

Irrationality in the Internal Equinox

On March twenty-first I walked out of the front door of Beaverbrook Residence, out into a cool whiskey nosed dawn. I lowered my head so that I might be soothed, watching the forward and backward motions of my feet. I concentrated. I climbed the noisy — noisy because they are so board — front steps of the Arts Building. I stood supported by the environment of stone columns when suddenly, I knew I was entirely and utterly alone. There was no bus disgorging clamoring and frightfully alert engineers at the foot of the hill. There was nothing, that is nothing except the trees and the buildings. There was no one, that is no one except me. I turned and raced through the door of the Arts Building inside my fears were thickened. There were no clues that would indicate the existence of another human being anywhere.

Gradually pangs came to my stomach. At first slight pangs, then tremendous pangs. The bells in the Tower gave out an announcement of the new hour. Suddenly came their sentence which shook me like one shakes a teaspoon. Like a psychoanalyst about to divulge the secret of a life, they said "It is really only eight o'clock old boy." I was cured. The pangs?—I was hungry. . . . The people?—I was still eating breakfast. . . .

I dashed back to the residence. I would prove conclusively that other people existed. I walked into the dining room. There were some eager beavers eating rice crispies. I might mention that they made known their surprise at my early appearance with epithets that after getting past their muzzles only spent their potency on my concrete exterior. I am certain I generated the impression of imperturbable dignity.

There they were, as they manched their rice crispies, keen as buck-saws, sharp as the edge of a broken beaker, bound by their faith in eco-

nomics or ecology or existentialism or biochemistry, bound to success with straps of knowledge.

I began to realize that I was just a great big failure, and I felt that I would like to say something in a very loud voice, something ridiculous. I would like for it to filter thru' the maze of square roots the beavers were gnawing, and then hear it come back to me just as ridiculous as it had been when I sent it out. I did not shout. They went on digesting their breakfast food.

Suddenly, at eight twenty I thought I saw another human-being enter the dining room. It seemed to smile, but what I thought was a grin was only part of the gymnastics performed in checking its teeth. I was dreadfully disappointed.

The night before there had been several real people abounding but that was yesterday, and perhaps thirty years had passed since then: I could not be sure at this hour of the morning. No one laughed. No one smiled. I was surrounded by human things which were similar to me physically, but in no other fashion—

I gazed into my coffee cup — perhaps if I ignored these creatures and withdrew into myself I would be able to gain an identity. Something that would be strong enough not to be shaken by the non-existence of outside humans. I concentrated on the whirling brown fluid. The hubble which formed in the centre slowly stopped turning, and abruptly broke. The cream began to curdle, and the coffee became blighted. Maybe, if I were to tell myself stories or reminisce on situations in which I had been involved with humans. . . . clearly I remembered my old friends, the things they'd done. . . . The time Joe said "Beware, beware, the arthropoda, they will inherit the earth. Man is going down to distinction". (He was a bug man). The time Pete said after being beaten in an argument, "Ah well,

forlorned is forearmed. I thrust but no touché." The time Fred became so interested in body building, and weight lifting, when every other phrase had to do with athletics, and one exasperated individual countered one day with:

"When you mention athletics, old man, it sounds like a disease." The time a person came into a room which had as part of its decoration a mounted boar's head, and the person said "What's that? A wild pig?" and we answered saying: "That is a wild boar. Where that is a wild boar, you are a domesticated one."

A blasé beaver with an expressionless face put his paws on the edge of my table and interrupted my raucous laughter. He said, "Are you sure you feel O. K.?" "O. K. O. K., of course I'm O. K." I said, de fiance in my voice.

I saw him signal his henchmen. One after another they came out from between the table legs. I was trapped. I wanted to jump to the top of a table and with a cereal spoon hanging out from between my ribs, shout "You fools, you fools, you must laugh to be saved". Then to appoint someone to: "Lead us in Laughter". I said: "What time is it?"

One beaver said "It is now on nine hundred hours. You are too late". I expected them to point at me, and sing in chorus "Too late, too late, too late", but they did not.

They escorted me to the lounge, and sat round me. Two of their number, after checking their orders, proceeded out the door.

I set in silence for a few minutes, then I asked if I might see the morning paper. They brought me True Hypocrisy, or something like that. Anyway I couldn't solve the cross-words, and the rest of the issue was devoted to conditions in the Provincial Mental Hospital. I asked if I could smoke. They looked at one another, finally they said "All right". I asked if anyone had a match. They said that they didn't use them. Then a little fellow came forward, and holding a match by the tips of his fingers said "I saved this one from forestry camp, last year."

I blew the smoke upward since I could gain little from annoying them further. Gradually I noticed my hand begin trembling, I felt my collar sticking to my neck. Sweat rolled into the corners of my eyes. My vision dimmed.

Suddenly, a voice said: "Well!" I looked up thru' the film of water. There seemed to be a tall person in a black pencil-striped suit, staring down at me. From one hand a brief case dangled, and rested against a knee. The other hand was occupied with pointing its finger at me. I knew I should say something like, maybe "Britons never shall be slaves". I said: "I am sorry if. . ." He said "Obviously a paranoic". I said, "I really just meant to think. . ." "A schitzophrenic". "I'm sorry, I'm very sorry". "A manic depressive in a depressive. . ." He held up his hand with the fingers spread wide apart. He said, "How many fingers?" I said "Five, on that one". He turned to the beavers and showed his teeth. They all showed their teeth. He asked if I'd mind coming to his office. I said that I would not at all mind, and got a little mixed up on the inference. The bowing horde cleared a path for us, and we walked out into the sunshine.

The clock struck ten; he said, "You know, I think you are all crazy. . . . Was that ten o'clock, and I've a lecture at Alex, now. . . . What date is this. . ." I said "March twenty-first". I said: "There goes the bus". The clock rang ten o'clock over again. He said the clock was very irrational and probably run down. I said it was the first day of spring. He said, "They are all crazy, crazy, crazy".

SAINT JOHN

It is not known from whence this travel bureau gem was unearthed, or to whom we are indebted for it. It may be reasonably assumed, however, that it was written by some nature lover, some enamoured poet, some Saint Johner whose nostalgia became too much for him to bear. This, then is the product of great pain crystallized out for all to abhor. . . .

Saint John is a city of 57,000 (1931 census), located in the Bay of Fundy on a rocky peninsula, almost surrounded by water and completely submerged in fog. It was settled by Loyalists who backed the wrong horses in the American Revolution and followed it up with another error in judgment.

It has two harbors — an eastern one, and a western one. Four of the first or two of the second would make a fairly decent harbor. The eastern harbor is overlooked by the poorhouse and the western one is overlooked by a large and flourishing lunatic asylum. Both harbors are overlooked by the rest of Canada. The harbors are used by the shipping interests of Upper Canada when the St. Lawrence is blocked with ice and the American ports are blocked with traffic.

The Saint John River still flows past the city, in spite of the Dominion Government, and the selfish interests of Ontario. Saint John is the home of Maritime Rights, and continues agitation for something or anything it has not got. The inhabitants can be recognized by a peculiar stooping posture caused by climbing hills or else by a chip on the shoulder.

King Square is located on the top of a hill near the centre of the city. It contains a fine cross of Ontario granite erected to the memory of the Loyalists, a statue of Sir Leonard Tilley which no one can explain, and an expensive War Memorial which bears a family likeness to War Memorials in general. On the side of the Square there is a fine modern hotel erected and run at the expense of the shareholders for the benefit of American tourists.

The architecture of the city is mainly Victorian, but the later public buildings are in an entirely individual style of architecture sometimes known as the late Mett. There is an excellent dump at the south end of the city.

Saint John is chiefly noted for the number of former inhabitants who live somewhere else. It has populated Western Canada, and Massachusetts with a splendid type of citizen. The local inhabitants as soon as they can afford it, move to Rothesay or Westfield, while the more fortunate ones move as far as Hampden. There is an excellent Vocational School where first class mechanics are developed for the Detroit automobile industry and the Pittsburg steel manufactory.

The best thing about Saint John is its excellent transportation facilities. One can leave the city by C. P. R. train for Fredericton or Montreal, or by C. N. R. for Moncton or Montreal. If one can wait until morning, there is a C. P. R. boat leaving every morning except Sunday for Digby. On Sunday, failing all other means, one can use the excellent paved roads (that did not win an election), and escape towards the border or to the north and east. One can bear in mind that there is a speed limit.

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