Promethia 1984
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I've seen a movie and I've read some books, and in glancing off their opaque surfaces I've caught a clearer vision of the natural world, or at least one blacker and lighter than before, one that eclipses definitions revolving in their paths around my belief in man. The workings of my mind are still working it through, still trying to bring it into focus, but, as I recall, a short passage from W.B. Yeats' *The Tower* set the wheels turning. The lines read:

So the Platonic year  
Whirls out new right and wrong,  
Whirls in the old instead;  
All men are dancers and their tread  
Goes to the barbarous clangour of a gong.

The idea of a “barbarous clangour” clanging at the backs of all our rhythms, making its dusky shape firm beneath the thin sheen of civilization, makes the simplest sense to me. We are all the dancing barbarians, the primitives who, under our lapels and within the rings of our knotted ties, pulse with old passions and desires. We all step in time to times past, sweeping and stomping to an unconscious direction, to the immortal mystery of who we are, why we are found here and from whence we have come. We yearn to whirl in toward the shrouded center.

Yet we presume upon the new adornment of society. That is altogether another thing. We believe in what we have convinced ourselves is the new shape of our life—we hang our presumptions on it—when in reality life keeps its old sure shape and is underneath, and society is hardly enough for cover. Who knows whether our rationales looped across the fabric of living and thinking together are right or wrong, but they without doubt, by the way they are unsurely hung, make up much of the risk and drama that marks us as human.

The doings of Mohandas Gandhi illustrate the tenuous nature of civilization’s success. Not long ago I saw Richard Attenborough’s filmed tribute to his great civil disobedient who almost singlehandedly or heartedly undid the tethers of long tyranny and forced its surrender by taking unjust imprisonment, unmerciful blows and the anxiety possibility of his own assassination. He lifted not one finger in violent coercion or forcible self-defense, and after viewing the dramatization of his life I was left with one unshakeable impression: here is a man of mighty presumptuousness.

For presumption, Prufrock didn’t have an inch on Gandhi. The man who earned the gracious title of mahatma or “great soul” among his people was a gambler of unsurpassed mettle. Not only did he presume upon the justice and forbearance and civility of the colonial government, but he also took for granted the ability of a nation, often ill-educated and primitively kept, culturally and religiously sundered, tired and bitter and sorely oppressed, to catch his vision and patiently apply his unorthodox means toward freedom. Not to mention his self-reliance, he must have had a colossal faith in the consciences around him. When he spoke or wrote, he relied upon centuries of humane British culture to listen long enough to understand that it had gone awry, that its policies in India had become fundamentally wrong, that its highest ideals could be shared and perhaps more directly brought to physical manifestation by an alien nation of non-Christian belief. When he was jailed, he looked toward freedom pre-established by a civil system that made room for the business of dissent rather than making deposits of those businessmen’s bodies. When he picked up his staff and took the long road to the sea, he walked a highway surveyed, built and walked with care, first and alone, by the sahib. And out of stubborn idealism, a belief in a kind of spiritual democracy, he insisted that not only he, but all his brethren, all he represented, had to take the same journey, had to put on the same humility and tenacity, had to suffer, suffer graciously—not in the heart alone but across the skull—suffer identical blows. It was a magnificent risk.

In its effect on government’s structure, on legislative conduct, it was also a magnificent success. The British in India, shackled already by the cultural diversity and economic immovability of those under their rule, were completely stymied at the political level by active social resistance. An unworkable system ceased even the appearance of working. The government was cornered and had left but two alternatives: bare its fangs and strike or, to put it simply, flee. The British tried striking back, which only increased the resistance and served to prove the claims of imperialism’s inherent brutality, then, finally, did flee. They fled more out of embarrassment than insurrection. But they did flee. And India was her own.

One of the quieter scenes of the Attenborough film presents a conversation between Gandhi and journalist Margaret Bourke-White on his strict policy of nonviolence. Even as the Empire struggles to keep its standing in the East, the motherland fights for her sovereignty against a merciless and aggressive foe: Hitler’s Third Reich. Stories of wartime atrocities in Europe have been publicized even to remote villages in India; the threat of Hitler’s advance is felt around the world. And Bourke-White herself has just recently come from the thick of the conflict. She looks toward her frail companion and tries to erase the ranked bayonets, the shouted “Heil!” and the heavy tread of her inner vision, and asks him, humbly, anxiously, what would he do against Hitler? He smiles at her. “I would not change,” he replies. “It would take
time--many would die--but, always, good has triumphed. We would win.

Perhaps Gandhi's heightened conception as a true and benevolent being at heart is the best belief to have. It is attractive; we yearn to say so about ourselves. But it must be recognized that the highest benevolence conceived in Hitler's camp was the imposed order, at all costs, upon beings thought to be superior to most humans (get them to move together, to move in power, and toward change) and the examination of the inferior (remove the impediments to that movement). They were cleaning up the world, making it better for life. They believed this. The custodians at Auschwitz saw their ritual not as the destruction of human life but as the protection, the immunization of human life against something less. Should they have ultimately been victorious, in their eyes it would have been the triumph of good. What had become their privilege by might had for many become their duty toward man. According to the truth they had convinced themselves of, they had to kill; they had to eliminate resistance to the new order, and someone like Gandhi, wise, noble, yet small, brown and resistant, would, without remorse because it was without hate, have been taken out of the way. It was the right, the good, something to be devoted to. The rearranged conscience pledged selflessly and religiously to an inhumane system simply would not see the reason behind Gandhi's civil disobedience--indeed would not see Gandhi--but would only notice the hampered progress in completing a divine plan.

To sound absolutely unsaintlike, I agree with Gandhi--in principle. The principle of nonviolence cannot be faulted in its humanitarian intent, for its Godlike mercy and love. And I agree that in the long view good has always won out. But how long a view are we required to take? And how should that view be applied? If Gandhi had persisted in the application of his principle in open and defenseless gestures of resistance, and had persisted against an allegiance the likes of which propelled the Third Reich, I am afraid he and his compatriots would have found themselves merely dead, their foe merely busied. Why has good always triumphed? Because evil, the old wrong, has always in its cycle whirled in to assert itself, and, for as long as man stands on earth, after good shall come its irresistible fellow.

Mohandas Gandhi--mahatma, Babu, Gandhi-ji--was a good man. And he possessed the power to make of other souls good men. He could look into their eyes and see himself. He could cause them to look into their neighbors' eyes and see themselves. And out of this vision came a picture of the past, a picture of the sacred parentage which held the old primal love and sacrifice and protection.

But it was not good enough.

As long as he could hold them entranced in a communion of good, as long as they could sum-
Prophecy
The young man
will whisper his dreams
to the breeze
and scream his songs
to the hills.

Linda Hopkins
MEMORIAL DAY

Who pays the high cost of freedom?
Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness
Sprout from the blood of the martyrs
Who live in lands past the shining sea.
Our loyal patriots can be seen
On every mountaintop
Mining treasures for our affluence
And sweating beneath the weight of our prosperity.
From dawn to dusk the Latino pays freedom's cost
Planting beans for our coffee
Which we deserve after two hour's deskwork...
Land of the Taiwanese pride
Shattered beneath the load of endless toil
In sweatshops making toys for our children
Who play with them for a week
And then throw them away.
Betsy Ross in Mexico weaves clothing
For our delight which we wear until it goes
Out of style. Home she goes, poor seamstress
Having done her duty for our nation
She brings home her wage of
Not enough food for the day.
We should always remember the gallant Korean
Who dies at the Battle of Gettysburg.
The Indians starve at Valley Forge
While we daintily drink the tea they send.
Brazil surrenders at Yorktown
And Hong Kong at Appomattox.
General Grant gives the terms for peace:
There will be unconditional surrender
Of trade rights and tariffs
Monopolies and prices.
There's room for more
At the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

Peter Smith
HEAVENWALK

Playground full to bursting  
new arrivals every day  
from nursery ever full  
(overflowing)

Bitter accusations  
dimly die among revenge  
beneath covering clouds of wool  
(guilt growing)

Fifteen million entries,  
new boundaries framed for these.  
Surrogate mother angels  
(etrnity showing)

Decade expeditious  
perambulator purge  
dispassionate abduction  
(blood flowing)

Heaven enriched, earth bereaved  
negated mother-urge  
miniature remains discarded  
(repentence owing)

Author of a Son laments  
Mourning base destruction  
creates celestial cradles  
(all knowing).

Teri Turman

A REMEMBRANCE  
OF THINGS PAST...

Here stands the house  
Where Amy used to play  
with dolls and kittens  
and dreams.  
Little Amy,  
Mommy's Angel, Daddy's girl.  
All pink and ruffles,  
blonde silky curls;  
Her smile shone bright as day  
Then, in one brief moment  
Little Amy was bad,  
and Mommy very angry.  
How the darkness descends so early...  
This house once was filled  
with childish laughter  
and joy.  
Then Mommy got mad.  
Little Amy will not play here again...

Dena Crick
First Prayer

In an old place in time
long and without measure,
in the newness of my childhood season
we kneel down together,

dark cherrywood floors
groan beneath our knees
and there in the halflight I meet
the Shepherd who takes care of me.

Jon Huntzinger
ORDINARY TIME

Kingdomtide, ignited by the fiery red of Pentecost
And you, O Lord, are seated up on high
Your work here among us finished,
Yet ever still being manifested.
I, like a traveller who has passed
through the lights and grandeur
Of the sky-reaching city
A thousand thousand lights invading the night
Now I pass on through darkness to a
surer destination
Leaving the city behind, here I am now
A time not to follow stars in the east,
Or to consider my return to dust
Or contemplate the mystery of faith
when I see a butterfly,
Or to imagine ascension when I see the gull,
Or wonder at the Spirit as I see a spreading
fire
No, there is a time for all of these,
When I should turn my gaze from
worldly thoughts
To the mysteries of the world to come
But this is Ordinary Time,
When you do not hold feast days
in your honor
But in ours, and in the saints before us.

We are still pilgrims, but now is when you
show that you are ever walking with us,
as to Emmaus
As well as being at the shrine, as in the broken
bread
There is a time when I must put aside my thoughts
of hunger
And see the crucified within the bread
But there is also a time when the bread set
before me is bread alone,
The meal which sustains my body;
I enjoy the yield of the Earth.
Now is the time for the festival of creation
When I listen to the voice of birds;
I look for birds only;
I do not allegorize angels
I see clouds, and imagine faces and shapes,
But I do not contemplate them receiving you
on high
For now you are with me at every step
So I run through rain, and thrill in its
freshness
And I roll in the snow, and make snowmen
I chase rabbits and I leap with goats
And I turn to my daily business,
Plowing fields and building houses
As a tenant of this world which you have made.

Ordinary Time; you do not make it special
But you share with me its ordinariness
When Advent’s first candle is lit by a
red spark of fire
Then you shall teach me of your redeeming
But that is later, that is blossoms of red
and blue and violet and lily white
These first grow from green stems, and they from
brown soil
Brown, the color of the earth,
And green, the color of growth
First brown, then green
Only then, red and violet and blue and white
But now I gaze on stars for star’s sake
And when I look at clouds, not ponder glory above
Or dust, not meditate on man’s mortality.

Peter Smith
REFLECTIONS: Poem 7

Have you ever as a being
A looking-glass in front standing
Forcing the inner sense thinking
O'er the image afore you standing?

Have you on a lonely moment
With total mood of sobriety
And concentration a moment
Ponder on an adversity?

Have you through in your life ever
Alienated at times be
Passing through ordeals as never
Good Samaritans nor friends see?

Have you a hypocrite going
One finger outwards you pointing
Reactions of other ones showing
Reflected-prejudiced being?

Have you upon a highland stood
With real serenity viewing
As in fortissimo shouted
Echo of your uproar vibrating?

Our lives on earth all portray
Most remarkable of sayings
Reflections—whate'er you're sowing
Inevitably, you'll be reaping.

Emmanuel Ik. Nwabueze
Though your mouth be lined with silver
And your word be as good as gold,
If you speak not up for the righteous,
If you step not forth with the bold;
If the plea of justice you withhold,
Then, though your mouth be lined with silver
And your word be as good as gold,
As sounding cymbals you shall be;
For if you did it not for the least of these,
You did it not for Me.

J.L. Burns

ICICLES

Water falling from the sky
Changing from rain to ice
that says, "Now, hang on tight!"
But tell me,
Are you hanging on,
Or is it hanging on to you?

How like people,
Hanging on to things we don't need,
And ideas that are unfruitful.
But tell me,
Who is possessing whom?

David Putnam
Incarnation and Integration:
An Interview with John Michael Talbot

By Peter Smith

It is intermission at a relatively small concert hall. The audience, strolling in the lobby during the break or remaining seated and carrying on conversations, is a heterogeneous group of well-dressed young people, other youth in T-shirts and jeans with longer hair and beards, several nuns dressed in their recognizable habits, and a large number of older people.

They have just heard a group of fairly well-known musicians perform: the female duet Wendy & Mary and guitarist/singer Terry Talbot. But what accounts for the diversity and size of the crowd is the featured artist of the second act. Dressed in a simple brown Franciscan habit, the young, dark-haired, bearded musician sits on stage with his guitar and with his haunting, peaceful songs tranquillizes almost total quiet the crowd which only a short time before had thrilled in the enthusiastic, energetic style of Terry Talbot. But this musician, with sparse but moving orchestration in the background and the creative use of simple ballet accompaniment, creates an almost timeless atmosphere in which the audience even declines to applaud after many of the songs because they do not want to break up the peaceful, reverent mood which pervades the concert. With near effortlessness he evokes a mood of contemplative worship in which the audience readily participates, no matter that it is an unfamiliar mode of worship to many of them. There is all the mystery and otherworldliness of a Gregorian chant and yet the familiarity and simplicity of folk guitar.

His name is John Michael Talbot, perhaps the least characteristic of the ever so uncharacterizable musical field known as contemporary Christian music. At age 28, his artistic abilities are already widely recognized, and his ability to transcend denominational lines is a rare gift. Another gift he offers to the Christian music community, aside from his immense musical talents, is the set of clear, well-defined artistic principles which form the basis for his art. They are theories which he hopes other Christian artists will take up and apply to their own art, be it music or any other art form.

"There are a couple words that are key to my approach to music," says Talbot. "One would be incarnation: that God has come into the world to reconcile it to himself, and that all things can be made sacred. There is an attempt on my part to be open to as many different varying musical styles as I can, and this brings me to the second word, which is integration: I try to integrate as many different styles as I can. As a Catholic, that is a real key word. I think that's really a reflection of my Catholic faith: trying to integrate all the various styles and gifts and spiritual traditions. If the Lord calls me to be part of the body of Christ, then I need to be open to all the gifts and ministries that have come into the body of Christ all around the world today and also in the history of the Church and in the traditions of the Church.

"What this means for my own musical style is that I would say I'm definitely a street musician: I take the styles of rock n' roll, blues, folk, country — all of these are street styles — and I try to tie them together with the classical styles and with the various classical traditions."

Talbot says that this integration of the more rustic "street styles" with the classical styles is no unfamiliar relationship. In his studies of classical music he has noted that the Italian and other European folk ballads — from which classical music developed — bear many strong resemblances to the American folk music which developed in Appalachia.

It was, in fact, with this country style that Talbot began in music. In his teenage years he sang with his brother Terry for a group which would soon become a successful country band: Mason Profit. The group had its heyday in the late 60's and early 70's, but the band members began to drift apart, and soon the two Talbot brothers left the band. It was at this time that John Michael had a conversion experience in which he says the presence of Christ entered his room and answered his prayers for guidance to the truth about God.

Talbot spent the next several years in what he describes as his "fundamentalist stage." It was during this time that he began recording Christian albums. His music was a clear, crisp folk-country sound, and his lyrics were reminiscent of another well-known musician, Keith Green, in their mixture of simple devotional tunes and sober calls for a more fervent, dedicated Christian life.

A series of personal crises in his life brought Talbot to seek refuge at a Franciscan hermitage near his home, where he received counseling and spent a good deal of time in quiet and prayer. It was during this time that he became a Roman Catholic, a decision which he made only after months of intense study of Catholic teaching and theology. The fruits of this study are published in a booklet called "The Regathering", a thorough explanation of his reasons for joining the Roman Catholic Church.

It was at this time, also, that Talbot was growing in his attraction to the ideals of St. Francis of Assisi, the
twelfth-century Italian whose vision of the gospel life was that of being free from the bondage of the love of earthly possessions. Francis was a man who loved creation as passionately as any man ever has and yet he lived a life of utter poverty, for he believed fervently that one only can enjoy the world if one has died to it. It was only after a long fast in a dark cave that Francis wrote the glorious "Canticle of the Sun." The Franciscan optimism in regard to all created things has, throughout history, always encouraged artistic expression as a form of worship to God. It this Franciscan tradition that Talbot entered when he received Holy Orders as member of the Franciscan Third Order.

In 1979, Talbot broke his long silence in the music industry with an astonishing album, *The Lord's Supper*, which is based verbatim on the liturgy of the mass and overflows with a jubilant aura of charismatic celebration. Even more astounding is the fact that Talbot wrote the music in a single day as he was roaming the grounds of the hermitage at which he was staying.

Since then, Talbot has recorded as many as three albums in a single year, all of them significantly diverse in style, from the contemplative simplicity of *Come to the Quiet* and *Songs of Worship, vol.1* to the grandeur of *Light Eternal*. The images one senses in listening to his music cover the whole range of Christian worship: at times one feels secluded in the solitude of a hermitage; other times one senses the splendor and reverence of a vast cathedral; other times one feels caught up in spontaneous charismatic worship. The diversity in the music is no less pronounced (especially in the album, *Troubadour of the Great King*). Elements of many different styles are integrated in an effort to cover a wide stream of human experience and emotion:

“What happens when we limit our cultural expression to just a pop sound or just a classical sound, or just a folk or just a country sound, is that we limit our ability to communicate that which we are feeling inside. The key is that the truly Christian or the truly catholic artist — small “c” catholic — musician will want to acquaint his or herself with as many styles as possible, not just for a musical trip or to impress people with their style but to truly express and accommodate what the Spirit of God is doing in that individual and to be able to help stir it up out of them.”

Another of Talbot’s creative ventures is his use of ballet to accompany his music in concert performances. The simple yet inspiring dance adds a new and rare dimension to the concert and helps visualize the images Talbot is portraying in his songs. Does the use of dance correlate with his artistic theology?

“Absolutely. This again goes back to the idea of incarnation. Of course you could just go back to Scripture itself to find exhortations to use song and dance in worship. And in the studies of the early Church they believe they used a liturgical dance in worship. It wasn’t a ballet, but it was some sort of a use of prayer as movement. They have studied the mosaics of the early Church and most scholars believe there were definite patterns used.

“The idea of incarnation begins with various artistic expressions. Art by its nature communicates in an almost unspeakable manner. A painting can speak beyond words; music can speak beyond words, and a dance can be that way, too. I think that’s generally of the Church because of its relation with Jesus. Now there is a place for the doctrine of the spoken word, but it also goes beyond that. And love is mysterious — it cannot be expressed in words.”

If the love of God cannot be expressed in words, perhaps the nearest way it can be expressed in the finitude of man is through music. Surely Talbot succeeds gracefully in the expression of love. Talbot’s portrayal of a love relationship with Jesus Christ is one of the most prevalent themes in his music. The deeply moving passages from the Psalms — that timeless book which deals with all the joys, pains, and fruits of relationship with God — are brought to life in his songs, and his extensive use of the prayers of St. Francis, the medieval Celts, and other Christians throughout history provides a set of references for him which literally extend back through history to all who have borne the name of Christ.

We do not know how future generations will rate Talbot as an artist, but at age 28 he has already shown tremendous talent and ingenuity, and before his career is over he may produce musical works which will be treasured by the Church for years to come. The simplicity of his style gives him a wide popular appeal, and yet a close study of his music reveals a skillfully orchestrated complexity beneath the simplicity. Few Christian musicians today have exhibited such a command of so many musical styles, and Talbot’s artistic basis of incarnation and integration is a simple and yet solid foundation of artistic expression which Christians in every field of the arts would do well to adopt.

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In middle March,
We napped in a gauzy summer swoon.
Forward crawled the new-blood blaze
As we in spun sheets wheeled back to youth
And, sullied, clamoring, ourselves ablaze,
Approached the vernal equinox.

Unequalled suns
Cavort and havoc the favored earth--
Becalmed, undrape their lazy arms.
Six chastened springs, relenting, troth
New latitudes of will. My star's
Seductions charm you from your sphere.

Unmeasured days
And nights your wifely patience parts,
Half love, half salt, equating yields
Of wakened bliss to the pull of years,
Of longings turning to the yielding prow
In currents sounder than the sea.

Mean destiny
That the compassed love is last crossed off
And last fulfilled, that first cartography
A tack coincident and kind,
Retrieving wayward cavilling mates
To lulled meridians, familiar pain.

A husband's face,
Celestial guide, that navigates
Toward grace—I saw it where we moored.
He squinted, astronomic, from
An equinox of shade. His broad eye,
Single, eclipsed me in its wake.

Dennis Johnson
A Sudden Age

I can open and close the sink faucets by myself now.
I can reach my reflection in the mirror on the wall.
Nothing looks quite so big anymore,
but I still seem just as small.
And an old china doll rests on the very top shelf,
dying in the world of imagination.
I've grown too busy, too quickly to old;
too aware of the present now.
My goals that were propped at a tip-toe away
have all one-by-one occurred,
but so quickly time's hunger has passed them along,
I've forgotten to savor their taste
...suddenly I stand in a new day's poem, learning a
rushed soliloquy.
Penny M. Diolordi
"Oh but get serious, you have to be kidding,"
Your words pop the bubble where these dreams do my bidding.
And gasping, clutching, it slips through my fingers.
My illusion is gone. Your realism lingers.
I ponder, searching overcast skies for a sliver of light.
You smile and, hand touching mine, gently show who is right.
Embarrassed, I sheepishly raise the concrete and bury the abstract.
Breathing the invisible air, feeling intangible emotions, I strain for a contact.
For a brief moment two opposite worlds nearly touch,
Then jerk wildly apart. The stress is too much.
In a remote corner your perplexed eyes watch me drift.
You grow smaller and smaller. I increase the rift.
I watch for a time then resume meditation.
Reach deep into optimism, search for spare speculation.
I fumble as a small boy plying his pocket for pennies.
The sun strikes a shimmering note on the copper you clutch.
"Penny for your thoughts?" And once again we are in touch.

Charles Falci
The obvious thing was to play polo. Everybody else played polo and you were expected to, and if you didn't like it, well you'd jolly well got to lump it. I once had an assistant who came and said he didn't want to play, he wasn't to keen on playing polo, so I told him, "Well, if you can't play polo you're not much use to me. I'll have to find somebody who can." And that was the sort of attitude in those days.

—Kenneth Warren from Plain Tales From the Raj

The year was 1907, the place Lucknow—United Provinces—India. Edward was king. The British Empire, and particularly that glistening ruby in her crown, the Raj, were at their zenith. The White Man's Burden had not only been shouldered, it had been thoroughly dissected and examined, wrapped in brown paper—or khaki, if you will—and distributed throughout the select ranks of the products of English Public Schools. The Great War and the destruction of Empire that was to follow were still seven years off and despite the rumours of war in Europe, a sort of reckless optimism characterized the attitudes of the young Empire-keepers. Or at least such was the general spirit of the junior officers sitting in cane chairs on the verandah of the Lucknow Club watching the sun sink over the Himalayas. Because it was considered bad form to talk shop—that is, to discuss military or political affairs—off duty, most of their conversation centered around polo, hunting, pig-sticking, and local gossip. They were proud men; they had been given a great deal of responsibility while still very young.

"Have you heard about that new club some commercial chap is building at Simla?" asked a fellow named Walker-Harris, a second lieutenant in his first year of service in India. "I hear it cost him bloody near L5000. His own pocket, mind you! Brought a fellow over from Italy to lay out the gardens and the tennis courts."

"The buggers raised a fuss about it. Said the land he built on was holy ground or something," said Braithewaite, a major also in his first year.

"Chap wouldn't hear of that, though. 'E told the buggers the ground would be holier still when 'e had finished with it. Still they raised quite a fuss. Even threatened to strike. Chap just brought in different workers."

"That ought to show the buggers. That ground will be so holy they won't even be able to set foot inside the gates," said Middleton, the most experienced of the junior officers, having been in India five years.

They all laughed at the joke. The club was the holy of holies of British life in India. It stood for everything British and civilized, and therefore against everything Indian and barbarous. The only Indians ever allowed inside the gates of the best British clubs were gardeners, servants, and kitchen help.

A slight interruption of the officers' small revel occurred when Michael Brooke, another junior officer, walked onto the verandah, offered a terse "Goodnight, chaps," and headed off down the road to his bungalow.

"Odd fellow, him," said Braithewaite. "Never has a word with us."

"Always been like that, too. Keeps to himself. He was at Winchester the year I was sent down," said Middleston. "Not too bloody sympathetic either. Funny we should end up in the same regiment."

"They say he was rather good at rugger in his sixth form year," said a fellow called David Dunston. "Never seen him play here, though. Doesn't play polo either, of course. Just walks or rides alone. Reads rather a lot in the bungalow."

"Always a queer bloke like that in the lot," said Middleston. "Black sheep in a pen of whites. Best to just leave 'em be."

"They say he has bugger friends," said Dunston. "Say he eats with 'em in town."

"Ah, bad business, that," said Walker-Harris. "Mixing with the buggers!" A bad business, indeed! One did not mix socially with the natives. At least not if one valued advancing one's career.

"Rather an incomplete fellow all 'round," said
Braithewaite, "Comes of leaving Oxford after only a year. His father died or something. Capital ran out, so he had to join up."

This was not entirely dishonorable. Almost all of the officers for one reason or another "had to join up." Some, like Middleton, had been sent down at school and had no alternative but to serve His Majesty abroad. Others, like Michael Brooke, were educated but from poor families, and were forced by economics to shoulder the White Man's Burden abroad. And for others, the vast majority in fact, the Army was merely the logical extension of the life they had learned at Public School: regimentation, camaraderie, and of course, games.

All in all, it was not a bad life. One rose early, breakfasted, and went to drill. Then there was lunch and in the afternoon, games or hunting, usually something to do with riding. One had a rather amazing amount of leisure time really. What one did with this time was, strictly speaking, one's own business. But if one has ever been to summer camp or boarding school, one knows that one's free time isn't really "free." Like all things regimental in nature, time off was the time for doing things with—preferably games (and equestrian ones at that)—with one's mates. This, of course, fostered what was popularly referred to as "esprit de corps," a rather intangible asset, though one highly valued by commanding officers. At any rate, any variance or deviance observed in one's time off (and in British India little deviance was not observed) was duly noted.

Brooke's time off activities had, of course, been noticed, though not all the details were known. He spent a small amount of time with Smythe, the local priest. Generally, they had tea once or twice a month in the afternoons. And "the bugger" Michael ate with in town was his father's gun bearer, an old Sikh called Sundar, who, having served Michael's father for nearly three decades, was regarded as a long-time family friend. Michael thought nothing of spending several hours with the old man, allowing him the opportunity to reminisce about past campaigns, forced marches, the Great Mutiny, and pitched battles with Pathan tribesmen.

The priest, Smythe, was an educated man and for the most part, quite a "find" for Michael in light of the general quality of priests in the Empire. Smythe had chosen India rather than being sent. A single fellow, the idea of a life of solitude in a relatively beautiful part of the Empire had appealed to him. So at 23, just out of divinity school, he sailed for India, arriving first in Bombay where he assisted the Bishop for a year, then north to Lucknow where he had kept the same parish for the past twenty years or so. His particular congregation was "mixed," though whites and "coloreds" did not attend the same services.

Although solitude did suit him well, Smythe was by no means any sort of hermit, and mixed consistently with members of both communities. He belonged to the club, but only rarely "dined in," preferring to cook his own meals. He neither kept a servant nor regarded the Indians as anything less than his equals. In fact, at times he regarded his own position with incredulity. After all, he was an imposter!

Smythe and Michael Brooke had met in the club reading room when Michael, sheepishly excusing himself, asked Smythe some questions about the book he was reading, a volume of Yeats's early poems. It WAS a rather odd book for a clergyman to be reading. Smythe explained that while much of Yeats was "pure bosh," there were, of course, elements of truth. And using these "truths," he explained, one could then delineate to the initiated "the whole truth." A novel idea, indeed, but one which captivated Michael. An hospitable fellow, Smythe invited Michael to tea the next afternoon, and a sort of friendship began.

One is tempted to think at this point that Smythe was Michael's only friend, his sole comforter, or even his mentor. Granted, there was a marked difference between Smythe and the men of the regiment. Yet in a funny way Michael admired Smythe no more and at times even less than the men of his regiment. Michael did not like being regarded as the "thoughtful fellow" of the regiment, for he truly wanted to be a soldier, an ordinary fellow like Middleton, Braithewaite, or Walker-Harris. Michael was in the process of relating all this to Smythe over tea and Victoria sandwiches several days after the officers' discussion on the verandah.

"You see, I really don't quite fit with the regiment," he said. "They're all fine chaps, but most of them are--are--still in Public School, if you know what I mean."

"Ah yes," said Smythe, "English innocents abroad. They talk a good deal about nothing, I suppose. Polo, hunting, and the like? Not the sort of fellows you might discuss a good book with. Nevertheless, good men. One mustn't forget that."

"Course not, Sir. One only wishes that one could perhaps be more serious with them at times. Or at least not always talk such rot."

"Or," said Smythe, "at least talk rot comfortably and not feel bad about it. You see, you're in quite an admirable position. You can still see that
most of what those chaps talk about is trivial. And
most of them probably felt that way at one time.
But their parents talked like that. And the Public
Schools ...” He shrugged his shoulders and sighed.
“Though at the outset most of what society
discussed seemed a lot of bosh to many of those
fellows,” he said, “in order to be social they began
to talk rot as well. Very soon after that they forgot
there was anything else to talk of except polo, “the
buggers,” the weather, and hunting.
“Well, what’s a chap to do?” asked Michael.
“One must be social. One must be nice.”
“It is rather a hard one,” said Smythe. “One
does want to be polite and what you call “nice”
because it seems the Christian thing to do. But one
also risks losing sight of real substance and mean­
ing in conversation--and in life--if one indulges in
what you call “talking rot.” He raised his
eyebrows. “I can’t say, Brooke. You can see very
well the the path I have taken.”
“Yes, Sir. But don’t you miss society? You rare­
ly speak to anyone at the club. I have watched
you.”
“Brooke, I belong to the club because it has the
best library in this part of India. No other reason.”
“But don’t you care about being “in the swim”
or part of society or any of that sort of thing?”
“My boy, we cannot fully accept those people,
nor can they fully accept us. What I mean is that
the more you follow the path I have chosen--that
is, if you choose it, and I don’t mean the
priesthood--the more you follow that path, the less
you will find you have in common with them. In
fact, the less you will find yourself attracted to
them. But you must choose for yourself.”
Michael was disturbed by this--this ultimatum!
Who was this fellow? What cheek! Turn his back
on society? He told Smythe he had to report
back,and hastily excused himself.
Riding back to the bungalow, Michael thought
of the men he lived with. Good men, indeed! What
was this business about not fully accepting them?
And them not fully accepting him? He only needed
to save a little more money in order to buy the
polo pony he wanted. He found himself getting
very angry with Smythe. The nerve of the fellow!
In the winter months in India--what were
popularly known as “the cool weather”--the
British celebrated the pleasant temperatures by
staging intra-regimental games, the capstone of
which were the polo matches. It was during such a
week of games that Michael, an avid spectator of
“the polo,” was watching a match between his
own regiment and a Gurkha cavalry regiment when
he met Smythe for the first time since their rather
aborted tea a month or so before.
“Ah, hello, young Brooke. And how have you
been these last few weeks? One doesn’t see you at
the club often.”
“Been out on tour, Sir,” said Michael. “With
my bungalow mates. Visited the Hills a bit.”
“Did you find anything?”
“No, Sir. Much the same everywhere really.”
“Ah, yes. So I expected. But a pleasant diversion
nonetheless?”
Ironically, it seemed to Michael, Smythe was ex­
changing the same sort of numb pleasantries with
him as he himself might with his bungalow
mates. The fellow was torturing him!
Michael cleared his throat. “What brings you to
the polo, Sir? I didn’t know you were fond of
games.”
“Merely on a walk, my boy. Merely on a walk.
Games are fine--for entertainment and fitness--but
for the meaning of life? Sheer nonsense! Much
more to life than games.”
“I assure you, I quite agree, Sir,” said Michael.
“Nevertheless, our games here--why they’ve done
so much! Take polo, a barbarous game played by
equally barbarous tribesmen before we came. With
our rules and some gentlemanly conduct--why it’s a
game for kings!” Michael was embarrassed by his
enthusiasm.
“Hmmm, I rather like it the way the Pathans
played it,” said Smythe. “I suppose you’ve never
seen a REAL Indian polo match?”
“Bit before my time, Sir. Heard they were quite
bloody, though. Monstrous affairs!”
“Blood? What’s a game without blood? Blood is
the essence, Brooke. Those conversations we
discussed--perfectly bloodless. Men try to clean
things up, take the blood out, if you will. Instead,
they end up sterilising things. There’s no life
without blood. Well, I must be getting on. Enjoy
your game. Good day!”
“Good day to you, Sir.” Michael was left stand­
ing quite alone at the edge of the polo field as
Smythe walked away.
The third and final chukka was just beginning.
Not minding watching the match in solitude, but
quite aware that this was not done, Michael moved
vaguely in the direction of the crowd of spectators
composed primarily of officers’ wives sitting on
wicker chairs or blankets. He was not the only of­
ficer in the regiment who did not play polo, but he
was the only YOUNG officer who did not.
Actually, his reasons for not playing were quite
good. He sent a small part of his pay home to his

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And he absolutely refused to live above his means as the vast majority of young British officers did. His comrades got by by signing "chits"—IOUs of a sort—to pay for anything and everything. Michael signed chits, but only when he had money to back them up. His friends were all in debt, but cared little. They had a certain self-indulgent attitude Michael particularly disdained. A new polo pony, a tailor's bill in Bombay, the bearer's pay for last month—sign a chit and it was taken care of. Sign too many and you got a visit from the commanding officer. Sign to few and you were regarded as a miser.

So though Michael desperately wanted to play "the polo" and vehemently admired his comrades who did, he did not and was therefore regarded as something of a "queer fish" by the other men in the regiment. He felt uncomfortable watching a game he wished to play, knowing all the while that the rest of the regiment were damning him for not playing. 'Even the old officers' wives disdain me,' he thought.

He spoke to Colonel Radclyffe who was seated on his horse watching the "mixed" Gurkha team give the regimental team a lesson in team polo.

"I say, Sir, they're giving the chaps a bit of a knocking about, eh?"

"They bloody well are, Brooke. And if it weren't for that fellow from the Frontier, Alex something-or-rather, we would have them. He was at Sandhurst with me, I believe. The buggers certainly aren't doing anything."

There was an awkward silence. Both men intensified their concentration on the game.

"Your wife, Sir. Is she well? And your son, is he back from the Hills?" asked Michael.

"Yes. Yes to both," said Radclyffe. "Bloody hot weather stayed longer this year. Ruined my week of hunting. All the game were still in the Hills."

"You got nothing, Sir?"

"Oh, pea-fowl and the odd duck or two. Nothing worth the trip. Had trouble with the bearers. They wanted more money because of the long Hot Weather. A bad business all 'round."

"Quite sorry, Sir."

"Yes, well there will always be hunts." "Yes, of course, Sir. Good day!"

"Good day, Brooke."

Michael moved toward the memsahibs.

"Ah, Mrs. Radclyffe, the Colonel told me about the hunt. Hard luck! So sorry. Wonderful match, though. That fellow from the Frontier, Alex something-or-rather, 's giving us quite a knocking about out there. From Sandhurst, I believe."

"Yes, my dear boy, he WAS a cad. The Frontier is the only place for men like that."

"Quite right, Madame. An absolute jungle-wallah if I ever saw one. Rides like a Pathan. Not a gentleman at all. Look! He gave Middleton's horse a poke in the leg when he rode by."

"Yes, rather. The polo is SO exciting, isn't it?" Mrs. Radclyffe murmured. "I remember when Jack played. He was so dashing in his outfit."

Michael felt himself blushing. He was glad the chukka was almost over. The Gurkhas were giving his friends a beating, and he felt ashamed for not having upheld the honor of the regiment. There would be ill humour in the bungalow tonight he was quite sure.

"Young Brooke. Do come amuse us. Isn't the polo just so exciting?" said Mrs. Sidebottom, wife of one Captain Sidebottom of Michael's regiment.

"Yes. Quite exciting, isn't it," muttered Michael. And looking up, "How are you, Mrs. Sidebottom? Was YOUR time in the Hills pleasant?"

"Oh, dear boy, such a season! All the young ladies--and such clothes! Oh yes, quite pleasant, indeed! On could catch up on all the latest. And one knows just everyone. It's--it's like a big party!"

Michael did not know quite how to reply to this, so he merely nodded his head in agreement.

"Your children," he asked, "are they still in England?"

"Certainly," Mrs. Sidebottom replied. "Charles has just one more year at Oxford before he comes over. He tells us he is becoming quite good at the polo. He hopes to join the regiment, you know."

"I didn't know," said Michael. "I went to Oxford."

"It really is the BEST school, isn't it?"

"I played rugger at Oxford," said Michael. "Ha! Rugger! The polo is just the latest, though, isn't it? You simply must play, Mr. Brooke. It's, it's--it's the gentleman's game. So dashing!"

"You're right," he muttered. "I really must."

Good day, Mrs. Sidebottom."

The final chukka was just ending.

Michael began walking to his bungalow. No use waiting around for his ill-humoured mates. Not a night to go to the club, either. 'They will all be drunk,' he mused, and it won't be very quiet. Shall have to stay in tonight."

'But dash it all,' he thought, 'why not just sign a chit, buy a pony and some gear, and join the team? One DOES only live once!'

So feeling rather reckless, Michael changed his
mind, and instead of returning to the bungalow for
the evening, headed off down the road toward the
cub.

The Indian doorman salaamed to Michael as he
entered the club.

“Sahib Brooke,” he said, “we have not seen you
in so long.”

“Been out on tour, Aziz. Are the team in?”

“Oh yes, Sahib. Very, very angry tonight. A bad
chukka?”

“Yes, Aziz. Several bad chukkas.”

“That is most unfortunate,” said Aziz. “One
feels it deeply.”

“Quite. Well, good evening. I shall dine.”

Michael walked first to the bookshelves outside
the dining room and selected a book to go with his
dinner—VANITY FAIR by Thackeray. “Light stuff,
to be sure,” he thought, “but amusing!” He seated
himself in the dining room and placed the book on
a small stand.

“Koi Hai!” he called to the Indian waiter. “I
want a pint of bitters and the usual beef.”

“Yes, Sahib. You are alone?”

“Yes, of course.”

He turned to the place he had left off in VANITY
FAIR. This fellow Thackeray knew the human
condition. ‘Well, no more nonsense about frugali-
ty,’ he thought. He was going to buy a pony and
gear tonight.

He would show the chaps!

Upon finishing his meal, Michael walked out on-
to the verandah and joined the team, most of
whom were sitting in cane chairs facing the Hills,
staring meditatively into the distance.

“Evening, chaps. Bloody tough match today,”
Michael said.

“Mmm ... Brooke,” No one turned around.

Middleston, who had acknowledged him, pointed
to a chair. “Come to join the mourners?” he said.

“Well, actually, I had thought I might buy a
horse and a bit of gear,” said Michael.

“Think we need some help, eh?” asked
Braithewaite.

“No. Just wanted to play the game. You know,
dash and all that.”

No one spoke.

“Any of you chaps have a horse and some old
gear he wants to sell? I’m willing to pay a price.
Within reason, of course. I might join the team
after a bit of practice.”

Again, there was silence.

Finally, Middleton spoke. “See the Afghan
horse trader in town. He sells mostly nags, but to
an officer ...” He shrugged. “You might find

something.”

“Oh, I’m sorry,” said Michael. “I fancied settl-
ing on something tonight. Oh well, hard luck all
’round. But cheer up. A game is a game. And
there’ll be other games. Goodnight!”

No one returned his goodnight. ‘Rather the cold
shoulder treatment,’ thought Michael. He walked
back into the club feeling as if he did not quite
belong to the regiment any longer. But it was not a
new feeling. That—that fellow Smythe! He had
ruined it for him! Thinking VANITY FAIR might
cheer him up, he went into the reading room.

Smythe, the room’s sole occupant, looked up and
smiled. There was no escaping this fellow!

“Brooke! I assume the polo was satisfactory to
your tastes? No? Well, perhaps Thackeray will pro-
ve more rewarding.”

“Yes, one would hope so,” murmured Michael.

“Are you feeling ill, Brooke? You DO look
rather poorly. Too much sun. Or perhaps your
liver? If you will pardon my meddling, what IS
wrong?”

“Well, nothing exactly, Sir. But at the same
time, everything it seems.”

“You are not happy in India?”

“Yes—I mean—no, that is not it. I am quite hap-
py here. But the men ... and well, you remember
what we talked about.”

“Ah yes,” said Smythe. “You want to be a polo
player. Is that it? Money a little tight. Not quite
one of the chaps. A foolish man would say you
think too much.”

“Sir! You seem to know.”

“Yes, yes,” said Smythe impatiently. “They’ll
send you to the Frontier, you know.”

“But, Sir, the Frontier—that’s a place for cads
and jungle-wallahs and men who haven’t ‘played
the game.’”

“You ARE quite a perceptive fellow, Brooke.”

“I don’t—I don’t follow you.”

“Don’t you see, Michael? You don’t fit. At least
not with them. From their point of view, YOU
don’t ‘play the game.’ Sooner or later they will
send you off. Not playing polo is just a sort of
symbol of it. You had a hard go of it at Public
School, I suppose?”

Michael nodded his assent.

“Yes, yes. Well, you’ll be entirely better off on
the Frontier, you know.”

Michael was struck dumb. The thought of the
Frontier horrified him. THAT barbarous place! To
be called a jungle-wallah? Never! This fellow
Smythe was like—well, what was he like? Certainly
an uncomfortable chap to be with.
"Think on it, Brooke. Better for you to choose the Frontier than for them to choose it for you. They will, you know. You and I, we make them uncomfortable. We don't--and I might add, I won't--speak their language. I stay here to prick them, to make them uncomfortable. You know, the salt of the earth and all that. You'll be much happier on the Frontier.''

'Well, this fellow has ruined Thackeray for the night,' thought Michael. 'The Frontier! What a silly idea!'

"I must be getting on, Smythe. Thanks for the advice. I mean it. Really. The Frontier, though?"

"Think on it, boy. One way or another, it's where you'll be. Goodnight!"

Smythe's prophecy left Michael with a chill as he walked back to his bungalow in the dusk. Men were killed on the Frontier. And no clubs. He supposed they played polo there. Or at least a form of it. No women, either.

'But dash it all,' he thought. 'I'm having no luck with any of that business here. Perhaps I shall go to the Frontier after all. At any rate, I shall think on it.' That Smythe! Always putting the most maddening ideas in one's head!

When he awoke the next morning, Michael knew he was going to the Frontier. He did not know quite what was compelling him, but he felt at rest about it. His feelings puzzled him. This was all so hasty! So rash! He still cared about the dangers and disadvantages of the Frontier, but not enough to stay in Lucknow with the regiment. He was going to the Frontier and that was that. He would go as a volunteer. Captain Sidebottom would be the man to speak to. He felt almost in a rush to be getting on with it!

After drill and lunch, Michael rode to Smythe's. He walked in unannounced and found Smythe, as he had expected, in his study reading.

"Hello. I've come to tell you I'm volunteering for the Frontier."

"Mmmm ... yes," said Smythe.

"I don't know exactly why I'm going, but I'm going and that's that."

"We never do know exactly why at first, Brooke. But you will know soon enough, I think. It will be quite wonderful for you in time, though you will dislike it the first year out."

Michael shrugged. "I'm going."

"Yes," said Smythe, "one does what one has to do today. Don't worry about the future. You will be quite happy, but you will only see it after a time. If one thinks about it too much, it somehow escapes one."

"I suppose. Do men ever come back from the Frontier?"

"Oh yes," said Smythe. "They come back and function in the same sort of capacity I do. After being on the Frontier, you know, one doesn't much mind being the 'odd man out' or not 'playing the game.'"

"And you are quite happy being the 'odd man out,' Sir?"

"Oh yes, quite happy, indeed."

Michael was puzzled. "Perhaps," he murmured, "perhaps one must go to the Frontier to forever escape this business of being in the swim and this society rot."

"You are on to something there, Brooke. They do play polo on the Frontier, you know."

EPILOGUE

Michael did go the Frontier, and, as Smythe had predicted, he was quite happy after the first year. The men he knew were, like himself, men who had purposely distanced themselves from a society fraught with pretention and trivia, wholly lacking in depth.

At first Michael thought himself special or set apart from the other jungle-wallahs. He soon found, however, that trying to be a sort of "breed apart" only added to his unhappiness. In effect, no one on the Frontier cared where his clothes were made, what school he had gone to, or what sort of polo pony he owned. When Michael realized this, he thought himself a fool for his self-indulgence. But he thought society the greater fools for putting so much stock in such nonsense. It was at this point, when he stopped caring about silly things, that he began to be truly happy.

With the extra pay he earned by volunteering for the Frontier he was able to afford a polo pony. Much to his pleasure, he found himself rather adept at the game from the start. But it was ONLY A GAME, and he realized this soon after he had played a bit.

Reflecting one evening after several years of good life on the Frontier in spite of the dangers and hardships, Michael thought, 'What a foolish fellow I was! The sacrifice I thought I was making to come to the Frontier--why it wasn't a sacrifice at all! And that Smythe! What had ever become of him? Probably still around somewhere putting those maddening little ideas in peoples' heads!'
Sitting on the bank of a quiet lake, 
I shatter the stillness, crying,  
"Lord, I need an answer! 
Say something, something clear and distinct. 
Leave off this painful and oppressive silence 
That puts you and me at opposite ends of creation!"

Repeatedly, I demand a sign. 
A response is all I want,  
Or some direction from on High--  
A voice would be nice, or perhaps  
A flash of lightning to engrave an answer on the sky. 
I cry out till my voice is hoarse; 
My throat is raw and rough.

Now huddling smaller,  
I sit in the vacuum of silence.  
Without permission, my body shivers.  
I feel like a flickering candle in the thin mountain air--  
Hungering, whimpering for that which keeps me aflame.

Weakly, I unfold, resigning myself to retreat.  
As I prepare to return home,  
I glance up and see my reflection in the still water.  
Watching my eyes widen in increasing understanding,  
I finally realize that the arms that covered my head  
Have shielded my ears from distraction, and from His voice.  
And the eyes so tightly closed to the world were  
Also blinded from seeing any of His signs.

Cara Smith
Twilight

Like watercolors,
   The pinks, violets, greys and blues
Swirl and streak the sky.
   Maybe God
Added water to the paint
   Making the colors appear
Muted.

Debbie Kruse
“ORU’s Literary and Visual Arts Magazine”