

# A Tale of Two Cities

Sticks and stones no longer count; it's words that land one in trouble—at least in the tight little island that is modern Britain, far removed from the green

and pleasant land I chose to live in thirty-five years ago.

But before I go on, a bit of nostalgia: After leaving the University of Virginia in 1956, I moved to Paris. The City of Light, according to Papa Hemingway, is, like an older mistress, a necessary part of a young man's education. At twenty, one indeed dreams of older women, and Paris in 1956 was full of them: chic, sophisticated, and beautiful females, mostly French, but also many South Americans as well as Scandinavians. (When I say older, I mean in their late twenties or early thirties.) There was nothing quite like the recently recovered from the war Paris of the Fifties. London was bleak and stuffy, Rome provincial, and Berlin was, well, partly occupied and under pressure from you know who. Paris was it. Fashion had come back with a vengeance, De Gaulle had brought order by 1958, Malraux had beautified the city, and I was a young man on the tennis circuit looking for fun.

I shared a flat with two Argentine polo players off the Avenue Foch—La Residence du Bois—a beautiful 19th century family house run by a wonderful lady, just like in old-fashioned black and white movies. It took Carlos and Enrique ten years to convince me to change sports, and I was fortunate enough to then join them and the great Dominican playboy Porfirio Rubirosa in making up a team that won more female hearts than trophies, although we did manage to win quite a lot of matches in between other pursuits.

They say it takes about ten years after a world war for people to stop feeling guilty and start enjoying themselves. Parisians began a frenzied run of festivities and balls once the Algerian conflict came to an end in 1962. April, May, and June were one long party, as were October and November. The place was crawling with Brazilian tycoons, Argentine oligarchs, Bolivian tin magnates, Greek shipowners, and rich American expatriates. The Brits were broke—in any case, they never spend money—the Germans too insecure to show off, the Russians enslaved, the Italians just starting to branch out, the Scandinavians too uptight to matter.

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It is difficult to describe the fun. One got up early after four hours of sleep, worked the ponies in the Bagatelle Polo Club in the Bois de Boulogne (and sweated out the hangover), lunched in town, went back for tennis practice and a swim in the club, and then got ready for the evening's activities. It was an empty life, definitely a useless one, but one I wouldn't trade for all the weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, especially as there are none.

The end of the fun came rather suddenly. Some students at Nanterre Univer-

sity decided to revolt because they were not allowed to share campus digs with their girlfriends. Leave it to the French to revolt because they wanted to make love rather than to stop war. The only good thing to come out of the May '68 "revolution" was that I decided the party was over and it was time to go to work.

Journalism beckoned, and London became my base because of the language. Swinging Sixties London aside, Britain was still a very traditional country in 1968. Self-restraint, rather than draconian laws, was key to the most civilized and crime-free society in Europe. As Peter Hitchens writes, "Unborn babies were safe from being butchered. Little children were far less likely to be deserted by their parents and dumped in the nightmare of 'care.' People were safe in their homes, and there were no guns. We still governed ourselves, made

our own laws ... we could throw the Government out at the next election." As in Paris, I was happy living in England. I made countless friends, built a career, and enjoyed a way of life that was uniquely British. No longer.

The rot had begun with the catastrophic immigration policies of successive Tory and Labour governments, centralization and European Union directives, and the fall of Margaret Thatcher, but went into overdrive when Tony Blair came to power in 1997. Far from a civilized society, Britain is now

the most uncivilized, lawless, and badly-governed country in Europe, with a bleak, disenfranchised countryside, filthy and dangerous cities, a Health Service and transport system that are the worst in Europe, a crime rate that is the highest in Europe, and an asylum system which has become mass immigration under another name.

Last week, on a brief visit, I ran into many friends, but the sense of gloom was as bad as the weather. Tony Blair can win elections through sheer demagoguery, but he certainly has no idea how to run a country. His government has lost the plot on education, on prisons, the health service, the transport system. All government services are in a state of chaos. Britain is now a haven for gangsters and racketeers from all over the world—Jamaican drug dealers, Kosovar gun smugglers, and Albanians running prostitution empires. Even ex-Taliban soldiers who fought against British troops are seeking asylum and receiving benefits while their cases are being processed.

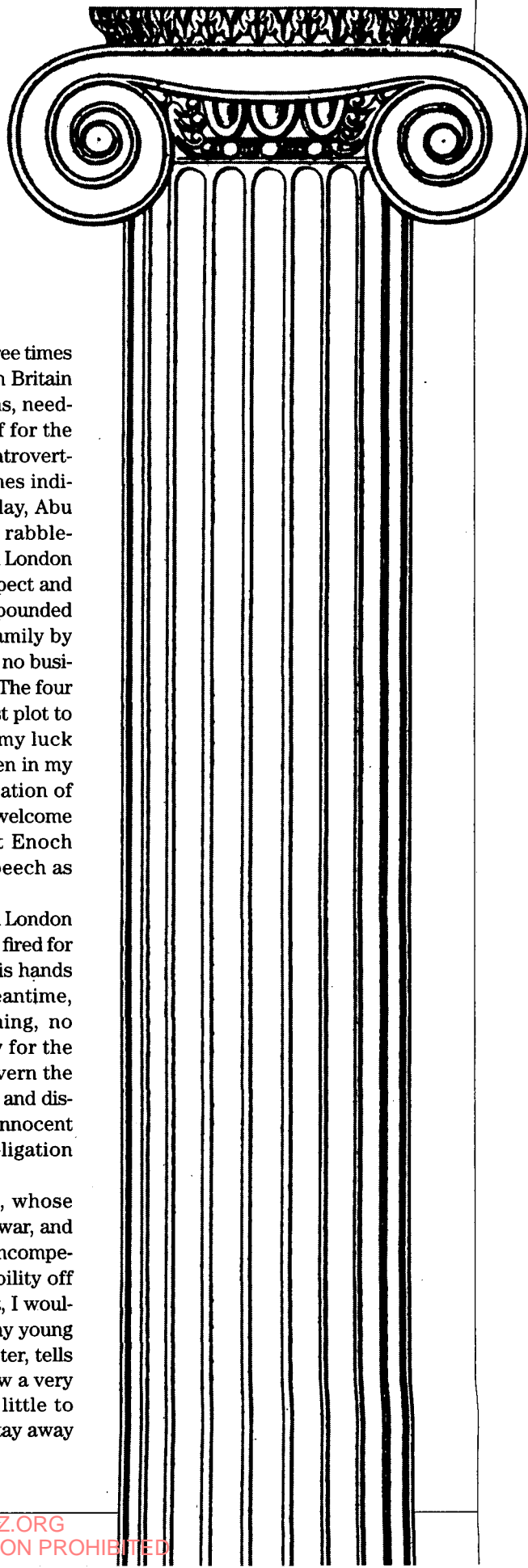
Last month, Britain's top judge sent a signal to the courts about how burglars should be treated. His preposterous edict was that burglars should not be jailed and that it's all a question of the degree to which the crime is aggravated. This was one Lord Woolf. His direct superior, Lord Irvine, a lawyer crony ennobled by Blair, had loftily announced that most people did not want to see violent thieves jailed. With 72,000 people behind bars, Britain's jails are bursting, ergo the buffoon's solution: no more jail for two- and three-time losers.

And it gets worse. While I was there, a police officer was stabbed to death by an Algerian asylum seeker who had

already been refused asylum three times but had been allowed to stay in Britain pending appeal. The politicians, needless to say, paraded their grief for the cameras but ignored the incontrovertible fact that they were the ones indirectly responsible. The next day, Abu Hamza, a notorious Muslim rabble-rouser who preaches at a North London mosque where the murder suspect and his three cohorts worship, compounded the agony of the slain cop's family by announcing that the police had no business raiding the suspect's flat. (The four are also suspected of a terrorist plot to spread the poison ricin). As my luck would have it, I had just written in my *Spectator* column that repatriation of criminal minorities would be a welcome change and quoted the great Enoch Powell's "Rivers of Blood" speech as prophetic and true.

The result was predictable. A London *Times* journalist demanded I be fired for racism. My superior washed his hands but did not fire me. In the meantime, Abu Hamza went on preaching, no politician took responsibility for the murder, and the elite who govern the British people took a tea break and discussed—I am sure—how the innocent have, in fact, some sort of obligation towards the guilty.

Welcome to Blair's Britain, whose government is itching to go to war, and rightly so. War will take their incompetence and criminal irresponsibility off the front pages. Had I known it, I would have stood in bed, in Paris, but my young son, now living there as a painter, tells me that the City of Light is now a very dangerous mistress and has little to teach a young man except to stay away from Arab neighborhoods. ■



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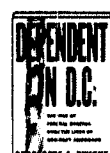
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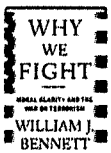
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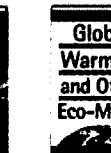
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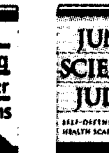
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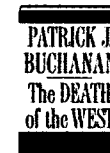
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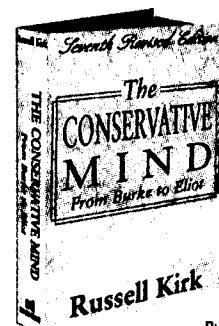
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"But the conservatives, who never abandoned the idea of community, still retain vitality, and with them lies the hope for arresting the might of political totalitarianism."

— Russell Kirk, *The Conservative Mind*

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