

Editorial: Penny Bundles

A good sermon is always topical, even such a miniature sermon as George Orwell's 'Books *v.* Cigarettes', first published in *Tribune* and later collected in *Shooting an Elephant*; for little sins, like greater ones, are seldom out of style. Like most good sermons, Orwell's essay moves indirectly towards its mark, and hits it only in the final paragraph:

These figures are guesswork, and I should be interested if someone would correct them for me. But if my estimate is anywhere near right, it is not a proud record for a country which is nearly 100 per cent literate and where the ordinary man spends more on cigarettes than an Indian peasant has for his whole livelihood. And if our book-consumption remains as low as it has been, at least let us admit that it is because reading is a less exciting pastime than going to the dogs, the pictures or the pub, and not because books, whether bought or borrowed, are too expensive.

The figures are of comparative consumption and costs of books and more glutinous indulgences. Some factory workers, during a shift of wartime fire-watching, had complained that books were only for the rich: 'chaps like us couldn't spend twelve and sixpence on a book'. 'These', Orwell's informant adds, 'were men who thought nothing of spending several pounds on a day trip to Blackpool'. They were also men who had forgotten that there were cheap second-hand books, and free public libraries.

The little sins of which Orwell is accusing us are self-deceits and *akrasiai*, thoughtlessness and ignorance, including self-ignorance. His essay is a penny bundle of philosophy of life, which could be applied to other instances. We 'cannot afford' taxis or long distance telephone calls because there was a time when we could not afford them. We 'haven't time' for this or that minor or middling obligation or commitment, though many an elder and better has reminded us, and we do not deny, that we have had 'all the time there is'.

Some of our regular readers 'cannot afford' to be members of the Royal Institute of Philosophy at a subscription of £20.00 per annum, though they know that that represents a charge of five pounds per quarterly issue, and though they also know that a paperback book of comparable size costs about twice as much. They may or may not know that the journal's own supplements, and many other philosophical

Editorial

books published by Cambridge University Press, are available to members at an attractive discount.

From our own temporary pulpit we speak also to those who contribute prose to our pages but no subscriptions to our coffers. And they, after all, have been demonstrated and certified to be 100 per cent literate.