

SOCIETY IN THE TWENTY FIRST CENTURY

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**“THE SHAPE OF THE WORLD TO COME?”
(Or: Education, for What?)”**

by SIR LESLIE FIELDING, parent

*“As we approach the end of the second millennium, it seems likely that the world we know is passing away”: Karen Armstrong: A History of God.

*“There is no permanence. Do we build a house to stand forever?”: Epic of Gilgamesh.

*“Be Mindful”: Motto of the Campbells of Cawdor.

The question posed by this conference is how better to prepare our boys for the kind of world into which they are growing up. As the initial, curtain-raising, speaker, I do not propose to answer the question directly, but to speculate about the possible future shape of that world. I shall therefore approach the subject of education from an unaccustomed angle, and perhaps a controversial and rather creepy one.

As the Second Millennium draws to its close, Cardinal Daly of Dublin warned us to watch out for a proliferation of alleged visions, apparitions and messages from the unseen world. The same things happened, of course, first time round; so there is no need for me to talk about them, this time. Neither shall I dwell on the moral confusions of today’s youth – real though they are; nor on the unaccountable preference for games of “Kick Boxer” or “Street Fighter” on a computer; or potato crisps on television couches, rather than for outdoor team sports, or the cooking of dampers over a scout fire lit with two matches. Cicero has already more or less said it for me, somewhere in his Letters to Atticus. (Tom Sharpe, in his novel “Grantchester Grind”, has the elderly Praelector of Porterhouse College, Cambridge musing on the pulsating and orgiastic may Ball outside his windows. The undergraduates, whom he did not blame, appeared to the Praelector to be “drowning out in a world that seemed to have no structure to it and no meaning for them ...”).

Instead, I propose to peep into the early part of the Third Millennium. Futurology is, of course, an art, not a science. I am not much more reliable as a guide than Mystic Meg. But I shall give expression to one or two rather twitchy intuitions. I have the hunch that we, on these Islands, may be living at the end of Antonine Era of stability and ease. While “what’s to come is till unsure”, the rate of change is exponential, both at home and abroad; and it may not be too long before in-stability and dis-ease re-surface, as they mostly have through history. The UK could then be thrown very much on its mettle. Even if education may be powerless to prevent this, it can certainly help society to “roll with the punch”. When the Gatling is jammed, and the Colonel is dead, and the sand of the desert is sodden red with the wreck of the Square that broke, it may not always be the voice of a Schoolmaster, a Head of House, or a Vice-Chancellor that rallies the ranks. But Educators and Educationalist will be called to teach new skills and to adopt fresh assumptions quite rapidly, on all our behalves. This adaptation will I think inevitably be utilitarian, in the context of carefully orchestrated, expensive, and mostly publicly funded “Neoteny”. Meanwhile, in the words of the highland motto engraved over the drawbridge of the

castle at Cawdor: “Be Mindful”. By which I take it that the medieval thanes essentially meant: “Watch it!”

Anyone contemplating the Millennium, in this country at least, does so with mixed feelings, because these are the best of times and the worst of times. In the society which we have built, there is much to be proud of and to give credit for. (I speak as a recent visitor to Russia, its chaos, injustice and backwardness; and who is well familiar with Mother Teresa’s world, in the city slums of Asia). Anyone old enough to remember, would not swap the England of 1999 with that of ’29, ’39, or even ’49. The European dictatorships – the apocalyptic movements of Fascism and Communism – have gone. The Cold War is over. Welfare and consumption have increased.

Equally, we have no cause to be complacent. Aspects of our political, economic and social system do not feel right. Some disquieting perspectives have been swept under the carpet. Few thinking people doubt that there will be massive upheavals for our nation before the next Century is out. We are moving fast towards an as yet unknown destination, which we shall probably have little choice than to accept, in the sense of Dag Hammarskjöld’s famous prayer: “For all that has been, Thanks. To all that will be, Yes”.

First, the immediate issues: the tensions within a mutating society in the United Kingdom. While many ordinary people on these Islands seem not discontent, in the satisfactions of the moment, and given that material welfare and average incomes have never been higher, nevertheless contemporary Britain is morally and ideologically a very different place from what it was when I was a young Army Subaltern, an Undergraduate at Cambridge, and a junior Diplomat, in the 1950s; or even from what it became in the swinging Sixties and early Seventies of my playboy years.

We now live in a “Flat Society”, in which traditional authority and leadership (the Monarchy; Parliament; the Judiciary; the Churches; Teachers; Heads of Family; “Gaffers” and “Foremen”; etc.) is no longer naturally respected. A “Culture of Contempt” exists, among some fat cats and glitterati, for traditional virtues; among the rest of us, a diminished willingness to accept individual responsibility for the common good, or to engage in unremunerated civic action, on the assumption that “They” will pay for it and do it, without our having to bother too much, personally. We suffer under a national press much of which is paradoxically both prurient and puritanical; xenophobic, yet foreign-owned. The approach of Lord Reith to public broadcasting is not merely no longer reviled, but is not even remembered. Where Parliament palls, “Direct Action” (as in the City riots, this summer) offers a heady but dangerous alternative. In what is now generally a rather yobbish national culture, purely gratuitous violence seems closer to the surface, from the milder manifestations of road rage to the latest knifing. We also live in a “Kingdom of Grab”, in which the “street credibility” goes to those with “loads-a-money”. Greedy and growing executive share options on the US model, if unconditional and unregulated, threaten to rob the many to benefit the few. A decline in past standards of conduct have tainted both politics and business with sleaze, and given Wall Street rewards to the bosses of monopoly public utilities, and fly-by-night speculators.

It doesn’t stop there. Today’s Northern Ireland still doesn’t know whether it is Bosnia or Britain. We have large and rapidly growing ethnic minorities in our midst (expected to become 12% of the population, and 20% of the workforce, within the next 30 years) which are often geographically concentrated, culturally unassimilated, and in some cases entrepreneurially unsuccessful and driven to crime through boredom as much as indigence. The challenge is political and confessional as well as economic and commercial. We have approaching one and a

half million Muslims, but barely a Muslim (as, in the last century, barely a Jew) at Westminster; and we still cannot make up our minds whether we face in them the enlightened and tolerant Islam of Haroun Al-Rashid and Jalal-ud-Din Rumi, or the bigoted malevolence of Saddam Hussein and the contempt for all Christians of Colonel Qadaffi.

Morality and belief in the UK have not been immune from these mutations and abrasions. In a spiritually confused nation, in the words of a remarkable unpublished hymn by the late Deaconess Barbara Young (d. 1979), ancient words have lost their meaning. For the majority, Christianity has become little more than a purveyor of rites of passage, a spectator sport at Harvest Festival and “Xmas”. Standards of conduct, too, have lost something of their former objective moral foundations. While much instinctive personal decency remains, the anvil of the Established Church, and indeed of the British so-called Establishment generally, has taken one hell of a beating.

These are difficult problems. A solution to some of them may call for pretty radical change. But they constitute, as it were, no more than the initial, and perhaps the least, of a series of further waves of turbulence approaching us, after the Millennium. Despite over-confidence in our future, on account of our past, there is sound reason for uncertainty (a deliberate Anglo-Saxon understatement – perhaps “gnawing anxiety” is what I really think justified) about our longer term economic competitiveness; about the impact of “globalisation” and the new and prospective technologies; and about our chances of avoiding certain potentially serious external threats to our national well-being.

Unhelpfully and sadly, we in England are saddled with an imprisoning, if glorious, imperial past. Our greatest current national failing is that of a faulty assessment of the world, and of the UK’s position and capabilities within it. No senior political leader of any shape or size in this country has found it possible, for fear of denunciation as defeatist and unpatriotic by H.M. Loyal Opposition of the day, to advertise in public what many of us have for years known in private, namely that the UK has for some time been in the grip of steady *relative* decline, in the face of other leading countries. Human kind, of course, cannot bear very much reality. We have been encouraged too readily to assume that Britain is exempt from the normal laws which govern political and economic success. For fear of finding something worse, we have always kept a hold of Nurse – for some, Queen Victoria; for others, Lady Thatcher.

The constraining facts of our objective situation are, however, that we are a small Island off the coast of Europe, with almost no useable natural resources, other than finite supplies of oil and natural gas, and the brains and determination of a mere 58 million citizens (and, as in so much of life, “size matters”). We face a host of problems – some of them openly acknowledged in the 1999 edition of the Official Year Book of the Office for National Statistics; a declining manufacturing base, insufficient domestically generated investment, over-strained logistics and infrastructure, patchy technological and vocational training; in some areas, deficient international competitiveness. Thanks in part to under-performance in the state schools in the 1960s-1980s, and the particular skew of the otherwise admirable expansion of Tertiary Education in the 1980s-1990s, we are, on the whole, probably less trained and well educated than e.g. the French or Germans, Dutch or Scandinavians.

To be sure, absolute levels income and welfare have slowly risen; but have served, in so doing, to camouflage the fact that others have forged ahead. Membership of the EU may have helped to cushion and protect us from isolation and exposure. But, even here, only Spain, Portugal and Greece currently have a manifestly lower GNP per head than the UK. Yet the ostriches in

Westminster, Surbiton and the Shires now advocate withdrawal to an independent but unviable national base in the English-speaking world, as a would-be, but unwanted, US off-shore aircraft carrier. More significantly, new centres of power and affluence have emerged outside Europe, not only in the New World and Japan, but also throughout Asia. (A leaked confidential Treasury memorandum a couple of years ago forecast that, by the year 2015, gross UK output would have been overtaken by that of China, India, Brazil and even Thailand; and that the UK would have lost her place in the G7 and on the UN Security Council). As current top military men will point out, never have our Armed Forces been so small – less than 100,000 in all branches of our land forces, for example; nor our military dependence on the US in an emergency so great – a cause for concern, if the US were to lose interest in this part of the world, or cease to be the remaining Super-Power. We spend less on health than our European peers. Young couples today can no longer be sure that their children will be able to draw adequate old age pensions, their grandchildren receive free health care. New Labour is not able, and does not now wish, to go back to the aspirations of 1945.

Another further wave of turbulence is that building up in applied science and technology. I refer not so much to the dislocation and redundancy which is already the inevitable and perhaps necessary side-effect of modern manufacturing methods and “IT” – with the premium they confer on the young, the well-educated and the highly-skilled, the MBAs and the PhDs, leaving others under-valued or even members of a perhaps permanently unemployable underclass. After all, this has at least had its good side in dealing with over-manning and Old Spanish Practices in e.g. Fleet Street and the former nationalised Behemoths. And many jobs can no longer reasonably be for life. Rather I am thinking of the upheavals promised, both to living patterns, and to medical morality, by such developments in genetic engineering as the manipulation of neural stem cells, or the cloning of embryos, to produce human tissue. If society is still unhappy about divorce; uncertain what to think about the transformation of family structures into something else, by way of single parenthood; and divided over gays and lesbians, how confidently can we expect social consensus on the *in-vitro* selection and manipulation of the human breeding stock, and of even the possible future transplant of brain tissue?

Yet a third wave of turbulence bearing down on us after the year 2000 is constituted by what used to be the recondite academic contemplation of “disaster theory” and is now openly and internationally discussed in the shape of global environmental degradation. The IPCC (the UN’s scholarly Intergovernmental Panel of Climate Change), and – more emphatically – the WHO, forecast a warmer and more pleasant life, at least initially, for some parts of the globe; but the spread of disease and the potential loss of sustainable livelihood in other parts. Also, a growing shortage of renewable fresh water. We already consume over one half this resource, world-wide. If the world population doubles by 2050, and given that the shortages are more local or regional than planetary, we may see “Water Wars” before the next century is over. Botswana is already dependent on Namibia; Egypt on Ethiopia; the Levant on Turkey: while North Africa is without any evident new resource, along the edge of the advancing Sahara. The possible deflection of the Gulf Stream, as a consequence of the melting North Polar ice-cap, would give a further vicious twist to the ice-kaleidoscope, as it could affect the UK.

As I just indicated, the danger is rendered more acute by the projected further growth in world population. The population of India is now 1000 million – half of them illiterate, a third below the poverty line; China has 1250 million, not much better off. To some thinkers, such a scenario could give rise to the risk of the massive migration of peoples, and of genocidal wars on a scale approaching or exceeding that of the barbarian invasions of the Roman Empire and the

devastation of Asia and Eastern and Central Europe by the Mongols, Tartars and Turks. (At a seminar I attended in Eastern Europe which touched on this scenario, one expert said that the Polish Army would not have enough bullets to hold back such hordes, even if it had the will to use them and the natural barriers behind which to organise a defence). Even without climatic change, however, the population issue will not go away. The UN predicts that Europe, for example, will become less populous, while Africa and Latin America much more. Thus, where Europe had a quarter of the world's population in 1900, it may account for only seven per cent by 2050. If so, we shall face real immigration pressures. (In circumstances such as these, what price conventional, "Greenpeace" pieties? Or the bigotry and outrageous one-sidedness of some recent manifestations of "Political Correctness"? And who will care much, either way, about fox hunting – which I naturally support)?

Other "terrors" of the New Apocalypse are also in distant prospect. One, a global pandemic which overcame the already diminishing protection against Super-Bugs still afforded by today's anti-biotics. (Vancomycin, the antibiotic of so-called last resort, is now struggling against *Staphylococcus Aureus*: some Enterococci are already Vancomycin-resistant. Prospects are made worse by the profligate use of half our anti-biotics in today's intensive agriculture, as growth promoters and generalised herd prophylactics) A second terror, the acquisition by dictatorships, terrorist groups and even criminal organisations and fanatical sects, of ABC (Atomic, Biological and Chemical) weapons – we have had a foretaste in Iraq and on the Tokyo subway and more than the hint of a potential threat from Libya and North Korea. The third terror, still fortunately theoretical, but nevertheless beginning to be written about: the danger of a global disaster from super-sophisticated scientific experiments – for example, with GM crops or laboratory-cultured bacteria; but also conceivably with new kinds of atom smashing. (Because it is not a man-made danger, I will be silent today about the remote risk of impact on the planet by the 500 to 1000 celestial objects now suspected as big enough and close enough to be able to cause significant damage: a large one came within hours of the Earth in 1937; a smaller one, less close, in 1996).

Assigning degrees of probability to these disquieting possibilities is highly problematical. Nevertheless, the following are some informed, "surprise-free", professional guesses. The UK's *relative* economic decline is already a fact of history, even if it may have recently reached a plateau and we could now be catching up a tiny bit on at least the French. Our restructuring into a divided, post-industrial, Hi-Tech-IT-AI-driven community is already happening. Future UK *relative* penury is entirely possible, some would say quite likely – even if we might initially not feel it too sharply. Environmental change is also happening, but more slowly. Control of atmospheric green-house gases will be much more difficult than that of aerosols; and the situation will get worse before it gets better (especially if China and India are reckless, and the West does not or cannot help them with new technology and resources), with the associated outside risk of triggering off an irreversible "step change". But massive climatic deterioration of the nature and scale to destroy or fatally undermine these islands is still unlikely – even if still also ultimately conceivable. A scientific accident leading to a *global* catastrophe seems distinctly remote, although the degree of risk is unknowable. Mucky practices in mass agricultural production will continue to kill quite a few, but will not (with luck) murder the many. Pandemics, on the other hand, while not imminent, are well within the possible. The serious use of ABC weapons, against a few targets and with no more than local or regional impact, seems to me more likely than not, somewhere in the world within the next 50 years. I would assign a slightly higher probability factor to another Chernobyl. (Against backgrounds such as these, some of the political debate in recent UK general election campaigns inevitably seems nugatory and unreal).

It may be that the foregoing will have seemed too theoretical; too much “of the Academy”; too removed, anyway, from the world of daily work. Allow me therefore to express, in telegraphic language (because of the time constraint) a few practical thoughts – some of them possibly heretical – which may have a bearing on the discussion in Seminars which comes next. Stubbily expressed, in the form of deliberate false antithesis and admittedly cheap paradox, they are the following:

a) Father Christmas versus Fearful Fate? The cavalry will come to the rescue. Our future on these islands may turn out significantly less bleak than some of the forgoing potentialities imply. The mid-century Oxford Historian, H.A.L. Fisher, in the preface to his “History of Europe”, drew attention to the play of the contingent and the unforeseen, in human affairs – I think, wisely. For, almost no one foresaw the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the implosion of the Stalinist East. Nor the amazing new dimensions of computers and the Internet. Nor the Green Revolution, which enabled India to triple its grain production over the past four decades. New methods of desalination, and the recycling (as to 70%, in the case of Israel) of sewer water, may avert early “Water Wars”. Work on the human Genome, when completed, may vastly improve present medical therapies. What the Financial Times and The Economist cautiously term “The New Paradigm” may encourage us to expect better economic growth and less inflation than we have known in the UK over the past 25 years. Thus, while we breathe, we hope.

b) Cassandra versus “Crying Wolf”? That the worst scenarios are the least probable does not evidently signify that serious global problems can be myopically dismissed. It is true that the Club of Rome overdid its planetary predictions; and that Rachel Carson’s “Silent Spring” has not hitherto fully materialised. But this is not a reason for not taking with deadly seriousness the major and palpable environmental dangers, from pesticides to atmospheric pollution. Global Warming seems to be happening, if more moderately than some anticipated. We must be ready – and educate others to be ready – to take decisive action in the presence of clear and present dangers, and to anticipate intelligently the troubles we see coming.

c) Metaphysics versus the Natural Sciences? Science is not a God or even a complex of Unassailable Absolutes. It is a method, a branch of human reasoning, a realm of tentative insight which is liable to constant correction and change. It is not a substitute for philosophy or theology, but a complement to both. We must take “science” with a pinch of salt and a healthy creative tension. There was Newton; but to whom there was then added Einstein; with a little help from Hubble and its like, there will next be added Someone Else. Even the debate about Natural Selection initiated by that great Old Salopian, Charles Darwin, continues to rumble on. Yesterday, we were being told that we had a common female ancestor who lived in Africa about 200,000 years ago, on the basis of assumptions about mitochondrial DNA which today have been called in question by John Maynard Smith and his research colleagues at the Centre for the Study of Evolution at the University of Sussex.

From Deuteronomy to Dawkins, there have always been those who say in their heart that there is no God; or who feel that they do not need the hypothesis of God to live their lives and strut their stuff. It is an entirely comprehensible position; they may even be right (although I myself do not believe so). But it proves nothing either for or against religion that some biologists tend towards Atheism and some astronomers towards Theism. It may well be true that Britain, and indeed Europe, no longer presents itself as a Christian country or continent, in the way it was in the past. And that we are experiencing a seismic shift in what constitutes religious orthodoxy and patterns

of popular belief. But, in matters of Faith and Morals, there is the bath water, but also the baby. There is, moreover, value and truth in what theologians mean by the technical term, “myth”. Even Star Wars owes some of its grip over audiences, to powerful ideas of the Fall, the Chosen One and the Spirit of the Creator. And finally, as the respected religious correspondent Clifford Longley argued last month in *The Times*, without morality we are all psychopaths. Me? I think we should “be still and know” (the motto of Sussex University). Otherwise, the humanoid God (or no-God) will be too small.

Not the least of the cultural impoverishments which society has suffered, under secularisation, is the loss of a respectable language in which to talk about First and Last Things. (Despite spending three quarters of the NHS budget on our last three months of life, we keep obsessively quiet about death, for example-old Alington would have disapproved!). We need the presence, not the absence, of a religious and moral public conversation. Not, these days, because of Blaise Pascal’s famous “Wager”; but certainly to help keep open the possibility of peace and benignity on a troubled planet. However derisory “Public School Christianity” might have seemed to our fathers or grandfathers, our sons and grandsons will still need some form of “R.S.” at Shrewsbury.

d) Origen versus Don Giovanni. Linked to what I have just said, I have always doubted whether Origen was right to argue that ultimately, in the final Apocatastasis, there can be no damnation. I well see that no one fully exposed to it, can readily resist God’s love. And we must all exercise toleration, and all of us hope for mercy, whatever our religious convictions or their absence. But I do not think that the history of the Twentieth Century, in some ways the most bloody and barbarous of any, supports the theory that freewill and intelligence will result infallibly in a heaven on earth. Whatever we mean by it. Evil exists; and the young need to know this. They could do worse than start with John Milton’s “Paradise Lost” and “Evil be Thou my God”.

e) Hierarchy versus Horizontalism. It is a fact that hierarchy, if not dead, is out of fashion. I grant that there is a coherent managerial case for horizontal networks and shared informal norms in the organisation of tomorrow’s workplace. Struggles between superiors and subordinates to control information and to get jobs done through detailed bureaucratic work rules, operating procedures and cack-handed top-down managerial attitudes, do not promise to serve well in many branches of the coming all-hi-tech economy. But Frank Fukuyama has been consistently wrong in predicting the death of things. Authority, discipline and the willing acceptance of responsibility and accountability towards those above and below us, will always be a constant requirement of a rational and efficient society; and therefore a part of any serious educational process.

f) Education versus Training. Let us not be afraid of Elitism. The best is not, in education, necessarily the enemy of the good. Our predicament and prospects require the national education system to continue to foster excellence and to nourish the intellectually outstanding. This is supremely true of engineering, technology and the applied sciences, since the country is now required to live by its wits, rather on its ex-imperial rents. But pretty well all serious intellectual disciplines have their value, if rigorously pursued. The study of Medieval History and Oriental Languages at Oxford, Cambridge and London had its subsequent uses, in my case, as an intellectual preparation for the New Byzantium that is the Brussels Nomenklatura. One of the advantages of traditional undergraduate education as I knew it at Cambridge, and of an Inter-Disciplinary School of Study at Sussex as I observed it, was and is the ability to listen and learn across the board, but also to look around corners and to reach one’s own conclusions. One acquired the ability – useful, later on, when changing jobs and getting new skills – not to be fazed by the unfamiliar. Or over-impressed by the emphatic or opinionated – useful, in a world of phoney soundbites and Gurus-for-the-gullible. Some may call this arrogance; I see it as intelligence. Care and concern for the majority (Betas and Gammas) does not relieve us of the paramount duty to encourage the minority (the Alphas). In the controversy between “Black Book” and “Child-Centred” educationalists over the past two decades, the balance of credibility has swung in favour of the former.

But Education, in the broad liberal sense, is not inherently superior to Training, in the sense of vocational preparation and craft-skill acquisition. We need both Balliol and Oxford Brookes; both Imperial College and Cirencester. New subjects at the New Universities and at Tertiary Colleges are not to be dismissed. We can be critical of them; demand better adapted courses and greater skill content and vocational relevance. But any sinking feeling about “Post-Marxist-Neo-Freudian-Feminist, Deconstructionism” at Merthyr Tydfil Polytechnic will not mean that “Media-Studies-with-Semiotics” at John O’Groats’ College will be a waste of time and public money. The trouble with the Oxbridge paradigm, which some educational institutions privily and preposterously still seek to imitate, is that it produces too many Nobs and Snobs, and not enough Nitty Gritties.

Finally, whether it is education or training or a combination of the two, neither now ends with the diploma. Life-long learning will be essential for anyone who wants a decent job, or (rather) series of good jobs, because holding down such a job, and moving on to the next, will increasingly involve the understanding of things which no-one understood ten years earlier.

g) Crude and Cost-Efficiency-Dominated Utilitarianism versus Soft-Option, and Hedonistic Neoteny. Those who are teachers – in Secondary, Further and Higher Education – cannot, in today’s world be, and mostly do not aspire to become, the “Guardians” of society, in the sense of Plato’s “Republic”. But they owe it to the rest of us to serve commonsense communal requirements. “Neoteny” – in the Greek, simply the extension of youth; and, in the Natural Sciences, the retention of juvenile characteristics or sexual immaturity into adult life – is also understood, in Anthropology, as the arrangement under which childhood is prolonged, and adulthood deferred, for the purposes of an extended learning process. The more time-consuming that process, the trickier; and, perhaps, the more inherently unstable and unreal the “Youth Culture” of the society in which it features. In parts of the Third World, even infants are committed to spinning, weaving and other communal activities. In Anglo-Saxon England, a thousand years ago, a male followed the plough from an early age and was judged fit to stand in or behind the Shield Wall from the age of twelve. In later centuries, preparation for the plough and the shield was progressively lengthened, to serve the adult needs of the three R’s, the skills to serve machinery in the Industrial Revolution, and the rest. Today, the extended Neoteny for which the tax payer mostly foots the bill permits many upcoming adults to serve computers, to operate in networks and to find employment in the service industries which now account for two-thirds of UK GDP. Tomorrow, if our Armed Forces have to be re-expanded, we may need to re-incorporate greater physical fitness, and compulsory team games, into Secondary schooling. But the societal costs and psychological perils of Neoteny will continue to be principally justified only by the extent to which the product meets the market. If the pace of change continues to be exponential, it follows that educators and educationalists will need to be increasingly pro-active, quick on their pins and shrewdly prescient. Neoteny does not fall cost-free from a welfare tree; it is precious, and demands prudent administration. Incidentally, since full-time education cannot be indefinitely prolonged – we cannot all be perpetual students on the recent German model – simple cost-effectiveness will require that some things will have to be cut out, to make place for others. No one now needs to know how to flake hand axes out of stone; not all clever girls need spend much time on knitting and domestic science (I have sewn on my own buttons, and darned my own socks, since my military service). Given the polymathy and information overload of the foreseeable future, the more difficult decision will be to decide what important and valuable things to leave out of education, rather than what indispensable novelties to include. Subjects such as Civics and Citizenship need to be carefully defined before they are permitted to occupy space otherwise earmarked for English, mathematics, computer science etc. in any National Curriculum. (I speak as a man who had to swink to put some measurable substance and some transferable skills back into what once passed for Geography in many State schools).

h) Nationalism versus Globalism. My friend and former FO colleague, the Euro-sceptic diplomatist Sir Charles Powell, recently took issue with me and others, in the national press, for thinking too much in terms of what he called the “Glory Days” of British national decline.

Cockerels crow on their dung heaps; gorillas beat their breasts in the jungle. But such conduct, while no doubt necessary to them, is not sufficient for their welfare; and can even generate a degree of self-delusion. For long years, I have held the Queen’s Commission with pride and been glad to give what public service I could. A solid Monarchist, an orthodox Churchman and, once upon a time even a Conservative (but before the take-over of the Party by those whom the Old Salopian ex-Parliamentarian, Sir Julian Critchley, characterises “les garagistes”), I am affirmatively Anglo-Scottish and definitely pro-Brit. But, as Nurse Cavell famously said, before being shot by the Germans, “Patriotism is not enough”. And, of course, a blind appeal to patriotism, as Dr. Johnson wrote, can be the last refuge of a scoundrel. Charles Powell is, however, unmistakable in un-masking me as a man who regularly consorts with “known Europeans” (in the old FBI and McCarthyite terminology of the anti-Communist witch hunts)! I do indeed recommend, on honest and objective (even if conceivably mistaken) grounds, the entry of Sterling sooner or later into the European Currency; I want the UK, in John Major’s sometime phrase, to be “At the Heart of Europe”, and not a tolerated but eccentric and little-listened-to off-shore island; and I have for many years advocated, and at Sussex University implemented, the more intensive teaching of a wider range of European languages in British educational establishments (with the fervour, I confess, of a forced polyglot who happens to be a natural non-linguist). I call all this the forward-looking pursuit of the national self-interest. It is not, as far as I am aware. High Treason.

But there is, of course, more to it than the national interest, narrowly defined. Educated elites are now ceasing to be nationally circumscribed. It has already long been true of small countries that their young professionals often need to acquire part of their skills abroad, and may subsequently need to perfect them in a wider context. Thus, a world class neuro-surgeon from New Zealand may find himself training in London and applying his science on the US West Coast. Men and women who work for global banks and business corporations, or for international institutions such as the IMF, the UNHCR or closely integrated cross-border phenomena such as the EU, will develop legitimate and constructive careers independently from their national origins – picking up a First Degree here, a Master’s there, and a Doctorate somewhere else, with a couple of extra languages along the way. The UK educational system is therefore called upon to serve, not only the needs of native autochthons, but also the formation of growing international elites. In the new global paradigm, we do not lose them, for they serve us and commonly look to their native land with affection.

And here I come down again, with a bump, like Alice arriving in Wonderland, in today’s England. I am certain that Schools, Colleges and Universities do have the future in their hands, in so far as it can be shaped. Much of what has been discussed in this paper is going to happen to – us whatever we do. But the scholar and teacher can at least ensure that the people who will face these perils have some of the qualities needed to surmount them, some sense of their own history and some achievable ambition for their future. The answer is hard work, serious learning from an early age, self-discipline, and a measure of fostered elitism. But also, humanity; an ability to work together; a sense of responsibility for society; and a healthy dose of idealism and unselfishness, Ted Maidment, in his talk to parents in June, was surely right to say that our boys needed both to be well qualified and articulate academically, and also to be encouraged to develop an appetite for ideas and adventure, to acquire a sense of passion and with it a sense of humour. Sir Philip Sidney, Charles Darwin, Sandy Irvine, Michael Heseltine: there may be no standard moulds at Shrewsbury; but the general paradigmatic thrust is clear. And Public Schools are often freer than their State equivalents to aim high and serve well.

The way ahead, in my view, will therefore call for more and better education and training; philosophical as well as practical, both pure and applied; better pruned and focused; and with provision for life-long learning. It will certainly call for modesty and patience. Perhaps also even require courage. The Brits may not enjoy what they encounter in the next Century or so: they could end up (unlike Biggles, Rockfist Rogan or James Bond) losing instead of winning, for a change. Our national future, like our past, will have its full ration of perils and nasties; and we may find ourselves much further from the centre of international power and influence than we have been used to.

Any road, and on any reading, the next Century promises to be very different from the one now ending. It will not be in all respects a comfortable experience for anyone, anywhere. Nor for Education, either. So, "Be Mindful"! And, in the words of Obi Wan Kenobi and Luke Skywalker: "May the Force be with you!".