

March 12th 1996 - Ambitions

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On Tuesday 12th March I had been kept awake most of the night because there was a blizzard outside and a window had been banging in the wind all night. I gave up at ten minutes to four and got out of bed to have a bit of a read. At that time I had got myself passionately interested in the Second World War and the politics leading up to it. I had read Shirer's "Rise and Fall of the Third Reich" and then started it again. Of course, that only took me to "The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire" and Lord Russel of Liverpool's excellent books, "The Knights of Bushido" and "The Scourge of the Swastika". I couldn't read enough about history, and no period was safe from my greedy mind. Everything I read brought insights into periods in history, connections with other things I had read and studied, particularly the art and periods when certain artists had lived, the trials and troubled times they had lived through. Then of course the French Revolution caught my attention and I got to the stage where I would read just about anything given to me, as long as it was factual.

I became fascinated by how certain people had acted and reacted to various difficulties in their lives. Some of the ideas they uttered made my simple solutions to difficulties seem so trite and quite childish really. I may not have realised it but I had started to take on the wisdom of philosophers, generals, historians, politicians - even some sportsmen had things to say which made a lot of sense. All of this was being hurled into the maelstrom of my mind and, while I did not realise it, must have been affecting me in the strangest ways. Sometimes when I spoke to my contemporaries I couldn't even understand how they could think along the lines they did. The fact that I had thought along those exact same lines a few years ago had completely slipped my mind.

I had become, I suppose, a sponge for knowledge - anything would do. I studied English history, Irish history, in fact just about anybody's history, as long as it came to me as something new. Ideas of my own began to form, opinions and, while I may not have realised it at the time, I had started to develop a real character rather than just the violent reputation I had used to sustain me prior to all of the education. I often found myself reading little bits of three books in particular: Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress", Machiavelli's "The Prince" and Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales". Could there ever be three books so far apart from each other?

I also had found a quote from Stephen Grellet and had got Binji to print it up for me so that I could put it on the wall as a sort of permanent reminder of what I WANTED to be.

"I expect to pass through this world but once; any good thing therefore that I can do, or any kindness that I can show to any fellow creatures, let me do it now; let me not defer or neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again."

One day I will be capable of living up to that passage, I only hope I can manage it before I drop dead. It is supposed to be that when a person is young they have their ambitions and as they grow older they fulfil those ambitions one by one until the day comes when they are old, decrepit, past it and all ambitions have been fulfilled. When there is no ambition left, then it is said we have nothing left to live for, and so we quietly fold our tents and slip off into the night. We hand in our dinner pail, we shuffle off this mortal coil, we go to join the heavenly choir in excelsium, we fucking snuff it!

It's working back to front with me. The older I get, the more I learn, the more I want to learn and the more I want to do before I take my place on Charon's ferry across the Styx and try to

cheat him out of his proper fare. I have things I want to do, things to write, ideas to leave for those who come after me. I have ambitions!