

Textaufgabe I

If We Can't Have More Police, Have Less Tolerance

It seems a pity that you have to die to get attention, but it does sometimes feel as if only coroners¹ ask the right questions. We had it in Oxfordshire over avoidable military deaths; now we have the forthright remarks of the Loughborough coroner Olivia Davison. She presides at the inquest into the death of Fiona Pilkington, apparently driven to suicide by fire with her disabled daughter and pet rabbit alongside her. We are forced to contemplate the stark possibility that Britain is no longer competent to defend the weak from persecution. Even by children.

Mrs Pilkington, a shy woman coping with a severely handicapped child and a teenage son with a history of being violently bullied, nerved herself to report her tormentors to the police 33 times. In her last ten months, police logs show, she appealed 13 times.

The arrogant brats who broke her windows, mocked her daughter, beat up her son, screamed abuse and invaded her garden, told her that they could do what they wanted and "there was nothing she could do about it".

Which apparently, in Leicestershire, is true. With steely insistence, the coroner repeatedly asked the police why they never linked the complaints and saw this as serious persecution, and why several times they sent no officer round (on one occasion leaving four days to respond to reports from a neighbour of a "siege"). She also asked why they downgraded the attacks to "antisocial behaviour", not crime.

The usual answers come — things have improved since 2007, training is better, tum ti tum. Most enragingly, the acting chief constable explained that today, given the girl's disability, such a persecution would be classified as "hate crime" and treated seriously. How dare he hide behind this political novelty? You shouldn't have to be black, Muslim, gay or disabled to expect

protection from vandalism, threat and mockery. You shouldn't need to be a "minority" to get a response from the police. No citizen of a heavily taxed and regulated country should meet shrugs and accusations of "over-reacting" when they daren't step out of their front door.

Yet they do. There are bad streets and estates all over Britain. There are places where old people won't go out, and where anyone labelled as a "weirdo" suffers miserably. Children in packs can be cruel: we don't need the new biography of William Golding to tell us that. We might, however, glance nostalgically at the closing page of his *Lord of the Flies*², where the crisp naval officer lands in his white-topped cap and says to the murderous, filthy lads: "I should have thought that a pack of British boys — you're all British, aren't you? — would have been able to put up a better show than that . . ."

Well, the Leicestershire tormentors were British, and nobody, including the police, seems to have expected anything of them but savagery. Any kid who ever barracked³ the Pilkingtons, down to the youngest sneering ten-year-old, should be forced to stand an hour in silence (as should their parents) beside the burnt-out car, to see and smell what happened to their victim. They didn't mean to be angels of death but they played their part. Let them share the nightmare now.

The police, of course, get close to nightmare every day, and nobody is saying that their job is easy. However, we know from a hundred awful stories that ASBOs⁴ are mocked, cruel children know their rights all too well, and police can't cope. So what's to be done? Pushing children through the legal system and into prisons, which make them worse, is no answer. Besides, in a fearful, feuding community it can be impossible to disentangle evidence solid enough for a criminal court. The long-term solutions include parenting orders⁵ and training, not to mention a more robust and humane care system to dismantle truly hopeless families. But when the stones hit your windows you want a quicker solution. You want police.

PLEASE TURN OVER

If we want short-term alleviation, I suppose there are two routes. The first is to treble street policing and throw resources around until any incident, anywhere, gets promptly answered (and not by a community support officer coming to “chat” to the persecutors, as per⁶ Leicestershire). That is the expensive answer, but Britain is broke. A cheaper answer is to remove, at risk of mild illiberalism, a great many of the safeguards, rights and procedures now covering under-18s. It is to abolish a swath⁷ of the paperwork it takes for an officer to accost, arrest and generally frighten the bejasus⁸ out of youths: take away their mobiles and iPods to sell for charity, dress them in orange jumpsuits, set them to work scrubbing the pavements. Deter. Make gang fun a lot less fun. And yes, then you can bring on the therapy, the understanding, the community rebuilding. But first of all, stop them storing up misery for others and lifelong shame for themselves.

It is not often that I feel like rowing back on our well-meant liberalism. History suggests that draconian rules tend to put the poor too much at the mercy of the police. But given that so many of them are already at the mercy of their neighbours’ children, that might be a necessary risk. At least the police have rules of conduct. And thinking the unthinkable becomes easier when I contemplate that shy, worried woman and her daughter, mental age four years (old enough for fear); when I think of her orphaned son and even the poor damn rabbit, and then remember the scores of others who this very day will suffer similar misery. Though not, pray God, a similar end.

Maybe ultra-cautious policing and a culture of rights before duties are luxuries we can’t afford. Shall it be far more police, or far less tolerance? At the moment we have a stretched force hampered by bureaucracy, political correctness, stupid government targets and back-covering. It doesn’t work. Not for the weak, the frightened, the timid.

Libby Purves

From: *The Times*, September 21, 2009

Annotations

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| 5 | 1 coroner | person presiding at an inquest, i.e. an examination into the causes of a person's death |
| 10 | 2 <i>Lord of the Flies</i> | famous novel by William Golding, in which a group of British schoolboys stuck on a deserted island try to govern themselves, with fatal results |
| 15 | 3 to barrack | <i>here:</i> to bully |
| 20 | 4 ASBOs | anti-social behaviour order in the UK issued by a court, which says that somebody must stop behaving in a harmful or annoying way |
| 25 | 5 parenting orders | <i>gerichtliche Auflagen für Eltern</i> |
| 30 | 6 per | <i>here:</i> in |
| 35 | 7 swath | <i>here:</i> large amount |
| 40 | 8 frighten the bejasus out of sb. | really frighten somebody |
| 45 | | |

Textaufgabe II**Salem House**

David Copperfield, a young boy, was packed off to Salem House after biting his cruel stepfather's hand during a savage beating.

A short walk brought us – I mean the Master¹ and me – to Salem House, which was enclosed with a high brick wall, and looked very dull. Over a door in this wall was a board with SALEM HOUSE upon it; and through a grating in this door we were surveyed when we rang the bell by a surly face, which I found, on the door being opened, belonged to a stout man with a bull-neck, a wooden leg, overhanging temples, and his hair cut close all round his head.

55 “The new boy,” said the Master.

The man with the wooden leg eyed me all over – it didn't take long, for there was not much of me – and locked the gate behind us, and took out the key. We were going up to the house, among some dark heavy trees, when he called after my conductor.

60 “Hallo!”

We looked back, and he was standing at the door of a little lodge, where he lived, with a pair of boots in his hand.

65 “Here! The cobbler's been²,” he said, “since you've been out, Mr. Mell, and he says he can't mend 'em any more. He says there ain't a bit of the original boot left, and he wonders you expect it.”

70 With these words he threw the boots towards Mr. Mell, who went back a few paces to pick them up, and looked at them (very disconsolately, I was afraid), as we went on together. I observed then, for the first time, that the boots he had on were a good deal the worse for wear, and that his stocking was just breaking out in one place, like a bud.

Salem House was a square brick building with wings; of a bare and unfurnished appearance. All about it was so very quiet, that I said to Mr. Mell I supposed the boys were out; but he seemed surprised at my not knowing

that it was holiday-time. That all the boys were at their several homes. That Mr. Creakle, the proprietor, was down by the sea-side with Mrs. and Miss Creakle; and that I was sent in holiday-time as a punishment for my misdoing, all of which he explained to me as we went along.

5 I gazed upon the schoolroom into which he took me, as the most forlorn and desolate place I had ever seen. I see it now. A long room with three long rows of desks, and six of forms³, and bristling all round with pegs for hats and slates. Scraps of old copybooks and exercises litter the dirty floor. Some silkworms' houses, made of the same materials, are scattered over the
10 desks. Two miserable little white mice, left behind by their owner, are running up and down in a fusty castle made of pasteboard and wire, looking in all the corners with their red eyes for anything to eat. A bird, in a cage very little bigger than himself, makes a mournful rattle now and then in hopping on his perch, two inches high, or dropping from it; but neither sings nor chirps.
15 There is a strange unwholesome smell upon the room, like mildewed corduroys, sweet apples wanting air, and rotten books. There could not well be more ink splashed about it, if it had been roofless from its first construction, and the skies had rained, snowed, hailed, and blown ink through the varying seasons of the year.

20 Mr. Mell having left me while he took his irreparable boots upstairs, I went softly to the upper end of the room, observing all this as I crept along. Suddenly I came upon a pasteboard placard, beautifully written, which was lying on the desk, and bore these words: "*Take care of⁴ him. He bites.*"

I got upon the desk immediately, apprehensive of at least a great dog
25 underneath. But, though I looked all round with anxious eyes, I could see nothing of him. I was still engaged in peering about, when Mr. Mell came back, and asked me what I did up there.

"I beg your pardon, sir," says I⁵, "if you please, I'm looking for the dog."

"Dog?" says he. "What dog?"

30 "Isn't it a dog, sir?"

“Isn’t what a dog?”

“That’s to be taken care of, sir, that bites.”

“No, Copperfield,” says he gravely, “that’s not a dog. That’s a boy. My instructions are, Copperfield, to put this placard on your back. I am sorry to
60 make such a beginning with you, but I must do it.”

With that, he took me down, and tied the placard, which was neatly constructed for the purpose, on my shoulders like a knapsack; and wherever I went, afterwards, I had the consolation of carrying it.

What I suffered from that placard, nobody can imagine. Whether it was
65 possible for people to see me or not, I always fancied that somebody was reading it. It was no relief to turn round and find nobody; for wherever my back was, there I imagined somebody always to be. That cruel man with the wooden leg, aggravated my sufferings. He was in authority; and if he ever saw me leaning against a tree, or a wall, or the house, he roared out from his
70 lodge-door in a stupendous voice, “Hallo, you sir! You Copperfield! Show that badge conspicuous⁶, or I’ll report you!” The playground was a bare gravelled yard, open to all the back of the house and the offices; and I knew that the servants read it, and the butcher read it, and the baker read it; that everybody, in a word, who came backwards and forwards to the house, of a
75 morning when I was ordered to walk there, read that I was to be taken care of, for I bit. I recollect that I positively began to have a dread of myself, as a kind of wild boy who did bite.

from: Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield*, 1850

Annotations

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|----------------------|---|
| 1 Master | <i>old-fashioned for: teacher</i> |
| 2 the cobbler’s been | <i>short for: the cobbler has been here</i> |
| 3 six of forms | long school benches for several pupils |
| 4 take care of | <i>here: beware of</i> |
| 5 says I | <i>old, informal use</i> |
| 6 conspicuous | <i>informal for: conspicuously</i> |