



May 1911

Headteacher's log

Monday 8

We have entered the seventh month of a national strike of county Directors of Education. So far schools have coped very well. Workforce remodeling dictates that Mr Peel can no longer do the non-teaching task of rescuing children from the upper branches of the churchyard yew tree that overhangs the school playground. Moreover, the ladder has been condemned by the county health and safety officer. How, then, is Peel's role to be filled? Parental confidence would be zero if we relied on the distant and disorganised Slimepond Fire Brigade. The answer is a hot-air balloon, stored in the village hall, and staffed at three minutes' notice by two paroled horse-thieves.

Tuesday 9

Health and safety now requires prominent warnings to be displayed before the enactment of any curriculum work with the slightest element of risk. Each morning the school secretary, Mrs Lamplady, makes a notice to appear over the stage at assembly. Its enormous length requires her to allow the full length of her office and half of mine to accommodate it during sign writing. Yesterday I arrived to find, through the open door, a notice reading *'Maths: long division – you might find some scenes distressing'*. Today the notice reads *'RE: the Sermon on the Mount – don't try this at home'*.

Wednesday 10

After his catechism class today our curate, Mr Smoothman, told me very proudly that his oldest nephew had won a Crippen Scholarship in Chemistry to St Vitus College, Oxford. Mr Smoothman was a Benetton Exhibitioner in Ethical Advertising at Cambridge; there is obviously much

natural ability amongst the Smoothmans. We admitted a new pupil today, seven-year-old Beverley Hills-Beckham, a boy of good family whose parents have just returned from Spain.

Thursday 11

Schools are the obvious places for contradictory legislative tendencies to collide. Child protection reform has led to the introduction of new sanctions in line with a liberal understanding of the teacher in loco parentis. The statutory offence of 'naughtiness' is now to be rectified (they hope) by the teacher refusing to speak to the 'naughty' child. The teacher may use other unspecified measures to 'withdraw affection' from offending juveniles. Meanwhile, anti-terrorist legislation requires that any pupil observed with a peashooter in or out of school shall be confined in the school coal cellar without trial, appeal, or access to parents.

Friday 12

I was visited today by a new SEN adviser with special responsibility for innocence. Innocent children have recently been identified as having special educational needs. Obviously they can be marginalised and ostracised, the latter because they do not understand some jokes. They may be unusually distressed by stories that are read to them, or by the kind of narratives that make history exciting. Statistically, evangelical Christian homes show high incidence of children with innocence, as well as of those with something else. Girls of both types from these families have recently tended to enter convents. I promised to look out for signs of serious innocence in the school. I must confess I can't recall any during my time here.

■ Leonard Bookman

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