obtuse not to recognize that strategic planning, at least in outline, has its place. A nation, or a business, has to be given direction and set broad objectives.

But in all the plethora of expert debate and high-level planning which I am sure continues to take place there is a question I hope will come up again and again in discussing development. It is whether we should not be redefining completely what development means. I fear that it will simply be taken for granted that development means economic growth, making people better off materially, adding more and more trib-

ute to that idol of the modern age, gross domestic product. Such an exercise is profoundly misguided.

An article in the June 1995 issue of *CARICOM Perspective* by Professor Norman Girvan entitled 'Rethinking Development' continues to be required reading for all of us. Girvan points out that in the past planning has proceeded on the largely unquestioned assumption that human welfare is to be measured principally by levels of material consumption and that human progress consists mainly in increasing such levels ad infinitum.

Long ago that greatest of all West Indian thinkers, C.L.R. James, saw the fallacy in such a foolish assumption. In a public lecture in Trinidad in the 1960s he asked his audience to consider the question, *"What is the good life?" "I am speaking,"* he told them, *"about the good life from the point of view of society...For example, Mr. Butler (then Chancellor of the Exchequer in the UK) has told the people of Britain that in twenty-five years time the standard of living will be doubled. It is this kind of inanity that I want to warn you against. That statement is without meaning. Fifty years ago I am sure that the amount of goods, the quantity of services, that were at the disposal of the average worker in a particular country were more or less half what they are today...Has that solved anything?...Has that solved any social and political problems which are today worse, more acute, than they were in 1910. The question, therefore, of the good life is not to be judged by quantity of goods."*

There might be development, C.L.R. knew, but there would only be regression in real human terms if, for instance, constitutional arrangements remained unresponsive to the popular will or if runaway and brutal crime came to drive desperate fear and wholesale corruption into a nation's psyche or if cultural creativity failed to flourish or if the safety and beauty of the natural environment could not be sustained.

In the course of his penetrating article Norman Girvan has the following to say: *"The idea of human progress needs to be delinked from the fantasy of never-ending increases in material consumption. This has been seen to be physically impossible for the individual, morally questionable for society and ecologically nonviable for the human race."*

I hope our national development planning will always aim to take full account of this eminently sensible thinking.

36. RELAX, AMERICA

I am more unsettled than I am amused by the increasing number of stories I hear of paranoia over security at American airports. This is a symptom of a hugely dangerous malaise in that great democracy — the growing restrictions on freedom because of obsessive fear of being attacked by that ultimate bogeyman organization, al Qaeda.

An approach more like that adopted by the Duke of Wellington and Lord Uxbridge is advisable. The Duke of Wellington and Lord Uxbridge are standing together on the field of Waterloo in the midst of battle. A bouncing cannonball knocks off Lord Uxbridge's leg. After a short pause, Wellington says, *"My God, Uxbridge, you've lost your leg!"* At which Uxbridge, looking down, agrees, *"My God, so I have!"* Wellington won the battle. Uxbridge survived.

Though far from possessing the capacity to emulate them, I think I admire the Stoics most of all the philosophers. Probably we would all like to be able to approach disaster, illness, bereavement and eventually death with the unflinching restraint of the Stoics. Certainly it must be very rare for any man or woman not to need the strength of a Stoic sometimes in a life since, the truth be told, we really have about as much control of what is going to happen to us hour by hour, day by day, as one of the Stoics remarked, *"as a dog tied to the tail of a cart — he can run a little from side to side, and bark loudly, but if he tries to stand still his lead will strangle him since he has no power over the driver of the cart"*. But, however useful in terrible times, it is not an easy philosophy to live up to in practice.

The Stoics took catastrophe, and the threat of catastrophe, in their stride. They believed that to be virtuous involved being unaffected by pain, pleasure, desire or fear which were emotions belonging to a lower level of existence. To them the ends most men pursue so eagerly — wealth, success, comfort — have no importance. The revered Stoic Emperor of Rome, Marcus Aurelius, in his *Meditations*_wrote that it was man's duty to forgive injuries, regard all men as brothers and await death with equanimity.

That does not sound very similar to what Americans would regard as an acceptable approach to life. And I do not think one can easily equate George Bush with Marcus Aurelius. Yet one nation which, I believe, is going to have to adopt the Stoic philosophy as quickly as possible is America. Basically, Stoics think and act on the basis of "what will be will be." Americans are going to have to learn that philosophy or spend their lives in desperate daily trepidation worrying constantly about what might be going to happen, taking over-elaborate and costly precautions against the ten million to one chance of a Bin Laden strike affecting an individual, sensing danger in every shadow that passed unseen before, changing life styles in ways that contradict their culture, undermine their economy and threaten their freedoms, existing permanently on anxious tenterhooks. Living as if you are about to be struck by lightning at any time is absurd and is anyway unlikely to divert the lightning strike. Paranoia in a nation spells great trouble.

Far better, like the Stoics, to shrug off the fear of awful Fate, rise above anticipated pain and look upon the prospect of suffering with indifference if not disdain. But are Americans, with no experience in living memory of the dreadful brutalities of war on their soil and accustomed to thinking of comfort and plenty and safety as a right, likely to adopt a philosophy so foreign both to their experience and their ambitions? It hardly seems likely. But at least they better get used to living with threats and the suggestions of threats without being paralysed by nervousness.

This war against Al Qaeda is not going to be easy to control, limit and reduce to mere high-tech skirmishes against evil in Afghanistan and Iraq. It is a war which the American leaders claim to understand will last for years. However, it is not at all certain that the vast majority of Americans really appreciate the implications of such a contest. In the war the Americans have overwhelming military superiority, of course, but their shadowy opponents have a tremendous psychological advantage. This advantage is summed up in the confusion and fear and clumsy fluster which a simple sentence broadcast from a primitive hideout brought about not long ago in America. *"Muslims amidst the infidels are warned not to*

ride in aeroplanes or go into high buildings." The overreaction to such a simply produced threat is likely to be symptomatic of what is going to happen. Are they going to jump high every time a shadow voice murmurs boo? Even without the capacity to implement it will be easy for Al Qaeda spokesmen to express any threat they can think up – suitcase nuclear bombs, smallpox bacilli in air-conditioning ducts, nerve gas in the subways, overturned chemical trucks in the long tunnels, poison in the water supply and so on and on – and life, business, daily routines and the ordinary sense of personal security of tens of millions will be disrupted and every neighbourhood psyche made fragile as an eggshell.

And just a few actual incidents, even though on a far smaller scale than the strikes against the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon, will create disproportionate terror, dislocation and rage. This in turn will increase the danger of America lashing out indiscriminately. And this will then hugely escalate the danger of that "clash of civilizations" which everyone, well nearly everyone, fears and which men like Bin Laden desire with all their heart and soul.

It is not that Americans should try to return to normality. Pre-September 11 normality is lost in America, and on this earth, for the foreseeable future. But a great effort must be made to calm down, regain balance and proportion, pick up the threads of life and weave them again into ordinary patterns of love and work and play in freedom without nameless dread burrowing into the heart of everything they think and do and hideous suspicions spoiling how they treat strangers and even friends.

Jonathan Franzen, the novelist, has said that the problem of this new time "*will be to reassert the ordinary, the trivial, and even the ridiculous in the face of instability and dread: to mourn the dead and then try to awaken to our small humanities and our pleasurable nothing-much.*" The Stoics would have agreed.

37. REFLECTIONS IN THIS SUDDEN NEW YEAR

In childhood a year is a very large part of a lifetime long – but by old age a year has become fragment – brief. A seventy-fifth part of life seems minuscule short. So it is the passage of time quickens as life goes by, like a torrent going faster as the chasm's edge approaches.

The New Year, come again so soon, finds me still poised, as I have been for quite some time, between two opposing inclinations. One is to relax, withdraw from the hustle and the hurly-burly and the frustrating daily effort to get things done and sink into reclusive peace and quiet. The other inclination is to go on working as hard as one can to clear as wide a patch as possible of efficiency, civility, goodwill, cultural contribution and constructive endeavour in the hope of making the world a slightly better place. In considering these options, Sheila Wingfield's poem about the Emperor Hsuang-Tsung, long a favourite of mine, reflects a belief that guides me still:

"Hsuang-Tsung, great emperor,
Giddy and ill and old, carried in a litter,
saw the stars sway.
His conquests and his arrangements
and his powers, falling into fever with himself,
pulsed their lives away.
Bow to his shade. To be at rest
is but a dog that sighs and settles:
Better the unrelenting day."

I do not think I would do very much in life, except retreat from it in despair, if I had become absolutely cynical and had lost all belief in the brotherhood of man. Archibald MacLeish's poem of the pioneer astronauts seeing the world whole and entire for the first time in human history is a vision I respect:

"To see the earth as it truly is,
small and blue and beautiful
in that eternal silence where it floats,
is to see ourselves as riders on the earth together
brothers on that bright loveliness in that eternal cold,
brothers who know now that they are truly brothers."

I know there is a tremendous amount of evidence to prove that the brotherhood of man is an idle dream and, of course, in a universal sense it may never be accomplished. But at the level of neighbourhood, community, country and region surely it is a valid belief to hold. In this not very large household of ours, prejudice against anyone because of class, creed, colour, gender or location really is despicable.

As the number of years lengthen, and the purposes of all work and life become increasingly obscure, one truth remains as strong and clear as it has always been to me: the all-importance of loving and being loved. The unbearable lack of love is the worst thing in the world. Not to have someone to say always "*I will not let go of your hand ever*." Among the last writings of Raymond Carver, the American writer who died young of cancer, there was found this late fragment of a poem.

"And did you get what
you wanted from this life, even so?
I did.
And what did you want?
To call myself beloved, to feel myself
beloved on the earth."

As the old year gives way to this new one, my thoughts sadly turn to old friends gone forever. By the end of each year the numbers have progressively escalated. This is in the nature of things. However, that stoical reflection does not make the loss any lighter. The lines of regret and love written by Callimachus, Greek poet and scholar, more than two thousand years ago, reminds me of the departure of old friends:

"Someone spoke of your death, Heraclitus.
It brought me tears
And I remembered how often together
We ran the sun down with talk."

38. THE ADDICTION OF COMPETITION

Anyone who has played sport at the highest level knows that sinking, nervous, fearful feeling before a big event. It is made up of all manner of emotions – the pure nerves associated with any competitive endeavour, the fear of letting your team or country down, the fear of not doing yourself justice in the eyes of others – and the knowledge of the distress, which is extreme in the hardest confrontations, that you know can result as the mind and body are pushed to the limit. Which sportsman – unless, of course, he is earning his living by it – has not asked himself the question before the match: Why am I doing this? I could be cosily among the spectators, taking a drink with the boys. Why on earth am I here at all, about to go again under the gun of competition?

Indeed if a sportsman does not have this feeling you can be fairly sure that he is not a really good competitor. The Champion with ice-cold nerves and unshakable super-confidence is a myth. A great champion may look ice-cold and supremely confident but, inside, the tension and the nerves and the fear are shaking him up too. Lara was no different. Federer suffers the torture too. Even Tiger is not immune.

As sportsmen grow older, this nervous feeling, the self-doubt, the fear before the match, does not diminish – in fact, it tends to get stronger. "*Why on earth am I here?*" is a question the older sportsman asks himself more and more insistently. This is partly because he generally has a reputation from younger days to protect and cannot help but feel, however irrationally, that that reputation is still at stake. And, more importantly, he asks himself the question "*Why am I still doing this?*" because he knows that his body is generally letting him down, weakening, can less and less do justice to what he once was able to achieve. He knows, increasingly, that the freshness and fitness that flows from youth alone is no longer there to give a lift to the wilting spirit. I feel for all sportsmen growing old as I watch them fight fiercely against decline.

Why do old veterans still compete when it isn't for money?

The answer is not easy to find. It isn't for exercise – that can be obtained outside competition.. It isn't for fame – the days for that are over. It isn't to make the nation's team –those days are also past. It isn't to impress – one is much more likely to make a fool of oneself.

What, then, is it? It may, I think, have something to do with the answer the English climber, George Mallory, gave when he was asked why he was going to climb Mount Everest: "*Because it is there,*" he said. "*Because it is there*." It may have something to do with the need to know not merely what you can do, but, more importantly, what you are. And discovering what you are – the inward explanation necessary – comes only when you are competing to the utmost.

However, I have come to the conclusion that the urge to go on competing mainly has to do with what is known to sportsmen as "*hitting the wall*", and the high – a much more potent high than you get from alcohol – that comes from surviving and triumphing when you do "*hit the wall*."

The "wall" is well known to all champions. It is a threshold which the sportsman has to force himself to cross, a low point of pain and weariness and sometimes despair which the sportsman has to get accustomed to fighting through if he is ever to become a champion. This low point of exhaustion, this threshold of distress, is a memory which comes back to a sportsman and makes him ask himself why is he risking again what hurts so much. But the interesting thing is that while the memory of the "wall" is strong and powerful, the memory of what it was like to conquer it is stronger still. And that is the answer to why an old sportsman still competes. The memory of hitting the wall makes him pause, the hope of conquering it perhaps one more time urges him on. He remembers it as a kind of exultation and he wants to feel that thrill again.

And here is fascinating thought. Medical studies suggest that in situations of great stress, great danger, in a battle, for instance, with death a fraction away, the body is able to generate something akin to heroin. This subdues all pain, takes away all fear, and allows absolute concentration and crystal-clear awareness of the self and its potential. I believe it may be that the climaxes of competition are something like such

life-and-death struggles. At those times, when losing is just a fraction away, it is like dying to the champion sportsman. And who knows then what drug his body manufactures? The fact seems to be that if a sportsman has felt such a drug thrill through him often enough he will always want to get it again. He is like a man addicted and that is why, for no good rational reason, he ventures again and again into the battle of competition –its agony, but its exaltation also.

39. PAGEANTRY

You see what we were missing all these dull years we didn't have a Miss Guyana contest! How ever did we get by without this spicy mixture of beauty, backbiting, farce and frolic? Never again must we be tempted to forego this sure-fire occasion for a good, vociferous, old-fashioned, name-calling, finger-pointing, gossip-mongering row. No society should be without one. It adds considerably to the gaiety of the nation. This year's pageant has been unbelievably successful on this score and all concerned are to be congratulated.

We have some suggestions to make for future contests which we think will add further dimensions of desirable and colourful debate to the event.

One, the selection of the judges should itself be a separate pageant held at the Cultural Centre with those in contention arguing their respective merits before a sellout crowd. Who will judge who the judges should be at this pageant is admittedly a delicate matter. But we are sure with all the goodwill evident on all sides that this could easily be worked out amicably in time for next year.

Two, the "stealing of the swimsuits" should be institutionalized. It is the sort of challenge that all contestants should have to contend with as a matter of course.

Three, there is a serious omission currently in the judging of contestants. Poise and beauty is best judged under the least, not the most, favourable conditions. In addition to seeing the girls displayed to perfection in their swimsuits and evening gowns the judges in future must be charged with surprising contestants when they might be expected to be at their worst – at six o'clock in the morning, say, no make-up, hair in curlers, funny-looking nightdress, even (God forbid!) suffering from a hangover. This would be a real test of true beauty. This rule might also with benefit we think be recommended to the

Miss World and Miss Universe authorities.

Four, the question to the final contestants should be made a true test of intellect and learning. After all, is this not a contest for brains as well as beauty? This year's question was absurdly easy, no test at all, so much so that one of the contestants quite rightly refused to answer. We need something more like *"Give a précis of Kant's Critique of Pure Reason in not more than two minutes"* or *"Explain, if you will, the motifs in the Second Movement of Mahlers' Fourth Symphony*." This change is a **must** for next year's pageant.

We urge that consideration be given to these suggestions which we believe would improve the contest and make it even more of a highlight in our national life than it is now. We intend to mount a picket in the matter and are even now preparing our placards.

40. THE BATTLE AGAINST BAD GOVERNANCE

I do not get the impression that the governance of the world is good or that it is getting better. The gap between rich and poor is widening horribly - between countries and within countries. The world's environment, mankind's patrimony, is suffering gradual ruin. The main institutions of the world are organized to enhance and protect the wealth and influence of the powerful. How can we accept that these three world-tendencies are bound to continue, inexorably producing what is a greater and greater sum of misery and deprived dependency on earth? Such passivity before the "inevitability" of this sort of globalization is one of its most depressing effects.

I read every day, looking for hope whenever I can find it. I would very much like to share such hope especially with my sons whose century this will be in which to thrive or struggle, exult or tremble. But, sadly, I find I have jotted down in my journal at various times the following, mainly depressing, thoughts:

• Fashionable economic theory tells us the interference with the operation of market forces - through concern for the poor, the weak and the vulnerable or in the cause of civilized compassion of one kind or another - is hopelessly misguided and counterproductive. But this is simply untrue and if followed slavishly will lead to increasing misery in the world and the brutalisation of relations between people. Here is what the greatest economist of the 20th century, John Maynard Keynes, wrote in 1928 in an essay entitled 'The End of Laissez-Faire'.

"It is not true that individuals possess a prescriptive "natural liberty" in their economic activities. There is no "compact" conferring perpetual rights on those who Have or on those who Acquire. The world is <u>not</u> so governed from above that private and social interest always coincide. It is <u>not</u> so managed here below that in practice they coincide. It is <u>not</u> a correct deduction from the Principles of Economics that enlightened self-interest always operates in

the public interest. Nor is it true that self-interest generally is enlightened; more often individuals acting separately to promote their own ends are too ignorant or too weak to attain even these. Experience does not show that individuals, when they make up a social unit, are always less clear-sighted than when they act separately."

• It is incredible. Any other country in the world would long ago have fallen into a chaotic condition of currency devaluation, stock market collapse and generalized economic disarray. But America blithely proceeds untouched. I am speaking of the extraordinary current deficit which America runs with the rest of the world. America imports half as much again as it exports and this gap is widening. It is estimated that America needs to raise from abroad US$660 billion annually or US$2 billion per day to cover this deficit. And that is not all. America also exports capital at a rate which equals its current account deficit with the rest of the world. What this means is that America requires about US$4 billion per day (US$5 billion per working day) in gross capital imports to balance its books over all. And America gets it.

I do not note this as a criticism of America. It is simply one of the remarkable facts about how the world functions. America, not only militarily but also economically, has graduated beyond superpower into hyperpower status. It bestrides the world. It can do virtually what it wants economically. It can run deficits that would spell doom to even the largest other nation. It can print money as it likes and not experience inflation. And, of course, it can and does dominate the world's leading financial institutions - America, quite simply, leads the world in the economic direction it wants the world to take and there is no one to challenge it at the present time.

• The erosion of human rights in America, and elsewhere, is likely to grow in the powerful wake of the September 11th World Trade Centre massacre. As other major terrorist attacks take place it is inevitable that more and more fundamental human rights will be infringed. After Pearl Harbour perfectly innocent and harmless American citizens who happened to be Japanese were hauled off to detention camps in their scores of thousands. Alas, even the revered land of the free is not

immune from very human, though brutal, reactions. In the Federalist Papers, those miraculously perceptive and brilliantly written documents which prepared the way for the United States constitution and American Independence, Alexander Hamilton in 1787 described perfectly what would always be the case in times of danger:

"Safely from external danger is the most powerful director of national conduct. Even the ardent love of liberty will, after a time, give way to its dictates. The violent destruction of life and property incident to war, the continual effort and alarm attendant on a state of continual danger, will compel nations the most attached to liberty to resort for repose and security to institutions which have a tendency to destroy their civil and political rights. To be more safe, they at length become willing to run the risk of being less free."

Hamilton's shrewd words are also very relevant for us locally, and in the Caribbean generally. As violent crime grows and criminals become more indiscriminately brutal, can one doubt that ordinary citizens will increasingly become quite prepared to see the exercise of their civil rights eroded? "*To be more safe, they at length become willing to run the risk of being less free.*" Yes, I am afraid that is very definitely so.

• A gleam in the shadows - there is the refreshing Nolan Committee report. This Committee was set up by former UK Prime Minister, John Major, to investigate corruption and sleaze in the UK Government and recommend what might be done. As with most such reports, anywhere in the world, this one has been safely pigeonholed. However, it has lived a little longer than most because it enunciated "*seven principles of public life*" which are now much quoted as setting a benchmark, idealistic no doubt but useful as a reminder, for public service behaviour. At the start of a freshly elected Government here in Guyana it may be useful to set out these principles. They are: selflessness (holders of public office should serve the public interest, not seek gains for their friends); integrity (they should not place themselves under financial obligations to outsiders who might influence their duties); objectivity (they should award public appointments and con-

tracts on merit); accountability (they should submit themselves to appropriate scrutiny); honesty (they should declare conflict of interest); openness (they should give reasons for their decisions); and leadership (they should support these principles by personal example).

It is good to be reminded sometimes of how a perfect world might work.

41. THE GREAT ADJUSTMENT

The world is bankrupt. The Great Regulator in the Sky for some good reason has put His people everywhere into receivership and the impact will be more devastating and more universal than the Flood.

This rather overblown metaphor is simply to point out that, at the end of this shambles, standards of living everywhere will be very much lower than before the universal bankruptcy.

There is US$600 trillion (trillion!) of multi-leveraged, packaged and repackaged debt sloshing around the world and no one, absolutely no one, knows who really owns it or knows how much these toxic assets are worth, if they are worth anything – which means that no one, absolutely no one, knows what to do to solve this developing catastrophe. Bail-outs, stimulus packages, I.M.F. handouts, one interest rate cut after another, one desperate mini-nationalisation after another, all are proving to be too little, too late. The great ones of the world shuffle around in a maze of make-believe. They remind me of Yeats's great line in 'The Statues' – *"Mirror on mirror mirrored is all the show."*

I cannot understand why there is still a debate whether what is fast developing is going to be a severe recession or something worse. It is going to be much worse than a severe recession. The only comparable period of financial and economic misery may perhaps be the Great Depression and this melt-down will be even worse than that world disaster since economies are at a much higher level than they were in the 1930s and the fall therefore will be that much more calamitous. The only development that might avail against this great melt-down is an immense new war (as World War Two brought an end to the Great Depression) and that is not a very happy solution to contemplate.

It is generally reported that what started this worldwide disaster was the bursting of the American sub-prime mortgage bubble. But much more than this was involved. As Nouriel Roubini, Professor of Economics at the Stern School

of Business, has pointed out: *"The crisis was caused by the largest leveraged asset bubble and credit bubble in history. Leveraging and bubbles were not limited to America's housing market, but also characterized housing markets in other countries. Moreover, beyond the housing market, excessive borrowing by financial institutions and some segments of the corporate and public sectors occurred in many economies. As a result, a housing bubble, a mortgage bubble, an equity bubble, a bond bubble, a credit bubble, a commodity bubble, a private equity bubble, and a hedge funds bubble are all now bursting simultaneously."*

A number of vicious circles of deleveraging, sinking asset prices and proliferating margin calls are all spinning together out of control, all fuelled by fear and panic, those accelerators of disaster par excellence.

This is systemic failure of immense proportions. This is a generalized run on banking systems everywhere. And the so-called shadow banking systems –broker-dealers, non-bank mortgage lenders, restructured investment instruments hedge funds, money market funds and private equity companies – are also experiencing a run on their short-term liabilities. We are beginning to see the results all around us. Those who too trustingly grasped at the too-good to-be-true returns in this shadow world are ruing the day. There is greater rue by far to come.

In this melt-down surely it is obvious that developing countries, especially small developing countries, are going to suffer more than anyone. Joseph Stiglitz, Professor of Economics at Columbia University and 2001 Nobel Prize winner, summed up the situation very well after attending the recent World Economic Forum in Davos:

"This crisis raises fundamental questions about globalization, which was supposed to help diffuse risk. Instead, it has enabled America's failures to spread around the world, like a contagious disease. Still, the worry at Davos was that there would be a retreat from even our flawed globalization, and that poor countries would suffer the most.

But the playing field has always been unlevel. How could developing countries compete with America's subsidies and guarantees? So how could any developing country defend to its citizens the idea

of opening itself even more to America's highly subsidized banks? At least for the moment, financial market liberalization seems to be dead.

The inequities are obvious. Even if poor countries were willing to guarantee their deposits, the guarantee would mean less than that from the United States. This partly explains the curious flow of funds from developing countries to the US – from whence the world's problems originated. Moreover, developing countries lack the resources to engage in the massive stimulus policies of the advanced countries.

Making matters worse, the I.M.F. still forces most countries that turn to it for help to raise interest rates and lower spending, worsening the downturns. And, to add insult to injury, banks in advanced countries, especially those receiving aid from their governments, seem to be pulling back from lending in developing countries, including through branches and subsidiaries. So the prospects for most developing countries – including those that had done everything "right" – are bleak."

When untold millions are losing their jobs and are therefore poorer, when untold millions are losing value in their houses, stock portfolios and other assets and are therefore poorer, when untold millions of savers are getting less and less for their savings as interest rates go down towards zero and even the prudent are therefore poorer — I cannot understand where the increased spending is to come from to revive the various economic corpses littering the landscape. Of course Governments can spend by printing money hand over fist but that isn't going to be nearly enough to fill the rapidly growing private shortfall. And anyway I thought Governments printing money led to galloping inflation which is financial melt-down by another route.

What I really hope is that I have completely missed something and that a magic wand — perhaps one waved by President Barack Obama — will miraculously moderate the meltdown, then convert it into a sturdy recovery which will in turn lead to the first Great Euphoria of the 21st century. But what I very much fear is that what we are experiencing is a Great Adjustment which in truth the world needs to survive at, yes, a much lower but at the same time more sustainable standard of living.

42. THE HORROR OF NEVER BEING OUT OF TOUCH

The end of the word as some of us know and love it is close. The new electronic world order is well established and we cannot escape it: instant communication, computers in every office, class, and living room; the internet; immediate access to an infinity of data; online databases; proliferating networks and modems; e-mail and voice mail connecting everyone; the information highway inexorably, all day and every day, flowing straight through one's life at work and play.

Make no mistake. It is happening in the developed world and it is going to happen everywhere. Even if you want to opt out it will be impossible to do so. In the age of the motorcar there are no horse-drawn buggies left to drive. Candles are romantic but electricity is essential.

However, even if drowning in the digital deluge is inevitable one doesn't have to like it. I, for one, loathe this new world, this worship of the God of undigested data. It means that people read less, think less, meet less. Relationships become impersonalised and activities become programmed. Human contact in the flesh is increasingly lost. Paradoxically, computers and networks isolate us from one another. It will simply be a more unpleasant world in which to live. The internet flashes its message of knowledge-as-power, summoning us to surrender our real leisurely and lovely time on earth.

This brave new world spells the end of reading except among a few who increasingly will be seen as an eccentric brotherhood inhabiting a strange and antediluvian world. As long ago as 1929 Paul Valery, the French poet and critic, saw what was going to happen and predicted that literature was on the way to becoming "*as obsolete and as far removed from life and practice as geomancy, the heraldic art and the science of falconry*". That day of the obsolescence of the book has now come much closer. George Steiner, the great polymath and book-lover, in his collection of essays *No Passion Spent*, writes, "*It is fairly evident that the book as we have known it since the scrolls of the pre-Socratics will survive in only a more or less specialized for-*

mat and function. Increasingly, printed and bound books will be instruments of scholarship, of local and specific distribution, and of luxury." With a sigh of resignation he says we can expect "*the eclipse of reading, of the book itself*." In such a world I know I will be a stranger.

Do not think for a moment that this new world of the wordless will be any more efficient or that living in it will be any easier. It certainly will not. It will be far more difficult and harassing. Why should anyone think that the universal introduction of computers will magically improve the competence of the ignorant and the uneducated? Why should anyone think that computers and the cybernet will simplify life? Of course they will not. If anything it will be an infinitely more ignorant, duller and more demanding world which we are rushing to inhabit.

Certainly more demanding. Think of the flood of e-mails and voice mails continually to be sorted and assessed. Think of the library– huge bank of web site information demanding to be downloaded. But experiencing information is not the same as experiencing life. Think of never being out of touch which is the modern, globalized man's dearest ambition – but never being out of touch in a very real sense means never being free. Think of the time so busily and urgently spent linked to the proliferating array of techno–gadgetry – but real creativity comes from human minds with time to think and play and not minds jam-packed with unassimilated information and continually harassed by a never-ending stream of messages.

I once read a report with grim satisfaction. It told how some British and American military observers narrowly escaped being killed when watching a demonstration of state-of-the-art anti-aircraft cannon. The cannon suddenly identified a nearby portable toilet as a hostile aircraft. I am not in the slightest surprised. It is just like a computer not to know the difference between a toilet and a plane. Computers don't know the difference between anything unless they are told and those who tell, after all, are who they have always been – poor, foolish, misguided, fault-ridden, infinitely fallible men and women, only now these are far worse educated and more narrowly focused in their comprehension of how the actual,

living world works.

Especially in Guyana now the new electronic world order is going to be a place littered with booby-traps and extreme frustrations. Even in the most advanced countries computers "crash" continually. They stop working because they are too hot or cold or sited in rooms too dusty or too loud or too damp. They are ridiculously susceptible to passing viruses and prying hackers. In Guyana, of course, computer vulnerability and unreliability will be multiplied a hundredfold. The infrastructure is hopelessly antiquated. It is like bringing a sleek Mercedes to drive on a rock-strewn grass-track.

Gearing Guyana up for effective entry into this new world of instant communication and universally available information is going to be a long and difficult haul. I can't say I am sorry about the delay. As Mort Sahl used to say, "*The future lies ahead*," and I don't at all like the look of it. But speak to my sons. They don't see it that way. In the end that is what is going to matter.

43. THE CONSTERNATIONS OF ART

This has been a good week for me in the realm of poetry. Not many days pass in my life without some new discovery in that ancient art and craft but the past week has been especially fine and revelatory. This contributes to a deeper sort of awareness in the daily run and scattersoul of things.

• I am reading *The Anchor Book Of Chinese Poetry* edited by Tony Barnstone and Chou Ping and published by Random House. It is a new and wonderfully rich compendium, displaying a creative tradition going back more than 3,000 years and continuing over the centuries to this day. There is so much that is completely new to me, for instance the work of Lu Ji, famous general (eventually executed for treason) and great poet, who lived in the years 261 to 303. His most celebrated book was a treatise in rhyme and prose, *The Art of Writing,* as influential in Chinese literary thought as Horace's *Ars Poetica* was in Western culture. *"With heaven and earth contained in your head/why should anything escape the pen in your hand?"*

•I discover a love poem by Elizabeth Bishop not published in her lifetime. It was probably a jotting she meant to work on but never got around to doing so but it is simple and perfect without amendment or amplification:

'Close, Close All Night'

Close, close all night
the lovers keep.
They turn together,
in their sleep,

close as two pages
in a book
that read each other
in the dark.

Each knows all
the other knows,
learned by heart
from head to toes.

• I also find a new poem by the American Marvin Bell who has published eighteen collections of poems over the years but whose fine work I have only recently seen. What a good poem this is:

'Prodigal?'

If I put some straw into the suitcase,
I'll always have a bed. Scraps of olive wood,
slow to light, dense, will burn all night.
Some hard pumpernickel for good gums.
A sad bundle of underwear. A leaf
dropped by a poor scrub oak to remind me.
It will be a long Monday when I go.
The alarm throbs inside me, the early news
is crowded with bodies returning.
I'm off to the front lines in the war to preserve
the privilege of myth-making,
the consternations of art, the nerve to think
the future and remember the past. Others
left their homes to sail and trek, to consort
with consorts and outsiders and so
learn the reaches of mankind's instinct
for survival. They breathed the fumes and ate
the stew. They lived among the heroic
who did not want another life, and if
they erred in creating bigger-than-life characters,
they broke bread with the unspeakable,
and that is worth something.

• Wislawa Szymborska, the Polish Nobel Prize poet, has become in the past few years one of my best-loved writers. This last week I read her grim and beautiful poem about children dying very young and I wonder to myself why I was randomly picked to live so long and receive so much on this

marvellous earth but not them.

'Return Baggage'

The cemetery plot for tiny graves.
We, the long-lived, pass by furtively,
like wealthy people passing slums.

Here lie little Zosia, Jacek, Dominik,
prematurely stripped of the sun, the moon,
the clouds, the turning seasons.

They didn't stash much in their return bags.
Some scraps of sights
that scarcely count as plural.
A fistful of air with a butterfly flitting.
A spoonful of bitter knowledge – the taste of medicine.

Small-scale naughtiness,
granted, some of it fatal.
Gaily chasing the ball across the road.
The happiness of skating on thin ice.

This one here, that one down there, those on the end:
before they grew to reach a doorknob,
break a watch,
smash their first windowpane.

Malgorzata, four years old,
two of them spent staring at the ceiling.

Rafalek, missed his first birthday by a month,
and Zuzia missed Christmas,
when misty breath turns to frost.

And what can you say about one day of life,
a minute, a second:
darkness, a light bulb's flash, then dark again?

KOSMOS MARKOS
CHRONOS PARADOKSOS:
Only stony Greek has words for that.

44. THE DEAD HAND OF THE BUREAUCRAT

The public sector in Guyana consists of hundreds of different Ministries, Departments, Divisions, Agencies of all sorts and even Corporations. They all have their own objectives, problems, challenges and constraints. They employ scores of thousands of men and women of different ability, background, drive, temperament, motivation and loyalty.

You cannot hope to make an operation of such complexity work properly by issuing centralized guidelines and by imposing across-the-board regulatory norms. In such an attempt the lowest common denominator always prevails and the bad ends up driving out the good.

Take one example - the application of across-the-board norms for increments of pay. The attempt to equalize rewards, especially in a harsh economic climate, may be laudable. But observe the counterproductive effect in our economy where we can, above all, do without counter-production of any sort. The norm catches in the same net the bad performer and the good, the hard worker and the workshy, the brilliant creator and the dullard, the innovator and the stick-in-the-mud, even the loyalist and the saboteur - **all** are caught. The norm makes a mockery of merit and hard work which are indiscriminately lumped together with stupidity and sloth. No surer system to lose the cream and encourage the dregs to come to the top was ever devised by the wit of man. Norms will steadily drive away the best brains, the hardest workers, and the most talented innovators. Increasingly the good men will either opt out or get out.

The dead hand of the bureaucrat is abroad in the land. We must fight it before it takes the nation by the throat and chokes the productive life out of it. Any society tends to invest in itself: a commercial society becomes more commercial, a military society becomes more military, and a bureaucratic society becomes more bureaucratic. Institutions are framed to perpetuate existing methods. The society tends to become even more what it already is. When any such society is hit by a real

crisis it is bound to be partly paralysed by the weight of its own investment in itself. It is hard to shift emphasis, change policy, rethink the usual procedures and paper work reorder priorities, reward outsiders, listen to nonbelievers.

I fear very much that Guyana is becoming a deeply-rooted bureaucratic society. In such a society all problems are subjected only to bureaucratic solutions. This means that problems become self-perpetuating since the solutions themselves, conceived by bureaucrats, make the problems even worse. It is like the old days, before modern medicine, when the cure for everything was found in letting out a little of the patient's blood. This was the sovereign remedy, taken so far that even pernicious anaemia was treated by letting out a cup of blood each day until at last the patient died. Bureaucracy is like that ancient cure. Bureaucratic procedure becomes the universal remedy even for the diseases of bureaucracy itself. Those ancient doctors took a little blood and the patient got a little worse so they then prescribed a few more cups because the remedy was evidently not strong enough to cure. And so the vicious circle spun until the gasping patient died. And now our modern medicine men of how to get things done prescribe a little bureaucracy and, when it makes the patient weaker, prescribe a stronger dose, and stronger yet, reapplying even more of what in fact is killing us.

It is interesting to dissect the bureaucratic process. A regulation is conceived at the centre of the administrative web for some no doubt excellent, immediately perceived, purpose. It is broadcast abroad as a general directive. Naturally it will be irrelevant or confusing or contradictory or even positively harmful in a great many of the operations which it impossibly seeks to cramp and confine within its declared intentions. Those subject to such general directives will desperately seek to escape its clutches when the results are perceived to be obviously absurd. They make this attempt because the creative instinct of man is very strong. But the bureaucratic instinct is more than a match for the creative instinct. And the bureaucratic instinct is never, never to give some slack, allow initiative, release the energy of individual men in individual operations - but always, always to tighten up, flatten out, arrange around a norm, suspect initiative and depress indi-

vidual effort. So the screw is tightened turn after turn, tighter and tighter, until, if we don't watch out, the tap of productive effort will yield not a single drop after a while.

Human nature being what it is, men need to grumble and groan about those who govern or manage them. Edmund Burke, the great English Parliamentarian and political philosopher, made that point plainly and well when he wrote the following in his 'Thoughts on the Causes of the Present Discontents' two hundred years ago.

> *"To complain of the age we live in, to murmur at the present possessors of power, to lament the past, to conceive extravagant hopes of the future, are the common dispositions of the greater part of mankind."*

It is no different now in Guyana than it was in Burke's day in Britain two hundred years ago.

Yet we all know there must be government and that government needs to be firm and decisive and that government even gains strength from a central vision or philosophy informing all its actions. But a central political vision is **not** to be confused with the bureaucratic urge to centralize all procedures and all programmes. The terrible danger is to confuse strong government with pervasive bureaucracy. The two are **not** the same. Indeed, bureaucracy made over-mighty is the deadliest enemy of good government.

In the old days when a man died he was wrapped in what was called a winding sheet. Perhaps, for all I know, that still is done. Nations also have their winding sheets, but they are not made of fine, clean linen. The weaving is done from best regulation red tape and the strongest sort of multi-departmental memo and is presided over by bureaucrats who sit behind their administrative looms, humming faster and faster every day and every hour to make the nation's winding sheet.

45. THE GREAT FLOOD

All my life I loved rain. Real rain, I mean, not the thin, cold, foggy, spattering drizzle out of desolate, leaden skies which I remember with no love at all from my days in England. (*"It is impossible to live in a country which is continually under hatches. Rain! Rain! Rain!"* – John Keats in a letter to a friend). But rain at home in the islands and Guyana I loved for as long as I can remember.

When I was a romantic boy one of my favourite poems was the anonymous 18th Century poem 'Western Wind' which spoke of rain and love in the same breath:

"Western wind, when will thou blow
The small rain down can rain?
Christ, if my love were in my arms
And I in my bed again!"

And when I was a stripling youth our family spent long holidays in Antigua where my grandparents lived. Antigua suffers from severe droughts and during those holidays we quite often experienced a land burnt dry and dusty by endless days of sun. So when rain arrived the joy was unconfined. Every face seemed to light up as when a much loved relative visits. We children were allowed to run outside in celebration and dance in the showers. Sometimes the rain fell when the sun was shining and the air seemed full of crystals. Lovely rainbows formed over Prickly Pear Island. I remember how good the cool rain felt as we got drenched. And by the next morning what had seemed dead, dry roots in brown fields were already flushing a delicate green. Rain was then a rejoicing. I wrote a poem about that sort of life-giving rain:

'Rain'

No rain for months, sky hard blue,
ground hardening like iron,
earth hot to shod feet,
smoke-shawls from bush-fires;
sun glares red before night falls.
White the worst colour, bright as bone.
Time soon coming when the oxen starve;
grass turns to ash, savannahs
send up clouds of burning dust.
Green is a colour gentle and forgotten
like blood gone from a dead face.
Mud cracks in pools once sweet with lilies.

Old men, who have known
the hard seasons, say
water would be the best gift
if it could be wrapped.

And so it comes, a fundamental beauty,
a simple thing not often counted –
like love; when it's there life balances,
though we do not feel the balancing,
until departure leaves us husked and dry.
It comes again and steadies us,
soothing, far away, a noise in the clouds,
a summoning freshness in everything.
An arid heartland springs alive;
water is love; it clears and shines:
clemency for a wracked land.

Yet it was not only that sweet rain that I loved, rain with a light and joyful touch, drought-ending rain. I also loved that dark and stormier rain, the sudden cool darkness in the middle of blazing days, the peace and comfort lying safe in bed at night listening to it fall outside never thinking for a moment it could do harm. I especially loved the fierce storms of rain that march up river many afternoons on the banks of the Essequibo, sweeping over us with wild winds for half an hour

then disappearing, leaving sunlight and a gleaming world.

That habit of love for rain has changed. Mixed now with love of rain's fruitfulness will always be fear. I could conceive of rain's destructive power, and I imagined what a great flood could do in the poem 'Between Silence And Silence', but I had never personally, intimately, experienced rain which could lead to catastrophe until the deluge which started in the early morning of Saturday January 15th, 2005 in Georgetown and on the low-lying coast of Guyana.

There was never an onslaught of rain like that in my lifetime's experience. From the start in the small hours of the morning, the windless, heavy, insistent downpour without the slightest break had an unrelenting, fateful sound about it. Daylight came and it continued, a steady, brutal hammering. After a few hours without ceasing it seemed a great gray canvas bag as large as the sky full of all the water in the world had been hauled right over us and was emptying its contents endlessly, slowly, relentlessly, on to us, our homes, our gardens, our crops, our city, our villages, our lives. Sometime mid-morning I remember thinking "*This rain will bury us alive*." It was that heavy and suffocating, falling out of the darkest of shrouds. Tragically, one way or another it sent many to their burials and many thousands more lost all but their lives and the life of the country was fundamentally dislocated. Who would not fear rain, the sound of rain, after that?

That first daylong rain was the killing deluge. But the rain continued to fall out of a bruised and swollen sky. The whole low coast became choked with water. It seemed the land would merge with the sea. Day after day the water slowly rose around us. We watched it encroach on our safe lives and comfortable home by measuring its growth up the boles of the trees in our garden. White egrets took up residence, strangely beautiful. We saw snakes swimming in the lake of our garden. We retreated upstairs but would not abandon our home. We tethered a small rubber dingy to our backstairs and paddled out to the car parked on higher ground to go shopping and to work. A foot or two more and we would have had to leave. Seeing watermarks appear on the trees one morning after the stars had come out was the sign of redemption and the signal for joyful hugs exchanged. The purest happiness is

survival.

In the end the water destroyed much of our garden, created and tended by my wife with so much love and care over many years, and stood four feet in my study downstairs, destroying books but not my most precious collections and damaging furniture and other belongings. But in comparison with what some of our friends lost, and even more clearly in contrast with what tens of thousands went through in the lowest lying villages and housing schemes, our experience of loss and inconvenience was nothing. The land and its people in their losses out-wept the rain. It will take years still to provide. And the innocence which senses rain as only a benediction will not return. Half an hour of gentle rain in the middle of the night and my wife wakes up and shakes me.

46. THE GOOD LIFE

Most jobs are done because they have to be done – to earn a living, support a family, get on in the world, secure the future. Some jobs are backbreaking, some comfortable, some challenging, some boring in the extreme. Most work is a chore, not a joy. There are very few persons who absolutely love their jobs.

I have known some of them. They are the blessed of the earth. A long time ago I met a visitor to Guyana who has remained vivid in my mind. He was an expert on grasshoppers. He was a great enthusiast and I spent an hour talking to him about grasshoppers around the world and could easily have spent another day or a week on the subject. I did not know, until he told me, how full the world is of grasshoppers – green and gold and brown and black and red even, some inches large and some dot-like small, with a thousand sounds and songs and habits of their own. If you should cut down one of your great forest trees, he told me, in the branches of the crown, if you look carefully enough, you will find twenty or more separate species of grasshopper there. This man was going up the Essequibo for a few days and was looking forward to discovering at least a handful of completely new kinds of grasshopper to add to his collection. There was going to be a full moon and apparently there are some grasshoppers that are especially attracted by a combination of the moon and the sweet sap in the leaves of a certain kind of tree he hoped to find.

This man was one of life's especially happy people. You can always tell them. A sort of serenity settles around their eyes. There is absolutely no bombast in them. They are filled with a pure enthusiasm which lights up their faces and makes them vibrant when they talk about what they love to do. There is no greed in them – no greed for power or position or money or public precedence – which is why in this rare category of the especially happy no career man, no politician, no big businessman, or anyone seeking the limelight, is ever likely to

appear. The truly happy are those who find supreme contentment in working quietly all their lives to add to the stock of human knowledge in their chosen, much-loved field. The satisfaction they get is in their own constantly renewed awareness of how their small successes daily increase mankind's precious store of knowledge. Perhaps, as an added bonus, they also find pleasure in the informed praise of peers and colleagues in their field, but that is not the main thing. The main thing is self-satisfaction, in the best sense of the world.

"*When I am out of joint, from bad weather or a poor run of thoughts*," E.B. White, that perfect American essayist, once wrote, "*I like to sit and think about Edward Howe Forbush*." The great ornithologist, Edward Howe Forbush, loved birds all his long life from when he was a boy of ten exploring for song sparrows in the woods and fields around Boston to his death at 71 when he had just a few pages left to finish his great summation of bird life, the magnificent 3-volume, illustrated book *Birds of Massachusetts and Other New England States* which has given, and will continue to give, infinite pleasure and instruction to the generations as they succeed each other. Knowing such people, or reading about them, lifts the heart even in the worst of times or moods.

So now I read with great delight of Nico Declercq of the Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta and Cindy Dekeyser of that Institute's campus in France in Metz who have applied modern acoustic theory to explain why audiences in the ancient Greek theatre of Epidaurus can hear the actors as well far back in the amphitheatre as right up front.

As well as the slope, the two researchers considered the seats themselves. There are stone benches arranged in rows, which give the semicircular bowl-shape of the theatre a corrugated surface. In a paper published in the *Journal of the Acoustical Society of America,* Dr. Declercq and Ms. Dekeyser calculate how each frequency of sound behaves as it diffracts off the rows of seats.

Epidaurus's perfect acoustics are indeed the result of what its audience sits on. Theatre-goers receive sound from the front, reflected off the theatre's foreground, as well as from behind them, backscattered by the seats. The seat rows only backscatter frequencies above a certain threshold, so they act,

in effect, as a sound filter. Conveniently, Epidaurus's threshold is about 500 hertz. That is the usual upper limit of the noise of wind rustling through bushes and of the murmurs of an audience, which might have drowned the actors out.

Dr. Declercq points out that it does not matter that the theatre design also removed fundamental tones of the human voice because the brain reconstructs these from the available high frequencies. Millions of people experience this daily without noticing it when they listen to somebody else's voice through the telephone.

Such people are possessed of a passion which is innocent, intense and perfect — a passion which adds to the stock of human knowledge for the pure love of it. Blessed by the Gods in his work as he is, Dr. Declercq goes happily from job to job. Previously, for instance, he had demonstrated why a handclap in front of the stairs of the great pyramid of Chichen Itza in Mexico has an echo that sounds like the chirp of a beautiful bird called a quetzal. What a lovely life he has!

47. THE ENORMOUS PRIVILEGE OF LIFE

Walking in our garden until night finally obscured a glorious setting of the sun, my wife showed me through tree branches the crescent of the moon riding in the black velvet of the night with a star close by like a spark from a silver fire. There are such times when life is so inexpressibly beautiful that tears come to the eyes before you can help yourself.

The enormous privilege of life is a mystery and a wonder which we cannot fathom. We should never stop thanking whatever Almighty God or Great Forcefield or Ten-dimensioned Symmetry has bestowed it on us. Everyone has a responsibility to pack every hour with a measureless delight. This underlying joy should not falter however encumbered with problems or distress life sometimes becomes. Among all that is woeful and stupid and ugly and agonizing and even evil, there is a fundamental marvellousness about the one life each of us will ever have that makes it essential to find meaning and challenge and opportunity and pleasure in whatever we meet along the way, young or middle-aged or old.

The only thing that can sometimes undermine this fundamental joy in life is the thought that death will end it. That thought is unacceptable so we all fight not to accept it or, at least, not think of it for more than a flash. It was this thought, this dread, that kept plaguing the great Russian novelist, Leo Tolstoy, even in the full glory of youth, health, love, and success. "*My whole being aches with the need to live*," he wrote, "*the right to live, and the same moment I feel death at work...and then everything tells me the same story: there is nothing in life, nothing exists but death and death should not be!*" He used to shout it even in the flow and ardour of his lavishly eventful life. "*Death should not be!*"

But of course it is. And yet that is all the more reason to welcome, to bless, to enjoy, to enrich and add to life while we have it. And all the more reason why it is difficult for me to understand, despite the powerful arguments advanced on the other side, how anyone, who stops to think for a minute, could

advise abortion which deals in death and cuts short life with all its mystery and infinite potential. No argument for abortion stands up - and certainly no argument based on the mere convenience of others. Not even the argument that a child is likely to be born tragically deformed or retarded really stands up, though it is often used to justify ending a pregnancy.

Consider the case of Christy Nolan who was born with a body utterly shattered by cerebral palsy - completely incapable of speech, with hardly any control of his muscles so that he twitches uncontrollably, unable to walk or talk or feed or help himself or do the simplest, normal things.

Much better dead, you might say, much better never alive - better for himself, better for his family, better for society where he would only be a burden.

And yet you must think again about Christy Nolan. Make no such judgement on his behalf or on his family's behalf. He is acknowledged as one of Ireland's best writers. At 22 he won the Whitbread Book of the Year award, one of the most prestigious in the literary world, for his book *Under The Eye of the Clock.*

What is he, this utterly shattered human being? He is, quite simply, a marvellous writer, his mind as clear and piercing as any that has existed Christy Nolan learned, gradually and with infinite pain and care, to communicate by a system of eye movements. With further infinite pain and care, he learned to tap out words on a typewriter with a "unicorn stick" attached to his forehead and with the assistance and dedicated love of his amazing mother. She joined in the agonizingly slow task of composition by supporting his head at the typewriter as he tapped out a few words every hour.

Listen to him write about his birth:

"About death there is no secret. Joseph Mecham knows that, after all he has been there and back. He dwelt among the Gods for his two fobbed hours but life claimed him back, copperfastened him and called him free... Better dead said the crones, better dead said history, better jump in at the deep and decided her strong soul as she heard his crestfallen cry. His mother it was who treated him as normal, tumbled to his intelligence, tumbled to his eye-signalled talk, tumbled to the hollyberries, green yet, but holding promise of burn-

ing in red, given time, given home."

I defy anyone to read those line carefully and not feel the glory as well as the sadness of life and not feel as well how desperately important it is always to use life well and delight in it while we are allowed the privilege of doing so - remembering the example of Christy Nolan with his shattered body and his gleaming mind.

In accepting the Whitbread Award Christy Nolan, through his mother, said *"Tonight is my night for laughing, for crying tears of joy. But wait -my brothers hobble after me hinting "What about silent us, can we too have a voice"?"*

In these words Christy Nolan heart-rendingly reminds us that no life, however handicapped or hopeless, must ever be neglected - and teaches us also, those of us who are too used to grumbling over small problems, a lesson about how we need to live our lives to fullest value.

48. ILLTH

Absurdly, we still take for granted that Gross Domestic Product is an accurate measure of success and wellbeing in a nation, so that if G.D.P. is increasing we think we must be doing better. This is nonsense. When anybody proudly declares that G.D.P. has gone up by such and such a percentage we should simply chups our teeth and say "*So what*?"

When the World Bank decrees, as it is inclined to do, that G.D.P. is "*the main criterion for classifying economies*" and formulates loan strategies aimed simply at boosting G.D.P. we should reject such superficial ignorance. We should take every opportunity to point out the error of that mighty organisation's outdated and damaging ways.

By the way, did anyone notice how as long ago as 1991 the international development establishment controlled by rich countries quietly changed the mode of measuring economic progress from a Gross National Product to a Gross Domestic Product basis? This was a quiet little change with very large implications. Under the old measurement, the Gross National Product, the earnings of multinational firms were attributed to the country where the firms were owned – and where the profits eventually return. Under the new Gross Domestic Product measurement, however, the profits are attributed to the country where the mine or factory is located. This subtle accounting shift turned many struggling nations into statistical boomtowns while strengthening the push for a so-called "global economy" which is another phase for "multinational paradise." This covered up conveniently a very basic fact: the rich nations are walking off with the resources of the poor countries and calling it a big boost for the poor. Why didn't poor countries object strongly to this change in how economies are measured internationally – and why don't they still?

But let us return to how misconceived and misleading it is to look upon G.D.P. as a suitable measure of national wellbeing and progress. It is time to stop fooling people by clinging to this indicator, especially since by doing so we simply play

into the hands of the "market force" fundamentalists who have inherited the earth. The fact is that G.D.P. and its various proxies – rate of growth, expansion, economic recovery – have become the language in which we report and debate, a barricade of intellectual abstraction which separates us from human reality. We should realise that such phrases tell us almost nothing about what is really going on in our lives.

The G.D.P. is simply a gross measure of market activity, of money changing hands. It makes no distinction between the desirable and the undesirable, evil or good, costs or gain. It looks only at that part of reality the economists choose to acknowledge – the part involved in monetary transactions. The crucial economic functions performed in the household and volunteer sectors go entirely unreckoned. Also, the G.D.P. calculation not only masks the breakdown of social structures such as the family and the destruction of the natural habitat upon which the economy – and life itself – ultimately depend; worse, it actually portrays such breakdown and destruction as economic gain.

Consider this. If you were told that "activity" in your place of residence, Georgetown say, had increased by 20 percent would you not want to know specifically what activity was being measured? Garbage collection or street-children begging? Childcare or abortions? Charity work or choke and rob? Road repairs or traffic accidents? The mere quantity of activity taken alone says virtually nothing about whether life around you is getting better or worse. In the same way G.D.P., which is simply a measure of total output, makes no distinction between costs and benefits, between productive and destructive activities, between sustainable and unsustainable endeavours. It is as if a business kept its accounts by merely adding up all transactions without distinguishing between income and expenditure, assets and liabilities. Can we not see the absurdity of this calculation which so rules our public life?

Do we not see that social decline and community breakdown can easily be called growth by another name? For instance, increasing crime, proliferating divorce and mass media addiction replacing stable family relationships have the effect of adding to G.D.P. In America teenagers spend about

four hours a day watching television and playing video games and about five minutes a day alone with their fathers. In Guyana we are headed in that direction too and think that it represents progress because the expansion of mass entertainment certainly adds to G.D.P. while children spending time with their parents does not count.

Also, consider the natural habitat, on the preservation of which our quality of life ultimately depends. The more a nation depletes its natural resources the more its G.D.P. increases. Again, this violates basic accounting principles in that it portrays the depletion of capital as current revenue. If we overfish our waters or overcut our forests this appears in the national books as an economic boom – until the resource disappears. Current national accounting systems around the world treat the earth as if it is a business in liquidation.

G.D.P. also ignores very basic human contributions in the social and communal realms –that is, the economic role of households and communities. This is where much of the nation's more important work gets done, from caring for children and older people to volunteer work in its many forms. It is the sort of work that holds a nation together. Yet because no money changes hands in this realm, it is invisible to conventional economics. The G.D.P. doesn't count it at all – which means that the more our families and communities decline and monetised service sectors take their place, the more the G.D.P. goes up and the pundits cheer.

Why do we continue to be brainwashed into measuring human progress in this absurd way? I have said it before and I will say it over and over again – I hope our own nation's plans for development will never make the terrible mistake of measuring our progress and wellbeing as a nation in simplistic terms of G.D.P. increases and superficial economic growth. Long ago, in the 19th Century, the writer John Ruskin pointed out that an economy produces "illth" as well as wealth. In our national accounts these days we lump wealth and illth together and call the sum progress. To put it very simply, that is brainlessness of the first order.

49. IMMORTAL FRAGMENTS

Fifty-five years ago - can it be so many years, gone so quickly, insubstantial as a dream? - in the sixth form at Queens Royal College in Port-of-Spain, our literature teacher departed from the well-beaten path of the set syllabus to tell us about Sappho, the Greek poetess.

He said she was the greatest of all lyric poets of ancient Greece. She lived in the sixth century before Christ. Hardly a single poem of hers has come down to us whole and intact but the fragments that have survived are so beautiful, so perfect in their grace and passion, that her name and work have become immortal.

The crystal, perfect fragments of poetry by Sappho which our eccentric teacher read to us were more memorable than anything in the syllabus. Young imaginations, preparing to receive the glories of the world unfolding, yearn for such teachers out of the ordinary. I remember him - thick spectacles which made him goggle-eyed, a red rash of small boils circling his neck - and thank him and praise him down the years. My love of the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins I owe to him and my first hearing of Sappho's immortal fragments, tears of unrequited love distilled in exquisite, shining vials, I also owe to him. It is by chance that we benefit from such teaching when we are young.

Sappho was born in Lesbos and love like hers has ever afterwards been called lesbian. It is love expressed with extraordinary purity and passion. No poet, male or female, has expressed the agony of love unrequited more simply and fervently than Sappho in the few wonderful fragments of poetry that have survived the centuries.

Perhaps the most famous of all the fragments is a lyric of four lines of aching intensity known in a thousand translations in all the languages of the earth. The teacher read the lines to us in Greek - which we did not understand - and then gave us a dozen different translations in English and we were to say which we liked best and why. Here are two versions:

"The moon has set
and the Pleiades; it is the middle
of the night and the hours go by
and I lie here alone"

and

"The Pleiades disappear,
the pale moon goes down.
After midnight, time blurs:
sleepless, I lie alone."

I recall all that long ago because I have just read of the discovery and reconstruction of a "new" poem by Sappho. This is described in an article by the scholar Martin West in a recent issue of the *Times Literary Supplement*. The new text has emerged through:

"...the identification of a papyrus in the University of Cologne as part of a roll containing poems of Sappho. This text, recovered from Egyptian mummy cartonnage, is the earliest manuscript of her work so far known. It was copied early in the third century BC, not much more than 300 years after she wrote." The second of the three fragments found *"...had been partially known since 1922 from an Oxyrhynchus papyrus of the third century AD, and by combining the two texts we now attain an almost complete poem."*

Here is this poem by Sappho, translated by the Canadian poet Anne Carson:

'The Beat Goes On' ['fragment 58']

You, children, be zealous for the
    beautiful gifts of the
    violetlapped Muses
and for the clear songloving lyre.

But my skin once soft is now
    taken by old age,
my hair turns white from black.

And my heart is weighed down
    and my knees do not lift,
that once were light to dance as
    fawns.

I groan for this. But what can I
    do?
A human being without old age is
    not a possibility.

There is the story of Tithonos,
    loved by Dawn with her arms
    of roses
and she carried him off to the
    ends of the earth

when he was beautiful and young.
    Even so was he gripped
by white old age. He still has his
    deathless wife.

How wonderful and intellectually satisfying that scholarship and love of poetry can yield such a treasure after so long. I think I see behind those thick spectacles my old teacher's eyes light up.

50. IN DREAMS BEGIN RESPONSIBILITIES

I have seen the claim made that the recent CARICOM Summit was the most successful ever. What does that mean? The best organized? One with the best speeches? The best final communique? Success can only be measured after time has elapsed to judge what action has actually been taken. So the claim is at least premature. But it is the sort of claim that we have come to expect in CARICOM where words speak louder than action.

In every Government worldwide there is a gap between rhetoric and action. In the West Indies, probably because our rhetoric is of such a high quality and so sophisticated, the gap seems to yawn wider than in most countries. One former West Indian Prime Minister, who had great difficulty getting his fine words transformed into deeds, in his frustration used to call his civil service an "*army of occupation*." "*Big talkers, small achievers*" is the reputation critics delight in giving us. They are not all that wrong.

The problem is compounded at the regional level. There we experience a whole new dimension of frustration. Rhetoric is removed not once but twice from reality. Regional statements of commitment become what have been called veritable symphonies of triumph. But the ugly scrape of dragging feet too often drowns the quiet sounds of progress. Marvellous resolutions are drafted, superb initiatives undertaken, far-reaching goals announced. The CARICOM secretariat is then left to encourage, support, monitor, study, advise and urge. And it does all this very well. But it has no authority to implement policies in sovereign states. It is a purveyor of good intentions, a word-factory, a dream-machine.

Take culture as just one example. The promotion of regional unity should be actively pursued at the cultural level. Every effort to come together culturally should be made. There should be regional dance and theatre groups. There should be regular exchange of art exhibits, book displays, and artists and writers in residence of every sort. Arrangements should

be pursued to ensure that books written by West Indians and West Indian literary and cultural magazines are readily available throughout the Region. Yet one CARICOM Cultural Officer, before the post was abandoned, used to speak of his experience as a living death in which he achieved almost nothing because no resources were made available. What a sad commentary, what an indictment of the regional movement!

At no time is frustration more evident than at CARICOM Summits. Then the dream-machine works overtime. It efficiently cranks out words that raise our hopes. And then over the succeeding months comes the big letdown. At summit-time expectations are raised on high and when there is no follow-up disillusion is that much greater. Cynicism grows and the regional movement suffers. The big ones declaim but the officials lower down rule. I think this is what happens, for instance, in the case of the mistreatment of Guyanese travellers at CARICOM destinations so often reported.

The first CARICOM Head of Government who gets up at a Summit Conference and for his opening speech says: "*I have nothing to say. There has been too much talk already. Let us get on with the agenda. Better yet, let us go home and do what we said we were going to do*" will be honoured in Caribbean history.

If we are serious about a West Indian future for us all, we will have to concentrate on getting things not only approved in principle but also actually implemented by all the sovereign states. Here is a very short list.

1. We should have one airline, organized around Caribbean Airlines, with the other main air operations absorbed and redeployed.

2. A Caribbean Court of Appeal should be accepted by all and become fully operational.

3. We should begin habitually to share embassies, embassy staff, and even Ambassadors abroad.

4. West Indian passports must be designed with a common CARICOM cover and they should at least entitle one to respect as a brother or sister on entering any

CARICOM country and a discount on airport fees as a symbolic gesture.

5. Above all, executive teeth must, at last, be given to regional governance. Fifteen years after the West Indian Commission proposed how to do this a Technical Working Group has come up with fresh proposals which have been met by the momentous decision at the recent Summit that *"wide-ranging consultations throughout the region will now be held and an interim report will be presented to the meeting of CARICOM Heads in July in Barbados."* Consultations? Interim report? All over again? Will this rigmarole never end?

How many years will it take to achieve even one of these objectives which have been around for ages? Two years? Five years? Sometime? But I refuse to say never. As we wait it is much better than nothing that we do have a dream machine. In the words of the famous short story by the American writer Delmore Schwartz, 'In Dreams Begin Responsibilities.' After all, in offering to stage the World Cup we dreamed a tremendous dream and now we are on the point of making that dream become reality. It should make us proud and also confident and optimistic about our future course however zizzag and roundabout that course may often seem to be.

51. NOW FOR NOW AND NOTHING FOR HEREAFTER

I think I am right in feeling increasingly agitated at the impression one gets that Governments everywhere, and certainly in the Caribbean, are simply skipping from one headline problem to the next without time, thought and energy given to the deeper, persistent crises gathering forte like huge, hidden tsunamis.

I once had the interesting experience of browsing in the diaries of William Gladstone, one of the greatest British Prime Ministers. Many things amazed me, not the least being the inhuman mental energy which allowed him after each day filled with hard and unremitting work to push himself further to record his thoughts and views in a comprehensive journal. I was fascinated also by the intriguing account of this dour, moralizing man's abiding interest in prostitutes, the trouble he took in getting to know them personally and trying, as he put it, "*to save them*" – a remarkably thankless task as it turned out.

But there was one extract in Gladstone's journal which particularly struck me. It was a detailed account of a discussion he had one day with two of his cabinet Ministers about England's forest reserves. At one point, Gladstone records, they talked about the role of the oak tree in England's history and went on to discuss ways and means to make sure that oak forests still flourished in England in 100 years' time. That is what struck me –the determination of three old men to secure part of their nation's heritage long generations after they were dead. What they decided would bring them no personal gain or political merit whatsoever. The resources they earmarked would bear absolutely no fruit for them.

That seems a far cry from these cynical days when, in the words of another British Prime Minister, "*a week is a long time in politics*." Today, what is expedient is what seems to count. What is temporarily successful is what matters most. What gathers instant popularity is most applauded. It is a world where the froth on the wave is made to seem more important

than the solid sea beneath – a world where one can say of very few men what the writer, Oliver Goldsmith, said of the great Eighteenth Century conservative politician, Edmund Burke – that *"he was too fond of the right to pursue the expedient."*

It has to be admitted that it is not always easy to get the correct balance between present expediency and the waiting generations. It is all very well to plan for the long-term future, but, as John Maynard Keynes, the celebrated economist, pointed out long ago, "*in the long term we're all dead anyway*". After all, today well-spent builds all our tomorrows. And it is not merely expedient to get through a sudden crisis. "*Live to fight another day*," has been a perfectly acceptable, and not necessarily immoral, tactic through the ages. In these perilous times, when new crises fall like storms dropping from the sky, it almost seems enough just to get through each day that dawns.

Still, we must try to hold on to a longer vision through even the sharpest crisis. Expediency taken too far must, in terms of the economy, undermine the long-term prosperity of the nation and, in terms of the society, fatally corrupt and demoralize its citizens. If only instant survival matters every man will grab what he can today and say go hang to tomorrow.

It is therefore important to look out for symptoms of exaggerated expediency in how our affairs are conducted. A one-off exercise serves its purpose if it can be made the subject of a glamourous announcement or, better yet, an even more glamourous opening ceremony. It serves its purpose if it can make a brief showing in the market place. It serves its purpose if the citizens are given the impression that their desperate need is at least being met, however temporarily, in one direction or the other. It serves its purpose if the impression can be given of work-in-progress and action stations bravely manned.

But such exercises do not serve the purpose of adding permanently to the fundamental capacity and strength of the nation. They do not serve the purpose of solving problems once and for all and "done wid dat". They do not serve the purpose of safeguarding long-term prosperity. They really are

a fraud on all our tomorrows.

Consider any new crop or product or initiative. The announcement, the publicity, the ceremony of inauguration, the first dramatic sales or mobilization drive, the showy displays in the shop windows or at the latest Exhibition, none of these are really of any importance. What matters is whether the new business is securely founded, whether sufficient working capital is available for the long haul, whether the new product can be supplied on a regular and continuing basis at a competitive price, whether long-term markets are available, and whether annual profits can be generated, not just instant cash on a one-and-done basis.

When you next see or hear a headline story about a new product, a new crop, a new marketing initiative, any new occasion for premature self-congratulation, suspend applause for at least a year. Check the follow-through. Assess what has happened since the first reports. The only thing that really matters is the follow-through. You can always tell a gimmick when the follow-through is nil.

We do not, it is true, always have to think in terms of growing Gladstonian forests that will yield timber a hundred years to come. But at least when our day is past we should have set some sturdy plants and not just a few precarious shrubs that wilt before the day is done.

52. NAMING IS NOT KNOWING

In Guyana getting a good education is defined as getting good exam results. And getting good exam results involves going to school twice – to school itself and, more importantly, to "extra lessons."

This double dose of teaching deprives children and young people of an absolutely vital part of their lives – that part which should be spent in games and recreation, in pursuing hobbies and developing creative talents which have nothing to do with any exam syllabus, in simply having fun, enjoying themselves, getting really good at some sport, stretching their imaginations in art or dance or drama or in reading books that have nothing to do with classroom. In other words they are deprived of making the most of a time in their lives when all-round ability, mental flexibility, character, social skills and special aptitudes are practised and developed to face the much larger and more important exam of life itself. It is a tragedy of the first order.

Parents mean well but they should know that what is involved in the exercise of "extra lessons," taken to the lengths that now obtain in Guyana, is child abuse by another name. I find it unbearable to think of the countless aimless hours which our children and young people spend in school classrooms all over the country to be followed by further countless hours spent in crammer's sweat shops preparing for exams. Our educational authorities should also find it unbearable.

The educational system, especially including "extra lessons," is geared to cramming for the purpose of doing well at exams. Doing well at exams is a worthy objective but it is certainly not the only purpose of education and cramming information into young minds is the worst possible way of teaching anything properly.

In Guyana we desperately need to recover the fundamental purpose we should have in mind in educating a child for the complicated, eternally changing, infinitely challenging

world he or she will inherit.

Richard Feynman, Nobel prizewinner for his fundamental work in quantum electrodynamics, Professor of Physics at Cornell and then at the California Institute of Technology, once spent a sabbatical during which he taught basic electromagnetism to students at the University of Brazil in Rio. He found himself deeply disappointed because the students meekly refused to ask questions. The need to memorise had replaced the impulse to understand. He pointed out to the Brazilian educational authorities that the students could recite Brewster's Law: "*Light impinging on a material index N is 100 percent polarized with the electric field perpendicular to the plane of incidence if the tangent.....*" But when he asked what would happen if they looked out at the sunlight reflecting off the bay and held up a piece of polarized film and turned the film this way and that, they stared at him blankly. An examination question would read "*What are the four types of telescope*?" Students could answer by rote and yet, Feynman said, the real telescope was lost: the instrument that helped begin the scientific revolution, that showed humanity the humbling vastness of the stars.

What Professor Feynman was trying to impress upon the Brazilians was the uselessness of simply cramming facts into students: words about words – hardly anything about the intricate tapestry of meaning which lies behind mere words repeated over and over again. Standardised, memorized knowledge is hollow knowledge, a shell without the life of true learning. Rote learning drains away all that is valuable in knowledge: the inventive soul, the habit of seeking better ways to do anything, the impulse to discover the deepest wells of thought and understanding. Not everyone can be a Nobel prizewinner, but everyone should pay attention to how a Nobel prizewinner views life and teaching. Richard Feynman advised the Brazilians how they should approach science in their schools.

"Science is a way to teach how something gets to be known, what is not known, to what extent things <u>are</u> known (for nothing is known absolutely), how to handle doubt and uncertainty, what the rules of evidence are, how to think about things so that judgements

can be made, how to distinguish truth from fraud, and from show."

Feynman was a scientist so he spoke about science. But his advice is just as applicable to all the subjects in the curriculum of any school.

If we do not listen to what Professor Feynman once told the educational establishment in Brazil we will fail our children. As it is, we are badly off-track. The evidence is that our children in their vital formative years are being subjected to an educational regime which is hopelessly unsuited to preparing them for the accelerating challenges that lie ahead in this world. Day after day we cram them with stalely repeated information ordained year after year by tired examiners going through the motions in an impoverished and infinitely slow-moving system. Words about words about words, repeated again and again, remain just that: inert, stultifying, lacking the life and magic of how the real world works, giving little clue how to unravel the subtle mysteries of what men seek to know and need to understand.

When Richard Feynman was a boy of ten he learnt a lesson worth more than getting by heart the answers to a hundred old exam test papers crammed into him ten times over and over. He was walking with his father one day in the Catskill Mountains of New York. "*See that bird*," his father said and pointed. "*It's a Spencer's Warbler. Well, in Italian it's a CHUTTO LAPITTIDA. In Portuguese, it's a BOM DA PEIDA. In Chinese, it's a CHUNG-LONG-TAH, and in Japanese it's a KATANO TEKEDA. You can know the name of that bird in all the languages of the world, but when you are finished, you'll know absolutely nothing whatever about the bird. You'll only know what humans in different places call the bird. So let's look at the bird and see what it's doing – how it flies, how it sings – that's what counts."*

53. MAGNANIMITY

We have become depressingly used to the party political animosity which divides the nation and holds back united efforts to solve the multitude of problems which need our combined human resources. Old antagonisms continue to overwhelm hope of a new era of consultation, consensus and jointly approved programmes for progress.

Democracy ensures, or should ensure, that the differing views, varied cultural persuasions and diverging concepts of how the people's affairs should be managed are allowed expression and not ever squeezed into resentful, and eventually festering, silence. But encouraging plural views to contend often makes day to day government a frustrating business. To those in power, to command and control without question will often seem a more appealing option than to govern through consultation, tactical concession and necessary compromise. Take Leon Trotsky for instance – he makes a good point but you can also hear him reaching for his gun and sabre when he says:

"There is a limit to the application of democratic methods. You can enquire of all the passengers as to what type of car they like to ride in, but it is impossible to question them as to whether to apply the brakes when the vehicle is at full speed and accidents threaten."

The essence of democracy is that different views find organized outlet in contending parties. But the danger always is that contention will become so fierce and unforgiving that democratic give-and-take deteriorates into a sort of modified (and in some cases not at all modified) civil strife. The great 18th Century essayist, Joseph Addison, saw a danger in his day which other nations in other eras can easily recognize:

"There cannot be a greater judgement befall a country than such a dreadful spirit of division as rends a society into two distinct peoples and makes them greater and more averse to one another than if they were actually two different nations."

And Vaclav Havel, President of the Czech Republic, surveying the transformed political scene in his country after the demise of communism, made some observations which might strike a chord not too far from home:

"...electoral politics are dominating political life...partisan bickering, bragging and intrigue, predictions about who will join with whom and against whom, who will help (or harm) whose chances, who might eventually shift support to whom, who is beholden to whom or falling out with whom. Politicians seem to be devoting more time to party politics than to their jobs...All this displaces responsible interest in the prosperity and success of the broader community."

In a democracy what is needed above all to avoid a state of continuous civil strife, and the consequential displacement of interest in the needs of the community at large, is magnanimity – magnanimity on all sides: the magnanimity of the minority which recognises that those who win cannot be expected to observe a saint-like self-denying ordinance when favours for loyalty are being handed out; but, above all, the magnanimity of the majority who must try their utmost to play the essential role of evenhanded arbiter, keep the settlement of old scores to an absolute minimum and, overcoming every temptation offered by power, keep reminding themselves that the winner must not take all – must indeed bend backwards to give up considerably more than the more fanatic players on their side think justified.

Magnanimity does not mean condoning corruption or overlooking outlandishly selfish chicanery in high places. Nor does it mean governing weakly by constantly deferring to opposition protestations. But it does mean forgiving and forgetting, and therefore not penalizing, for instance, honest links and loyalty to a previous order. And it does mean taking account of the views and involving in every way possible the talents and experience of those who may be on the other side of the political divide but who are equal in their love of country and the desire for its progress.

Magnanimity – holding out the hand to help a man who has knocked you down before. It isn't easy – it is indeed very

hard – but democracy without a ruling magnanimity at its heart will never work at all well. You could call it the Mandela Lesson in honour of that very great man. It is a lesson which needs to sink more deeply into our body politic than it ever has done since we became a nation.

54. NATIONAL ACCOUNTING AND REAL LIFE

Governments everywhere, quite naturally, make every effort to portray the state of the nation in the best possible light. How does one account for the fact that in countries, including our own, official spokesmen can proudly, and in one sense accurately, boast that Gross Domestic Product is increasing while the mass of ordinary people feel and know their standard of living is falling?

Observe how these two concepts - increasing G.D.P., declining standard of living -can be reconciled.

First, of course, an adjustment to total G.D.P. has to be made for population growth to arrive at per capita G.D.P. - but, since in Guyana emigration seems at least to balance the natural increase in population, that is not a factor that applies to us. However, an increase in total G.D.P. could very well be the sum of a large increase in wealth or, say, 25 percent of the population accompanied by a hard-to-bear reduction in wealth for the rest - meaning that while statistically the country is doing well 75 percent of its people are dissatisfied with progress.

Secondly, to judge national income you have to deduct from national product the interest component of debt servicing. It is much better than it was but for Guyana this remains a factor reducing the goods and services actually available to the domestic population.

Thirdly, what counts in assessing living standards is not gross but net national product. And net national product in a country like ours should be calculated by taking into account inadequate maintenance and the widespread neglect of replacements which leads to a steady deterioration of buildings, equipment, roads, wharfs, sea defences, bridges, factories, plant, hospitals, schools and so on and on. Official statements on the subject of increasing G.D.P. omit to take any account of such deterioration and decay because national accounting conventions are formulated on the assumption that reasonable maintenance and replacement expenditures will

occur as a matter of course. In this way do we continually delude ourselves at the national level. At the personal level, of course, we are not deluded.

Fourthly, and comparable to the deteriorating infrastructure resulting from the neglect of maintenance, is the decline in the real value of most government services. The causes are well known. They start with insufficient public revenues and continuing inflation. The government budget deficit has to be controlled - public capital formation is cut first as being the easiest thing to do. Then the recurrent budget also needs trimming. This is done by cutting down on the purchase of provisions and supplies - especially imported supplies - as being politically less unpopular than cutting down numbers in the civil service. The civil servants, however, are left without the equipment and supplies necessary to do their job properly. Hospitals might sometimes have to go without drugs they need. Extension workers cannot visit because fuel is expensive. Schools may not be given the materials to function properly.

Civil servants remain at such a demotivated level that the service they provide and the initiative they show also remain at an unproductive level. Instead of just sitting at their desks doing not very much, numbers of civil servants even absent themselves from the office tending their kitchen gardens or looking after the demands of a second job. Service to the public becomes a residual activity. Customer satisfaction no longer matters and corruption proliferates.

Crime at the same time increases and increasingly infects society with fear. And how is all of this familiar sequence reflected in the national accounts? It isn't. Because government departments do not normally produce a marketed output, the convention has always been that the volume and quality of the public sector's output should be measured by the cost of its inputs. Thus, for example, the greatly increased money value of educational inputs is assumed to result in greatly increased quality of education. A more unrealistic assumption it would be difficult to imagine yet it is an assumption made in all national accounts.

Finally, in judging the real standard of living as opposed to official G.D.P., an adjustment has to be made for inflation.

Important elements in the national accounts are estimated in money terms and then deflated by a price index. If the official price index understates the actual inflation, the drop in living standards will also be understated. Such understatement regularly occurs because it suits government or because statisticians ignore "parallel market" prices. Thus the impact of inflation is underestimated in measuring and announcing G.D.P. figures.

In these various ways must we step by step adjust the good news we get about increasing G.D.P. so that we can arrive at the distressing reality of the ordinary person's actual standard of living and quality of life.

When next you hear that our G.D.P. is going up by some impressive percentage, take the statement with at least five pinches of salt. Out there in the real world life is measured differently.

55. "OPEN THE CLENCHED FIST OF THE PAST"

It happens all the time in small, closely-knit groups – Cabinets, party executives, boards of directors, Church congregations or club committees. It is called groupthink. It is when such groups become more and more certain that their collective judgment is infallible. Groupthink signals big trouble.

The individuals within such groups, who may or may not be very bright, find themselves listening only to themselves. They find themselves stressing the absolute need for loyalty to the consensus. Increasingly they begin to equate dissent with a kind of treason. They live in an echo chamber of their own views. They do not think of the hard questions to ask and even if they do they soon get to the point when they would never think of actually asking them. They pay attention only to information that fits their own conclusions and block out information that does not. So the more they discuss the more they are convinced they are right. Reality is overwhelmed in the comfort zone of groupthink conformity.

To an ordinarily intelligent, reasonably independent, person all this seems absurd. But it happens again and again and again in history and around the corner not far from you and me. Any group of people in charge of anything for a long time – Committee, Board, Party Executive or Government – the longer it stays in charge becomes more and more liable to the groupthink risk.

Who can doubt that groupthink was responsible for the gigantic mess which America got itself into in Iraq? A small group of neoconservatives surrounding President Bush, led by Vice-President Dick Cheney, Defence Secretary Ronald Rumsfeld and Assistant Defence Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, taking advantage of an America stunned by the terrorist attack of 9/11, determined to take out Saddam Hussein and establish American power in an important, oil-rich Middle East state. They then successfully blocked out all information and views contrary to what they wanted, selectively presented to the President and themselves information and views favour-

able to their position, and proceeded to impose their groupthink on the Administration, the Congress and, sadly, the American people. Even Colin Powell was trapped in that awful echo chamber of single-minded decision-makers hermetically sealed off from all opposing views, ordinary common sense and even from what should have been the irrefutable daily flow of facts on the ground. Groupthink was powerful enough to allow such men to believe that American soldiers would be welcomed in Iraq with open arms and strewn flowers. Let us hope Barack Obama, a sharp thinker and deeply read in history, has learned that lesson.

At home in Guyana groupthink has prevailed for decades. Ethnic division endured because group thinking on each side of a cleavage prevented solutions and remedies that challenge how each side thinks. Opposed group thinking gives completely conflicting versions of the same events, the same facts, the same dangers and threats, the same potential for progress. Dialogue breaks down because of groupthink on all sides. What has our politics been but echo chambers sealed off from each other? When some few try to raise their voices above the snarling echoes they are soon silenced or sidelined well before they can make a real difference. Groupthinkers by definition only wish to listen to their own thoughts and applaud their own actions.

It is never too late – in Government or Opposition – to try and try again to break new ground. One senses that it is time for fresh voices and ideas to contend in chambers where previously only outworn and dutiful echoes sounded. If not now, when? Urging generosity despite everything, Czeslaw Milosz wrote a line that speaks to all men: "*Open the clenched fist of the past*." That's hard to do but it would be better for us and for the coming generations if we could.

Alfred Sloan, probably the greatest and certainly one of the most successful business executives who ever lived, ran General Motors from 1923 to 1956. He loathed the debates of yes-men and feared the threat posed by unanimity. In recent years the great company he ran so well has fallen victim to a very serious case of groupthink and is virtually bust as a result.

"Gentlemen," Alfred Sloan would sum up when necessary, *"I take it that we are all in complete agreement on this decision. I propose therefore that we postpone further discussion to give ourselves time to develop disagreement and perhaps get some real understanding of what the decision is really all about."*

56. MILOSZ

"You gave me gifts, God-Enchanter.
I give you thanks for good and ill.
Eternal light in everything on earth.
As now, so on the day after my death"
- **'Thankfulness'**

"To find my home in one sentence, concise, as if hammered in metal. Not to enchant anybody. Not to earn a lasting name in posterity. An unnamed need for order, for rhythm, for form, which three words are opposed to chaos and nothingness."

- **Czeslaw Milosz** (1911 –2004)

Everyone should read him. He is a great poet and great poets should be read. Czeslaw Milosz, the Polish poet, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1980, died in August this year at the age of ninety-three. He never petered out in silence. It astonishes me, who at seventy-one feels and fears the steady depletion of creative energy, that Milosz was still writing strong and marvellous poetry up to the time of his death.

One is blessed to be given longevity not only with reason intact but with the faculty which generates ideas and insights unimpaired and the ability to give expression to them still powerful. It is rare. The ebbing of energy and enthusiasm is what happens to the huge majority of us as we grow older and surrender the eager freshness of youth which opens wide heart and mind to every adventure of thought and deed in this inexhaustibly astonishing world. But no one ever wrote an elegy for lost youth for Milosz. He never ceased to celebrate or to be amazed or to be hurt to his depths as if for the first time. The world for him was always new and sometimes terrible and he was restlessly concerned to respond to its beauty and cruelty as long as he lived.

He had this to say about poetry and love which informs

the best poetry.

"People observe and describe people, people pronounce their opinions on people, but, above all else, people are bound to people by feelings of love, hate, compassion, fear, admiration, loathing. It is not certain whether good poetry can arise from hatred...At the risk of being pedantic, it is worthwhile to invoke here three Greek words denoting kinds of love. Eros is sexual love, but not only such, because it is "an intermediary between gods and humans," an unlimited desire, a true motoric force of creativity in art and science. Agape is love of our fellow man, love-empathy, allowing us to see in another human being a creature as frail and as easily hurt as we are ourselves: that is the same as Latin caritas, charity. A third Greek word, storge, denotes a tender care, affection uniting parents and children. Perhaps some teachers feel such a love for their pupils. It is also not impossible that storge may be applied to the relationship between a poet and generations of readers to come: underneath the ambition to perfect one's art without hope of being rewarded by contemporaries lurks a magnanimity of gift-offering to posterity."

In honour of Milosz I choose two poems written when he was well into what others call old age.

'A Confession'

My Lord, I loved strawberry jam
And the dark sweetness of a woman's body.
Also well-chilled vodka, herring in olive oil,
Scents, of cinnamon, of cloves.
So what kind of prophet am I? Why should the spirit
Have visited such a man? Many others
Were justly called, and trustworthy.
Who would have trusted me? For they saw
How I empty glasses, throw myself on food,
And glance greedily at the waitress's neck.
Flawed and aware of it. Desiring greatness,
Able to recognize greatness wherever it is,
And yet not quite, only in part, clairvoyant,
I knew what was left for smaller men like me:
A feast of brief hopes, a rally of the proud,
A tournament of hunchbacks, literature.

'Preparation'

Still one more year of preparation.
Tomorrow at the latest I'll start working on a great book
In which my century will appear as it really was.
The sun will rise over the righteous and the wicked.
Springs and autumns will unerringly return,
In a wet thicket a thrush will build his nest lined with clay
And foxes will learn their foxy natures.

And that will be the subject, with addenda. Thus: armies
Running across frozen plains, shouting a curse
In a many-voiced chorus; the cannon of a tank
Growing immense at the corner of a street; the ride at dusk
Into a camp with watchtowers and barbed wire.

No, it won't happen tomorrow. In five or ten years.
I still think too much about the mothers
And ask what is man born of woman.
He curls himself up and protects his head
While he is kicked by heavy boots; on fire and running,
He burns with bright flame; a bulldozer sweeps him into a
clay pit.
Her child. Embracing a teddy bear. Conceived in ecstasy.

I haven't learned yet to speak as I should, calmly.

I cannot help ending with Milosz's famous lines warning all tyrants, murderers, those who do great evil unto others and think they have got away with it.

"You who wronged a simple man
Bursting into laughter at the crime,
And kept a pack of fools around you
To mix good and evil, to blur the line,

Though everyone bowed down before you,
Saying virtue and wisdom lit your way,
Striking gold medals in your honour,
Glad to have survived another day,

Do not feel safe. The poet remembers.
You can kill one, but another is born.
The words are written down, the deed, the date.”

57. COLOUR OF THE SKIN

I received a letter from a fifth-form student in England. She explained that she was a black girl, born in England, of West Indian parentage. One of the books set for study in her school was my novel *The Humming Bird Tree.* Being in a minority herself she wanted to know what my experience was in the West Indies so that she could compare our respective situations. She wondered to what extent I as a white person had ever suffered from prejudice in my community. I found it a most interesting letter.

As I considered my reply an amazing fact quickly begun to dawn on me. Thoroughly though I searched my memory all the way from childhood and youth in Trinidad and Antigua throughout my life in Guyana and much travelling in all the West Indies right up to date I could think of absolutely no occasion when I had experienced discrimination or even ill will because of the colour of my skin. I call this fact amazing not from my estimation since I have simply come to take it for granted in my own case, but because I quickly realized that in the perspective of my young correspondent from England such nondiscrimination might truly seem astonishing.

I have never in the slightest been made to feel conscious of the colour of my skin in my life and career in the West Indies and Guyana. At school never, in sport never, in my career in the Guyana and Caribbean Sugar Industry never, in my literary contributions never, in my social life never. Never have I felt any strain or opposition to me in my job because I was white and the people I was dealing with were not. I have been called on to represent Guyana at conferences and in many negotiations, and to play for Guyana and the West Indies in sport, with absolutely no consideration given to whether I was white or black or blue.

Even at times when there must have been especially bitter feelings about the way white people were treating black people in the world - particularly during countless terrible tragedies in Southern Africa - when one could have thought such

bitterness might be reflected locally, I have never received anything but consideration as just another human being. Racial prejudice has never touched my life or in any way blighted my hopes and ambitions.

Getting that letter from England made me realize what a blessing all this is. It is a blessing that I have come to take for granted. But I wonder how many black persons living in predominantly white communities can take such a blessing for granted. I do not think very many. And that remains one of the saddest facts in the world.

Do you remember, as the struggle for South African freedom unfolded, a startling feature was the continuing magnanimity of black leaders like Nelson Mandela, Allan Boesak, and Desmond Tutu towards the whites. Mandela in particular had been cruelly imprisoned for 27 years yet his policy always envisaged the full participation of whites in a future democratic South Africa.

I believe the achievement of South African freedom was the most heroic, and at the same time most magnanimous, episode in human history. The white rulers in that country, well aware of what agonies had been inflicted by their own race on black "under-citizens" through crude and cruel prejudice must have thought for sure that if the tables were turned their opponents would naturally act as they had done. Somehow Mandela convinced them that it would not be like that and it was not. An incomparable lesson was taught to the world if only it would pay attention.

Looking around the world, I know I have reason to be grateful. I can appreciate without surprise that I have never suffered any impact from domineering majority or revenge-discrimination. I communicated as sincerely as I could to my young student friend in England my own experience. I only hope that she in her life as a black English woman has been, and will be, half so lucky.

58. EXTRA LESSONS REVISITED

In Guyana education once deteriorated to the point where parents had little confidence that the formal system would or could produce results. This created a condition in which parental paranoia flourished. They felt compelled to step into the breach and direct their children's education themselves. Thus did dreaded "extra lessons" come to curse a generation of our children. From the age of eight or younger children were made to suffer a double dose of schooling. It was truly an abomination.

We will not know for a while – until we see how they perform as matured human beings – what impact this recipe for burnout and alienation has had on a whole generation of children but the damage may be deeper and longer lasting then we imagine. And, even if it is not, the fact that the childhood stage of so many lives was sacrificed is a sin so cardinal that it will hardly escape retribution at the gates of the Hereafter.

Extra lessons now seem irremovably rooted in our educational system. Even when they are no longer required they are still imposed. And this curse is now accompanied by the absurd development which leads to young people being encouraged, or themselves opting, to take more than 8 or so subjects at C.X.C.

This combination of completely misplaced zeal is a nonsensical waste of youth. Creative energy stifled; sporting, artistic and non-academic talent not given the change to develop and shine; the breath of life itself in its first blossoming exhausted.

The continued deficiencies in the education system – particularly the depressed remuneration and status of teachers – which led to the infamy of institutionalised "extra lessons" should not escape censure even for a single day. But blame must also be on the head of overzealous parents in this matter. Loving parents have every right to be concerned enough to try to compensate for what is missing in their children's schooling. But let them beware they do not overbalance into

a tyranny which may seriously harm their children. The pressure of parental over-expectation is a scourge.

Even a moment's reflection must lead to the realization that a child sent to extra lessons most days in addition to going to school every day, a child experiencing the burden of two sets of homework, a child caught between different methods of teaching the same subject, a child deprived of a regular daily quota of games and relaxation, a child whose holidays are taken over by yet more tuition, a child, God forbid, enduring such a regime for a lifetime between 8 and 17 – is likely to suffer considerably in one way or another. The danger of burnout by University level and beyond is all too evident. Stunting of the personality in the awful straitjacket of duplicated schooling is a real danger. At the very least, are parents willing to bear the responsibility of reducing their children's lives to much less than the well-rounded, enjoyable, at least partly carefree experience their young lives should be?

Adults over anxiously trying to live out their own dreams and ambitious in the lives of their children are a particular horror. Such people are not a new phenomenon but in this driven materialistic age they seem to be more common than ever before. And any breakdown in the educational system gives them a perfect excuse to set their own, and not a child's, agenda and to impose their own priorities. They take pride not so much in their children but in themselves through what they keep driving their children to become. They set tasks, goals, standards which are those of their own ambitious selves and not naturally those of a child. Such driven, overanxious egos are a menace.

Children may take after their parents but not by any means are they their parents' replicas. So what the parent wants for the child may be crucially opposed to what gifts are waiting to emerge in the unique personality of the child. What parents want desperately to happen may not be in the nature of the child to deliver. In that case imagine the awful potential for immediate, though for the time being unexpressed, disappointment and resentment and for future hang-ups and traumas.

Adults too easily forget what it is like to be a child. Or

perhaps it is not a matter of forgetting. Perhaps it is that adults remember well enough but feel that childhood is simply an unimportant preliminary to the serious business of "real" life and therefore consider that the quicker children settle into adult ways the better for all concerned. That is a terrible, heart-rending mistake too many parents seem to make. The great 19th Century Russian thinker, and wonderful human being, Alexander Herzen, writing about his childhood said something which we adults too often forget in dealing with our children.

"We think that the purpose of the child is to grow up because the child does grow up. But its purpose is to play, to enjoy itself, to be a child. If we merely look to the end of the process, the purpose of all life is death."

To sacrifice the joys and discoveries and wondrous adventures of childhood to meeting the entirely different and, after all, entirely unpredictable demands of future adult life is a form of delusion which pollutes the essence of childhood and runs the grave risk of stunting the real and rounded potential of humanity as it gradually blossoms and blooms in a growing child.

At the cruel heart of extra lessons and taking unnecessary subjects is teaching by rote, the forced feeding of exam information into children. We are reminded of Dickens's magnificent novel *Hard Times* in which we are introduced at the very start to Mr. Thomas Gradgrind, schoolmaster. His first words make clear exactly where he stands in the matter of teaching children: *"Now, what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts: nothing else will ever be of any service to them. This is the principle on which I bring up my own children, and this is the principle on which I bring up these children. Stick to Facts, sir!"*

And having said these words. Mr. Gradgrind steps back a bit and sweeps with his eyes *"the inclined plane of little vessels then and there arranged in order, ready to have imperial gallons of facts poured into them until they were full to the brim."*

The legacy of Mr. Gradgrind presides disastrously over the education of our children. God knows – and so I hope does the Minister of Education – they deserve a better legacy than that.

The feelings, the fears, the delights, the forebodings, the dreams, the torments, the triumphs of a child are no less valid in their proper time than those of an adult. The child must be given room enough and time to work out a child's destiny before he or she graduates to tackling the challenges and enduring the trials of another stage. Soon enough another time will come for them. Soon enough the shadow of the counting house will fall across their lives. Soon enough they will find themselves calculating the main chance and how to gain the upper hand. Until then, God save us and them, let children be children.

59. LAUNCHING HISTORY OF THE THEATRE IN GUYANA, 1800 – 2000 by Frank Thomasson

The launch of Frank's book is a great event – in my opinion one of the outstanding highlights of Carifesta. Let me sum up what I feel about this book by quoting from the first paragraph of the Foreword I wrote for this great History of Guyana Theatre.

"Frank Thomasson's A History of Theatre in Guyana, 1800-2000 immediately establishes itself as an indispensable part of the cultural history of the nation. Scholars no doubt will add and amplify, provide further valuable information and extend the story of the performing arts in Guyana. But this history will stand as an incomparable pioneering endeavour. Guyanese, now and to come, who love the theatre, Guyanese who take pride in the country's record of cultural achievement, Guyanese who care for preserving what is an essential element in their heritage will always be in debt to Frank Thomasson. And his History will add an extremely valuable account to the larger, glorious story of theatre in the West Indies. At an age when the vast majority are at ease in slippered retirement Frank Thomasson set himself the task of telling the fascinating story of theatre in Guyana with enthusiasm, energy, intelligence and dedication. He has succeeded in producing a work which greatly honours his subject and himself – a golden achievement in his golden years."

It is a wonderful coincidence that Frank's book coincides exactly with the revival of the old Playhouse and the Theatre Guild and it is infinitely appropriate that this book is being launched in this new Playhouse which has been brought into being by a national endeavour in which Guyanese of every persuasion, across the widest possible spectrum of interest and conviction, have wholeheartedly contributed in an extraordinary and sustained act of cooperation. The new Play-

house is a symbol of a nation at one with itself. If this can be done why not so much else?

It must give Frank immense satisfaction that his great History is being launched here in the new Playhouse. So many memories must come flooding back. I like to quote W.B. Yeats in relation to what the Theatre Guild stands for: In Yeats's writing there is an eloquent phrase: *"a country bound together by imaginative possessions."* Yeats used the phrase in the context of discussing the importance of a National Theatre for his beloved Ireland. Yeats also wrote in this context that it was impossible to exist if there were *"no national institutions to reverence, no national success to admire without a model of it in the mind of the people."*

I cannot doubt that in his heart Frank was driven partly by such thoughts and inspiration in writing his book. Fifty years after Frank participated in a great blossoming of theatre in Guyana his book now appears to bless the coming of a new birth of theatre in the land he has always loved.

My love and best wishes to you, Frank, and heartfelt congratulations.

60. A CULTURE VALUABLE IN THE WORLD

In 1991 and 1992 when I was working with the West Indian Commission a feature of many of the presentations made by scores of experts and academics and businessmen and educators was how often they cited other countries as influences we needed to recall or examples we should strive to emulate. The Commission was constantly hearing about a dominant American influence, the New Europe, the Japanese example, the dynamic image of the Asian tigers, the Singapore model. Now, of course, people enthuse over the world-shaking dynamism of China and India.

During the Commission hearings years ago I remember after a while wondering if all the experts were overdoing it a bit since I was quite sure very few of the presenters really found the ways of life in most of these countries preferable to our own. Did we, then, have nothing for others to emulate?

Well, I am glad to say that in its discussions the West Indian Commission concluded that, while such presentations certainly gave useful reference points for appraising our future, they also underestimated our own worth - that we in the West Indies possess our own singular potential and it was by no means impossible, if we worked hard to get it right, for us to propose for others a West Indian model for the 21st Century.

Here is how the West Indian Commission described such a model:

"It must, first of all, be a community which has learned enough about industrial and business efficiency to generate the sort of economic dynamism which will yield the material sufficiency which people expect and deserve. That sufficiency of material return must not simply be numbers in an index of averages concealing great disparities in the distribution of goods and social services. The institutions of government, intervening as little as possible in the processes of wealth generation, must be alert and efficient in ensuring that people at every level share in the basic goods, essential serv-

ices, and educational and employment opportunities which the economy produces...Basic to this is the example of smoothly working democratic institutions where the full range of human rights is protected as a matter of course. The world at large does not take such an achievement for granted. It is a special West Indian strength which we must be at pains to preserve.

And within that framework we may offer what is uniquely our creation. It is rare, especially in the still developing world - and it may become rarer yet as the decade advances - that a people of many nationalities, many races, many faiths, and different cultural heritages stay together, and indeed grow closer, in a single community. It is an example that is likely to be valuable in the world. The talents which have emerged from our amalgam of peoples have already made a telling and universal mark."

That was the view of the West Indian Commission. I think they were right. Indeed I hope and pray and believe in such a West Indian model for the rest of the world. I hope because I am an optimist and think we can teach the world. I pray because I think we will need some heavenly blessing in a hard task. But in the end I profoundly believe because I think we already hold enough in common to secure an undivided future together.

We enjoy a great variety of people, cultures and nationalities in the West Indies but the variety is not divisive in any crucial sense. There is no fatal remoteness of experience or the spirit that condemns us never to come together and stay together as a nation. Indeed, we have more cause to be one - more of a subtly sensed brotherhood - than many who are already one in the league of nations.

I think of an image which is a favourite of mine. Katha is the Indian name for a kind of quilted patchwork made from coloured rags of cloth. To an Indian it has a special mystical meaning: it signifies that what was once in shreds is now whole again, just as man's *"little rag of life is of no account until it has been joined to the Supreme Being and so transformed*." Perhaps we can take the imagery in another way. In the patchwork quilt of the West Indies many kinds of fabric go to make up the pattern. Without all the bits of fabric the quilt loses its essential beauty and being. The separate pieces lack special

beauty and significance until they come together in the whole pattern of the Katha. This is how it is with us. No legacy is so small that it has no important part to play, no legacy is so great that it crowds out all the others.

This is the example we can offer the rest of the world. In his great poem *Omeros* Derek Walcott sensed the formation of our special culture:

"...strong as self-healing
    coral, a quiet culture
Is branching from the white ribs
    of each ancestor

deeper than it seems on the
    surface; slowly but sure,
it will change us with the fluent
    sculpture of Time."

So let us leave it to time and the accumulating wisdom of the people, more than just the politicians, to sculpt us slowly into a nation which will increasingly be a valuable example in the world.

61. A LEGACY WORTH LEAVING

The nation breathed a collective sigh of relief when the general election in August 2006 was held in calm and peace. It was a proud achievement. I was in Canada at the time and remember getting phone calls from friends of more than one persuasion whose common theme, after the initially expressed elation or disappointment, was that they felt good to be Guyanese. What had been feared as an inevitable ordeal of competing accusations and disruptive recriminations had been instead a celebration of democratic maturity.

The aftermath continued to lift the heart - acceptance of the results by the losers, assurances of fair and inclusive governance by the winners. The mood of political détente has continued. It gives more hope for the future of the country than I can remember in a very long time. For the time being compulsive backbiting has ceased to feature. A spirit of constructive give and take lingers in the post-election air like a blessing. The realization seems to have dawned, but will it sink in deeply, that in the absence of public peace it is very hard to cultivate private virtues.

A large part of what is needed is to embed in the body politic this newfound habit of civility. And in the context of this need let us consider the life and example of one of the most sensible, open-minded and civilized men who ever lived. Anton Chekhov, born in 1860, became a doctor and practised his profession devotedly. But he also turned himself into one of Russia's greatest writers. In a wonderfully creative life of only 44 years he was able to divide his time between *"medicine...my lawful wife and literature...my mistress*." He wrote perfect stories of shining lucidity and his plays - the celebrated *Uncle Vanya, The Seagull* and *The Cherry Orchard* amongst others - revolutionized the theatre of his day and have provided succeeding generations with vivid insights into how men and women suffer and exult, love and hate, when living even the most ordinary and uneventful lives: *"People*," Chekhov pointed out, *"eat their dinner, just eat their dinner, and in the*

meantime their happiness is taking shape or their lives are being destroyed."

As a doctor, Chekhov tended thousands of peasants in a clinic on his estate, planned and helped build schools, endowed libraries, and scraped together money and support for a multitude of other causes. This first-hand involvement with day-to-day practicalities made him scornful of all-or-nothing recipes for universal salvation. He was once accused of writing a story that lacked "ideology." *"But doesn't the story,"* Chekhov responded, *"protest against lying from start to finish? Isn't that an ideology?"*

In a famous letter to the editor of a journal which had begun to publish his work he outlined his credo: *"I am neither liberal, nor conservative, nor gradualist, nor monk, nor indifferentist. I would like to be a free artist and nothing else. ...Pharisaism, dullwittedness, and tyranny reign not only in merchants' homes and police stations. I see them in science, in literature, and among the younger generation. That is why I cultivate no particular predilection for policemen, butchers, scientists, writers or the younger generation. I look upon tags and labels as prejudices. My holy of holies is the human body, health, intelligence, talent, inspiration, love and...freedom from violence and lies, no matter what form the latter two take."*

What shines through in Chekhov's life is his plain humanity, the allowance he made for peoples' weaknesses and foibles, the understanding he showed for beliefs he did not share, the respect he cultivated for the personalities of others, his disposition to seek arrangements which brought out the best in all whom he encountered.

Would that the spirit of Anton Chekhov might preside amidst the tense debates which will undoubtedly resume in Guyana. The civility which he stood for all his life is going to have to prevail in such debates. And in this connection my thesaurus gives a wide range of words and phrases associated with civility: common courtesy, considerate attention, graciousness, politeness, tactfulness, diplomacy, amiability, obligingness, benevolence, agreeableness, kind words, generosity of spirit, respect, attentiveness, good temper, amity, peacefulness, fair-mindedness – to name some of them. A tall order, to say the least, in the context of the old Guyana.

Détente is truce not permanent peace. On all sides the effort to entrench the gains surrounding the remarkable election success must not slacken. The losers cannot expect miracles of sudden and comprehensive national accommodation nor, however, will they want to wait interminably for more than lip service.

On the other hand, I have no doubt that the main burden of seeking to entrench the elements of a lasting accommodation will fall on the winners of the election, the party in Government now for nearly a generation. It is they who must take the main initiatives, show the greater magnanimity, rise above rebuffs and never seek refuge in a majoritarian redoubt.

And it is, of course, the leader of the winning side who bears the chief responsibility, by far, to ensure that the process of accommodation does not slacken. It will not be easy. It will be very hard. The personal qualities required are not at all ordinary: the ability to forget past opposition and even insults, the capacity to soothe injured feelings and disappointed hopes which, if left untended, might harden into permanent hostility, the willingness to assume responsibility for the failures and bad-mindedness of subordinates and correct them, the rare ability to share credit comfortably, the largeness of spirit it takes to admit mistakes readily and learn from those mistakes, the determination to find the time to keep trying again and again. All that is hard but it is not impossible if the President wishes to leave a great legacy.

62. A WORLD WITHOUT CONSCIENCE

I have been asked why I criticize the way rich countries treat poor countries in this era of the much acclaimed new world order. Why do I keep writing about a "new tyranny" and the rabid cult of "free trade fundamentalism?"

Is this not a case of biting the hand that feeds you? Look at the aid rich countries give to poor countries, look at all the debt forgiveness. Poor countries wasted so much money in the past, it is right and proper that they be kept on a tight leash now lest they fall back into their bad old profligate and corrupt ways. Structural adjustment programmes are the strong medicine these poor unfortunate patients need. They deserve such strictness, it is for their own good.

In any case, it is said, private foreign investment will only enter countries if the new rules are abjectly accepted and we are all supposed to know that without this inflow of investment we are doomed.

It brings gall into my throat to hear these slick and much repeated reasons for imposing a system which simply seeks to organise the world in a way which will go on benefiting the rich and strong and continue disgracefully neglecting the poor and the weak. It makes me almost as sick as it does to hear the fanatics of the new free trade religion proclaim the glorious and inevitable triumph of market forces in a global economy where only the "efficient" and the "competitive" will have a place in the sun.

It is truly sickening. I once received a letter from Father Michael Campbell-Johnson, that great priest whose work for the wretched of the earth verges on the legendary. Guyanese will remember well his stay here. He is in El Salvador where he is in charge of the Jesuit Development Service among other responsibilities. What he wrote from his standpoint in the midst of the desperately poverty-stricken expressed infinitely better than I ever could the true nature of what is going on in the world:

"I sometimes wonder about the whole process of third-world N.G.O.s financed by first-world funding agencies slaving away to bring a modicum of prosperity or development to small pockets of poor and oppressed people around the globe. On the whole both the N.G.O.s and agencies do a good job ensuring that the money goes where it is most needed and is spent cost-effectively in an attempt to promote sustainable self-development. But all the funding added together is a mere drop in the ocean when compared to the massive amounts being plundered from the third world in a deliberate and systematic manner through unjust market structures, international financial institutions or multinational corporations. The so-called aid from first world countries to those in the third world is one of the major myths of our time, a lie presented in a hundred ways to disguise the truth of what is really happening: namely, that the aid is flowing in the other direction; that wealthy nations are continuing to live off the poor and exploit them with impunity. One sometimes wonders if the aid-giving agencies and N.G.O.s are anything more than a sop to the conscience of hard-bitten governments or corrupt elites whose sole concern is to milk the cow to the last drop. The wealthy and powerful in both worlds seem to be saying: yes, we want justice and a better life for the poor provided that present power structures don't change and our living standards are not threatened. I am reminded of something Gandhi is supposed to have said on the eve of India's independence from Britain when asked if India would attain British standards of living. "It took Britain half the resources of this planet to achieve its prosperity. How many planets will a country like India require?" In the meantime, one goes battling on in one's own little corner, hoping to help a handful."

And in another passage he wrote of *"struggling third-world countries swept over by the tide of free market reforms (so called) imposed by international financial agencies and Western governments."*

"The policies of privatization and deregulation, centrepieces of what used to be known in Europe as Thatcherism and in the US as Reaganomics, were seen as universal panaceas by the political Right after the collapse of communism. And they are still stipulated as conditions for aid, trade or credit. The fruits of unbridled economic liberalism, roundly condemned over 100 years ago by Pope Leo XIII

in the first "social" encyclincal, are becoming increasingly obvious and difficult to hide. Just as the citizens of the former Soviet Union and its satellites in Eastern Europe have seen capitalism bringing in corruption, crime and growing inequality, so in El Salvador workers' demonstrations and union marches protesting the laying-off of thousands of state employees and rocketing prices for basic commodities have been repressed by tear gas and brute force. Visitors to El Salvador, including the Pope, praise the achievement of peace and democracy. But these are the delusions of a few. For the poor, the majority, neither exist: only the law of the jungle, the survival of the fittest."

In a recent letter Father Campbell-Johnson amplifies the argument. He calls attention to the writings of Ignacio Ellacuria, Jesuit theologian and Rector of the University in San Salvador when he was murdered by right-wing extremists. Ellacuria eloquently rejected the direction in which the world is being driven without any real regard for the poor and the weak.

First it is based on a self-seeking materialism that runs counter to Gospel principles. *"The civilization of wealth and of capital is the one that, in the final analysis, proposes the private accumulation of the greatest possible capital on the part of individuals, groups, multinationals, states or groups of states as the fundamental basis of development, and individuals' or families' possessive accumulation of the most possible wealth as the fundamental basis for their own security and for the possibility of ever growing consumption as the basis of their own happiness."*

Secondly the system, even if it were desirable, which it is not, is a false solution since the world doesn't possess and never can possess sufficient resources for everyone to live like Europeans or North Americans. *"If the behaviour and even the ideal of a few cannot become the behaviour and the reality of the greater part of humanity, that behaviour and that ideal cannot be said to be moral or even human, all the more so if the enjoyment of a few is at the cost of depriving the rest. In our world, the practical ideal of Western civilization is not universalizable, not even materially, since there are not enough material resources on earth today to let all countries achieve the same level of production and consumption as that of the countries called wealthy, whose total popu-*

lation is less than 25 percent of humanity."

The saddest thing in the world is that the new and sole masters of our destiny can exultantly exclaim *"There is no alternative!"* and find that there are few to say otherwise. Future historians will not treat this grim age very kindly.

63. HOW DUTY IS BEST DISCHARGED

Whenever you hear that a Committee has been set up, reach for your worry beads. The overwhelming majority of Committees simply dilute the responsibility which individuals have to get things done properly and quickly. It is absurd, for instance, as I once saw done in a public utility, to establish a Committee to investigate and eliminate waste. Is that not the everyday responsibility of individual managers and employees? A Committee publicized as performing that function will simply give an excuse to managers to set aside their own responsibility and leave it to the Committee.

Nearly 60 years ago a German scientist named Ringelmann asked workers to pull as hard as they could on a rope attached to a meter that measured the strength of their efforts. Subjects worked alone and in groups of two, three and eight. As group size increased the amount of effort by each person dropped. One person pulling alone exerted an average of 63 kg of force. This dropped to 53 kg per person in groups of three and 31 kg in groups of eight. The greater the number of people performing the task, the less effort each one applied. This is sometimes called social loafing. Each group member feels the others will take up slack, resulting in reduced effort by each individual. Anyone in charge of anything should remember the Ringelmann effect whenever he or she thinks of setting up a Committee, Working Group, or Task Force.

The golden rule for getting things done is absolutely clear: *"Whenever one person is found adequate to the discharge of a duty by close application, it is worse executed by two persons, and scarcely done at all if more are employed thereon."* If properly applied this rule will at once eliminate 90 percent of all Committees, Working Groups and Task Forces – and good riddance. The main aim of most Committees is to cause delay. The application of the golden rule also has the salutary effect of identifying clearly where responsibility lies in getting action taken. When individuals are made specifically accountable, action automatically speeds up. On Ringelmann's rope, when eight men

pulled, none was responsible for the loss of leverage.

One reason why Committees are to be avoided like the plague is that they produce meetings as fast as rabbits in rut breed. And meetings are notorious engines for wasting time.

Most meetings serve absolutely no practical purpose whatsoever. They last too long. They take up the time of executives who should be getting on with actually getting things done. They are summoned more often than not because no one can think of anything better to do and calling a meeting at least gives the impression of doing something. Most of them are perfect examples of inbreeding: that is, kindred spirits fertilizing each other with ideas already bred deep within the group that is having the meeting.

Too many meetings consist simply of people called together to tell each other what they are planning to do which wastes time that could otherwise be used in doing what is being talked about. If athletes were bureaucrats they would spend all their time at meetings discussing how to train and how to run and they would never win a race. A huge number of meetings are held simply so that people can justify their existence, inflate their self-importance, excuse their mistakes, and exchange stale opinions. Perhaps most unhealthily of all, decisions emerging from meetings are too often based on the views of the strongest personality, not the clearest thinker. It is far better for the advice of the clearest thinker to prevail and then allow the strongest personality to take action – but meetings are no good at achieving that result.

My strong advice to any organization, including Government, is not to kick problems sideways by setting up one Committee, Working Group or Task Force after another when difficult decisions loom. Stagnation and failure lie in that direction. And inculcate in all the habit of hatred for time-consuming meetings. In this connection I have a practical suggestion to make which I have recommended before.

Take a lead from British royalty. When the Queen holds meetings of her Privy Council all remain standing. So Let President Jagdeo decree that henceforth all those attending meetings in the public service must stand throughout. That should save a few million wasted man-hours a year. And the decree should certainly not be limited to the public service – apply it to all the nation and watch how fast we progress.

64. GOLDEN ORCHIDS

I suppose it is getting older that brings this on but I have come to the conclusion in a long life that the high dramas of public events – the summits of great men who think they control events, the ribbon-cutting celebrations of immense enterprises, the coronations of Presidents and the inauguration of Parliaments, the inflated pageants of festivals and carnivals and celebrity occasions – fade into inconsequence compared with the quiet satisfactions of private life.

The realization that grand events, man's ceaseless manoeuvrings for power and position, are basically boring and unsatisfying increases with age in almost exact step with a growing liking for the simple, uncomplicated peace and beauty, for instance, of the garden at our home, filled with hummingbirds, on a golden afternoon turning into moon-filled night or a visit to the forested, windswept banks of the great Essequibo.

If you have seen a kingfisher dart and swerve and dip on a Guyana river or red-water creek you will know what I mean. Mary Oliver's poem describes a kind of perfection.

'The Kingfisher'

The kingfisher rises out of the black wave
like a blue flower, in his beak
he carries a silver leaf, I think this is
the prettiest world – so long as you don't mind
a little dying, how could there be a day in your whole life
that doesn't have its splash of happiness?
There are more fish than there are leaves
on a thousand trees, and anyway the kingfisher
wasn't born to think about it, or anything else.
When the wave snaps shut over his blue head, the water
remains water – hunger is the only story
he has ever heard in his life that he could believe.
I don't say he's right. Neither

do I say he's wrong. Religiously he swallows the silver leaf
with its broken red river, and with a rough and easy cry
I couldn't rouse out of my thoughtful body
if my life depended on it, he swings back
over the bright sea to do the same thing, to do it
(as I long to do something, anything) perfectly.

Lately I read an extract from the journal of Edmond de Goncourt which struck me as measuring what is important in life very well. He stayed at home when one of the 19th Century's great, culminating events was taking place outside his window in all its splendour and public clamour – the Paris Memorial Exhibition of 1899 – and he wrote:

"In front of me, a plate of strawberries. Besides the plate, in a rock-crystal flask, a Richardson rosebud, yellow edged with white. Upstairs, awaiting me in my darkened bedroom, a glass of Martell brandy and my bed turned down for a siesta of light and hazy slumbers. And, deep inside me a feeling of inexpressible scorn for all that trundling activity going on outside – the cabs, the omnibuses, the drays, the trams, and the carts, taking people to the Exhibition."

The last few weeks have seen in our garden, shining on the dark tree-boughs, cascading over the fence, a shower of golden orchids in astonishing profusion. It is a gift of beauty beyond price or fame and day after day our lives are enriched by this matchless display. What event manipulated by kings or clowns could compare?

65. GUESSWORK

Karl Popper, one of the greatest thinkers of his, or any, age, was modest in expressing his philosophical findings. He prefaced his book *The Open Society and Its Enemies* with a quotation from Edmund Burke which implies that all he, Popper, tries to do is make a useful contribution to the greater work of more illustrious men:

"In my course I have known and, according to my measure, have cooperated with great men, and I have never yet seen any plan which has not been mended by the observations of those who were much inferior in understanding to the person who took the lead in the business."

Pay no attention to such modesty. Karl Popper's books *The Logic of Scientific Discovery, The Poverty of Historicism,* and *The Open Society and Its Enemies* are among the most influential ever written. He revolutionized how men think about science and about truth itself. He explained with crystal clarity why all rigid ideology must fail and exposed the absurdity of Utopianism in all its guises. In particular, he revealed with cultured precision the falsities at the core of Communism and made men know that such falsities would ultimately defeat it.

The Open Society was published in 1945 and *The Poverty of Historicism* in 1957. The fundamental flaws in the work of revered philosophers such as Plato, Hegel and Marx were exposed more clearly than they had ever been and the whole world's intellectual bias began to tilt a different way, gradually at first, overwhelmingly in the end. It took a little time for Popper's lessons to be learnt and to take practical effect but he lived long enough to see the truths he had revealed those many years ago finally bear fruit in the rejection of ideology and the collapse of the Soviet Empire.

In the main, political philosophers have regarded the most important question as being *"Who should rule?"* and their dif-

fering philosophies seek to justify different answers – a single man, the well-born, the rich, the wise, the strong, the good, the majority, the proletariat. But Popper shows that the question itself is mistaken. Most importantly, the question "*Where should sovereignty lie?*" rests on the assumption that ultimate power must be somewhere, which is not the case. In most societies there are different and to some extent conflicting power centres, not one of which can get everything its own way. In the best societies power is and should be quite widely diffused. The question "*Yes, but where does it ultimately lie*?" eliminates before it is raised the possibility of control over rulers when that is the most important of all things to establish. The vital question is not "*Who should rule?*" but "*How can we minimize misrule – both the likelihood of its occurring and, when it does occur, its consequences?*"

If you want to understand something of the intellectual impetus which led to the worldwide shift of political power which has taken place in our generation, read Karl Popper's *The Open Society and Its Enemies* and *The Poverty of Historicism.* And yet, as if his influence in that respect was not enough, Popper also transformed how men think about the laws of science.

The accepted view was that scientific statements, being based on facts, are contrasted with statements of all other kinds – whether based on authority or emotion or tradition or religion or speculation or prejudice or habit – as alone providing sure and certain knowledge. But, as Popper lucidly explains, this is not so. What we call our knowledge is of its nature always provisional and permanently so. It is therefore a profound mistake to try to do what scientists and philosophers have almost always tried to do – prove the truth of a theory, or justify our belief in a theory, since this is to attempt the logically impossible.

What we can do, however, and this is of the highest importance, is to justify our preference for one theory over another at any given time. The traditional notion that the sciences are bodies of established fact is entirely mistaken. Nothing in science is permanently established, nothing unalterable. If we are rational we shall always base our decisions and expectations "*to the best of our knowledge*," as the popular phase so

rightly has it, and provisionally assume the "truth" of that knowledge for practical purposes, because it is the least insecure foundation available; but we shall never lose sight of the fact that at any time experience or experiment may show it to be wrong and require us to revise it.

In his autobiography *Unending Quest* Popper quotes a poem by the pre-Socratic philosopher Xenophanes which I have always kept near me.

> "The gods did not reveal, from the beginning,
> All things to us, but in the course of time
> Through seeking we may learn and know things better.
> But as for certain truth, no man has known it,
> Nor shall he know it, neither of the gods
> Nor yet of all the things of which I speak.
> For even if by chance he were to utter
> The final truth, he would himself not know it:
> For all is but a woven web of guesses."

66. FEAST ON YOUR LIFE

Too many of my good friends are overwhelmed with work which prevents them living more peaceful, varied, interesting and fulfilled lives. For them, and as a reminder to myself, let me spend a moment questioning priorities and imperatives taken for granted in a world increasingly devoted to nonstop busyness.

Our lives of such infinite value come and go in a whirl of work. We hasten and hustle in an endless hubbub and there is never enough time and always too much information. The hours trip over themselves as they pass into eternity. You will never have them back so regret every one not spent as you would really wish them to be spent.

Life increasingly is an unrelenting rush of activity and chores, appointments and commitments, all the demons of the deadline. *"Things that have to be done at once"* dominate the day to such an extent that there is hardly a moment, or no moments whatsoever, for the far more important things that do not need to be done at all. There are more and more reports to be reported on. What spare hours there might be are spent dealing with the overflow from workdays cluttered with obligations which lead inexorably into other obligations.

The trouble is that human beings now aspire too fiercely to simultaneity and omniscience. Perhaps it is an ancient wish come true to be like God who said *"Let there be light!"* and at once there was light. We want to be where we only have to open our mouths to make a world happen and open our eyes to have a world appear. So we surf the Internet for access to all knowledge immediately, we press a button for instant cash, and the countless pieces of paper we generate at home and office simultaneously yield countless pieces of paper in every sort of elsewhere and vice versa until all the time we have is consumed in dealing with all that stuff we ourselves have helped create. We are constantly dealing desperately with overflow.

Now it is possible to carry an office inside a briefcase: a laptop, a fax, a modem, a phone. Or it will even fit in the palm of your hand. Convenient they call it: the roots of the word convenient are "with" and "come". So now everything can come with you, into your car, into your bedroom, onto your wind-filled veranda, onto your holiday beach or into your forest hideaway. Every moment can be fully productive and cost-effective. But consider that moment Yasunari Kawabata describes so beautifully in his novel *Snow Country.* A man, looking through a darkened train window into the night outside sees on the moving glass the reflection of a young girl's lustrous eyes. Such a moment described by the great novelist represents the kind of time that is vanishing in our lives, a time completely free of usefulness, a time zone of wonder, a time when we leave aside the habits of achievement and the taken-for-granted tasks of life and are startled into realizing what life and the world really are.

The yearning after more and more speed – speed of exchanged communications, immediate access to information, concept instantly converted into conception – is destroying an important part of our lives. We are losing the art of waiting awhile.

Consider the joy of writing and receiving letters. Delay is an essential ingredient in the pleasure of correspondence. "Must do" turns into the relished achievement of "just done" and then you have the added pleasure of anticipating a reply. *"The sending of a letter constitutes a magical grasp upon the future,"* Iris Murdoch wrote. But that old magic has been completely destroyed by the fax and the email. Now letter-writing, and all too many pleasurably drawn-out exchanges between human beings, are carried out in a frenzy of instant messages instantly sent and almost simultaneously returned. No space is left for valuable periods of meditation and review when those second and third thoughts come which are often best.

I cannot, of course, really tell but surely it is this quality of waiting awhile with a purpose that can make pregnancy for many women such a uniquely redemptive experience, a time in their lives when they are released from the awful tyranny of do-it-now. Then simply to be – to eat, breathe, sleep, wait –

is to do something very important. We have to remember as often as we can to wait awhile and let the world and its wonders happen to us.

There is a poem by James Wright, one of my great favourites, 'Lying in a Hammock at William Duffy's Farm in Pine Island, Minnesota', which I like to read when life presses too hard on one's precious time. I move it forward between the leaves of my diary so that I am reminded regularly what is, and what is not, important in life.

> Over my head, I see the bronze butterfly,
> Asleep on the black trunk,
> Blowing like a leaf in green shadow.
> Down the ravine behind the empty house
> The cowbells follow one another
> Into the distances of the afternoon.
> To my right,
> In a field of sunlight between two pines,
> The droppings of last year's horses
> Blaze up into golden stones.
> I lean back, as the evening darkens and comes on.
> A chicken hawk floats over, looking for home.
> I have wasted my life.

The poem itself confirms the irony of its last line. It is not this experience of a world where nothing is lost, where tranquil beauty is contained in each passing moment, where dung blazes up like gold, it is not such an experience which is a waste of life. It is rather that in such an experience one realizes that a lifetime only of dutiful, anxious, unrelieved effort is utterly foolish, a waste in truth.

The novelist Kurt Vonnegut, who recently died, once spoke in an interview about technology and himself. He worked at home and he said he could, if he wanted, have a computer by his bed and never have to leave it. But instead he used an old typewriter and afterwards marked up the pages with a pencil and went down to the local post office to mail the pages to a good typist he knew. And in the line at the post office and later in the line at the corner store where he bought pencils and newspapers and sweets he got to talk to any number of

people – a birdwatcher desperately eager to get back to tracking bluebirds in the woods, a girl he fell half in love with, an off-duty cop full of stories – and he lazed around noticing the way shadows fall and the intricate lace of an old woman's shawl. And then he would walk home slowly. *"And I've had a hell of a good time. I tell you, as much as anything we are here on Earth to fart around and don't let anybody tell you any different."*

Well, yes, I suppose that is one way of expressing what I've been trying to say. But in considering how to live well, and not end up disillusioned and regretful, keep another poem close at hand always – Derek Walcott's great poem:

'Love After Love'

The time will come
when, with elation,
you will greet yourself
at your own door, in your own mirror,
and each will smile at the other's welcome,

and say sit here. Eat.
You will love again the stranger who was your self.
Give wine, give bread, give back your heart
to itself, to the stranger who has loved you

all your life, whom you ignored
for another, who knows you by heart.
Take down the love-letters from the bookshelf,

the photographs, the desperate notes,
peel your own image from the mirror.
Sit. Feast on your life.

67. HARD TO IMAGINE HOW UNREMEMBERED WE ALL BECOME

Which of us does not every now and then wonder about time, what is it, how can it possibly be described, what is a moment of it, what is an eternity of it? Saint Augustine in his *Confessions* tries to puzzle it out: *"So what is time? If no one asks me, I know: if I want to explain it to a person who asks, I do not know anymore and yet I affirm with certainty that, had nothing passed, there would not be past time – had nothing happened there would not be future time – had nothing existed, there would not be present time."*

One of the deep emotions I gain in reading good poems is that they fix events and people in time like vivid frames in the sequence of a film which you find hard to forget. Paul Cézanne said it about art but he could have said it about poetry: *"Right now a moment of time is fleeting by. Capture its reality in paint! To do that we must put all else out of our minds. We must become that moment, make ourselves a sensitive recording plate…give the image of what we actually see, forgetting everything that has been before our time."*

An important theme of poetry is the evanescence of human life, the fundamental futility of human effort: the *"vanity of vanities"* which Ecclesiastes urges us to remember in all our grabbing and grasping for life's favours. Not good, certainly, to be obsessive about this but not bad, either, to preserve a salutary detachment from any strong belief that what we are constantly striving to do and get is all that important. I like this poem by Charles Wright.

'The Woodpecker Pecks, But The Hole Does Not Appear'

It's hard to imagine how unremembered we all become,
How quickly all that we've done
Is unremembered and unforgiven,
                how quickly
Bog lilies and yellow clover flashlight our footfalls,
How quickly and finally the landscape subsumes us,
And everything that we are becomes what we are not.

This is not new, the orange finch
And the yellow-and-dun finch
picking the dry clay politely,
The grasses asleep in their green slips
Before the noon can roust them,
The sweet oblivion of the everyday
like a warm waistcoat
Over the cold and endless body of memory.

Cloud-scarce Montana morning.
July, with its blue cheeks puffed out like a *putto* on an ancient map,
Huffing the wind down from the northwest corner of things,
Tweets on the evergreen stumps,
Swallows treading the air,
The ravens hawking from tree to tree, *not you, not you*,
Is all that the world allows, and all one could wish for.

But also another theme of poetry is the priceless value of all life, not ever to be taken for granted or underestimated or in any shape or form belittled or neglected – and another theme is love and the grief that can grow out of love remembered and never dying though it was so long ago and so instantly gone. I have for long been moved by the American poet Brad Leithauser's poem:

'Son'

Memory buries its own,
And of what now forever must be
The longest day of his life
What mostly remained was a blur
Under too bright lights – so he
Could scarcely tell if the things
Sharpest in his mind were
Nothing but fantasies, sewn
Afterwards, out of grief,
And guilt's imaginings.

Yet it seemed memory called up
(After the interminable birth,
As his finger stroked the arm
Of a child who would not last
Even one whole day
And all of its time on earth
Ministered to by vast
Machines that couldn't mend the harm
In a single transcription slip
In reams of DNA)

A look so haunted, so
Haunting, he would not confess
(Not even later, to his wife)
How it stayed with him, on him: the slow
Flicker in a watery eye,
The mute call – through all
The exhausted hopefulness
The condemned come to know
In the end – from animal to animal,
Imploring, *Please save my life.*

68. FOR THOSE WE HAVE LOVED WHO ARE GONE

Of all the expressions of unconsolable loss I have read concerning the death of anyone greatly loved, the following lament by Henry James, the novelist, when his older brother, William James, the scientist and philosopher, died is the most heartfelt:

"I sit heavily stricken and in darkness – for from far aback in dimmest childhood he had been my Elder Brother; and I still, through all the years, saw in him, even as a small timorous boy yet, my protector, my backer, my authority and my pride. His extinction changes the face of life for me – besides the mere missing of his inexhaustible company and personality, originality, the whole unspeakably vivid and beautiful presence of him."

And there is one poem, hardly known at all I believe, which affects me greatly every time I read the lines. I know of no more desperate, despairing cry of love and loss in all the poetry I have read. It is a poem embedded in a longer poem. The long poem is called 'Hungerfield'. It is by Robinson Jeffers and the lines within the long poem are about the death of his beloved wife which he can hardly bear.

The poetry of Robinson Jeffery is unknown today. He was born in Pittsburg more than one hundred years ago, son of a professor of classics and theologian. He was educated in Zurich (medicine) and Washington (forestry), travelled widely for a while, but finally settled for good with his wife in Carmel, California, where he built them a stone tower using rocks which he hauled from the beach with his own hands. There in absolute solitude he wrote his poems. Indeed, most of his poems are set in this lonely, rocky, seal-haunted North Californian coastal region with its towering redwoods and its mists. It is one of those places where the self-important bustle and busyness of men seem utterly out of place and time. There he wrote poetry which reacted violently against nearly all aspects of modern life. He loathed the shoddy, shallow

consumerism which threatens to overrun the world. In his poems man in his present state is futile and depraved compared with the *"intense and terrible beauty"* of nature.

Here are the lines on the death of this poet's wife whom he loved more indeed than his own life and on the agony of her dying which tortures him without relief:

"September again. The gray grass, the gray sea,
the ink-black trees with white-bellied night-herons in them,
Brawling on the boughs at dusk, barking like dogs –
And the awful loss. It is a year. She has died: and I
Have lived for a long year on soft rotten emotions,
Vain longing and drunken pity, grief and gray ashes –
Oh child of God!
It is not that I am lonely for you. I am lonely:
I am mutilated, for you were part of me:
But men endure that. I am growing old and my love is gone:
No doubt I can live without you, bitterly and well.

That's not the cry. My torment is memory
My grief to have seen the banner and beauty of your brave life
Dragged in the dust down the dim road to death. To have seen
you defeated,
You who never despaired, passing through weakness
And pain –
to nothing. It is usual, I believe. I stood by; I believe
I never failed you. The contemptible thought –
Whether I failed or not! I am not the o
I was not dying. Is death bitter, my dearest? It is nothing.
It is a silence. But dying can be bitter.
In this black year
I have thought often of Hungerfield, the man at Horse Creek
Who fought with Death – bodily, said the witnesses, throat for
throat,
Fury against fury in the dark –
And conquered him. If I had the courage and the hope –
Or the pure rage –
I should be now Death's captive, no doubt, not conqueror.
I should be with my dearest, in the hollow darkness
Where nothing hurts.

I should not remember
Your silver-backed hand-mirror you asked me for,
And sat up in bed to gaze in it, to see your face
A little changed. You were still beautiful.
But not – as you'd been – a falcon. You said nothing, you sighed
and laid down the glass; and I
Made a dog smile over a tearing heart.
Saying that you looked well.

Robinson Jeffers published twenty books of poems but no one reads him any more. But every time I go up the Essequibo and spend a few days on the shore of that mighty, soul-uplifting river with the great forest at one's back and the stars out in that eternal dark I sense the power and permanence of poetry like his and believe that it will have its time again. And every time I read the lines in 'Hungerfield' on the death of his wife I cannot help remembering those I have loved very much and who are lost and the lines tear my heart.

69. DEFINING LOVE

At thirteen, I think it was, I was reading love poetry. At seventeen, lovelorn often, I was writing it – very badly, full of inconsolable sighs and lamentation, but at least I was trying. And all my life since I have made a special point of looking for books of love poetry and collecting them. At seventy-four the search for the right way to express our most life-giving emotion is not over and the best love poems please me as much as when I was young, though now in a more contemplative way.

Look at one poem which I think wonderful as I remember not long ago at a dance seeing two young people obviously newly and ecstatically enraptured with each other perform for each other with utmost grace. It is a poem by C.K. Williams.

'Love: Beginnings'

They're at that stage where so much desire streams between them,
so much frank need and want,
so much absorption in the other and the self and the self-admiring
entity and unity they make –
her mouth so full, breast so lifted, head thrown back *so* far in her
laughter at his laughter,
he so solid, planted, oaky, firm, so resonantly factual in the headiness
of being craved so,
she almost wreathed upon him as they intertwine again, touch again,
cheek, lip, shoulder, brow,
every glance moving toward the sexual, every glance away soaring
back in flame into the sexual –
that just to watch them is to feel again that hitching in the

groin, that
filling of the heart,
the old, sore heart, the battered, foundered, faithful heart,
snorting
again, stamping in its stall.

Chinese love poems, in translation, have particularly fascinated me. These poems are less intense, but more subtle, than love poems in the Western tradition. You can read whole life stories in a few lines. Hints of deep devotion or desolation pierce deeper than loud declamation. A friend once made me a gift of a beautiful book of *Chinese Love Poetry* which brings together the arts of poetry, calligraphy and painting regarded in China as the Triple Excellence. The illustrations, all taken from the British Museum collection, are beautifully appropriate to the chosen poems. A poem by Wang Wei, calligrapher, painter and musician of the Tang Dynasty (618-906), is marvellously illustrated with a jade cup decorated with plum blossoms and dragons:

'Farewell to Xin Jian at Hibiscus Pavilion'

A cold rain mingled with the river
at evening, when I entered Wu;
In the clear dawn I bid you farewell,
lonely as Chu mountain.
My kinsfolk in Luoyang,
should they ask about me,
Tell them: 'My heart is a piece of ice
In a jade cup!'

And a poem by Xue Tao, one of the most famous courtesans in Chinese history, also of the Tang Dynasty, who learned to write poems when she was eight and excelled at calligraphy on special crimson-dyed paper, is illustrated by a lustrous basket of flowers inscribed in ink and colours on silk:

'Gazing at Spring'

Flowers bloom:
no one
to enjoy them with.

Flowers fall:
no one
with whom to grieve.

I wonder when love's
longings
stir us most –

when flowers bloom,
or when flowers fall?

From such delicate and subtle poems, love hardly spoken, it is a far cry to the fervent, explicit, marvellously wholeheartedly poems of Pablo Neruda celebrating love with earthy and passionate reverence and no reservations. Here is number seventeen of his '100 Love Sonnets':

I do not love you as if you were salt-rose, or topaz,
or the arrow of carnations the fire shoots off.
I love you as certain dark things are to be loved,
in secret, between the shadow and the soul.

I love you as the plant that never blooms
but carries in itself the light of hidden flowers:
thanks to your love a certain solid fragrance,
risen from the earth, lives darkly in my body.

I love you without knowing how, or when, or from where.
I love you straightforwardly, without complexities or pride;
so I love you because I know no other way

than this: where I does not exist, nor *you,*
so close that your hand on my chest is my hand,
so close that your eyes close as I fall asleep.

Finding a definition of love is an eternal task for poets, for any of us. It is not passion, it is not desire, though these may be paths that bring us to love. Shakespeare found one way of defining it in his imperishable sonnet.

'Let Me Not to the Marriage of True Minds'

Let me not to be the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments, love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove.
O no! it is an ever-fixed mark,
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wand'ring bark,
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come,
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom:
    If this be error and upon me proved,
    I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

In his beautiful poem 'The Great Fires' the American poet Jack Gilbert writes at the end of it some lines in which I sense may be the truth about love.

"Desire perishes
because it tries to be love.
Love is eaten away by appetite.
Love does not last, but it is different
from the passions that do not last.
Love lasts by not lasting.
Isaiah said each man walks in his own fire
or his sins. Love allows us to walk
in the sweet music of our particular heart."

70. ENHANCE YOUR LIFE

It is extremely important that you pay attention to what today's column says if you wish to live a longer, healthier, more alert and happier life. We yearn to be immortal but, I can safely say, it will not happen this human side of eternity. So the next best thing is to remain fit, well and absolutely alive for as long as possible. There is definitely something you can do about this.

Apart from having the luck in life's lottery of inheriting good genes there are two sure ways to live a longer and healthier life. One, of course, is not to smoke. I will not bore you with going on and on about this. It has been said so often, anyway, that smoking is extremely bad for you that the statement now goes in one ear and out of the other without stopping in the brain on the way. All the same, smoking is indeed deadly and you should know very well without being told again that you shouldn't do it. I realize, however, that I am never going to convince a hard-core few of my friends who will no doubt all live to ninety puffing their three packs per day happily without a care in the world about such things as their poor, polluted hearts and lungs.

But that is probably because they take a lot of good, healthy exercise. For the other sure way to live longer, apart from giving up smoking entirely, is to exercise more. There is the strongest possible case for this. Professor Bengt Saltin of Copenhagen carried out the most extensive experiments with people who have never done much exercise. The results are illuminating. He gave them regular physical training and, after two or three months, found that the blood supply to all their muscles had greatly increased. The number of small blood vessels in their muscles had grown by as much as 60 percent. This meant that the muscles were receiving an increased flow of blood and could extract a lot more oxygen. And the heart, the most important muscle of all, responded by performing more slowly and efficiently because it was pumping more blood with every beat. And the slower the

beat the considerably longer the life. Please remember this – it could add quite a few valuable years to your life and it is worth remembering that, really, a year of life won't come again your way so it's worth preserving, every glorious minute of it.

The lesson is that, no matter how sedentary and inactive you have been, if you now begin to indulge in regular, relatively undemanding exercise – a brisk 40 minute walk in the National Park, for instance – it will do you immeasurable good. No need to play hard squash or badminton or join a football team or enter for the next half-marathon. Much less than that is excellent for you. The only thing to remember is that the exercise must be regular. It must not be in bursts, arising from some temporary good resolution. The benefits of exercise cannot be stored up, they must be earned day in and day out. But if you do exercise not very strenuously day in and day out within a month see how much better you will feel.

And there will be added bonuses. Research also shows conclusively that people who exercise regularly recover from illnesses more quickly; they fall over less often; and they are much less likely to suffer from depression. A psychiatrist at Glasgow University has reported in detail how a programme of supervised walking and jogging has greatly helped patients who have been going to their doctors suffering from severe depression.

Even more importantly, and of extraordinary interest, is the impact of exercise on the functioning of the brain. It had been thought that brain cells slowly but continually die with no hope of regeneration. But recently it has been found that neurogenesis, the creation of neurons in the brain, is possible. Specifically, one definite means of neurogenesis has been identified: aerobic exercise. In her book *Can't Remember What I Forgot: The Good News From the Front Lines of Memory Research*, Sue Halpern explains the process by which exercise leads to "brain-gain": it promotes new cell growth in old brains by increasing their blood volume and cell growth improves memory. "*In addition*", Ms. Halpern explains, "*exercise…….increased the amount of the chemical B.D.N.F. (brain-derived neurotrophic factor) circulating in the brain and it*

was B.D.N.F. that stimulated the birth of new brain cells…B.D.N.F. also enhanced neural plasticity, which was to say that it enabled the brain to prosper. In diseases like Alzheimer's', depression, Parkinson's and dementia more generally, B.D.N.F. levels were low. In people who exercised, B.D.N.F. levels rose."

So while we await that far-off day when some marvellous elixir of fish-oil, blueberries, the nectar of wild orchids and Amazonian herbs banishes M.C.I. (mild cognitive impairment) which afflicts us all sooner or later – and even overcomes the dreaded Alzheimer's, until that day, there is something we all can do to assist not only our physical wellbeing but also our mental health. That great old English 18th Century poet and man of letters, Samuel Johnson, knew what he was saying: *"I have found in life how much happiness is gained, or, to put it more carefully, how much misery is escaped, by frequent and violent agitation of the body."*

Let your New Year's resolution this year be more serious than usual: exercise daily.

71. THE CUTTING EDGE

Any practical person in charge of anything periodically asks the question: *"How do we get things done most effectively?"* In asking such a question what is not required is a theoretical discussion about which model of organization, say socialist or capitalist , is better or whether Private Enterprise can do a better job than Public Administration. The whole big muddle in this area of theory and academic sloganeering was summed up beautifully by a statement once made by a Trade Minister of Sri Lanka.

"To my mind, today...we have taken a Socialist road, but in practical terms Socialism means whatever methods can be employed to improve the lot of the poor. If that includes Private Enterprise then that also is good."

The fact is that practical men have to make all theories work. What yields the best results best serves mankind. Everything else is philosophy and intellectual entertainment.

It is thought by some that large organizations – big businesses or vast public corporations – hold the secret to efficiency. There is a strong tendency to place one's faith in the economies and efficiencies of scale which great agglomerations supposedly give. Big firms seek salvation in taking over other companies to get even bigger.

However, big organizations suffer from potentially fatal weaknesses. Consider just two flaws.

Motivation slackens and involvement diminishes. People lost in vast concerns withdraw themselves from deep interest in what is really going on. Some large concerns are better at motivating than others, but in general bigness breeds a feeling of remoteness from the action. If a big concern is successful and making lots of money the heartbeat of the ordinary employee isn't going to thud much faster nor will he usually sweat with much agony if the concern is just ticking over or not doing very well. To get the best out of any man you have

to convince him that his personal involvement and his individual contribution really matters and this can best be achieved in small groups. The group in fact has probably got to be very small. It is a cliché to point out that Jesus Christ tried twelve and that proved one too many.

Secondly, in any large organization there is an inexorable tendency towards bureaucracy - too much red tape; too many committee meetings; too much paper and forms and questionnaires and interdepartmental memos and monthly returns and circulating files; too many pettifogging regulations; too many references up or referrals down before decisions are made; too much settling for the lowest common denominator to get any agreement at all. Sad to say, in such an organization – whether it be big business, big Corporation, or big Ministry – even good impulses are ruined in practice. Take the praiseworthy impulse to keep everyone informed about what is going on. That is basically a good thing, but in a big organization what tends to happen is that an extraordinary amount of valuable time is spent by executives, managers and technical people holding countless conferences among themselves just to tell each other what they are all doing with the result that more and more they are all prevented from actually getting on with doing what they are so busy explaining to each other what they are going to do.

There is a growing school of thought that dynamic organizations even if they remain large, must simultaneously try to find ways of doing things in a competitive way within themselves, fostering what are sometimes called "intrapreneurial" units. One of the seminal thinkers on this is Gifford Pinchot. He is quoted as saying:

"Decentralisation alone is not enough. In a hierarchical organization, promotions can be won by special graces, loyalty to one's boss, and general political skills. Courage, original thought and ability to observe and act on the obvious do not necessarily lead to success. If we are to get really good problem-solving in our decentralized corporations, we must introduce a system that gives a decision to those who get successful results, not to the inoffensive. Such people will be willing to take moderate risks and will be more concerned with achieving results than gaining influence. These are

among the characteristics of the successful entrepreneur. What is needed in any large corporation is not more semi-independent departments run by hard-driving yes-men, but something akin to free-thinking entrepreneurship within the corporate organization."

It is all very well to enunciate vast schemes and wide-ranging theories. It is all very fine for people sitting at the centre to issue general directives and outline marvellous projects. But in the end it is individual people working in small units away from the centre that have to get things done. The limelight must shift on to them and away from the underproductive and the oversized.

Poets are must wiser than politicians or businessmen or even scientists, engineers and computer programmers – so I will give a quotation from Edmund Spenser. the English Elizabethan poet. (He is the same one, by the way, who spoke for all public servants in hard-pressed times when he wrote: *"And all for love and nothing for reward"!*). A long time ago Edmund Spenser recognize that small was indeed not only beautiful but also all-important when he wrote:

"How canst thou these greater secrets know
That dost not know the least thing of them all?
Ill can he rule the great that cannot reach the small."

72. THE JOY OF A LIFETIME

All my life I have loved sport. All my boyhood and youth I delighted in games. An important part of my active adult years was taken up in tennis competition and to a lesser extent in squash. And I have never wavered in my opinion that cricket is an endeavour to be appreciated on the same level as good literature and great drama. Now I sit and watch sport in pavilions or in front of a television set, I read as much as I can get about sport – still turning to the sports page first when I pick up a newspaper, and I put writing about sport, especially cricket, on a par with writing about anything else.

Nearly every sport holds a fascination for me. One game is particular I once knew nothing about but have grown to enjoy by watching it on TV is basketball as played in the N.B.A. in America. At its best it is one of the most purely thrilling games to watch Michael Jordan remains certainly one of a single handful of sportsmen of supreme genius I have seen in my life. (Rohan Kanhai is another I hold in that handful, Tiger Woods also and another, dare I say it, is that supreme brat as well as supreme genius, John McEnroe). For me an enormous benefit of TV is that it brings the world's greatest sporting events into our homes, immeasurably entertaining all of us, and especially the old ones, who love sport.

However, in my lifetime there has been an immense seachange in sport. John Arlott, that peerless commentator on cricket, summed it up:

"The fundamental cause of the change was honest – even historically inevitable...it was the switch of attitude from 'the game's the thing' to a belief that winning is all-important."

The change may have been honest, it may have been inevitable, but to me it has seemed a melancholy change. An unpleasantness, a viciousness even, has entered much of sport. This spoils a game for me when it occurs, which it all too frequently does. I am much too old-fashioned to accept that com-

ing first is all that matters. Courtesy and good sportsmanship and having fun can perfectly well be combined with an unbending will to win. My father taught me that and I try to pass the word on to my sons. Sport is not war, no matter how many modern-day coaches and trainers and professional managers try to convince their team members to the contrary. There should be an underlying goodwill between opponents in sport, an unspoken but strong mutual commitment to upholding the enduring values of the game itself before anything else. What is involved is the honour of the game. I am not embarrassed to use the phrase. The following words describe one of the greatest figures in cricket history, W.G. Grace, but seem to me to epitomize also what any great sportsman should be:

"He was and will remain the very impersonation of cricket, redolent of fresh air, of good humour, of conflict without malice, of chivalrous strife, of keenness for victory by fair means, and utter detestation of all that was foul."

And if all this more and more seems stuffy and dull and outdated in an age of temper tantrums, the secretive taking of steroids, and the frequent display of gross confrontational and absolutely unfair conduct on the fields of play, then sport's true spirit, at least as I have conceived it all my life, will have been lost entirely.

At the very least the sense of fun which lies at the heart of all games is in grave danger of disappearing from sport at the top level. In such circumstances spectators – numbered in their hundreds of millions with the advent of TV – will indeed begin to view sport as another form of war and the world at large will have mislaid another of its glories.

Love of money, of course, is the root of the growing malaise in sport. The huge amounts of money now at stake in sport at the top inevitably makes it into a cutthroat business. People competing in cutthroat business do not behave like people playing a game in the dictionary-original sense. I am not sure I will ever find it very enjoyable watching a lot of bad-tempered, cold-eyed, back-stabbing businessmen going about their too often overpaid work.

And yet despite these caveats, despite the ugliness growing in too much of sport these days, there is more than enough heartwarming and mind-delighting excellence still to be experienced in playing and watching any game with men and women performing to the limits of their potential. Time and time again games still catch fire – think of magnificent Eusain Bolt. Time and time again games inspire what I can only call a reverence for the holy spirit of man creating beauty under the eye of an approving God. And if that sounds overblown then I can only say that it is not far from what C.L.R. James in the greatest book every written about any sport, *Beyond a Boundary*, writes when he entitles a whole chapter on the subject, What Is Art? C.L.R. affirms that cricket, at least, belongs with the theatre, ballet, opera and dance as an art form and clearly states his conviction that aestheticians who have scorned to take notice of popular sports and games have been utterly wrong:

"The popular democracy of Greece, sitting for days in the sun watching the Oresteia; the popular democracy of our day, sitting similarly, watching Miller and Lindwall bowl to Hutton and Compton – each in its own way grasps at a more complete human existence. We may some day be able to answer Tolstoy's exasperated and exasperating question: What is art? - but only when we learn to integrate our vision of Walcott on the back foot driving through the covers with the outstretched arm of the Olympic Apollo."

Games have filled my own life with interest and exhilaration. They have revealed – and continue to reveal – marvel after marvel of extraordinary talent, physical courage, mental tenacity and sheer joy-giving achievement. I wish I could communicate to the younger generation my sense of the glories that lie in sport despite developments that seem so reprehensible to my old-fashioned eye. If I could communicate to them the abiding glories and satisfaction of sport the whole of the rest of their lives would be lit by wonders and surprises and be made richer by far.

73. THE APPROPRIATENESS OF POETRY

I read poetry for pleasure — otherwise, why read it? But I find all the time that poetry also is relevant in defining or highlighting what is going on around us every day. Consider poems I have lately read and found they express a sentiment appropriate to what I am reading in the headlines.

• One of the most obscene and hateful features of everyday life is the abuse, sometimes murderous, which men inflict on women. A development to be praised and widely supported is the establishment on what seems a secure basis of Help and Shelter arrangements for otherwise helpless abused women. They now have an option of behaving towards their disgusting and brutal mates or partners like the wife of the man in the little poem I recently discovered by L.A.G. Strong.

'The Brewer's Man'

Have I a wife? Bedam I have!
But we was badly mated.
I hit her a great clout one night,
And now we're separated.

And mornin's, going to me work
I meets her on the quay:
'Good mornin' to ye ma'am!' says I:
'To hell with ye!' says she.

• Any number of times I have read of some atrocity here (the merciless slaughter of the *Kaieteur News* people) or in the wider world (in Russia the Beslan school massacre by Chechyna terrorists — *"It is not given to many —the chance to shoot children in the back as they swerve in their underwear past rotting corpses"*) and said to myself or exclaimed in horror: *"No, this is the worst. This freezes the blood forever!"* And then I read Aleksander Wat's poem and see that it will not have an

end, mankind will always be capable of worse.

From **'Persian Parables'**

By great, swift waters
on a stony bank
a human skull lay shouting:
Allah la ilah.

And in that shout such horror
and such supplication
so great was its despair
that I asked the helmsman:
What is there left to cry for? Why it is still afraid?
What divine judgement could strike it again?

Suddenly a rising wave
took hold of the skull
and tossing it about
smashed it against the bank.

Nothing is ever over
-the helmsman's voice was hollow-
and there is no bottom to evil.

• Or I read about the latest bombing in whatever country, in whatever "good" cause, and read Brendan Kennelly's poem written in the time of the Troubles in Northern Ireland.

'Nails'

The black van exploded
Fifty yards from the hotel entrance.
Two men, one black-haired, the other red,
Had parked it there as though for a few moments
While they walked around the corner
Not noticing, it seemed, the children
In single file behind their perky leader,
And certainly not seeing the van
Explode into the children's bodies.

Nails, nine inches long, lodged
In chest, ankle, thigh, buttock, shoulder, face.
The quickly-gathered crowd was outraged and shocked.
Some children were whole, others bits and pieces.
These blasted crucifixions are commonplace.

• As I get older, and the older I get the faster I seem to get older, I find myself regretting all the wonders and miraculous developments I read about and feel that I will miss as time goes on beyond my passing. Every day brings a series of reports on new things in the world, some prospect promising extraordinary, fresh insights into how the universe works and how man will master all he surveys. I find myself yearning to be there when it all happens. And then I read the Portuguese poet Affonso Romano DeSant' Anna's poem and get things into a rather different perspective. We, I realise, are always there right now.

'Letter to the Dead'

Friends, nothing has changed
in essence.

Wages don't cover expenses,
wars persist without end.
and there are new and terrible viruses,
beyond the advances of medicine.
From time to time, a neighbour
falls dead over questions of love.
There are interesting films, it is true,
and, as always, voluptuous women
seducing us with their mouths and legs,
but in matters of love
we haven't invented a single position that's new.

Some astronauts stay in space
six months or more, testing
equipment and solitude.
In each Olympics new records are predicted
and in the countries social advances and setbacks.

But not a single bird has changed its song
with the times.

We put on the same Greek tragedies,
reread "Don Quixote", and spring
arrives on time each year.
Some habits, rivers, and forests and lost.
Nobody sits in front of his house anymore
or takes in the breezes of afternoon,
but we have amazing computers
that keep us from thinking.

On the disappearance of the dinosaurs
and the formation of galaxies
we have no new knowledge.
Clothes come and go with the fashions.
Strong governments fall, others rise,
countries are divided,
and the ants and the bees continue
faithful to their work.

Nothing has changed in essence.

We sing congratulations at parties,
argue football on street corners,
die in senseless disasters,
and from time to time
one of us looks at the star-filled sky
with the same amazement we had
when we looked at caves.
And each generation, full of itself,
continues to think
that it lives at the summit of history.

74. SOUL-NEEDS

Some weekends I travel up the Essequibo River to spend time in a house set on the shore in a clearing of white sand cut from the forest. There great beauty quiets the heart: the peace of the early morning let by a red dawn; the changing shadows on the immense river made by sun and cloud; the flights of white birds at evening; the moods of the great river changing; moonlight blazing on the white sand; the sweep of wind in the trees, the soothing sounds of the waves of that ocean-river coming ashore.

How many Guyanese know about the amazing beauty that lies in wait for them in their own land? No coral island in all the glossy brochures, no Acapulco tourist trap, can begin to compare with the beauty we own ourselves and so seldom go to see.

The fact is that beauty has no priority in the lives of most men, here or elsewhere. Even the mention of the word tends to make practical men squirm a little with embarrassment. This is not without reason.

Every man has a hierarchy of needs. **First,** there is the need simply to survive. If you are starving, you cannot eat sunsets or the silver moonlight and all the beauty you will ever need will be a husk of corn and some lentil stew and a half cooked yam.

Secondly, comes the need for security – shelter, clothes, and a stable life: some reserve against the future. When a man lives day-to-day, naked to chance and circumstance, he will find beauty in the simplest sense of his own security and that of the family close to him. The golden fretwork of the stars at night does not seem lovely to a man with no roof above his head.

After survival and security, **third** in the hierarchy of man's needs, comes a sense of self-esteem. To be sound and whole a man must have a settled image of his own worth and usefulness in the eyes of himself and of others. For a man who has reached this stage of need beauty rests in basic education, a

reasonable job, an awakening to his social usefulness. For him no contemplation of work of art or Nature's beauty can replace the ability to read a simple book or earn a basic livelihood useful to himself and others.

So there now our brother stands — he can survive, he feels secure, he knows his own worth. Only when these needs are met can the soul grow more ambitious. Only then does he have a base on which he can stand to search the world for higher meanings and discover the beauty that lies in nature and in art. Only then can he recognize deep down what Dante wrote in the ninth book of the *Paradiso:*

> "You were not born to live the lives of brutes,
> But beauty to pursue and knowledge high."

The greater part by far of all political and economic effort must necessarily be concentrated on satisfying the first three in man's hierarchy of needs. A nation must as a fundamental priority feed, clothe, house, educate, employ and secure its people. Yet the hierarchy of man's needs does not end there. The flowering of intellect, the appreciation of beauty, the development of men's creative imagination may seem mere luxuries at a time when a country like Guyana is buffeted and burdened by numberless shortcomings. But these crowning needs remain — they should never be forgotten.

After all, what is material prosperity **for?** It cannot be for its own sake because then a stuffed pig would be the most realized creature on earth. Human beings cannot and should not be so easily satisfied. They must always ask themselves Tolstoy's question — *"What do men live by?"*

And that is why every struggling sign of art and the imagination, every show put on at the Cultural Centre, every exhibition of paintings at Castellani House or the Yumana Yana, every signal of creation passing in a Mashramani parade, every archeological discovery in our remote interior jungles, every poem stirring in a young person's mind or sweet dance swinging in the hips of a young girl in the national dance troupe must be treasured by us all and honoured.

We must love the principle of beauty in all things. One weekend, coming back home steeped in Essequibo beauty, I

happened to read late the same night an article about the marvellous English potter, Bernard Leach, one of the very great artists of the 20th Century. His favourite possession was a simple, ordinary Korean rice bowl, made by a village potter on an ordinary, irregular potter's wheel. "*That is as it should be*," Bernard Leach used to say of it as he caressed the rough, glazed clay. "*The plain, the unagitated, the uncalculated, the harmless, the straightforward, the natural, the innocent, the humble, the modest: where does beauty lie if not in these qualities?*"

It is good to end on that note. All around us in Guyana there is beauty to be discovered. Schumacher said "*Small is beautiful*". He might have added "*Ordinary is lovely too*." Just as there is, they say, appropriate technology so too perhaps we can find beauty appropriate to our time and place. As we go up and down this lovely land — we need to seek out beauty everywhere and matching it with our other needs, find out ourselves the poet's truth:

"Beauty is truth, truth beauty, that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know."

75. REVOLT OF THE LISTENING CLASS

At last it has happened. It is about time. An audience, bored out of their minds by an interminable function, decided to take matters into their own hands and exited the seemingly endless and agonizingly dull proceedings. On that day a banner was raised which should not be lightly lowered.

The brave pioneers of what one can only hope will build into a revolution were the graduating students of St. Benedict's College in Trinidad. Earlier this month the vast majority of the students declared enough is enough and walked out of their own graduating ceremony. The ceremony had started at 9 o'clock in the morning and the student walkout was provoked by the lengthy speeches inflicted upon them with no end in sight and the benches hard and lunch ready and the feature address by Archbishop Edward Gilbert and God knows what other pious palaver still to come. A few meek souls who remained were in bad shape, propping sorrow, slumped in ennui, waiting to be put out of their misery.

Can there be any doubt that all functions and ceremonies are too long? Every single person attending an event where speeches are the order of the day hopes and prays that the organizers for once will keep the number of speeches to a minimum and that the speakers will have mercy on their captive audience and keep what they have to say short and to the exact purpose.

Short means no more than seven to ten minutes which is the scientifically researched attention span of the average person listening to a speech. The main speaker at an event can be forgiven if he or she speaks for longer than that but, even so, much beyond about twenty-five minutes risks a rustling and restlessness and much silent sighing and yawns politely stifled in the throat.

The fact is that very few people indeed can make a long speech which is also good and interesting. Oratorical skills are exceedingly rare. It is a self-indulgent fantasy in most public speakers to believe that an audience is hanging on every

golden word they deliver, it being much more likely that the audience is covertly looking at their watches after about ten minutes. An absolute rule of public speaking is that ninety-nine percent of speeches would be much improved if they were cut by half.

It is a mystery, therefore, why event organizers customarily want to pack an average of two to three more speakers into a programme than should be accommodated. Do they really think speeches are fun?

Henceforth, all functions and ceremonies should be organized with audience comfort in mind. The new guidelines, to be known as St. Benedict's blessing, are to be strictly followed.

One, master of ceremonies to be an unobtrusive facilitator and not an important mini-speaker by his own estimation.

Two, a real effort made to begin on time even if honoured guests are embarrassed by having to find their places after the start of proceedings.

Three, speeches limited to 75 minutes in total at most.

Four, persons introducing speakers must get up, give the unembellished facts and sit down fast.

Five, seriously consider how many speakers need to be featured in addition to the star of the show and any such subsidiary acts warned to keep it short, say 7 minutes apiece.

Six, vote of thanks should simply be that, kept brief, and not hijacked as an occasion for yet another self-serving speech.

Seven, refreshments should be ready and waiting and it should be understood, and become socially accepted practice, that the audience, after, say, 90 minutes of ceremony, must be able to drift off towards the drinks and snacks, leaving any weak master of ceremonies and remaining speaker or speakers deservedly in the lurch - in other words, the burden of seeming impolite must be fundamentally shifted from persons leaving early to speakers going on too long.

It is time to declare a Manifesto for the long-suffering listening class. The sore-of-bottom, hungry, fed up student martyrs of St. Benedict have shown the way. Let the rest of us not be far behind.

76. THE JACKDAW AND THE EAGLE

In cricketing terms 1982 will be a year of parching drought in the West Indies. With New Zealand barred and Sri Lanka unwilling we will be starved of Test cricket in the region. One can only heave a sigh of deep regret and seek consolation in the thought that, still, wherever the West Indian team plays, at home or far away, that will be the real centre of world cricket in the present era.

The last few weeks, spanning the old year and the new, have seen momentous cricketing deeds performed far across the other side of the world: the clash of India and England amidst the roaring crowds of Bangalore and Delhi; Pakistan, thrashed by, then thrashing, Australia in the space of a few weeks; and, above all, renewal of the blood-hot rivalry of West Indies and Australia.

In particular, the record books have been rewritten in two important respects: Geoffrey Boycott has become the scorer of the greatest number of runs in the history of Test cricket, and Dennis Lillee has overtaken Lance Gibbs at the top of the list of wicket-takers in Tests.

One could certainly spend an article or two on the Dennis Lillee record - discussing, for instance, the symbolic importance of a fast bowler overtaking a slow bowler at this time when the slow bowler seems to be becoming a redundancy in the game, as quaint and outdated as a horse-and-carriage in an age of the supercharged sports car.

But today I want to discuss the Boycott record and what it means and what it does not mean.

What it does show is that care, application, concentration, and obsessional ambition can get you to the very top - like a slow, determined man scrambling doggedly up the side of a mountain inch by painful inch.

But what it also shows is that dry statistics can never tell the whole truth. The sight of Boycott at the top above the names of Sobers, Bradman, Hammond, Kanhai and the rest eloquently underlines the point and is worth a few reflections.

Sobers and Boycott - the genius and the plodder. A Boycott innings is a ledger entry compared with Sobers who always wrote his centuries in script as golden and illuminated as a medieval Book of Hours. On a sun-filled afternoon Sobers was a beaker full of the warm south, the wine sparkling at the brim, compared with the sensible jar of North England ale of Boycott on a late summer's misty day.

No one will grudge Boycott his slowly built pinnacle of fame. In the class below the very greatest he has been among the best. To his credit he recognizes this himself. What I write, therefore, is more in praise of Sobers than in dispraise of Boycott - though it is inevitable that in describing one the other may by comparison suffer, as even the brightest star can only dimly shine when the sun comes up.

It is a truism to say that Sobers was five Test cricketers in one: supreme batsman, opening bowler, orthodox spinner, mystery change bowler, and the sharpest close fielder the game has ever known. But this account compares him with Boycott and is therefore about his batting only.

Sobers, the batsman, was one of the three or four mighty geniuses that the greatest game so far invented has yet produced. The supreme mark of his batting was that at his best there was simply no good ball that could ever be bowled to him. When he was in the mood, in full song, there was an arrogant certainty in him that no bowler on earth, or summoned up from Hell, could deliver him a ball that could keep him quiet, no ball that he could not with a sweep or a punch or a slap or a cut or a flick, or with some sovereign wave of his bat, dispatch to any boundary that took his fancy. No other batsman has ever had quite that supreme, imperial disdain for bowlers.

You have to compare that with Boycott of the careful preparation and the straight bat and the patient wait for the just less than good ball to be hit. Sobers at his peak put the world's best bowlers to the sword like an emperor executing upstarts. Boycott could only inflict a more gradual and more tortured death.

Sobers was master of all the strokes and he used them at his pleasure. He could cut the identical length ball which a moment later he would drive which a further moment later

he would most delicately glance. He had the sharpest eyes, except for Kanhai's, the most whiplash wrists, except for Richards, the quickest feet, except for Bradman, and the most instantaneous reflexes, except for nobody, of any batsman that ever lived.

Consider this. If you came across a Boycott batting and did not know his name it would take you a whole day's watching to begin to appreciate his value as a solid batsman of unusual perseverance - but watch Sobers, not knowing him, for half an hour and he would stamp his genius on your mind forever.

How many thousands over the years, in countries all around the world, hearing that Sobers was not out at lunch and in full flow, have let their food grow cold and cancelled all appointments to hurry to the ground to see a masterpiece unfold? For Boycott it would be enough to hear the slow progress of his mounting score from a transistor on the desk.

So often I remember Sobers making out of the game of cricket something rich and strange. I only remember Boycott banking his runs as if cricket was a business. I know it is harsh to say it about a cricketer whose art, though fustian, is in its sheer obsessive application most admirable, but when I think of Boycott overtaking Sobers in the cricket annals the line that comes to mind is a line that scoffs at such presumption:

> "The eagle is gone, and now - crows
> and jackdaws own the land."

77. POETRY IS BREAD

Theodore Fontane is the German writer best known as the author of novels which are considered *"the most completely achieved of any writer between Goethe and Thomas Mann."* He possessed a clear and vivid a sense of *"factuality"*. He sought in his work to transfigure everyday facts into something imbued with *Ratsel* and *Halbdunkel*, *"mystery"* and *"twilight"*. Ordinary facts have to be converted into memorable art. *"A piece of bread ….is poetry"*, he wrote.

That is the aim of poetry – to transform ordinary facts and ordinary experiences into memorable art. The task and craft of the poet is to achieve this. It is not often done well.

One of the reasons I like the Australian poet Les Murray so much is because of his ability to evoke the universal in everyday encounters. Here are the delights of being a big name in the literary world.

'Fame'

We were at dinner in Soho
and the couple at the next table
rose to go. The woman paused to say
to me: I just wanted you to know
I have got all your cook books
and I swear by them!
    I managed
to answer her: Ma'am
they've done you nothing but good!
which was perhaps immodest
of whoever I am.

And I like very much how Les Murray, a collector of the arcane, combines eccentric facts into a picture of the astonishments which continuously connect us to history's evergreen, never-ending narrative.

'The Conversations'

The glass king of France feared he'd
shatter
Chinese eunuchs kept their testes in
spirit
. . . . . .

Your brain can bleed from a sneeze-breath

A full moon always rises at sunset
And a person is taller when prone
Donald Duck was one banned in
Finland
because he didn't wear trousers

The heart of a groomed horse slows down.
A fact is a small compact faith.

There is a poem I like to look up when the facts of the world reek of disaster, hatred, cold-hearted slaughter and the shock of repeated terror and destruction as they do now – and are likely to get much worse.

It is a poem by Adam Zagajewski, translated from the Polish by Clare Cavanaugh.

'Try To Praise the Mutilated World'

Try to praise the mutilated world.
Remember June's long days,
and wild strawberries, drops of wine, the dew.
The nettles that methodically overgrow
the abandoned homesteads of exiles.
You must praise the mutilated world.
You watched the stylish yachts and ships;
one of them had a long trip ahead of it,
while salty oblivion awaited others.
You've seen the refugees heading nowhere,
you've heard the executioners sing joyfully.
You should praise the mutilated world.

Remember the moments we were together
in a white room and the curtain fluttered.
Return in thought to the concert where music flared.
You gathered acorns in the park in autumn
and leaves eddied over earth's scars.
Praise the mutilated world.
and the gray feather a thrush lost,
and the gentle light that strays and vanishes
and returns.

I think of Theodore Fontane's desire for "*factuality*" to be imbued with "*mystery*" and "*twilight*" and there comes into my mind one of those haunting late poems written by Mahadai Das in her tragic illness not long before she died young at 47. This is one of that late blossoming of poems as memorable and extraordinary as any written by any Guyanese or West Indian poet:

'Switch Off The Darkness'

Switch off the darkness, sweet.
Direct your smile with its rosedrawn
chariots across my dark clouds.
I need your light, young one –
not a small star, some dim moon
nightly sliced in my sky,
but your whole golden coin
so I may freely spend it
across love's counter in your eyes.

78. WILL THE ELECTION MAKE US HAPPIER?

The debate about what constitutes happiness has been going on for thousands of years. It is unlikely ever to end. Even if scientists come up with a pill which, taken daily like a vitamin tablet, imparts an all-encompassing feeling of permanent contentment, that will not end the questions. Can such artificially induced euphoria really be happiness? Is not the contrasting experience of misery essential to any true knowledge of happiness? Is not a sense of achievement one vital ingredient in feeling happy? And so eternally and philosophically on and on the questions will remain.

Measurement features prominently in the debate. How does one measure happiness? It is easy to measure money in the bank, material goods accumulated, successes gained, power exercised, fame achieved. Yet add all these together and it is said happiness may not result. But most men and women prefer to be able to count their blessings rather then enjoy a nebulous bliss. So money, worldly success, possessions, power and fame are what most of us would choose over any vague experience of happiness if both were on offer. Indeed, there is a good case for claiming that if mankind's goal had not always and simply been to get money, success, possessions, power and fame our species would not have made it this far. Through the millennia, generation after generation, the drive to attain these goals, not the mushy desire to be happy, is what has taken mankind to the top of the tree of life. And yet, though we have made it far indeed, is it not strange that the questions involving a satisfaction we cannot measure never go away?

The debate has long left the realm of philosophy and entered the arenas of political discussion and public policy. In 2006, for instance, Professor Richard Layard at the London School of Economics argued that unhappiness was a more serious social problem in Britain than unemployment. He pointed out that more people were claiming incapacity benefits because of depression than were on the dole. Of course,

since then the Great Recession, continuing to this day, has altered all that and now without a doubt the jobless outnumber the joyless. But the point remains. The British Prime Minister, David Cameron, has asked his Office of National Statistics (President- elect Ramotar/Granger/Ramjattan take note) to examine his country's "*general well-being*" (G.W.B.) and not only G.D.P. Such thinking has its origin in the teachings of Jeremy Bentham (born in 1748) who advocated that policy makers should seek the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people. It is becoming fashionable. The small Himalayan country of Bhutan has gone as far as formally adopting the concept of gross national happiness over gross national product as the perimeter of its development success.

Happiness also appears prominently in America's founding documents. However, the Declaration of Independence is careful not to say that government should pursue the happiness of its citizens, only that it should secure their inalienable right to pursue it themselves.

But people are irrepressibly strange. Quite often people have the knowledge and even the self-awareness to choose happiness and yet they fail to do so. A recent study conducted by Cornell University asked hundreds of people to say whether they would rather earn $80,000 per annum and sleep 7.5 hours per night or earn $140,000 per annum and sleep 6 hours per night . 70 percent chose earning less and sleeping more. Similarly, two thirds said they would be happier earning less and living closer to friends rather than earning more in a strange city. And 40 percent said they would be happier paying significantly more rent in order to enjoy a commute of ten minutes rather than one of 45 minutes.

So, one would say, money isn't everything. But the same study shows that what people would actually choose is different to what they say would make them happier. 17 percent of those who said they would be happier sleeping longer and earning less also said they would still choose the higher pay, 26 percent of those preferring the shorter commute over lower rent would still take the cheaper home and 22 percent of those valuing friends over money would still move to where the money is. It is not now, but for thousands of years, that men have changed and changed their minds about what the good

life is.

Given the complicated nature of the subject and the waywardness of human motivation, it is certain that in the coming elections none of the parties will include in their manifestos any plans to increase the quota of happiness in Guyana. It is likely that all the parties will proclaim the usual litany of promises to improve sky-high the standard of living of all Guyanese. Whether at the end of the day Guyanese will be any happier is another matter altogether.

79. WHAT HAPPENS HEREAFTER

One of the most remarkable men of the 20th Century undoubtedly was King Sobhuza the second, Lion of Swaziland. In 1898 he was anointed future King of Swaziland at the age of four months. In 1921 he ascended the throne and for 61 years he ruled his people shrewdly and well. In his lifetime he had some 100 wives and about 600 children, a record unsurpassed as far as one can discover in the annals of human stamina and productivity. His biography, properly researched and written, would make a book infinitely more interesting and instructive than 99 percent of the dull tomes that come off the press these days recounting the lives of statesmen supposed to be world famous but whose names fade into the dust of history before the eye blinks.

How King Sobhuza died has stayed in my mind. In the middle of a State Council he suddenly waved everyone out of the chamber except for his Health Minister. "*I am going*," he said to the Minister, a Dr. Hynd. Puzzled, Dr. Hynd replied: "*Where are you going? Where are you going?*" But the Lion of Swaziland made no response – he only gave a little smile and a wave of farewell and then he died.

The simple answer to the question the doctor put to the king – "*Where are you going?*" – might have been to describe the mountain cave near the Lobama royal palace where all the Kings of Swaziland are buried. It is a lovely place, set amidst green majestic mountains known as Sheba's Breasts. It sounds as good a place as any to rest forever. But, really, a deeper question hung in the air as King Sobhuza gave his little smile and waved farewell and did not answer. Where, indeed, was he going? Where do all men go?

It is one of the great mysteries. What happens when a man dies? Does he simply disappear forever or does some immortal shred of him remain intact somehow, somewhere, for some inscrutable reason? Since human thought was first recorded the wisest men have tried to give an answer. Their answers range from the plain conviction that nothing survives death

to the triumphant certainty that all men will rise again body and soul in glorious resurrection – either cold dust forever or eternally transfigured spirit. In the gulf that separates the dusty from the glorious answer a myriad suggestions contend. Some are extremely simplistic, teaching that man when he dies will literally either burn in torment or enjoy the perfumed sweets of Paradise, depending on his behaviour here on earth. Many believe, with more sophistication, that the soul is on a long journey through many lives to final reabsorption in the Godhead. There are a hundred variations of this theme of serial reincarnation. Death succeeds death as the soul gradually matures, through many ups and downs, towards a final identity lost in the One.

I find it just about possible to conceive of existence after death in some form of disembodied intellect or spirit, even though it does seem strange that so little hard evidence of such phenomena has accumulated over all the ages of man's odyssey. After all, on the face of it, if something does survive after death, ghosts should be as common as gravestones. Even so, it does seem possible that one day the preservation of the mind or soul or spirit in man will be proved after the body dies and returns to dust. What I find much more inaccessible to the understanding is the concept of the immortal body. Whatever one thinks about soul or spirit it seems better to imagine the body after death as white ash on the wind rather than as one day staging some sort of spectacular encore.

Christian teaching on the body's resurrection has always bemused me. Consider, for instance, one or two practical problems. Our physical tissues are continually renewing themselves, so a large quantity of matter will have passed through our bodies in a lifetime. How much of this is going to be resurrected? If God raises the whole lot we shall be grotesquely overweight in heaven. St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas both solemnly considered this problem. The aspect that most worried St. Augustine relates to our hair and fingernails which are constantly being trimmed in life and which if restored to us in bulk would give us a most peculiar appearance. After some consideration St. Augustine decided that God will resurrect hair and nail clippings but instead of attaching them to their former positions will use them as padding to fill parts of

our bodies which could benefit from a little bit more. This seems neat and beneficial, I must say. Another problem is at what age will people be resurrected? Would parents who have lost newborn children be confronted at the Resurrection by strapping, grownup strangers addressing them as Mum and Dad? St. Thomas decided this puzzle by declaring that we shall all be resurrected at the age of 30 since this represents the perfection of physical growth. Those who die before 30 will be credited with the necessary seniority.

I confess I am a little sceptical about most versions of life after death, especially those literally painted pictures of the molten lakes of hell and perfume falling from the air in Paradise. On the other hand one must be careful not to forego any options as one approaches an event as momentous as death. Remember the story of Machiavelli. As he lay dying, a cardinal urged him time and time again to renounce the devil – to which Machiavelli replied: *"Your Eminence, now is not the time to make enemies."*

In the end what is one to say without seeming either too sentimental or too cynical? I think again of King Sobhuza, Lion of Swaziland, as he rests in his cave set in the green hillside between Sheba's lovely breasts, and I hear him whisper a last prayer that any man can say – making no judgement, but acknowledging God and asking one last favour:

"Oh Lord of wine and water
fire and snow
purifier and destroyer of all my days
grant me this
that when I die
it will be under my own sky
and that You will give me
Your good peace."

80. ROHAN KANHAI – BATSMAN EXTRAORDINARY

Rohan Kanhai is back in the country. The name and the man at once bring back memories of artistry, excitement and marvellous accomplishment on cricket fields all over the world. And when his name comes up it always raises that age-old question all cricket-lovers will debate until the last ball is bowled in the last game before the ultimate Umpire calls the end of play. What constitutes greatness in a batsman? Who was the greatest of them all?

A great batsman, like greatness itself, can be defined in many ways.

There is statistical greatness. If that is the criterion, one man surely stands above all – Don Bradman of Australia. Test average 99.96 runs, a century every third time he walked to the wicket in a Test innings. He was almost an unbelievably methodical and consistent scorer of runs. No one can excel him in the records book.

There is the greatness of the batsman who carries a team nearly alone, bearing almost the whole burden on his own shoulders. Here, surely, the greatest name is George Headley. Other great batsmen – Bradman included – had compatriots in their teams who were themselves outstanding. But in his time Headley was West Indian batting. Only the greatest of batsmen could have carried the responsibility of knowing that after he was gone the team was gone.

There is the greatness that comes from pure athletic genius. Here it seems to me that Gary Sobers stands alone. A sportsman who if he had chosen could have won Wimbledon, matched Pele, run and jumped in the Olympic, equalled Woods at golf. His batsmanship was pure instinct. It had the greatness of unbeatable agility, hawk-eyed reflex and physical sharpness.

There is the greatness of simple tenacity, persistence, long consistent years of scoring thousands of runs at the highest level. Many names come to mind – Hobbs of England, who scored a hundred hundreds after he was forty years old. The

massive Ponsford of Australia. Sunil Gavaskar of India. Geoff Boycott of England, that obsessive accumulator of runs.

Is there not greatness in elegance too? I would say yes. And in my memory the form of Frank Worrell appears with all the grace in the world, stroking the ball so softly, everywhere along the grass, with such beauty and delicacy, that the very ground seemed velvet smooth because the strokes themselves were so velvet smooth.

And there is the greatness of the hammer-stroke batsman, the batsman who any afternoon can suddenly put ruthlessly to the sword any bowler in the world. Weekes and Walcott of the Caribbean and Hammond of England, so History tells us. And certainly Viv Richards, undoubtedly great, a man whose name means massacre on the cricket field.

There is also greatness in a team crisis and here for me the name that stands out is Clive Lloyd. I still vividly remember his famous innings at Bourda against Australia in April 1973, when he held together the West Indian batting in a crisis, as he had done before and as he would often do again, and hit a marvellous 173. So often his greatness was the inspiration of his team.

Greatness lies in all these names. They stand out in the annals of cricket and always will. Cricket-lovers will name a hundred more. Some will name one the greatest of all. Some will name another. Each man to his taste, each man brings forward his own irrefutable argument. But for me, surveying the field, there is still the name which, if I had to choose, I would choose above them all – Kanhai of Guyana and the West Indies, this batsman who had something of all the greatness and, in their total combination, I believe surpasses all the others. For is he not statistically amongst the greatest Test batsmen? And was there not a touch of the Worrell grace in all his play? And on his day, was not his pure athletic ability supreme? And who on so many golden afternoons could tear a bowling attack to pieces like he did? And how many times did he not save and inspire his team in a crisis with the mastery of his batting when he really decided to put his head down?

All the ingredients of greatness were there, like no other batsman. And mixed into that mixture already so supremely

rich there was one final ingredient, a flair and a touch, that no one can define and no one can wholly grasp but which one knew was there and felt it as the man took the field and made his walk to the wicket – something uniquely his own, a quality that made excitement grow in the air as he came in, a feeling that here was something to see that made the game of cricket more than a sport and a contest, made it also an art and an encounter with the truth and the joy that lies in all supreme human achievement.

81. THE RAVENING PACK

As the tour of England begins the West Indies dominate the cricket world to an extent rarely known in the game's history. Since the Packer era ended West Indies have enjoyed a winning streak probably unique in the history of the game. Out of 34 Tests we have lost only 2. We have just given Australia the sort of thrashing a headmaster gives a wayward little boy. In our last 9 Tests we have not lost a second innings wicket which must be some kind of record. In limited-over contests we are, except for that one strange aberration in June last year, the complete masters. It is not only a question of superior playing skills. The West Indies have established a psychological ascendancy which exerts its influence before a ball is bowled in a new series. Even now you can be sure the English with chalk-white faces are shaking in their chalk-white boots.

What underlies this dominance? What is the secret? The captaincy of Clive Lloyd is a factor difficult to quantify but almost certainly more important than any of us fully appreciate. They used to say of the Emperor Napoleon that his presence was worth 100,000 men in arms on the field of battle. That is what happens when a man becomes a legend while he is still active. Lloyd's stature in cricket now looms so large that merely his presence in the pavilion oppresses our opponents and undermines their confidence. Another factor, not very much mentioned, is the superiority of our fielding which is currently a class above anyone else. A third factor is the opening partnership of Greenidge and Haynes which, late in their careers, has flowered into by far the best in the world. Yet any analysis of why the West Indies are dominant and have been for so long must in the end focus primarily on our fast bowlers. They are the key. They are our Praetorian Guard. They have made the essential difference. Let us then for a little while consider fast-bowling, this fearsome art which has given us our dominance in the game.

Cricket displays a more vivid gallery of beauty than any other game. The delicate late cut of a Frank Worrell, the deli-

cious leg glance of a Stollmeyer, a gleaming Kanhai cover drive, the majestic power of a back-drive by Walcott or Richards, the swooping grace of young Clive Lloyd in the covers – these are portraits in the mind's eye that will never fade as long as a sense of beauty lasts. But perhaps the most thrilling sight of all, a sense of danger mixing with the beauty, is that of a great fast bowler running in to bowl. In the whole sport in our time has there in fact ever been any sight which has more nearly stopped the heart with its combination of grace and savage excitement than that of Michael Holding gliding over the green grass in that marvellous run of his? Half the enchantment is in the beauty, half is in the menace.

When it comes to pure speed, every generation of cricketers has boasted its own contenders for the prize. Should it go to George Brown of Brighton who, legend has it, in the year 1818 once bowled a ball which beat bat, wicket, wicket keeper, longstop, went through a man's coat on the boundary, and killed a dog twenty yards the other side? Observers in the 1890s swore that no one had ever, and no one would ever again, bowl as fast as Charles Kortright who is the only bowler so far in the history of the game to have sent a bouncer flying from the pitch clear over the boundary full for six byes. Later generations have named Spofforth of Australia for the prize, and Constantine at his fastest, and Larwood of bodyline fame, and Frank Tyson when he destroyed Australia in 1954/55, and the dreaded Charlie Griffith at his peak. Ray Lindwall once bowled a man's middle-stump and sent a bail flying 143 measured feet away. The argument will never end: some babe now softly at his mother's breast will in years to come be crowned in his turn most terrifying of them all.

But let us give a roll call and observe one interesting fact: Richardson and Lockwood, Gregory and McDonald, Francis and John, Larwood and Voce, Martindale and Constantine, Lindwall and Miller, Statham and Trueman, Hall and Griffith, Lillee and Thomson. You will see that great fast bowlers have mostly hunted in pairs. But – and this is the essential point of recent international cricket – never in the whole history of the game have they hunted in a ravening pack like West Indian fast bowlers in the last seven or eight years. Roberts, Holding, Garner, Croft, Daniel, Clark and Marshall: it must

be hard enough to steel the nerve to face twin-demons straining fiercely at the leash – four or even five, refreshed in relays, make the hardiest batsman wish to settle for a rainy day.

The great question is this: after Garner and Marshall, will this mighty line of fast bowlers peter out at last? Baptiste, Small and Walsh do not to me have the ring of the old metal. But then men as they grow old never think new heroes quite measure up to the giants who they have grown used to praise. So I may very well be wrong. I hope I am. The English tour will begin to tell.

82. DISGRACE AND BEN JOHNSON

I find myself feeling desperately sorry for Ben Johnson. I would not normally feel sadness for drug-taking sportsmen and 9 times out of 10 would support the strongest sanctions against them. But I feel differently about Ben Johnson.

The first reason is I do not like to see such glory dimmed. Ben Johnson was the greatest sprinter in history, the fastest man the world has ever seen in competition. Nobody has equalled his surge of power off the blocks, the fierce strength of his running. The velocity of the man in full flight was awesome. He looked as if he could go through concrete walls without a shiver. It was a splendour, seldom seen, to watch him charge with such triumphant ferocity down the red track in the greatest race of this Olympics. Now the splendour and the triumph are soiled and lost and I for one regret it terribly.

The second reason for my sadness is the special tragedy of this man's downfall. I like Ben Johnson. I much prefer him to Carl Lewis or any of the other superstars. He seems a simple man with no sanctimoniousness, guile, conceit, or deviousness in his nature. As a boy he suffered from poverty and a terrible stutter. He grew up badly educated and never became the kind of man of the world who makes it regardless. All he has ever had is the majesty of his running. The memory of that at least they cannot take away. With the running he could have made it. But now he is disgraced and his life will become a ruin. There will be no flag-waving, honourable receptions, no million-dollar endorsements anymore. Not even the glory of his running will remain for him, the feel of his power on the sunlit tracks, the roar of the crowds in his ears, the feel of the wind, the beating of his heart in victory. I feel bitterly sad for this man in his fall from grace.

There was another Ben Jonson long ago, spelt one letter differently, Shakespeare's great contemporary. You can read his epitaph –"*Oh rare Ben Jonson*" – in Westminster Abbey in Poets' Corner. As poets always do, he had the right words for the great runner with his name.

"It must be done like lightning," Ben Jonson wrote 400 years ago – and like lightning now his namesake ran. *"He was not of our age, but for all time!"* Ben Jonson wrote – and so men said when his namesake ran the greatest race of all. *"The applause! The delight! The wonder of our stage!"* Ben Jonson wrote –and so it was for a fleeting moment for his namesake. But Ben Jonson wrote tragedies and in the end the words he might have uttered for his namesake in our day are the saddest ones: *"Alas, all the castles I have are built with air."*

There is a third reason for sadness in this case. And this time anger and disgust mixes with the sadness. It is anger and disgust not directed at Ben Johnson but at those around him, his closest confidants, men who no doubt called him friend, men who will now go scot-free while Ben Johnson's life collapses in ruins.

Nobody can tell me that Ben Johnson's various hangers-on – coach, doctor, advisers, trainer, manager, whoever was battening on his achievement did not know quite well he took that drug. Indeed, such is the simple nature of the man that is seems more than likely he would take whatever his closest advisers chose to give him "for his good' no question asked. When he left Seoul in disgrace the BBC reported that Ben Johnson looked bewildered. I am sure he was. He was bewildered because he was not the really guilty man. Others let him down, betrayed him grossly. In the TV pictures of him departing Seoul airport he looked as if he did not know where to turn. Clearly he was being abandoned to his fate. I am sure you will not hear a word about his coach or doctor being disgraced or dishonoured. Such men will not lose one wink of sleep. Their reputations and careers will not lie in ruins. Their pay-cheques will not stop.

I have to ask why, in this great campaign against drug-taking in sport, the coaches and advises to athletes are not as strictly penalised as the sportsmen involved. Do not tell me they are not just as guilty. At his level coaches are closer to the star than a nursemaid to a child. They know what he does every working hour, what he eats and drinks, how and when he trains, whom he makes love to, everything. It is ridiculous to think that they are not perfectly aware if and when the sportsman takes drugs. In many cases they are probably the

ones who advise the athlete to take the risk and suggest ways how to cover up. It is time such men are made to suffer too — not just dedicated, deluded athletes like poor Ben Johnson.

83. CRICKET'S MOST MEMORABLE OVER

I thought we would win the second one-day International against Australia decisively, if not comfortably, so I had planned to listen from 8 o'clock for 2 to 3 hours, then have a sleep and listen again for a couple of hours at the end. The history of our contests against Australia should have taught me better. Like thousands, perhaps tens of thousands, of others I ended up listening every minute all the way through to the great climax. And I went on listening, after G.B.C. lost contact with Australia, to the replay of the last three balls bowled, to Dave Martin's classic folk song, "*We Are The Champions*", and to the people phoning in their excited views. The one I liked the best was the man who argued with what I thought was impeccable logic that since the series was 2 best out of 3 and we were the best in the 2 played so far therefore we were undoubtedly the winners. It all made up one more chapter to add to one's unforgettable sporting recollections.

It naturally brought back memories of the Test between West Indies and Australia which built up to that famous climax in Brisbane on December 14th, 1960. My heart always races when I recall that extraordinary event, undoubtedly the greatest match ever played in the greatest sport of all. That Brisbane test was a "purer" tie than the tie in Melbourne in that all the available wickets on both sides fell and because of that and because it was a full five-day Test I give it pride of place – but we are privileged in one lifetime to have experienced two such games of glory.

Garner's last over at Melbourne will be fresh in your minds, but for my sake and yours too, can I recall again Wesley Hall's last over in the Brisbane tie. It is more that 23 years ago but I remember the night well, sitting around a bottle of Houstons Blue Label with four friends and pounding each other on the backs as each ball entered cricket history.

That most famous over began with Australia needing 6 to win, three wickets in hand, 8 balls to go, Hall bowling, Grout facing, Benaud at the other end. First ball of full length and

good pace got up and hit Grout in the groin. Normally he would have crumpled, but Benaud was coming for the single so Grout forgot pain and ran. 5 runs to win, 7 balls to go. Hall bowled a bouncer, Benaud flashed, and Alexander screamed his appeal with all the joy in the world. 5 runs to win, 2 wickets left, 6 balls to go, Meckiff coming slowly in. Hall bowled fast and straight as a bullet, and Meckiff blocked it in a tangle of arms and legs. 5 balls left, 5 runs to win. Next ball Hall bowled fast down the leg side. Meckiff didn't even play a shot but the batsman ran one of the strangest runs seen in Test cricket – a run while the ball went to the wicketkeeper, with Alexander hurling the ball to Hall who turned and hurled it at the bowler's wicket but missed, and some West Indian hero threw himself full length and saved the overthrows. 4 runs to win, 2 wickets left, 4 balls to go. The next ball brought madness. Grout mishit and the ball spooned up high, high over mid-wicket. Kanhai positioned himself right under it to make the easy catch. But Hall in a frenzy of resolve charged across, jumped all over Kanhai, and dropped the catch! 1 run scored, so 3 runs were needed, 2 wickets to fall, 3 balls to go. Hall must have heard the good Lord saying, "*You asked for the ordinary miracles, not stupid ones!*" as he walked back in disgrace. Worrell came over and calmed him, encouraged him. Hall came roaring in again. Meckiff swung and the ball sailed away square-leg where there was no fieldsman – a sure boundary and the match won, except that Conrad Hunte sprinted to burst his heart and saved the ball on the boundary-edge and turned and threw and 90 yards away found Alexander's gloves poised over the wicket and Grout, diving headlong for the crease, was run out going for the winning third run. The score was not tied. 2 balls to go, 1 run to win, 1 wicket to fall. Hall, fingering the cross on his chest as he started his run, bowled his heart out to Kline. Kline hit to leg. Twelve yards away, Joe Solomon, cool as ice in that crucible, from completely side-on to the wicket, swooped one-handed and threw as he picked up and broke the one stump visible to him. The greatest cricket match of all time was over. In the whole history of sport it is unlikely that there has been any period of ten minutes so highly charged with drama and emotion as that last over bowled by Wes Hall in the tied Test

at Brisbane.

I have said many times that cricket is the greatest game of all games. This is not simply because above all other games it requires a combination of all the skills – batting, bowling, catching, throwing, running – and use of all the physical talents – quick eye, sharp reflexes, speed of foot, dexterity, strength and stamina. It is also the greatest game of all because, at its best, it contains drama as good as the finest theatre, plots as complex and intriguing as in well-written novels, and beauty of performances at times as piercing as a painting or a poem. In other words, at its best, cricket is an art as well as a game. As at Brisbane, so at Melbourne last weekend, there was high drama on display, not just simple sport and the players all were heroes, with one or two villains, and not just ordinary sportsmen. It was a day of passion and for a while a cricket ground, as sometimes happens, became an amphitheatre for a performance fit for Gods.

And now the Australians will be with us very soon. After that match in Melbourne the omens are good for a great series. The stage is set. It seems we can look forward to play that will fill the days with something more than ordinary sport.

84. POETRY'S RALLYING CRY

Seamus Heaney, the great Irish poet, whose marvellous collection of essays *The Redress of Poetry* I like to reread, writes that W.H. Auden's elegy for Yeats was "*a rallying cry that celebrates poetry for being on the side of life, and continuity of effort, and enlargement of the spirit.*" Heaney believes that one function of poetry is to act as a counterweight to hostile and oppressive forces in the world: he calls this "*the imagination pressing back against the pressure of reality*." This is what he calls "*redress*", whereby "*the poetic imagination seems to redress whatever is wrong or exacerbating in the prevailing conditions,*" offering "*a response to reality which has a liberating and verifying effort upon the individual spirit....tilting the scales of reality towards some transcendent equilibrium...This redressing effect of poetry comes from its being a glimpsed alternative, a revelation of potential that is denied or constantly threatened by circumstances.*"

I believe that is finely put. But the overwhelming majority of people ask the question - in our "real" world what is poetry's relevance? In such tumultuous, oppressive times as these what is the point of poetry? For myself I am convinced about a good poem's value as "*a glimpsed alternative*" to so much in the world that is a denial of enlightened humanity. But at the end of the day what I get most out of good poetry is pleasure, pure enjoyment in what Coleridge called "*the best words in the best order,*" a feeling of intense contentment and lasting satisfaction that I have discovered a perfect expression in words of some fact about the world or feeling or thought which once I have experienced it there seems no other way it could have been written or said, an inevitable achievement of the human imagination to be savoured and remembered.

Here are two poems which give me that intense shock of recognition whenever I make a good discovery in poetry. Both poems are about "the end of the world" but they are completely different:

The first is a poem by Peter Reading the sardonic, completely anti-romantic English poet, whose work on the whole

I find too sour and disillusioned but this despairing poem I like for some grim reason, probably because it is so true.

'Lucretian'

Each organism achieves
its acme of growth then declines,
the vigour arid strength of its prime
slipping to age and decay -
copious ingestion of food
cannot keep pace with the surge
of fecal exudation.
Every thing ends when its innards
ebb, and it cedes to the blows
with which it's assailed from without.

So do the walls of the world
presently start to implode.
Earth, which engendered so much,
is unable, now, to support us,
possessed of more shit than nutriment.
Ploughs are eroded, the ploughmen
whinge that they've wasted their time,
envy the farms of their forebears
whose smallholdings yielded more bushels
per hectare than any do now.
Worldlings are loath to acknowledge
that the planet, like all other bodies,
is subject to senile attrition.

The second poem is by one of the very greatest poets of recent times, Czeslaw Milosz. It was written when he was a young man, trapped in Warsaw in 1944, when not only his world but all civilization seemed to be collapsing.

'A Song on the End of the World'

On the day the world ends
A bee circles a clover,
A fisherman mends a glimmering
    net.
Happy porpoises jump in the sea,
By the rainspout young sparrows
    are playing
And the snake is gold-skinned as
it should always be.

On the day the world ends
Women walk through the fields
    under their umbrellas,
A drunkard grows sleepy at the
    edge of a lawn,
Vegetable peddlers shout
    in the street
And a yellow-sailed boat comes
    nearer the island,
The voice of a violin lasts in the
    air
And leads into a starry night.

And those who expected lightning
    and thunder
Are disappointed.
And those who expected signs
    and archangels' trumps
Do not believe it is happening
    now.
As long as the sun and the moon
    are above,
As long as the bumblebee visits a
    rose,
As long as rosy infants are born
No one believes it is happening
    now.

Only a white-haired old man,
who would be a prophet
Yet is not a prophet, for he's
much too busy,
Repeats while he binds his
    tomatoes:
There will be no other end of the
    world,
There will be no other end of the
    world.

Milosz wrote that beautiful poem in the midst of death and destruction. Whatever our circumstances, there is always beauty - and there is always good work to do, mending the nets, binding the tomatoes.

85. REFLECTIONS AT THE SEVEN PONDS

Long ago when David Rose died under forty tons of iron scaffolding in London and came home for his State burial it was the time of Diwali and it was night when they bore him into town from Timehri. What I remember best were the thousands and thousands of kindled earthen lamps and lighted candles which everywhere people held in their hands in his honour, golden flowers in the dark. At the State Funeral of President Burnham I will always remember the white egrets flying overhead in the night, illumined by the lamplight at the Seven Ponds, and the figure of Dr. Ptolemy Reid, with slow and moving dignity, mounting the steps of the tomb, gently assisted by a young man, to say his last farewell.

And then very recently there were the ceremonies of farewell for our former and first President, Arthur Chung. He was a quiet, trustworthy, able and good man and fulfilled faithfully and well his duties as President of the Republic honouring his country and us all in carrying out his duties. He was given a farewell of quiet and impressive dignity and now rests peacefully after his labours at the place of the Seven Ponds where beauty reigns.

On solemn State occasions such as this the visual image of age-old pomp and sad ceremony are bound to impress and move us exceptionally. Yet at the heart of it, as at the heart of the death and burial of any man, even the obscure and unlamented, is the special individual sorrow and suffering of a very few people. That death levels all is a cliché which Shakespeare, as so often, expresses best:

> "This is the state of man: today he puts forth
> The tender leaves of hope; tomorrow blossoms,
> And bears his blushing honours thick upon him.
> The third day comes a frost, a killing frost,
> And when he thinks, good easy man, full surely
> His greatness is a-ripening, nips his root
> And then he falls..."

So it is that in any death, small as most or great as these, it is the few people, the family, that matter most in the mourning. The world outside will go on, as it goes on even when the greatest die. The nation will go on as nations do and must and will under whoever for their short time lead. But a widow and children cannot be so undisturbed by the death of one well loved and central to their everyday lives. Their tears are salt as yours or mine. They are the ones whose sorrow will not so easily fade as bustling life goes on.

I have always found it infinitely hard to find words which will really give solace to those nearest to a death. Nothing seems suitable, though everything has been tried.

One can offer a sort of comfort that the death was as easy as Wilfred Owen wrote it:

"And in the happy no-time of his sleeping
Death took him by the heart."

One can make the heartlessly obvious point that death is commonplace and say with Caesar:

"Of all the wonders that I ever heard
It seems to me most strange that men should fear
Seeing that death, a necessary end,
Will come when it will come."

One can offer anger and say with old Sir Thomas Browne:

"I am not so much afraid of death as ashamed thereof; 'tis the very disgrace and ignominy of our natures."

One can offer defiance as in Dylan Thomas's song for his dying father, "*Rage, rage against the dying of the light*," or as in John Donne's Holy Sonnet offer a more subtle and sacred protest:

"Death be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for thou are not so,
For those, whom thou think'st, thou dost overthrow,
Die not, poor death, nor yet canst thou kill me."

One can offer consolation as in Francis Lyte's poem and prayer, 'Abide With Me', sung at so many funerals.

One can offer the stoicism of the mystics that all will be well, all is decreed, all is in order.

One can offer the simple certainty of the old lady in Derek Walcott's marvellous poem 'Letter From Brooklyn':

> "'He is twenty-eight years buried', she writes, 'he was called home,
> And is, I am sure, doing greater work'
>
> So this old lady writes, and again I believe,
> I believe it all, and for no man's death I grieve".

One can suggest that the greatness or usefulness of the life overshadows the death. One can offer the hope of the priests that death is but another birth into life eternal. Or one can offer the fiery faith of the ideologue that though a man dies the cause will never die.

But none of this really helps. In the end, for all the fine words, every attempt to ease the hurt seems as meaningless as death itself. What can one say finally about the death of anyone that will do any good to those who love him or her best? I do not know. Death is the last and greatest mystery. Perhaps, in the last resort, silence is best as silence is best when one is faced with the mystery of the greatest beauty and the greatest art.

Aldous Huxley said that death was the only thing mankind has proved incapable of vulgarizing. Certainly at the Seven Ponds all was dignity and beauty. And there quiet will have returned in which you can hear the wind in the trees and see the white egrets fly. And the shouts of a few children at play in the afternoon will put death in its place.

86. THE DESTINY OF A SMALL STATE

TALK TO THE HEADS OF DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS AND INTERNATIONAL AGENCIES IN GUYANA AT THE PEGASUS HOTEL, THURSDAY, 1ST SEPTEMBER, 1988

I must warn you that I speak out of an abundance of ignorance of either economics or politics or diplomacy. I am, at best, an informed layman. Probably the best I can claim to be is a poet. And in this capacity at least I am delighted to see that the wonderful Russian poet Joseph Brodsky, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1987, had this to say in his speech accepting the Prize:

> *"There is no doubt in my mind that, should we have been choosing our leaders on the basis of their reading experience and not their political programmes, there would be much less grief on earth."*

I completely agree. And if only political leaders read more poetry then economics it would be better yet. After all the very best that sensible economics can achieve is material prosperity – and that, of course, does not and cannot add fundamentally to intelligence, spiritual fulfilment, happiness, security, enlightenment or even the peacefulness of man. If I was an American now I would be wanting to know who has read the most poetry – George Bush or Michael Dukakis – but somehow I haven't seen that subject figuring very prominently in their campaigns so far.

I want in this talk to face up to the fact that Guyana is not independent in today's world. And, again that dismal-seeming fact, I want to suggest one or two strategies which might be adopted to make the best of the situation.

Guyana is enormously vulnerable to external influences. The rhetoric goes on proclaiming sovereignty and independent nationhood and, if done well enough, it even beings tears of pride to the eyes. However, we are not and, what is more, simply cannot be independent in any real sense of the word. It is absolutely no good fooling ourselves. Brave words make

no riot. What is more, hollow words end up making hollow men in a hollow nation.

Consider five fundamental ways in which Guyana is exposed to the world at large. These five fatal exposures undermine any hope of independence.

1) Trade. We have no control of the terms of trade. Our basic commodity exports fetch less and our manufactured imports cost more and there is nothing we can do about it. Our balance of payments, on which so much depends, fluctuates according to the whim of other nations and other forces.

2) Finance. We have no say in deciding levels of interest rates around the world. These are imposed by greater powers. Our build up of external debt is therefore at the mercy of other. This is a gripping lack of independence.

3) Technology. Simply look around you and our reliance on technology from abroad in every walk of life is manifest. Cars, computers, kilns, mills, generators, presses, name it and we are dependent on others for it. In this context appropriate technology is a wonderful-sounding concept but in practice is usually impractical – what is appropriate technology in the field of computers – or, at worst, a recipe for entrenching backwardness. What makes our own dependence on outside technology particularly unfortunate is that the tiny scale of our domestic market very often means that outside technology – geared to very much greater production runs – cannot be found to meet our requirements. I remember we once looked at the possibility of putting sugar in sachets for the local market. We found that the smallest sachet-making machine on offer had a capacity to produce enough sachets in about 16 hours to meet the entire projected demand in Guyana for a year.

4) Information and Culture. It is well-known and controversial issue that we are becoming more rather than less dependent on external sources for information – books, magazines, journals of every sort, and, recently, the overwhelming influx of television. And in the wake of information, or on the

back of it, rides the invasion of external culture and culture values. There is nothing intrinsically wrong in all this – I believe that information and culture in the greatest possible variety should be accessible to all – but the danger is that in a tiny country information and cultural values from outside will completely overwhelm, degrade, diminish and subvert the local variety.

5) The People Drain. One of the greatest of our weakness is the insatiable appetite abroad for our people. How strong is our independence really when we are increasingly dependent on other countries' immigration laws to keep our citizens at home?

These five fatal disorders work away insidiously in the body economic and politic to make nonsense of our claim to be independent. We simply are not. Remember the dictionary definition of **Independence**: "*not depending on something or someone else for one's efficiency and wellbeing*"; or, "*unwilling to be under any obligation to others*." But we depend on terms of trade dictated by others. We depend on changes in the value of money manipulated by the more powerful. We depend on technology created and evolved outside. We are vulnerable to information and cultural values flooding in from outside. And we are vulnerable to the marketability of our people beyond these shores. Our status is one of obligation, not independence. Let us at least be independent enough in thought to admit that.

I know you will say that **no** country is entirely independent and of course that is true. No man is an island is a beautiful cliché that applies now more than it has done in the history of the world. But please let us not split hairs or become too philosophical. The fact is that a very small country with a very small population and a very narrow economic base is a complete dimension less independent than big countries or even medium-sized countries.

So what does this tiny, desperately exposed country do? One strategy that might be tried is what would be called the Albanian option, otherwise known as the "Medieval Keep" strategy–that is, ban all immigration and indeed travel, re-

duce trade to the barest survival minimum, close our frontiers and try to close our minds, go back to the technology of the spoked wheel and the horse, and in the end be content with shell instead of bank-notes as a means of exchanging goods and services among our deprived and narrow-minded selves. I leave that option to be explored by other. My only comment would be that the most wholehearted attempt to pursue such a course in recent times was by a certain Pol Pot in a once gentle, lovely land called Cambodia.

Another strategy, I suppose, might be to make a bold bid to become the 51st State of the USA or, probably better, Canada's 11th Province. After all, Martinique and Guadeloupe are apparently thriving examples of what could be termed the "re-colonisation" or "apron-strong" option. I would be interesting to make such a bid – say next April 1st – if only to see the looks on the faces of the American Ambassador or the Canadian High Commissioner when approached with the suggestion. The unfunny side of this particular thought, I'm afraid, is that thousands upon thousands of Guyanese are in fact opting for their own individual, if not their own nations, re-colonisation. To be honest, however, I find this option so intellectually distasteful and spiritually demeaning that I don't want to spend too much time contemplating it – though I greatly fear that if put to a referendum the 11th Province option might turn out to be disgracefully popular.

Can some way be found between the Scylla of closed frontiers and the Charybdis of complete recolonisation? There must be grave doubts whether any very successful way can be found for a country made so especially vulnerable by being so especially small. But let us at least try out a few ideas.

I am certainly not going to talk about boring things like I.M.F. agreements, rescheduling of debts, cutting of budget deficits, and balancing of external payments. The unfortunate politicians, civil servants, and diplomats in Guyana will have to go on struggling day by day to get those things right because if they don't we'll just suffer more inflation, more currency corruption, more black-marketing, and more infrastructure deterioration.

Perhaps in this connection I should say one word and that is that I honestly do not see any alternative to an agreement

with the I.M.F. It is the only way that we will be able to reschedule our debts and bring in the foreign exchange without which the country will continue to go downhill. TINA is the name of the creature. There Is No Alternative. It is the phrase that Mrs. Thatcher used when she set out on her crusade in Britain. It is the phrase that Mikhail Gorbachev is using now in the USSR I notice it is the phrase that Julius Nyerere used in a press conference last week when he was asked about doing business with the I.M.F.

But now I am going to deal with directions rather than details. And I am very clear about three of the major directions in which I think this small country should be going.

Education. I am convinced that education must take the highest place in our national list of priorities and that huge amounts more must be invested in it at every level. If we have to get money by diverting funds from other areas like the G.D.F. – so be it. If we have to get money by privatizing inefficient parts of the public sector and using the saved money on education – so be it. And if we have to raise some of the money by again charging fees to those who can afford it – so be it also. Our schools must become our best and brightest buildings, our teachers must be placed among our elite. The common factor in small countries that have done well – Singapore, Mauritius, Barbados, for instance – is that the proportion of national wealth spent on education is well above average.

And I certainly do not believe that the more and better we educate the quicker Guyanese will be drawn away overseas– the very opposite in fact. Real patriotism is in the mind and the better educated the mind the stronger and more self-confident the patriotism. Also, of course, when people know that their children can expect a good education then the family pressure to go abroad subsides. I firmly believe that the task of improving education in Guyana is an immediate national emergency.

Self-confidence. Secondly, I want to talk about building self-confidence. One of the troubles about being a small country is that the authorities in a small country tend to be extra-

suspicious, extra-defensive, extra-anxious about keeping tabs on everything to make sure that the big bullies outside don't take advantage of them and their nation. As a result more and more defensive mechanisms are built into the economy, more and more regulations are contrived for checking and monitoring and channelling all aspects of nation life.

No doubt these are meant with the best will in the world to protect the independence and integrity of the nation. But they end up doing the very opposite –they stifle the initiative and undermine the self-confidence of the people. Behind all the barriers and prohibitions we are made more parochial and therefore less and less able to hold our own in this rough and tumble world. I think, therefore, that the quicker we dismantle as much of the regulatory paraphernalia as possible the better it will be. Complete the removal of unnecessary licensing. Remove whole layers of worthless monitoring of public sector companies, abolish the visa requirements for entering the country. In every aspect of administration, but especially in the sphere of public business, observe the well-tested management principle of locating authority and knowledge in the same place. Proliferating controls and superfluous monitoring signify suspicion and self-doubt when the only chance a small country has is to develop in its people boldness, self-confidence, and the willingness to take initiatives.

West Indian Nationhood. Thirdly, however, I am convinced that in the longer run nothing will do much good unless we become part of a larger, strong, functioning, real West Indian nation – and quickly. And I use the term West Indian because quite honestly I am nearly completely disillusioned with the pettifogging gradualism that the word CARICOM is rapidly coming to stand for – with all due respect to the really excellent West Indians who staff the CARICOM Secretariat itself from top to bottom.

All of our small countries simply have to make ourselves bigger very soon – enlarge our domestic market, broaden our technological base, combine our financial resources, increase the scale of opportunity for our ambitious young people, bring together behind one frontier the marvellous common cultural strains that exist in the West Indies side by side but apart –

apart and therefore more vulnerable to outside cultural impact.

And all this must happen quickly, Practical regional institutions must be set up to set the pace – a West Indian Central Bank and monetary union, a West Indian Court of Appeal, a West Indian Stock Market, a West Indian Theatre Company, perhaps a West Indian Senate, certainly a West Indian Publishing Company, must join the West Indian cricket team as soon as possible.

And let us adopt the same year, 1992, as the Europeans have done, for establishing a definitive, frontier-free, really common market as a long first step to political union.

I have gone on too long. However, I want to leave you with a final thought in which there is hope instead of despondency. This talk has emphasized the truth of the saying "*Small is Vulnerable*." But there is, of course, another saying with much pleasanter implications for a tiny country like ours – it is "*Small is Beautiful*". And that is true also. We do not have the truly dreadful overcrowding and pollution and the miserably cluttered and high-pressured lives of urban industrialized countries. We enjoy many more of the smaller uncorrupted joys of living than big and powerful countries do, ridden as they are by furies that we do not know.

The lesson must be that where small is vulnerable we must band together to reduce the vulnerability. But where small is beautiful we must act to preserve the advantages and amenities that flow from smallness. Perhaps in the end our destiny will be to get the best of both worlds – the benefits that accrue from adapting our economics and politics to the needs and pressures of the large world, as well as the advantages that derive from emphasizing and preserving the traditions, the culture, the environment, and the pleasures of our small-scaled, really much more enjoyable and much friendlier countries.

And a final finally. Talks like this to important people like you always seem to be about economics and politics, G.N.P. and the growth of trade, investment and debts, prosperity and poverty, national power and weakness. It may be right that you should have to endure this in your role as ambassadors

and chiefs and heads. But it is not at all fair to you as human beings. The fact is that the world, led by the big countries, has gone crazy with its obsessive emphasis on economic and military criteria as measure of human success. Perhaps it may be the real destiny of small countries to encourage the world at large to see the craziness of this absurdly narrow, shallow, and limited view. I leave you with this quotation from the very great historian R.H. Tawney, in his very great book *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, which I read long, long ago when I was at that very great University, Cambridge.

"Few can contemplate without a sense exhilaration the splendid achievements of practical energy and technical skill, which, from the latter part of the seventeenth century, were transforming the face of material civilization, and of which England was the daring, if not too scrupulous, pioneer. If, however, economic ambitions are good servants, they are bad masters.

The most obvious facts are the most easily forgotten. Both the existing economic order and too many of the projects advanced for reconstructing it break down through their neglect of the truism that, since even quite common men have souls, no increase in material wealth will compensate them for arrangements which insult their self-respect and impair their freedom. A reasonable estimate of economic organization must allow for the fact that unless the world is to be paralysed by recurrent revolts on the part of outraged human nature, it must satisfy criteria which are not purely economic."

Thank you very much for listening so patiently.

87. DO STARVING CHILDREN DREAM?

Those who live in the richest country in the world enjoy an average income of $3,000 per month. Those who live in the poorest country get $20 per month. When that sort of economic discrimination exists **within** countries it leads to revolution. When it exists **between** nations sooner or later there will always be worldwide disturbances and war.

Leaders in the rich world must know this. Indeed, at conference after conference, sleek and well-fed delegates reiterate their most serious concern – and depart in good time to attend the receptions thrown to mark the latest debate on the misery of the poorest in the world.

Every time I read about another conference arranged to discuss the plight of the poorest countries I think of these hordes of well-dressed officials standing at cocktail parties with glasses slightly tilted in their expert hands and a line written by G.K. Chesterton, the Roman Catholic novelist and poet, comes into my mind:

> "The load of their loveless pity is worse than the ancient wrongs."

And when I hear the latest grumble from the rich nations about recession and unemployment, the picture forms of a soft and selfish man of robust health complaining about an ingrown toenail as he walks between the beds in a ward of agonizing cancer patients.

I have written a score of articles on this theme of the world divided between the rich nations and the poor. I return to it again and again simply because it is the all-important background of all our lives. A few days ago I read an article in which it was reported that in Accra, capital of Ghana, four out of every five children are suffering from malnutrition. Four out of five! And Somalia, Ethiopia, and Sudan – all forgo now the... of the Gulf.

It is terrible how easily we bear the suffering of others. If

only for one hour a day every man in the world could feel the hunger in the gut of a starving child in Bangladesh or Ghana or the Sudan perhaps the world would soon become a better place.

The fate of children should afflict us most. It is natural that the fate of a child should tear the heart more than that of an adult. When an old man dies he dies n the fullness of his days, but if a child dies with him perhaps dies some promise of the stars cut short.

And it is not only the physical lives of children that deserve our special consideration. Their imaginations also should be handled with the greatest care. After all, their days are filled with magic, with terror, and with inspiration that we adults have forgotten long ago.

It is true that Wordsworth said in his great Ode, '**Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood'**. He lamented how the things we saw in childhood, full of the glory and the freshness of a dream, we see no more as we grow old. Visions we had when we were young fade into the light of common day as the years bring their inevitable yoke and custom comes to lie upon us with its weight, cold and heavy as frost in the soul.

Once, a long time ago, I wrote a poem for my young son which ended like this:

> "Let him, I pray, sleep soft and well.
> Give him some sweet preliminary of life.
> Do not warn him too soon of cruelties and sleepless lusts,
> The bribery of habits, red wounds, the iron nations' wars.
> In this raw age of jealous, total moods
> When men soon march to order behind dogmatic whims,
> Watch well and deeply love and determine this:
> Take childhood's time and make a dream of it."

I think that still. Be patient with their anxieties which sometimes may seem nonsensical. Match their anxious nonsense with a reassuring nonsense – if they have nightmares and hate

the night-time do as the old peasant grandmother pretended to do in the glory story for her grandsons to set them laughing:

> "She swept the night up and put it in a sack and boiled it and then she took it and baked it and sprinkled it with sugar and sat down and ate it by the light of the silvery moon."

And do not punish children too harshly or too long. I think of John Berryman's lovely poem to his child:

> "Cross am I sometimes with my little daughter:
> fill her eyes with tears, Forgive me, Lord.
> Unite my various soul
> Sole watchman of the wide and single stars."

Punish mildly. And do not punish at all a child's imagination, even if it seems to get a little out of hand. We cannot tell the destination of the voyage into truth that a child's mind makes. But what we do know is that in the imagination of children, in the dreams they dream, lie all out tomorrow, how sweet or bitter they will be.

Sweet or bitter – as I say the words Accra's starving children come back to me and I wonder, and the blood runs icy for a second, if starving children dream and, if so, what dreams they dream tonight.

88. A DEPRESSION MADE BY DUNCES

There is a line in Scene 2, Act 4, of Shakespeare's play *King John* which I find myself using more and more in company with friends these days: *"Pray, do not seek to stuff my head with more ill news, for it is full."*

But I'm afraid that we must steel ourselves to being stuffed with more and more ill news as the international situation deteriorates. The fact is that the world is heading straight into an economic hurricane which will make the Depression of the 1930's seem like a small breeze. Gale-force winds have begun to blow and already the roofs are being torn off in small, weak, and exposed nation like Guyana. The supposedly sensible men who gather in their plush meeting places around the world seem absolutely helpless, mesmerized like animals caught in the glare of headlamps fast approaching.

It seems so obvious what is happening. In country after country like ours the investment just to maintain, much less increase production is simply not taking place. And as production stagnates, and then begins to decline, the virtuous circle, which once saw growth leading to more investment leading to more growth, reverses itself and becomes a vicious spiral downwards in which reduced investment leads to less production which leads to even less investment.

Why is this happening? Again, even to simply layman, it seems absolutely clear. The amount of investment money available depends on a simple calculation – the return expected from tangible assets such as factories and field machinery measured against the return expected from financial assets such as bonds and loans and bank accounts. And money these days gets a much better return when put into financial assets than it does when put into tangible assets. What would you do if you had a million dollars – put it into a safe account and sit back and relax and collect 16 percent per annum or risk putting it into a new factory and struggle and get ulcers trying to make an after-tax return of 5 percent? The answer to that question, repeated a million times, is sounding the death

knell of economy after economy around the world.

And this, of course, leads us into the mad, Alice-in-Wonderland world of international interest rates. It is a nightmare world where interest payments mount so high that loans leapfrog each other simply to pay the last but one back; a world where more and more is spent to service debt and less and less spent to serve people; a world where food and drugs and clothes and shelter come far down the queue behind the moneylenders interest charge. Almost all new loans in developing countries are now used to repaid debts or current interest charges. Such a system is fundamentally rotten and because it is rotten to core it is bound to collapse. Surely we must be fast reaching the point where countries realize that they are now receiving no benefit whatsoever from new loans because the proceeds go straight back to the lenders. And surely developing countries will then feel that they have nothing to lose by defaulting.

Enterprises in countries like Guyana simply cannot raise the money to replace the assets needed to keep production going, much less investment to expand production. More and more time and thought, not to mention money, is spent satisfying bankers and less and less spent on bricks and mortar and new ploughed fields to satisfy citizens. No wonder things are deteriorating. Most of our days are used up attending bankers' buts and don'ts, with little time left for builders' nuts and bolts.

I'm afraid there is very little Guyana, or indeed CARICOM acting all together, can do about such fundamental international problems. Remember that the **entire** G.N.P. of the whole of the Caribbean area, not just CARICOM, equals less than 2 percent of the United States G.N.P. We are minnows in a shark pool and even the sharks are helpless now.

If our economic lives are not to become very soon, in the words of Thomas Hobbs' "*solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short*," three things will have to be arranged in the high counsels of the world.

One, there will have to be a more stable system of exchange rates. The world market has become simply one great casino in which currency is traded at the rate of $70,000 million per

day. And we all know what happens when a poor man's little bit of money is put at risk in a casino.

Two, the vast, uncontrolled lendings by the international commercial banks, which have now grown to such a towering height that they threaten at any moment to topple over in a worldwide crash, - these cash lendings will have to be reorganised, rescheduled, in large part written off, and given in the end a new underpinning.

Three, much more long-term, low-interest financing has to be made available. Lending money for periods up to 10 years at most cannot finance a development process that takes decades. No country, including America, has ever grown on five-year money.

However, to achieve anything, united action above all is essential. No government, even of the most powerful country, controls its own destiny these days. No one can be unilaterally prosperous. The sort of world we have now, a world of competitive usury and tit-for-tat protectionism, must disintegrate sooner or later.

In the end what is really needed among the great economic powers is imagination, daring insight, and real political will – certainly not the cautious, don't-blame-me, utter selfishness of the current mob of dull and dreary world leaders. They, I'm sorry to say, put me in mind of the words used by the greatest of 20th Century economists, John Maynard Keynes, to stigmatise the idiot bankers of the Depression days. He said, as one can say to the whole present tribe of so-called world statesmen:

"A sound banker, alas, is not one who foresees danger and seeks to avoid it but one who when he is ruined is ruined in a conventional and orthodox way with his fellows so that no one can really blame him."

In the same way is the world now sliding, under the guidance of a new generation of just such dunces, most orthodoxly and conventionally straight to economic ruin.

89. DECLARATIONS OF FUTILITY

I see that the Commonwealth Heads of Government have issued another in the series of high-sounding communiqués which it has become the custom to proclaim at great summit events. But this time we have had an extra treat. We are given not one but two proclamations – not only the "Goa Declaration" but also the "New Delhi Statement." What have we done to deserve such a bonus?

At similar world-shaking events they have issued the "Declaration of Timbuktu," the "Charter of Marzipan," the "Manifesto of Capital X" or the "Programme of Capital Y". But this is the very first time that we have had a "Statement". I wonder what the subtle difference is between a Charter, a Declaration, a Statement, and a Manifesto. I have a mental picture of dignitaries by the score sitting late into the night debating whether they should issue a Charter, a Declaration, a Manifesto, or a Statement. Anyway, this time we have a Statement as well as Declaration. We are left to surmise which has the greater or lesser merit – though I get the feeling that a mere "Statement" is rather common-or-garden and ranks lower than a mighty "Declaration" or "Charter."

But, my goodness, haven't they really acted decisively this time! For what do we read? The "New Delhi Statement" says that a special Commonwealth group *"will consult on the most effective way of taking action"* on the world's financial problems, "*recognizing fully all the other international consultations*" which are proceeding on the same subject. What a dramatic advance! Let me stress- the group will actually now "*consult on the most effective way of taking action*." And I am sure they will consult dynamically, positively, and most strenuously. And then, if all goes well with their consultations, they might even agree unanimously to meet again to produce another Statement or even if we are lucky, a Declaration or a Charter which will in turn contain a most stirring appeal to consult again in order to take further action to consult most vigorously.

The New Delhi summit went further. We are told that the

Commonwealth Secretariat has been asked, in consultation with experts, to examine the debt problems of developing countries and submit a report to the next Conference of Finance Ministers. What dynamic progress do we have here! What imagination and drive and iron-willed purpose – decision-taking at its best! Think of it – the request has actually been made for a report to be prepared to be discussed at a further meeting. We can all now sleep easier at nights.

The truth, I'm afraid, is that nothing new has happened and nothing new will happen, In practice all that has happened is that another pretext has been formulated for continuing and extending the role of international talking shops which thrive and proliferate as the problems grow worse and worse.

This is not a new thing. Throughout history rulers have believed that the creation of bureaucracies and the announcement of good intentions are equivalent to the solution of problems. What is perhaps new in our age is that this tendency has hardened and crystallized into a way of life for multitudes of experts, advisers, and other important people who live and work and find their motivation in a sphere completely remote from the real world.

There exists in the world today two entirely separate spheres of activity. One is the sphere of rhetoric, impressive prepared speeches, mutual back-slapping, declarations of good intent, and agreed communiqués. The other sphere is the sphere of reality, cold hard facts, military and economic strength, tough commercial negotiations, payment by results, cash down the bottom line. Each of these spheres function quite separately, has its own apparatus of power and influence, administers its own procedures and proceedings, sets its own objectives, and achieves its own successes. They are quite self-contained. There seems to be little, if any, spill-over from one sphere into the other.

This is why action following summit meetings never seem to bear any resemblance whatsoever to the fine words expressed at such meetings. Look at what happened after Cancun – nothing. Look at what happened after Williamsburg – zero. Look at what happened after the two recent CARICOM summits –worse than nothing. Indeed, one has grown to dread

summit conferences simply because one has the feeling that the beautiful, high-sounding words and general expressions of goodwill at these conferences somehow give the participants a license to go back home and act particularly badly. They are like schoolboys on their best behaviour in the classroom, running riot when let loose outside. Real progress will only come when a way is found to connect the sphere of good intentions with the sphere of practical results. Given our experience of the last few years the prospects for making such a connection do not seem very good. It might well therefore be best to lump all these Statements, Charters, Manifestos, and solemn summit Communiqués into one all-purpose Declaration – a Declaration of Utter Futility – and for the time being at least cancel all further meetings.

90. SCHOLARS ALSO BUILD A NATION

I was lucky enough once to read an article about two remarkable books: *The Poetical Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins,* published by the Clarendon Press in Oxford, and *The Early Poetic Manuscripts and Note-Books of Gerard Manley Hopkins in Facsimile,* published by Garland in New York. I admire and rejoice in the poetry of Hopkins. A few of his poems are of an astonishing, imperishable beauty: I not only never get tired of reading them but each time I read one of these poems it seems quite new, different and better, more fully charged with the inexplicable wonder of what genius can do with words. If you have not ever read Hopkins go immediately to the National Library and discover him. Even the ordinary letters he wrote are full of extraordinary glimpses of truth and beauty in life.

But it is not so much about the poetry that I want to write, it is about the scholarship that brought forth these wonderful books. Norman MacKenzie, the editor, devoted most of his adult life to indefatigable research into the Hopkins papers and the manuscript poems. He has produced what is in fact a completely new edition of the poems – every line, every letter, every correction meticulously checked in the original. MacKenzie even called in aid Scotland Yard's Fraud Squad and a machine named an Infrared Image Converter which distinguishes between different inks and different ages of ink. The poems' text has been authenticated down to the last comma and outride.

The editor faced a particularly daunting task because the manuscript poems had in many places been "*corrected*" by Hopkins's mentor Robert Bridges and such "*corrections*" had to be carefully differentiated from the emendations made both before and later by Hopkins himself. Not only that, but Hopkins had very decided views on how his verse should be spoken and the later manuscripts, with their outrides, counterpoints, and sforzandos, are well on their way to becoming musical scores, with the result that the editor was obliged to

assess every dash, dot, pen-rest and quill-track to decide what was accidental, and what was intentional, notation.

Such scholarship fascinates me. To see how a great poet changes a word and makes a magical difference is to get a glimpse of a writer's genius. Equally marvellous is the dedication and love – there is no other word – that have gone into editing these manuscripts. The scholarship has preserved for posterity a great poet's work in definitive form, has squeezed every last scintilla of authentic beauty out of the original text. Such scholarship is achievement of high and pure quality. It delights me to read about it.

What partly spoils my pleasure, however, is a thought that keeps obtruding – the state of our own scholarship. How to compare the treatment of our written record with the meticulously careful, loving, scholarly care of historical material which these books about Hopkins represent? There is, of course, no comparison unless you wish to compare turgid night with bright day – or trash heap with a spacious and cultivated garden. Every time I read anything to do with deep and worthwhile historical research, scholarly attention paid to old authors and the elucidation of a country's past, I at once get heartburn thinking of how we neglect the records of our great men and women – except, perhaps, in the case of Dr. Jagan whose Red House repository does his memory proud.

But what is the current position? Every few years an expert in the preservation and organization of historical material visits to advise on the keeping and utilizing of our nation's records. It may be, miraculously, that the latest of these may actually have caused some action to be taken to rescue our history from philistine neglect and time's inexorable vandalism. I think we would all like to know exactly what action has been and is being taken. It merits at least a ministerial statement or G.I.N.A. media release.

I understand that the National Archives are in better shape these days. I am sure that those in day-to-day charge of the national records try their little noticed and under-remunerated best to improve the archives' state and status. Their work and what they need to do the job properly deserves publicity. Does anyone care that they are keepers of the eternal flame?

What is the state of the national archives? What preservation and cataloguing work is going on? Who is ultimately responsible for safeguarding and extending the archives? Are they open to the public? On what basis do scholars have access to them? What plans are there for the archives? What is in the 2011 budget for work on the archives? What steps are currently being taken to preserve them, augment them, organize them, and store them with a minimum of scholarly decency? In particular, what is being done, on an organized basis, to acquire, catalogue, safely store and make available for scholarly analysis the papers and memorabilia of those men and women – and certainly not just the politicians – who have made outstanding contributions to our history?

We can't expect the devotion that a Norman MacKenzie has given to the Hopkins archive, and a poor country can't afford too many Infrared Image Converters – but we should at least take that minimum of national pride to do the basic work of constantly improving, preserving, rehousing, augmenting and properly staffing our national archives so that current and future scholars are left with the material from which to seek the true history of Guyana and its people.

91. THEY DO NOT COME AGAIN

Death is among the most ordinary of experiences. After all everyone dies. In this sense it is no big thing. Indeed there is a view which holds that death should not concern us at all since, as the philosopher Epicurus long ago pointed out: "*Death is nothing to us, since when we are death has not come, and when death has come we are not*."

Yet, in our heart of hearts, each of us fears the terrible blank wall of death. We fear it so much that none of us cares to think about it even for a split second unless a death near us forces us at last to contemplate what the extinction of a human being really means.

It means total, irretrievable and heart-rending loss. Life will not come again. Even that good Christian thinker, C.S. Lewis, referred to death as "*the slamming of the door in your face and the sound of bolting on the inside*". There is a chant sung by the Dinka tribe in the Sudan which says it beautifully but finally:

> "The sun is born, and dies, and comes again
> And the moon is born, and dies, and comes again
> And the stars are born, and die, and come again
> And man is born, and dies, and does not come again."

The sorrow of the death of anyone we love stays with us forever. To some extent the passing of time heals but never entirely. I met a man, vigorous and not at all sentimental, and in the course of conversation he told me about his son who died very young forty years before. Even after all that time tears glistened in his eyes as he spoke to me.

Every person, but every child especially, represents such a miracle of potential achievement and creativity that his or her death is a huge catastrophe. Think of an individual's brain alone, infinitely superior to the most advanced computers now being constructed at a cost of millions of dollars each. And, after all, the brain in only a small part of the whole incalculable loss.

John Donne, the poet and priest, long ago perceived the truth that any person's death diminishes each of us who remain alive. And, in the case of a child's death, we are all diminished that much more because the loss of potential is so much greater.

All this talk of death is not because I am in morbid mood. In fact I remain enthralled by the timeless promise of the future and secure in the knowledge that those I love are for the time being well and happy. I raise the subject because hardly a day passes without all of us being reminded of the truly appalling loss of life in road accidents. Worldwide, 1.2 million people annually die on the roads and up to 50 million are injured. Statistics available show that the top cause of death worldwide among persons 15-19 years old is road traffic injury. The World Health Organisation puts the global cost of road injuries at over US$500 billion per year. In Guyana we are guilty of more than our fair share of this worldwide slaughter and mayhem.

The terrible and terrifying horror of so many road deaths is an epidemic, a plague, a curse upon the nation. A child a week is being killed on the roads, many of them while playing or walking on the roadside. I think of my own children and grandchildren and shiver at the horror of any child's death and death of such a senseless, unforgiving, mad and stupid kind.

There is a most beautiful poem by the Jamaican Lorna Goodison called 'Song For My Son' which describes a mother bending over her son in bed:

> "I hover over his milk-stained breath
> and listen for its rise
> every one an assurance that he is alive
> and if God bargains
> I strike a deal with him,
> for his life I owe you something, anything
> but please let no harm come to him."

Every parent with a young child will recognize the deep and fearful love which draws out that unspoken daily cry to

God:

> "for his life I owe you something, anything
> but please let no harm come to him."

The author Aleksandar Hermon recently wrote about his baby daughter's death in a story called Aquarium. It is the most harrowing account of a death I have ever read. In the aftermath, Aleksandar Hermon writes of him and his wife that the loss of their daughter is "*now an organ in our bodies whose sole function is a continuous secretion of sorrow.*" That organ never disappears and never stops secreting its grief. The terrible loss of a child may be mentioned less and less but the parents never, never get over it.

No column of mine or anyone lasts for long in the memory of the reader. But if ever I make a plea for one of my columns to be remembered for a little while I make the plea now. Whoever is reading – do not use the roads in any way that might kill. From this day onwards drive that much slower, take many fewer chances, do not drink when you know you have to drive. Alcohol begets careless speed and speed begets death.

Above all, look out always where children are, look out with your mind and heart as well as your eyes. Look out for the children. Do not run the slightest risk of killing a child. It will haunt you forever. The death of even one more child on our roads will diminish you, diminish me, spoil all our lives a little, place a stain on the nation that never really ever will rub out clean.

92. YOU RIDE ON THE WORLD-HORSE ONCE

Address at the Ceremony for the Presentation of Graduates, UWI, St. Augustine, Friday November 28th, 1997.

Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, Ministers of Government, Campus principal, distinguished_members of the academic staff, distinguished guests, graduates of the class of 1997 –

It is difficult for me to express the heartfelt pleasure and appreciation I feel at the honour which is being paid to me today. It is the great accolade of my life. It is the highest honour and the most treasured praise any West Indian might expect to receive in a lifetime. When I think of those celebrated West Indians who have previously received this honour – people like C.L.R James, Derek Walcott, A.J. Seymour, Vidia Naipaul, Sam Selvon, Wilson Harris, the Mighty Sparrow, all heroes of mine – I confess to feeling a little overwhelmed.

The University is the most important and most active institution in the business of building a West Indian nation. And because I have always felt profoundly West Indian the honour paid to me by the University has deep meaning for me. Always with me have been Derek Walcott's words: "*either I'm nobody or I am a nation.*"

The University adds by slow but crucial degrees over the years to the accumulating stock of historical insights, intellectual achievement and cultural patterns which West Indians hold in common. Every lecture delivered, every thesis completed, every seminar attended, every syllabus pursued and every exam set under the guidance of UWI focuses with greater clarity a truly West Indian perspective.

And graduates like yourselves are the key. The thousands of students who pass through the University carry with them all their lives, along with their formal degrees, the invisible insignia of their West Indian convictions – that fact alone is of inestimable value in forming a nation.

I feel so honoured now to have become in this special way part of this all-important and continuing process. Only cricket

compares with UWI as a sustainer of West Indian nationhood. So perhaps it is not very surprising that when I got the news of this honour I immediately thought to myself: "*My lord, this is a little like getting an honorary pick for the Test team!*" I think there may be one aspect in which this honour has a greater personal significance for me that for others who have received it. This St. Augustine is the place of my birth, the place of the joyous days of my childhood, boyhood and youth. I was born in Carmody Road not many yards from here. There my father and mother built our family home. As a child I knew every nook and cranny of the grounds of the old Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture. As a boy this ground was where I played and the surrounding countryside was where I wandered with my friends.

As a youth in St. Augustine where the University has risen I remember doing so many things that became of great importance in my life later on. I watched from under the College trees my first games of cricket. I played my first games of tennis on the College courts. There was even, I remember, the small sugar factory, used for instructional purposes in the Sugar Technology course, which I visited often and where I first smelled that distinctive smell of crushed cane and molasses which I got to know so well when I later made a career in sugar.

And I remember so well sitting on the steps of what I think is now the Administration Building reading Derek Walcott's first book of poems, a very slim volume called *25 Poems*, and reading on those steps I remember beginning to hunger to write.

Nearly 50 years have brought immense changes. The University has grown and spread so much that I can hardly recognize the scenes I used to know and love so well. But still as I come here now it is almost as if I tasted Proust's sweet biscuit dipped in tea and all the vivid remembrances of my past childhood and youth come flooding back and I relive those days as if they were yesterday. And therefore I hope you will sense how special this honour and this occasion is for me.

I hope you will forgive my brief excursion into nostalgia. Those were such happy and fruitful years in St. Augustine that started my life I could not resist remembering them on

as occasion like this. I can only think what an extraordinary way fate has found to bring me back on this visit to a much-loved home.

However, I do not allow myself to forget that the real importance of this occasion is not the award of an honorary degree to myself but the award of hard-won degrees to the hundreds of students gathered here. All of you with the talents that led you here and with the knowledge you have gained here have the potential to build illustrious careers and make tremendous contributions in the various fields you will now enter. Of course there will always be an element of chance and not just choice in the future that beckons you. As Les Murray, the great Australian poet, wrote:

> "Your ride on the world-horse once
> no matter how brave your seat
> or polished your boots, it may gallop you
> into undreamed-of fields."

Well, as you graduate from University into those undreamed-of fields of life I want to say a few words to you. I will not take long but as one with approximately 45 years more experience of life than a graduating student I ask for a few minutes to give you some advice.

I want to suggest to you a frame of mind you should try to cultivate. And I am going to select two aspects of this frame of mind – two attitudes of mind, two outlooks on life – which I believe are important and which I very much hope you will adopt as you grow older and as your generation begins to come into its own.

First, let me urge upon you independence of thought. Never let that be taken from you – not by colleagues or friends, not by those in authority, not by priests, not by politicians. And I want to explain something which involves language and why it is important to learn to use and understand language very well. Independence of thought requires honesty of opinion and clarity of expression. The three go absolutely together. Dishonesty of opinion breeds servility while abused language twists thought out of the shape of truth. Our intellect deteriorates every time we surrender to foolishness be-

cause any nonsense that we do not resist does not pass **by us** but **into us**. Without an assured grasp of how language works and how to express oneself in strong, clear and convincing language the potential of even the best minds will inevitably be diluted.

Therefore treat language as one of your most treasured possessions. Learning to use good, clear, straightforward English and taking a lifelong pleasure in the best literature of our own and the best literature of others is not only greatly satisfying but also of immense practical importance. It is a key to the making of any whole and independent man or woman.

And to add to independence of thought, may I urge you to cultivate an outlook of compassion in how you think and in all you do. The current world ethic is harsh and unforgiving. In this new world order of global free trade and liberalization many more will suffer than will gain. It is an age when that new and increasingly dominant international institution, the W.T.O., thinks nothing of condemning scores of thousands of small farmers and their families to great hardship and increased misery in the name of market efficiency. It is a world where the Chairman of General Electric in the USA, having closed dozens of plants and fired tens of thousands of workers, almost exultantly announces in an address to shareholders the philosophy which he thinks is bound to prevail: *"Ahead of us,"* he declared, *"are Darwinian shakeouts in every major marketplace with no consolation prizes for the losing companies and nations."*

So this is becoming a very hard world indeed and when the world hardens people instinctively harden inside and grow selfish to protect themselves. Please resist this inclination.

All of you here are winners. The temptation in this day and age will be for you to think that the world is only for winners. But the world is not for winners only. The world, life itself, is also for those who do not win, it is for those who run far down the track, even for those who come way last. Never forget that. To think and act otherwise is to negate our common humanity. Be tolerant of those less fortunate than you in possessions, health, strength, opportunity or talent. In

whatever you do give such others good cause to remember you kindly.

Above all, a compassionate outlook means using power wisely, considerately. And by power I don't only mean physical force or political position. I mean much more than that. All of you graduates in one way or another are going to exercise power of some sort – some as business people when wealth will be your power; some as lawyers when your power will influence the course of justice; some as doctors when you will exercise the power of life and death; some as men and women of science when the natural elements themselves will be in your power to treat for good or evil; some as politicians or Government servants when your power will touch the daily lives of your fellow citizens. And, of course, all you as parents will in your turn have power over your children. So all of you have to think carefully of how one day power must be used.

In advising you on this score I would just ask you to remember the importance of small causes. Do not concern yourself only with what the world at large considers the big issues and great undertakings: find time to deal with the problems and distresses that plague individual people. It is that which lies at the heart of what it means to be compassionate.

There is a passage in Boris Pasternak's great novel, *Dr. Zhivago,* which is worth quoting on this matter. The passage is about Strelnikov, caught in the huge ebb and flow of the Russian Revolution. Amidst the tremendous events taking place all round him, the giant turns of history, he suddenly realizes that the small concerns of individual men and women are what count in the end.

> *"And in order to do good to others he needed, besides the principles that filled his mind, an unprincipled heart – the kind of heart that knows of no general causes but only of particular ones and knows the greatness of small actions."*

The importance of small causes, the greatness of small actions: that is the essence of compassion. In the end they matter more than the highest policies of nations.

Let me try to sum up these few thoughts I have tried to express. Independence of thought, and a compassionate outlook: there I think you have the makings of a frame of mind with which you can confront with confidence the enormous problems which face us these days. I hope at the end of the day a few glimmers of what I have said – perhaps just the words themselves: independence and compassion – will stick in your minds and will not be dislodged.

As UWI graduates you are entitled to feel that you are among those who have risen above the rest. But when you rise above the rest you must be especially clear about your purpose in life. It should not be to rise above others in order to dominate and get the better of others for selfish purposes but to lead, to assist, to pursue excellence for the sake of others, to make a high and worthy contribution, to set an example.

The privilege of being successful brings with it great responsibility. As you graduate you should feel that you must use this special opportunity not just to do well materially and for fame and position but to become leaders of thought and action, achievers of better lives for your fellow men and women, examples of excellence in the world.

To all graduating students I offer my congratulations and best wishes for fruitful careers and fulfilled lives. In my own case the honour bestowed on me by the University today is itself a life-fulfilment which can compare with nothing else that has happened to me. Only writing the perfect poem, which dream still possesses me, might fill me with as great delight. I am grateful for the honour of this day amongst you.

Thank you for listening so patiently.

93. HORROR AT LUSIGNAN – THE DEPTHS OF EVIL

There are always tragedies in the world. The children of Somalia with flies settling on their dying, emaciated faces make us turn away from the TV screen with grief and horror. Their misery, and so much other misery in the world, charges the heart with overwhelming pity. But what happened in the darkness in those poor village houses at the back of Lusignan last week reached depths of degradation in man's inhumanity to man which, because at soul-level we are one family, shames us all. "*Hands like these I see before me slaughtered the little ones without mercy*."

Contemplating such a slaughter, and hearing hints that somewhere at the bottom of it politics might be involved, one remembers the lament of the American historian Henry Adams, grandson of a President: "*Politics is nothing but the systematic organization of hatreds*." In this case, if this was politics, it is politics taken to such depths of evil savagery as to be unthinkable. So unthinkable that I, for one, will not think it, will not accept that Guyana's political divisions can possibly have led to this.

This must be some aberration, some hideous deviation, some deed utterly unhinged from humanity carried out by men demented by drugs or furious revenge. Even then we cannot believe that in Guyana human beings can have descended to the bottomless depths of hell to find their exemplars. All these helpless people living their ordinary lives, living in their ordinary small houses, woken in the night and given no mercy though they begged, never to see the sweet light of morning again. The children might have been the children of any of us. My wife and I wept to see the horrible images. Who did not cry with pity and despair! We feel our common humanity is *VERNICHTEN*, a German word hard to translate but nearly meaning "*turned into absolutely nothing*." I cannot bear to think too closely of those parents and their children in their last moments of horror at the hands of men who are proof that there must be an eternity because how

else will they be properly be made to suffer in return?

At such a time it is easy to share the dark and baleful view of the poet/priest John Donne who saw man as sinful through and through even from the first moment of his birth: "*There in the wombe*", he wrote in one of his sermons, "*we are fitted for workes of darkness, all the while deprived of light. And there in the wombe we are taught cruelty, by being fed with blood…*"

The ancient question must be asked again: can this be God's work? Throughout history nobody has answered satisfactorily the eternal conundrum: either God could prevent evil but doesn't hence He is not good, or God wants to prevent evil but can't, in which case He is not all-powerful. Faced by such a dilemma, the words of the playwright Edward Bond shake the mind. "*If you look at life closely it is unbearable. What people suffer, what they do to each other, how they hate themselves in hating others. But you must turn back again and again and look into the fire. Listen to the howl of the flames.*"

"*Listen to the howl of the flames.*" With those words let us turn and look at such killings and consider them not as a terrible crime, though it was that, not even as a personal and even a national tragedy, though it was certainly those things, but as a firm reminder of the whole problem of evil in the world. How can one account for evil? How can there be a God, supposedly of perfect goodness, when horror and evil such as this infect our lives?

The universe, it seems, is ruled by the principle of symmetry. In any stable system the positive electrical charges must be balanced by the negative electrical charges. The forces of attraction balance the forces of disruption. Newton's Third Law of Motion decrees that any action must produce an equal and opposite reaction. Vishnu, the Preserver, could not exist without Vishnu, the Destroyer.

Theologians and philosophers use much the same argument in explaining the problem of evil to despairing victims:

"*It stands to reason*," they say, "*that without knowing evil you would not know the meaning of good; without pain you would not know joy; without knowing the taste of sour you would not recognize the sweetness of honey; without having seen some hideous hag you could not appreciate the beauty of a Boticelli virgin.*"

On this basis, at least we poor mortals could be sure that the total quantity of evil in the universe should not exceed the quantity of good; and likewise that the total quantity of suffering should not exceed its equivalent of joy. For every unbearably cruel murder of a child, we might console ourselves, there should be somewhere a marvellous birth of joy.

But there are times such as these when we must question whether this universal law of parity between good and evil has not broken down irretrievably.

Arthur Koestler's terrifying vision of a gigantic pair of scales, transfiguring the universe, and slowly but surely weighing down on the side of suffering and evil, comes into my mind like a nightmare. Pile all the cathedrals and the temples into the scale of goodness and they will be outweighed by a single obscure shower-room in the Auschwitz death-camp. And no matter how many Mozartian magic flutes you hear they cannot drown out the sound of a little boy and girl crying for their mother before their killing.

94. THE DEMONISATION OF SEX

There is much for which to bless the Christian religion. It has, for instance, inspired poetry of intense and enduring beauty. I quite often read John Donne: his poem entitled 'Good Friday, 1613, Riding Westward' is certainly worth a thousand Easter sermons on the theme of the Resurrection. And Gerard Manley Hopkins's 'Wreck of the Deutschland' is a poem beside which all the solemn Papal encyclicals ever written pale into banality.

But Christianity also has much for which it must answer, though by Christianity I do not mean the original teachings of that strange genius who appeared outside Jerusalem a couple of thousand years ago – I mean the institutional Church which men who came after Jesus of Nazareth built and manipulated for their own, often cruel and benighted, purposes.

One of the more obvious results of institutional Christianity was the rapid establishment of sexual guilt as a norm in human behaviour. It is amazing, for instance, to observe the revolution which took place in the morals of ancient Rome with the onset of Christianity. The Empress Messalina once challenged a leading courtesan in Rome to a contest and won it by having sexual congress with 25 men one after the other in a single prolonged session. This was public, not private, behaviour and society was by no means shocked. A couple of centuries later such public goings-on would have been unthinkable. A culture of sexual guilt had completely taken over from a culture of sexual indulgence.

It is strange when you come to think of it. The cardinal virtue celebrated in the New Testament is love, yet the cardinal virtue soon adopted by the Fathers of the Church was chastity, a very different thing.

In that crucial transitional time the theological argument was won by obsessively narrow-minded men. When, therefore, Christianity was established in Rome as the state religion a strict new morality prevailed. Sexual sin, given a preeminent place in the pantheon of evil, became a crime to

be severely punished. Inevitably, there was a vast increase in guilty feelings about perfectly normal sexual behaviour. All sense of proportion, all sense of humour, on the subject was abandoned – so much so that there came a time when St. Clement could write in all seriousness: "*Laughter is the prelude to fornication*", and hundreds of ascetics, reacting perhaps against mixed bathing in the old Rome baths, decided never to wash themselves again!

The trouble was that men like St. Paul got hold of the original teachings and distorted them. Jesus, after all, went on the record as saying that prostitutes have as good a chance of getting to Heaven as anyone else. Paul would have utterly repudiated such an outrage. To an adulteress Jesus said "*Neither do I condemn thee*". The very best Paul could manage was to agree reluctantly that it was better to marry than to burn with lust. For him lust was the sin of sins and he loathed it obsessively.

Paul's hatred of the flesh contrasts sharply with the relaxed attitude of Jesus. Unfortunately, however, Paul was a much more influential figure in Christianity than Christ, with the result that Western man for century after century suffered torments of conscience about perfectly natural sexual desires. Christian leaders through the ages would certainly have excommunicated Christ for being much too permissive. It is a sad tale, but one we have to live with to this day. The ascetic fanatics who hijacked Christianity in its formative years devalued normal sexuality and therefore succeeded in splitting off virtue from a large part of everyday joy and happiness. Their victory was an unhappy day for ordinary men and women. In historical terms it is only very recently that the rigid grip of this misguided sexual orthodoxy has relaxed. And, even so, there have been ominous signs from the Vatican itself, not to mention born-again zealots, that such relaxation will not be for long. In any case, in the shadow of AIDS, a new dark age of sexual guilt threatens. A backlash is well underway that would certainly thrill the withered heart of old kill-joy St. Paul. The founder of the faith Himself must be smiling ruefully as He surveys the passing scene and sees what He never intended – disgust replace delight as a test of virtue.

95. AMERICA COMPLETELY OFF-TRACK

America's insatiable appetite for oil is leading to her own ruin and endangering the whole world. The United States produces only 10 percent of the world's oil but consumes 25 percent of it. This tremendous gap helps to create the mighty and growing American fiscal and trade deficits which skew the world's economy in a way which is unsustainable. It also makes a highly disproportionate contribution to global warming and distorts American foreign policy into pre-emptive aggression thereby jeopardizing security and stability throughout the world.

In parallel to this growing threat, and considerably exacerbating it, is the full-blown emergence of forces which now dominate political life in America and control what the administration in Washington does. These forces include the influence of huge corporations especially in the drafting and implementation of energy and environmental policies, the neocon ideology which rejects contemptuously international organizations and international treaties and conventions, the military philosophy which favours unilateral, pre-emptive ventures, the escalating influence of evangelical religion on domestic and foreign policy and the growing divide in America along relentlessly hostile and partisan lines. Rancourous elements like the Tea Party absurdists cannot see the tree for the leaves far less the wood for the trees.

And amidst all this, growing like a lethal cancer, the greatest financial and banking scandal of this or any century has developed. As a correspondent in the *New Yorker,* Hendrick Hertzberg, has recently put it: *"...financial deregulation, along with cybernetic chicanery, defective and incomprehensible financial 'products', and banking greed unmoored from social, personal, and fiduciary responsibility, created a monstrous 'debt machine' that turbo-charged inequality of wealth, inflated bubbles, diverted talent and investment from making things to making bets, bilked millions on the edge to enrich thousands on the heights and ended – if it ended – by pushing the poor, the middle-class and the real economy into the abyss".*

The coming together of these developments in the present era makes the world an infinitely dangerous place. For the world just to survive, much less to grow into a better, safer, more stable and more uniformly prosperous place, is going to need imaginative and enlightened leadership of the highest order. What is more, an important, perhaps even main, quotient of such leadership will have to come from the United States since that nation is, and will remain for some time, the preeminent power on earth. But, given the current situation, it makes one despair to think what a major shift in policies and fundamental change of heart and mind it will take to bring forth leadership in America equal to the challenge of the times. The generation of great American statesmen and farseeing technocrats which led the way in putting the world together after the Second World War has been succeeded by a generation of impure politicians not up to the challenge of world leadership. A weak President Obama, of whom so much was expected, has been consistently hobbled and frustrated by the special interests which completely dominate America today.

Special interests have taken over the running of America. Over fifty years ago, towards the end of his presidency Dwight Eisenhower, a Republican, warned against the growing influence of the "*military-industrial complex*." Now such interests have become vastly more powerful in Washington and are consistently capable of blocking all efforts to find long-term solutions to their own national and to world problems.

An important indication of the immense power of corporations in America is their astonishing success in getting the government to delay or deflect action on well-informed scientific predictions about universal problems like the destruction of the environment and the increasing impact of global warming. With exorbitant American energy consumption, now added to the rapidly growing energy needs of China and India, it has become clear that oil will become scarcer and more expensive sooner than previously expected with huge and devastating economic and social consequences throughout the world. Far from summoning the decisive leadership in striving to conserve energy and rapidly find and develop alternatives to oil on a worldwide scale, the US government, at the behest of corporate interests, is busy covering up the

facts – and belittling the seriousness of the situation and is merely nibbling at the outer edges of a problem which threatens the world.

Just as frightening a problem is global warming. It is absolutely apparent that this phenomenon is a huge threat to the universal natural habitat as we know it and to human society. Yet even the current American administration, originally well-intentioned, under the direction of corporate interests blind to all concerns but instant profit balks at doing anything significant even to slow down global warming. Ignorant men in denial: let the future generations look after themselves! Confronted by a giant problem what we have is pygmy thinking at its worst.

Like it or not, America remains the central pole of the world tent. If it badly fails, as it is now in the process of doing, everyone on earth will be hurt in the collapsing structure. I am not a pessimist by nature but as things stand in the world I am full of fear for my children and grandchildren.

96. BEFORE AND AFTER ELECTIONS - WHAT MATTERS

We should beware the over-mighty State. A State that gathers all powers to itself drains initiative away from where it does most good - at the local level, at the level of the small group, the family, the individual. And the danger does not end when formal democracy - consisting of elections every few years, free, fair, and transparently honest - exists. An over-mighty State can evolve through a series of free and fair elections - even involving changes in Government - by preserving the apparatus of centralised authority untouched for whoever inherits it to use. Beware that insidious danger. The impersonal State, impervious to the passing whims and fancies of men and women practising politics, constantly threatens to arrogate to itself as much power as it can get.

The only way to protect the people on a continuing basis is to strengthen, and vigilantly keep strong, institutions in the land that are autonomous and can stand up to State power without flinching. Such institutions are the judiciary, a permanent and independent civil service, the media, Trade Unions, the Churches, strong and articulate professional bodies, Universities, the private business community. To the extent that any of these find themselves in the service only of the State, or under its thumb, they should take steps to get out fast and establish an integrity and a raison d'etre of their own. In that way they serve the people and the nation, ultimately you and me, best.

Often, especially when we are young, we believe that it must be possible for some great saviour to take control of events, which seem in such disorder so much of the time, in order to impose a great reformation in the land which will free everyone from all mischief and all wrong. This is an illusion. It is an illusion, indeed, which keeps returning to haunt mankind throughout the ages. We will probably never be done with it since each generation is as idealistic and gullible in its turn as its predecessor.

The saviour may come in the form either of a "great leader" or of some movement or ideology or party embodied in a Government. And, because the great cause seems so good, it may at first seem right to allow complete authority to this supreme governor or all-powerful government. But that is always a terrible mistake. Supreme power accorded to anyone or any institution is always in the end misused. And ideologies once incorporated into power structures tend to be taken to extremes and corrupted - capitalism, for instance, because it is based on greed and socialism because it is based on coercion.

Governments, of course, have a vital place and can go beyond their central role - keeping the peace and administering (a very different thing to controlling) the laws - to do great and positive good. But this is true only if their powers are kept under constant scrutiny and are carefully circumscribed through the operation of other countervailing powers in the land. Governments with grand designs, ambitious to take upon themselves the total powers which will allow them to achieve such designs, are deadly dangerous. The American commander in the Vietnam war who uttered the unforgettable words, *"We had to destroy the village in order to save the villagers"'* sums up for all time the course supreme power always takes in the end. Let children imbibe that truth with their mothers' milk.

It is at the level of the individual that life makes sense to me and comes alive with hope. I know the danger of this view - that it can led to the kind of quietism which advocates that each of us must cultivate his or her own small garden, that it is no good bothering one's head with useless metaphysical questions or with political matters that are none of our business: each of us can make life perfectly acceptable by getting absorbed in one's own occupations and pleasures. I admit I have a great deal of sympathy for this view. But my head, my heart, and my soul tell me (and only my cowardly stomach tells me differently) that this leaves open the way for the overmighty State to flourish, as evil does, like the green bay tree.

So, as well as in private enjoyment and in the ardent cultivation of one's own space, it is also in opposition to State power that individual lives must at times be lived. It is in that ulti-

mate sense that individual lives, not States and Principalities and Powers, carry the hopes of mankind.

Out of the detailed, historic accounts of the momentous events in the old Soviet Union that have emerged one small anecdote has always stuck in my mind. Two young men are having a drink in a hotel bar. It is 1989 and the old regime has crumbled. They have grown up together in the same village near Moscow where the grandfather of one of them - Leonid Brezhnev - and the father of the other - Andre Sakharov - had dachas. When Sakharov, the voice of reform was exiled to Gorky, his son was thrown out of University and ostracised. Then the only person who offered him help was Brezhnev's grandson. Now, in that time of reform the jackboot was on the other foot: Brezhnev's grandson was out of a job simply because he was the grandson of the despised old dictator. And the man helping him out was Sakharov's son.

97. RETREAT FROM THE MADDING CROWD

In my home, a step down off the dining room, overlooking the beautiful garden my wife has created, I have my *studiolo.* A *studiolo* in Renaissance times in Italy was either a piece of furniture or, in the case I have in mind, a small room in which to write and read and listen to music and think. It was, in miniature, a study cum library which offered privacy and a minimum of space for books and personal memorabilia and writing material.

In mine I have a comfortable chair and a desk looking out the window on the garden, lawn and trees with a view of the ocean over the top of the seawall. I note with no particular Luddite pride but certainly with no feeling of deprivation either, that this private room has no computer, fax, telephone or cell. On the shelves that surround me I have the special books I am currently browsing through or studying. I read and write there in blessed peace. I am distanced from trouble in the streets. The virulent and contemptible exchanges of distrust and hostility between fellow Guyanese can be forgotten for a while. The perilous state of the nation is for another day's, another week's, another month's consideration. I find myself retreating more and more into this quiet room, my books within easy reach, possessing the kingdom of the imagination beyond all squalor. I am increasingly reluctant to exchange such benison of private place for the boring and acrimonious turmoil of the world at work and play.

And so I sit there and write, far from the madding crowd. And often enough I put down my pen to savour the infinite sweets of reading. Never a day passes without a discovery, a revelation, a wondrous fact, an incitement to further study, further reading, some spur to the imagination to go off in extraordinary directions or just stay still and quietly enjoy the infinite ramification of mankind's astonishing passage from silence to silence.

• But what books to read? Franz Kafka, the great Czech allegorical novelist, is a stern adviser. "*Although*," he wrote in 1904 to a friend, "*I think we ought to read only books that bite and sting us. If the book we are reading doesn't shake us awake like a blow on the skull, why bother reading it in the first place? So that it can make us happy, as you put it? Good God, we'd be just as happy if we had no books at all; books that make us happy we could, in a pitch, also write ourselves. What we need are books that hit us like a most painful misfortune, like the death of someone we love more that we love ourselves, that make us feel as though we had been banished to the woods, far from any human presence, like a suicide. A book must be the axe for the frozen sea within us. That is what I believe.*"

• I am continually reminded of the limitless joy of books which those who badly read cannot seem to fathom. Richard de Bury, Bishop of Durham and treasurer and chancellor to King Edward II of England in the 13th century, loved and collected books with a passion: "*In books*," he wrote, "*I find the dead as if they were alive; in books I foresee things to come; in books warlike affairs are set forth; from books come forth the laws of peace. All things are corrupted and decay in time; Saturn ceases not to devour the children that he generates: all the glory of the world would be buried in oblivion, unless God had provided mortals with the remedy of books.*"

Six centuries later Virginia Woolf understood his passion and described a similar love of books: "*I have sometimes dreamt*," she wrote, "*that when the Day of Judgment dawns and the great conquerors and lawyers and statesmen come to receive their rewards – their crowns, their laurels, their names carved indelibly upon imperishable marble – the Almighty will turn to Peter and will say, not without a certain envy when He sees us coming with our books under our arms, 'Look, these need no reward. We have nothing to give them. They have loved reading.'*"

• I read and love Michael Ryan's poem about looking forward ungracefully to the time when he must write his last poems before departing.

'Extended Care'

I'm not ready to write my last poem –
paeans to the glory of sun porch and duck pond
and inner peace that comes to me at last
when, out of terror, I begin to pray incessantly
and love all my neighbours as I love myself,
including the unknown one who steals my crackers
and the former state senator who sings
"God Bless America" for every meal and snack time.
I'll have to be ninety plus, maybe over a hundred,
nine-tenths blind and needing a fresh diaper,
before my blinding fear of losing and not-getting
lifts like the huge purple curtain at the Metropolitan Opera
to reveal the extraordinary blessings of an ordinary day.
Maybe my hearing will also be so far gone
that I finally understand the voices in my head
debating whether or not I deserve to live,
when in fact – I'll realise – I'm living O.K. right now,
although I may still believe life could be better
if someone installed a lock on my snack box
and gave that state senator a laryngectomy.
How lovely (I'll think) every person I've known.
Even the egocentric shit heels had a kind of charm,
and the ones who lied purposely to cause me damage –
maybe they had kids they loved or parents they took care of.
They surely did something worse than the worst things I did.
Everyone will appear to me as a scared soul
struggling with the same sort of torments and disappointments,
as death rises like a dinosaur out of the duck pond
and lumbers dripping toward me on the sunporch
where I glow with the modest good I did with my life,
grateful this gorgeous world will be here for others when
I am gone.

And then, after travelling far in just a few hours, I am brought back home abruptly. I come across a quotation from Plato's discourses: "*When issues, definitions, sights and other sense-impressions are rubbed together and tested amicably by men employing questions and answers with no malicious rivalry, sud-*

denly there shines forth understanding." Sadly, in Guyana these days issues are "*rubbed together*" with so much suspicion, hostility, malice and deep ill – will that there is absolutely no chance of clear understanding shining forth. The only hope there has ever seemed to be lies in the politicians on all sides setting an example in their dialogue and thereby gradually bringing about a return to civil discourse throughout society – but at election time that flickering hope it seems is quite extinguished.

And when that hope fades what other option is there to finding some retreat and withdrawing from a world gone unnecessarily mad.

98. THE LAST POEMS OF MAHADAI DAS

They have become an inspiring part of Guyana's poetic heritage and I found them instantly unforgettable. I have come to think of them as the last poems of Mahadai Das. In the Peepal Tree edition of her poems, *A Leaf In His Ear,* they among others are listed as being composed - but composed may not be the right word - between 1973 and 1994 but never published. Mahadai Das died in 2003 at the age of 48 so it seems she wrote no poetry in the tragic, shattered last decade of her life. These poems are for me, therefore, a miraculous starburst of creativity before the darkness.

Her heart broke and her mind raged and out of this fire of despair and fierce desire emerged these passionate and enduring fragments. Here are a few of them plucked from a burning mind.

'Learner'

I am the great learner.
I devour the apple but before that,
I halve, then quarter
and eighth it.

I am a baby feeding on mashed yams.
I discover red apples and green ones,
Small apples, large ones. Romanos,
Granny Smiths.

I have eaten them.
Flame in the gut. Like a Chinese dragon,
I hold horses, I drive and I breathe fire.
Adam and Eve in one, I am in a garden,
eating. Breathing.
There are raspberries too, and bananas,
The banana-man sells me some.

I, oriental fire-dragon, mother Kali
in China, wrap snakes around my neck and
eat the fruits, belching out ribbons of fire
into the snow-white prison to which I am
relegated.
Bars are white hot iron.
Books encased in cartons stand low
against the bars.

'Tears'

Bones of dew scatter on my plate
as they rain down the land.
How can I stop them? They splatter
through my dreams leaving me homeless.
Oh God! I am naked as a newborn.
I implore you with my tears.

'Monday, Come Quickly'

Come quickly, Monday.
Your flag in my heart hides
from the wind of his eyes.

Deep-flung, I drink turquoise
pools of sudden water.
I am a mermaid basking on the rock
of his glance.

Woman-at-sea, I am vine-bound
upon rafters of his smile.

The razor- teeth of the hours,
swift, sure sharks, lurk
beneath my bark.

Light shards from above.

Nights of his absence
seem distant.

'Switch off the Darkness'

Switch off the darkness, sweet.
Direct your smile with its rosedrawn
chariots across my dark clouds.
I need your light, young one –
not a small star, some dim moon
nightly sliced in my sky,
but your whole golden coin
so I may freely spend it
across love's counter in your eyes.

I read them again with tears in my eyes, others also: 'Ant And Eternity'; 'Bernini Baby'; 'The Leaf In His Ear'; 'Lucky'; 'The Coming Of The Maiden'; 'In The Clear Ballroom'…I met her a few times in those final, silent years remembering her proud and frightened eyes. Read them over, those last poems in Peepal Tree's *A Leaf In The Ear* – her damaged but radiant mind unburdening itself in a rush of immortal longing before oblivion. And the last one of them all.

'Return Me To The Fire'

If I should ever die
Return me to the fire
If I should live again
Return me to myself.
Heartfire,
    flame in hurricane-lamp
Outside, into this storm.

99. THE WRONG WHICH ROAMS THE EARTH

Good poetry holds its truth and relevance throughout the ages. It may retail the facts and thinking of its own era, but part of it will always express what is eternally true and recognizable. In a jotting in one of his notebooks Thomas Hardy put the matter simply: *"A poet should express the emotion of all the ages and the thought of his own."* John Livingston Lowes in his book *Convention and Revolt in Poetry*, published in 1919, wrote the following:

"The old themes are perennial. Love is as dazzling a miracle to every lover who loves today as if unnumbered millions hadn't loved since time began. Death isn't trite to you and me because it's been the common lot since life first was; nor have the moon and stars grown old because uncounted centuries ago, besides the rivers of Babylon and Egypt, or among the hills and pasturelands of Israel, or in the wide stillness of Arabia, men saw them and brooded, and wondered, and dreamed. The oldest things in the world are the things that also have been new as many times as human beings have been born."

There is something infinitely valuable, but as infinitely hard to express exactly, in what good poetry provides in mankind's long voyage from and to who knows where. Rilke tells a story in which it is the sea and the distance that becomes the image of the poet's reality. A rowing-boat sets out on a difficult passage. The oarsmen labour in exact rhythm. There is no sign yet of the destination. Suddenly a man, seemingly idle, breaks out into a song. And if the labour of the oarsmen meaninglessly defeats the real resistance of the real waves it is the idle singer who magically conquers the despair of apparent aimlessness. While the people next to him try to come to grips with the element that is next to them, his voice seems to bind the boat to the farthest distance so that the farthest distance draws the boat towards itself. *"I don't know why and how"*, is Rilke's conclusion, *"but suddenly I understood the situation of*

the poet, his place and function in this age."

A long time ago I was reminded of these things when David Ford, one of the old school full of integrity and concern for things that really matter in life, was talking to me of many things – Adrian Thompson and his monumental work in Guyana, A.J Seymour, our greatest man of letters, old books like Henry Taylor's *The Statesman* which set out 160 years ago the principles of good government, Roy Heath's novels, many other subjects. Before we parted he handed me a poem which I had never seen before. It is an extract from a long work written (inscribed) by an Egyptian who lived about 4,000 years ago.

'The Man Who Was Tired Of Life'

To whom can I speak today?
Gentleness has perished
And the violent man has come down on everyone.

To whom can I speak today?
I am heavy-laden with trouble
Through lack of an intimate friend.

To whom can I speak today?
The wrong which roams the earth,
There is no end of it.

Death is in my sight today
As when a man desires to see home
When he has spent many years in captivity.

We don't know the man or the infinitely remote culture, so many centuries have passed, so many empires come in glory and gone to dust, but tell me if it is not the same tide of affairs washing around us which washed around him all those millennia ago, tell me if you cannot recognize still the same human heart that beats in you and me.

100. A FACT OF LIFE

Anyone who writes about life must think about death. It is not being morbid to do so. As Steve Jobs said in an address at Stanford University in 2004 which has become famous since he himself died prematurely at the summit of his life as the greatest design and marketing genius of his age: *"Death is very likely the single best invention of life. It is life's change agent. It clears out the old to make way for the new."* It serves no purpose to flinch from this simple fact of life.

Of course, that is true of death in general, death in the abstract. It is not so easy to face up to one's own personal extinction: *"I like to think that something survives after you die,"* Steve Jobs said. *"But on the other hand, perhaps it's like an on-off switch. Click! And you're gone"*. It is said it is as impossible to gaze at one's own death as it is to gaze at the sun at high noon in a cloudless sky. And much of one's life is spent in the desperate game and hurly-burly of averting one's gaze – working and playing, planning and scheming, getting and spending, loving and hating, building and tearing down, filling every hour as much as possible with people to connect to and things to do. And this is as it should be. How dismal it would be to mope around considering the futility of everything since nothing lasts. Far better the frenzy of the too-busy than the depressed stupor of continually thinking about the end for you.

As one gets older, however, it gets harder to outpace death's presence. For one thing, your fellow runners in the race with whom you loved to stride beside and compete against and just as surely and with whom it was so good to compare notes keep dropping out. This is a sad business, losing with ever-increasing regularity good friends and beloved family members who sedately, or suddenly, depart. It is more gradual than the massacre of battle but steadily *"the ranks of friends and rivals both are sadly trimmed."* And it cannot be a surprise when the time comes when an ominous diagnosis applies not to someone else but to yourself. Life gives no exception in the eternal process of give and take.

One result of this steady attrition is that the memories you accumulated and shared with so many can be exchanged with fewer and fewer and are eventually lost. This is a pity and a waste and a cause of deepening regret. It is one good reason why everyone over 70 who can should write down as carefully, but also as entertainingly, as possible memories of his or her life and perhaps for good measure a few judgements and conclusions. Leaving behind a complete blank is the depressing alternative.

More advice on this theme. It is supremely thoughtless, selfish and neglectful of those you love if you avoid giving careful attention to what your death will mean to them. Consider closely and make provisions. At the very least this means there is an almost sacred duty to make absolutely clear how you wish what you have to be shared among those you love when you are gone. A death without a will is a dereliction in meeting one of life's fundamental requirements. A life is incomplete if it goes undocumented but also if there is no audit and clarity at its end. Thus are the generations woven seamlessly together.

I do not find I am enjoying life less as I get older and the reality of one's death naturally gets closer. The joys and satisfactions, it is of course true, have changed their complexion but who is to say that what delighted me then is superior to what delights me now in the experience of life whose ever-changing nature which is one of the glories of creation. Then the carnival of senses counted most, the blaze of action was best, to be tethered down at rest was life wasted. Now pleasures have quieted down, they have simplified, they have even perhaps deepened into a more lasting contentment of the spirit.

I am always reading poetry and discovering new poets, new to me that is. A.R. Ammons is one such poet. I find he is famous on the American literary scene but until recently I had never read his work. One of the good things that keep on happening is that no matter how old one gets any day that dawns may, and very often does, bring a new discovery, a new wonder, an encounter with something intriguing, delightfully different, thought-provoking – life seen suddenly from a new angle. I am surprised it has taken so long for me to get to

know A.R. Ammons. But now I have him dancing in my mind. And in his poetry I find a poem which could not express better what one comes to think as one gets to my age. This is the well-written truth about life and death. The poem is 'In View of the Fact'.

The people of my time are passing away: my
wife is baking for a funeral, a 60-year old who

died suddenly, when the phone rings, and it's
Ruth we care so much about in intensive care:

It was once weddings that came so thick and
fast, and then, first babies, such a hullabaloo:

now, it's this that and the other and somebody
else gone or on the brink: well, we never

thought we would live forever (although we did)
and now it looks like we won't: some of us

are losing a leg to diabetes, some don't know
what they went downstairs for, some know that

a hired watchful person is around, some like
to touch the cane tip into something steady,

so nice: we have already lost so many,
brushed the loss of ourselves ourselves: our

address books for so long a slow scramble now
are palimpsests, scribbles and scratches: or

index cards for Christmases, birthdays,
Halloweens drop clean away into sympathies:

at the same time we are getting used to so
many leaving, we are hanging on with a grip

to the ones left: we are not giving up on the
congestive heart failure or brain tumors, on

the nice old men left in empty houses or on
the widows who decide to travel a lot: we

think the sun may shine someday when we'll
drink wine together and think of what used to

be: until we die we will remember every
single thing, recall every word, love every

loss: then we will, as we must, leave it to
others to love, love that can grow brighter

and deeper till the very end gathering strength
and getting more precious all the way ….