

SCHWEINEREI

One evening at dusk, I came across my teacher by the side of the swimming pool at the hotel in Atlanterra where the group was staying in the summer of 83. He was looking out over the nearly deserted swimming pool at some children sitting on the edge of the pool and stepping onto a large inner tube floating in the water. They were pushing the inner tube back and forth and having a great time laughing and shouting at each other.

My teacher had in fact been quite sick that summer, so I came up to him to see if he was okay : he frowned and went on looking out over the pool in silence.

“Is everything all right, sir?” I asked.

“Look at that” he replied.

“What?” I replied.

“Look at those children.”

We watched about a dozen children playing and shouting for about three minutes in silence. I had no idea what he wanted me to see, but he was looking very stern indeed, so I realised something bad must be going on.

“What’s wrong, sir?” I asked.

“The children” he replied.

“What about them?” I asked.

“They are making noise” he replied.

We then went on watching them in silence as they played and called to each other in German by the pool-side. They were not exactly silent but by no stretch of the imagination could they be considered to be really disturbing anyone. I pointed out to my teacher that they were not children from the group, because all of our people's children were in the dining-room with their parents.

"Whose children are they?" asked the teacher.

"They probably belong to the German and Swiss tourists who are also clients at the hotel."

"Schweinerei" said the teacher.

By this time two or three other friends had joined us by the side of the darkening pool. We were all listening to our teacher more or less muttering to himself, and we were all equally mystified.

"Why are you saying they are Schweinerei?" I asked

"Because they let their children make a disturbance and bother everyone. Such people can only be called Schweinerei. "Well" he said in a slightly phony German accent, "I think we're going to have to do something about this situation : Augy, go and get me the manager."

First my heart sank, then I went to get the Swiss manager of the hotel and sent him to my teacher by the poolside. Then I passed through the dining-room to tell my family to hold my place at the table. When I came out to join the others at the side of the pool, my teacher was in full swing with the manager, explaining in a kind of parody of precise German anger how it was outrageous that children should be allowed to disturb the

peace of honest God-fearing adults in this way, that there was a manifest disturbance taking place and that it was the manager's duty to put it right.

The manager obviously thought that my teacher was completely out of his mind, but since my teacher was head honcho of three hundred clients in his hotel, as a good professional, he clicked his heels and told my teacher that he would see to the situation. He then disappeared towards the cocktail lounge, and, as the little knot of friends stood in silence with my teacher at the edge of the pool, the parents came out of the hotel and gradually all of the little children were picked up one by one, until in about ten minutes the pool, now so dark that you could hardly see to the other side, was entirely deserted.

Someone bought my teacher some food, which he sat down and ate, still looking at the deserted pool, with the rest of us in attendance. He then got up and went off to bed, leaving us all looking at the empty pool, and then looking at each other, wondering what the hell had happened.

The answer only occurred to me many months later, after I had connected this incident with the way my teacher had behaved many years before when he had visited us in Italy and had inspected each well-head on the property where we were living to make sure they were all properly covered and protected against the possibility of children falling in. He had tested every hinge on every screen and opening.

In fact, there was no supervision at that swimming pool—it was getting dark, the lights had been turned off, the kids were in the water and their parents were all at the bar or in the hotel dining-room without really knowing where their children were. The simple reality of that situation was that those children

were in potential danger. No one had noticed.

It is worthwhile looking at the way this situation was resolved from more than just one point of view : what would you think of this incident if you were:

- 1) the manager,
- 2) one of the children playing in the water,
- 3) one of the bystanders, or
- 4) one of the parents?

When action is required, this is what a teacher must provide, at any cost.

True elegance is to make one's positive actions invisible.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

It didn't start it sort of ended somehow
it was always going to terminate in a holocaust
a kind of sacrificial pyre all would become clear
from the fires of the inferno purged we would step into
the kingdom of God

The inferno we live in is one we create
from our cowardice self-importance and evil intent
the worst call on God with the most insistence
we know His mercy is our only hope of knowing
the kingdom of God

Come don't be so childish the sceptic says
no it's real we reply we know what we've done
we know how we distanced ourselves from humanity
and watched ourselves standing aloof
from the kingdom of God

From the depths of our hatred of ourselves
we are as ullage disappearing into the cask
a moment always comes when we see beyond our ken
when the future is hopeless we're forced to look behind
to catch a glimpse of the kingdom of God

Because the product of human sacrifice
was just another dream no tussle twixt good and evil
such things cannot be the outcome of conflict
it has to be what we already know
experience is the kingdom of God

The kingdom of God is when we got it right
when we did things right by our children

guided them properly or forbade them with love
when we enter the beloved body of another
that too is the kingdom of God

What we aspire to is not another world
just a distillation of the one we already know
all who live know good and evil
the experience of both is what sets off the yearning
for the kingdom of God

Already in our genes and within our experience
even if we never left the confines of our village
each has a familiarity of paradise and hell
what makes us human is our knowledge of perfection
we are the kingdom of God

The option is our own we either go on
telling ourselves how disgusting we are
and thus doing making it all come true
or with the same eyes look at what's been done right
to see the kingdom of God

The kingdom of God is what we've done well
a time maybe just once when I acted with honour
once upon a time I loved and was loved
even if it didn't turn out the way it ought to have
I know the kingdom of God

So what if the Lord provides scary surprises
His handiwork is something you've just got to admire
He really does do his job very well
no blasphemy intended the bastard knows what He's doing
embedding the kingdom of God in our hearts

Even when forgetful or taking His name in vain
we cannot escape if only because we'll have to

look at perfection in the profile of its opposite
as we come out of our coma we ask the question
where is the kingdom God

It's all familiar territory the child's grin
love given or received preferably both
the secret generosity the gift once made
without hope of reward all beat a path
back to the kingdom of God

which presumably is where it somehow all began

