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1 Here We Go Again! (3.19)

Where would we be without irony?

Someone from the Society of Hermits telephoned yesterday.
I must admit it was quirky to be called in such an old-fashioned way.
At least, I thought, there could have been an email; maybe an abusive tweet
But no, it was the landline the eremites chose to rouse me from my seat!
And hey, ho, here we go,
Here we go again!

They were, he said, now planning a reunion, maybe I'd received the card?
"I am," he droned, "required to remind you regrettably you've been barred."
I already knew. The Secretary told me. It's seeming now the excuse is
My pointing out the contradiction in terms; a conclave of recluses?
But hey, ho, here we go,
Here we go again!

When first I heard about the hermits' plans, you could have felled me with a feather.
Who would ever think a bunch of folks like us might want to get together?
He either disapproved of my attitude, or was it my persistent strumming?
Whatever the reason, his mind-set was "Such conduct is unbecoming!"
So hey, ho, here we go,
Here we go again!

It all brought back my saddening experience joining the Anarchists' Club,

And how I'd been disdainfully dumped for missing my October sub.
Nothing then appeared the way that it should be. I'm minded to maintain
If this ain't Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, it's déjà vu again!
And hey, ho, here we go,
Here we go again!

Anyway, I gathered he'd been told to tell me I can stay for one more week.
After that, "Well, we can't be having members with an anti-social streak!"
Sometimes I think we've forgotten all the reasons Societies are created;
Or maybe, like much in these difficult times, they've simply been outdated
And hey, ho, here we go,
Here we go again!

So here today, I'm stuck on the internet, searching for a club to join.
If anyone gets any bright ideas they're happy that I purloin,
Feel free to float 'em in my direction; I'm hoping I'll find a gem;
But not with the Hermits and please, not the Anarchists – I've had my fill of them...
And hey, ho, here we go,
Here we go again!

Hey, ho, here we go,
Here we go again!

2 Al Killem's Final Show (3.21)

– *the remarkable story of a show business legend.*

I ran a finger down the lists
Of legendary artistes.
And there, below "*Ventriloquists*",
Was one of our high priests.
Al Killem garnered much acclaim –
A bawdy Yorkshire Tyke;
His dummy going by the name
Of Willie Eckerslyke.

Al was, up to his dying day,
Incorrigibly blue;
Though everything that Al would say
Young Willie would outdo!
The pair of them had entertained
For over four decades,
When finally a gig was gained
Down at the Ace of Spades.

The Ace of Spades, I should make clear,
Was not some dead-end dive –
They'd had Wee Georgie Wood appear
When he was seventy-five!
When Al and Willie took the stage,
As many later joked,
"The fella really earned his wage –
At least until he croaked!"

The funeral was, to say the least,
A show business affair;
"A mix," according to the priest
"Of strange and debonair!"
With worshippers in every pew,
The priest moved to the mic;
And then they heard him, dead on cue –
Willie Eckerslyke!

As later on the preacher deemed,
The dummy took control,
When Willie Eckerslyke, it seemed,
Inhabited his soul!
The celebrant would come to ask
What happened to his readings,
As Willie set about his task
To galvanise proceedings.

It truly was a vintage feast,
And blue as blue could be;
And, disconcerting for a priest,
Profoundly un-PC!
He flashed his audience a grin
And then – it's true indeed! –
The parson's head began to spin
Like Chucky, but on speed!

The congregation had much fun
When Al cashed in his chips,
The parson being the only one
Who couldn't move his lips!
Willie's performance in full flow
Was blasphemous, of course.
As for Al Killem's final show?
It was his *tour de force*!

3 Bells Beyond The Stars (4.39)

... tells a tale of triumph over adversity.

The voice inside my head is on its mission to confuse:
"An optimist is somebody who hasn't heard the news!"
I don't know where he gets that from; it surely isn't me!
I only see the sunny side, you have my guarantee!
He tells me how he's coming round
To break all of my guitars.
But I reply that if you try,
I'll still hear bells beyond the stars.

He somehow never takes the hint; he'll always double down.
Many may indeed conclude it's easier to drown
But me, I see the sunny side. He hates it that I've tried,
No matter what he's said, to keep my head above the tide.
He tells me he's convinced that he
Can drain my reservoirs
I say, it doesn't work that way –
I can hear bells beyond the stars.

I don't know why he finds it hard. Whenever he returns,
The tragic old recidivist who sadly never learns,
He knows I see the sunny side and that I always will;
Yet he persists, and still insists he'll stay around until
The day that he's convinced he's run
Through all his repertoires.
So even now, he won't allow
I hear those bells beyond the stars.

You'd think that he'd have cottoned on. It's very little use,
But here he goes again with yet another lame excuse!
He never sees the sunny side, is always indiscreet.
His rationale that victory is somehow a defeat
Is holed below the waterline.
A thousand battle scars –
They're borderline, but healing fine
'Cos I hear bells beyond the stars.

Let's bring this to an end. Let's stop the monkeying around.
Let's recognise a loser, casting seed on stony ground.
I only see the sunny side, so how is he to win?
If he was even half a man, he'd take it on the chin!
As always, it is up to me
To do the *au revours*.
And that's as well; I nearly fell,
Then I heard bells beyond the stars...

Of course, it will be up to me
To do the *au revours*.
I know so well I nearly fell;

Then I heard bells beyond the stars...

4 Socrates (3.18)

It's never too late to learn something old!

You know, in my twenties I used to be certain.
The pathways were straight, with no junctions or turns.
Teenage uncertainties went for a burton
And left no room, frankly, for others' concerns.
Later, I found when I'd banked the odd decade
That doubt had a much more reliable ring;
How surety's never been all that it's portrayed
And certainty's such a disquieting thing.
Socrates said it the best, I suppose;
"It's a wise man that's knowing how little he knows!"

So that's why I worry when middle-aged persons –
Or come to that, oldies when given the chance –
Pontificate wildly whilst everything worsens,
Unshakeable in their immovable stance.
I understand thespians have their detractors
But I reckon, deep down, that everyone sees
So many of us are a company of actors
Labouring in vain to confound Socrates.
Yet much is contained in his down-to-earth prose;
"It's a wise man that's knowing how little he knows!"

Nobody wants an ambivalent leader
Or some wishy-washy-type flake at the helm.
It's why we all vote for the arrogant bleeder
Whose certainties rise up, and then overwhelm.
Personally speaking, I quail at 'convictions' –
I guess 'inclinations' are what I'd prefer.
'Beliefs' we all know bring about crucifixions,
When 'leanings' leave room for a deal, as it were.
What Socrates said, only fools would oppose;
"It's a wise man that's knowing how little he knows!"

So this is the way of humanity's folly,
When wise ones get pushed to the back of the queue
And most of us sink into deep melancholy
'Cos crazies keep doing what crazies will do.
Whilst some are persuasive and outright compelling,
Most merit hashtag #incurablebores;
And those whom we know have a penchant for selling
Are always the worst kind of media whores!
Socrates knew it, and was moved to propose
"It's a wise man that's knowing how little he knows!"

Socrates said it the best, I suppose;
"It's a wise man that's knowing how little he knows!"

5 The Euphemism Song (2.59)

... considers a peculiarly British trait – primarily over matters involving bodily functions and the nether regions. I've often wondered how highly qualified medics arriving from overseas cope with our bottomless obfuscations!

I might give you a tinkle on the blower.
I've been a little dicky down below.
The runs, when first they came
Set everything aflame –
I notice it each time I come to go.
The floppy drive is simply out of order,
Reluctantly refusing to deploy.
If ever Percy tries
To resolutely rise
It's not what we could call the real McCoy...

I must give you a tinkle on the blower –

The Spitfire isn't up to playing ball.
Reliable for years,
It nowadays appears
It doesn't feel like taking off at all
So now I'm missing out on how's your father.
I don't know if it's her or if it's me!
I can't tell you how many
Times I need to spend a penny –
The old man is not the chap he used to be!

I will give you a tinkle on the blower –
My speedbumps have been flaring up again!
I've coated them in creams.
Unfortunately, it seems
I'm simply flushing smackers down the drain!
The waterworks appear to be improving.
The problems are around the three-piece suite.
They're sometimes out of place –
I keep a check in case –
But never take a butcher's in the street.

I'd best give you a tinkle on the blower –
You're not the sort that ever seems to mind.
The old Conquistador
Has grown a nasty sore –
In fact, it might be two that have combined.
So possibly you'll give me the once-over,
Or maybe a full Monty then we'll know?
I'd rather know the score.
Have I mentioned it before?
I feel a little dicky down below...

6 Nothing Worse (3.49)

... superficially highlights First World concerns of outstanding importance during the COVID pandemic. In reality, the song was inspired by the almost total lack of interest from the West over the Chinese government's actions against its own Uyghur people. (Many thanks, BTW, to John Bacchus Dykes (1823-76) for kindly donating the tune!)

There's nothing worse than being told
After half an hour on hold
How valuable I really am
When plainly no one gives a damn.
There's nothing worse; it's cut and dried;
Except for maybe, genocide...

There's nothing worse than being tracked
By Google, in some heinous act
Or manner I can't comprehend.
So, confidently I contend
There's nothing so unjustified;
Except for maybe, genocide...

There's nothing worse than journalese
With which so many seem at ease.
"The leafy suburbs" come to mind,
And clichés of a similar kind.
There's nothing, as I have implied;
Except for maybe, genocide...

There's nothing worse than when I need
My broadband to be up to speed,
And then it somehow comes about
The system keeps on dropping out.
There's nothing been identified;
Except perhaps for genocide...

There's nothing worse, I often think,
Than when the boiler's on the blink
And then at some ungodly hour
I'm left to shiver in the shower!
There's nothing more undignified;

Except for maybe, genocide...

There's nothing worse, it's my belief –
And nothing that can cause such grief –
In knowing that there's no one there
Available to style my hair!
There's nothing worse, I can confide;
Except for maybe, genocide...

There's nothing worse than running late,
Or finding I've confused the date;
Or contemplating how one copes
With running out of envelopes!
There's nothing, I am satisfied;
Except for maybe, genocide...

"There's nothing worse!" I told my friend,
When I was coming near the end
Of telling him of all my woes.
"Though some will argue I suppose,
There's nothing worse!" my friend replied;
"Except perhaps for genocide..."

7 Don Giuseppe Berardelli (4.22)

A sad note to run alongside this story. In early 2020 in northern Italy, when the coronavirus pandemic was at its most contagious, hospitals were overloaded to the point that accurate death records could not be maintained. Don Giuseppe Berardelli died on either the 15th or 16th of March – no one knows which. In the Roman calendar, the Ides of March – the 15th – was the traditional deadline for repaying one's debts.

Whilst endless sagas have been heard,
Many still remain to tell;
Tragic tales of COVID-19
Journeys in and out of hell.
Heroes will abound; however
Those who rate the highest praise,
As so often we've discovered,
Come in unexpected ways.

Don Giuseppe Berardelli
Died when he was seventy-two.
Maybe, in the scheme of things,
That's what he was supposed to do.
Nothing seemed premeditated;
Not until that moment when
Providence again appeared
To once more take its cue from men.

Don Giuseppe Berardelli,
If by chance you do not know,
Lived in an Italian town
In Lombardy called Casnigo.
In 2020, March it was,
Along with others of his age
Don Giuseppe came to feel
The force of the pandemic's rage.

When suddenly he couldn't breathe,
The cleric with his Rosary
Was taken at the greatest speed to
Hospital in Lovere.
Someone found a ventilator
Even where there were so few
To help the stricken on the ward.
Even now, he could pull through.

But that was when Giuseppe saw
Beyond his dark, foreboding fears.
A lad lay dying next to him,
Around a quarter of his years.
The ventilator being offered

He declined with gratefulness.
If this young man should need it more,
He himself must need it less.

No one knows the young man's fate,
But if he lives, we hope at least
He maybe some days thinks to light
A candle for a selfless priest.
As for Father Berardelli,
No one's sure which day he passed.
It could have been the Ides of March –
All debts paid, in peace at last.

8 A to B (4.06)

Occasionally, a dream returns time and again; like it's trying to get your attention...

It's good of you to make the space –
I had to see you face to face.
How long is it since last we met?
We talked about the alphabet.
I really don't remember much –
I know you said to keep in touch,
And that it can't be justified
How foolishly I've let that slide.
And now I don't know what to say;
Except, it's never gone away.
It's even harder now for me
To find the way from A to B.

I still have my recurring dream,
The constantly returning theme.
There's somewhere that I have to go.
I never ever make it, though.
The images are crystal clear.
The sun is bright. The atmosphere
Is unpolluted, fresh and clean
And dazzling like I've never seen.
It's somewhere that I recognise.
But now, accusing night-world eyes
Are always there; cajoling me
To find the way from A to B.

It may well be a city scene –
Most likely somewhere I have been –
Or possibly a country town.
I've never tried to pin it down,
But always I am left marooned –
A state to which I'm now attuned! –
And somehow have to choose a track
That finally will bring me back.
But back to whom, and back from where?
And every time it's always there,
This overriding urgency
To find my way from A to B.

They're not disturbing, I must say;
Or nightmarish in any way,
But tiring? – yes, I'm sure that's right.
To me they take up half the night!
And always are as clear as day.
The moment they are under way
I'm running down the steepest road.
In one specific episode
I waded through a flooding stream.
It didn't help me in the dream
'Cos even then, I wasn't free
To find my way from A to B.

I don't know why I tell you this.
It's nothing you would ever miss.

When you've forgotten every word
That I have said or you have heard.
You probably will say at best
I'm only one like all the rest;
And possibly this is at most
A bid to exorcise a ghost.
But thanks for listening all the same.
It's now become a waiting game.
I'm searching all the time, you see,
To find a way from A to B.

9 Hildegard Of Bingo (3.38)

... a cautionary parable!

It was late July when the sun was high –
The crowd was getting restive –
But nevertheless one had to confess
It all seemed fairly festive.
Then the drunk MC right in front of me
Started howling like a dingo;
“It's the Queen of Halls and she call the balls –
It's Hildegard of Bingo!”

She was six-foot high with a green glass eye
And a voice like Stentor's ma!
The promoters found when the word went round
That they flocked from near and far.
She arrived on scene in a sports machine
And the crowd was overjoyed.
She was like a cross between Stirling Moss
And the ghost of Marie Lloyd.

Seemed the stage was set as the spotlights met,
When her car screams in and stops
With a banshee wail in a hail of shale
And with two outrider cops.
Now, I hope and trust that I'm being just
When I tell you no one there
Could anticipate that a piece of slate
Would decapitate the Mayor.

As you might deduce, all hell broke loose.
An enthusiastic crowd
Gave a rousing cheer. It was all too clear
They thought she'd done them proud.
They were there to play the old-fashioned way
'Cos most folks like to gamble;
So her agent, Gus, then approached her thus
Without too much preamble...

“I've a great idea, and I think it's clear
That it's sure to entertain.
For a bit of fun, I give ten to one
That you can't do that again!”
When a local crook moved to make a book
I almost am forgetting
How the brightest cop then agreed to stop
To supervise the betting.

Some would find it hard but our Hildegard,
She was up for any game,
But to make it good she enquired who should
Be the focus of her aim?
Beside the deceased stood the local priest
With an elegant young heiress
And together they, in time-honoured way,
Both volunteered the Mayoress.

Now, the track was scarred after Hildegard
Came a'roaring around the curve.

As we hoped and knew, the shale all flew
As she made her final swerve.
When the dust was cleared, some dissenter jeered
The statuesque Brunhilde.
The cop said "This was a damn near miss!
Hard luck – you haven't killed her!"

So all bets were off and it seems the toff
And the cop kept all the cash.
It was all too plain that the Mayoral chain
That they'd added to the stash
Had been nicked, I guess, by the Mayoress;
But we understood the score.
It was only fair, 'cos we knew the Mayor
Wouldn't need it any more.

It was more than fair 'cos we knew the Mayor
Wouldn't need it anymore!

10 The Proper Folk Tradition (3.37)

To many of us, it comes naturally. TPFT is for those who could profit from a little guidance...

Well, being a new kid on the block with oodles still to learn,
My tutor took me to one side before I did my turn.
"The secret," he opined without a morsel of contrition,
"Is boring people rigid in the proper folk tradition."

Outrageously ambitious, I had much to realign
As someone who had bottled the authentic Dylan whine.
I quickly found I had a knack to crush the opposition,
Boring people rigid in the proper folk tradition.

So that was when I stuck my index finger in my ear
And cloned the drone of some unlikely old-time balladeer.
Nothing could dissuade me from fixating on the mission
Boring people rigid in the proper folk tradition.

It was, I'd always emphasise before I'd start to croon,
Imperative that my guitar was slightly out of tune.
Because it's democratic, no one ever seeks permission
Boring people rigid in the proper folk tradition.

Every night I'd tell the tale of poor old "Little Nell",
And after that, a rather flat "John Barleycorn" as well.
No one ever said that I was lacking in ambition,
Boring people rigid in the proper folk tradition.

The wailing of the bagpipes, as I'd nightly demonstrate,
Was good for making all the front-row's sinuses vibrate.
Truthfully, it had become a battle of attrition,
Boring people rigid in the proper folk tradition.

Occasionally, I would employ a greater firepower –
My banjo solos last around a quarter of an hour!
I've often noticed punters praying for the intermission,
Boring people rigid in the proper folk tradition.

"He truly is," reviewers raved, "one to the manor born,
Singing songs of salty seamen reaching round the Horn,
Hanging from the topsail yard; and by his own admission,
Boring people rigid in the proper folk tradition."

It really is rewarding when you know that, underneath,
The audience are grimly hanging on through gritted teeth.
I don't have to remind you that I passed at my audition,
Boring people rigid in the proper folk tradition.

11 The Tiger's Tale (3.17)

It was only the other night, lying awake,
That I wondered why ever we tigers lose sleep
With nothing disturbing; excepting, for pity's sake,
The petty resentments of powerless sheep!
I marvel at all who have come to caress us –
How high are their levels of lunacy set?
I pondered exacting the vengeance of Nessus;
And if I decide to, the mileage I'll get,
So hold on, hold on for the tiger's tale...

So slowly but surely, with plans coalescing
In what's now become my established technique,
I made my selection of buttons for pressing;
The ones that will carry most sway, so to speak.
We know that, to focus and foster resentment,
They must be emotive and hard to contest.
When everything works there's a certain contentment,
As public opinion takes care of the rest.
So hold on, hold on for the tiger's tale...

Eventually Morpheus turned up to claim me
But when I awoke I was simmering still.
I'd asked myself many times "Who's gonna to blame me?"
And finally determined that "Nobody will!"
We tigers will always have little regard for
A victim unable to mount a defence,
And this is the moment to really hit hard; for,
Strategically speaking, it makes perfect sense.
So hold on, hold on for the tiger's tale...

Now, many will argue I'm callous and scheming,
But I'm only playing the cards that I hold.
A tiger cares little for ritual screaming
Of sheep being returned to the traumatised fold.
The switches I'm throwing excite wokerati,
A tactic I've found both efficient and cheap
And highly effective destroying a party
Of helpless, defenceless and powerless sheep.
So hold on, hold on to the tiger's tale,

Hold on, hold on to the tiger's tale.

12 Deadly Nightshade (3.24)

"Alternate facts..."; "Your truth..."; "Lived truth..." – all acceptable Orwellian reinterpretations of "We hold these truths to be self-evident".

Face it, friends, we stand complicit –
Everybody plays the game.
Illegit or plain illicit,
Ethical; they're all the same.
Truths are mere interpretations,
Lies what our opponent tells;
Lowering our expectations,
Ramping up the decibels.

Reason has been accidentally
Atrophied and paralyzed;
Rationale coincidentally
Beaten up and traumatised.
Judgement, even comprehension –
Previously commonplace –
Merit not a single mention
On a modern database.

Lost, and feared disappeared;
Where have all the flowers gone?
Indulge me – tell me something weird

That we can agree upon!
Who has taken thinking captive?
How much ransom must we pay?
Nothing will be unattractive
Given what we see today.

Even when we sense the slurry
Obstinately on the rise,
Nobody will burn or bury
Authorised untruths and lies.
Some will still believe in turning
Gilead to Paradise.
Surely they are slowly learning
Always there will be a price?

Constancy emerges; blinking,
Stunned and almost at a loss.
Time was when coherent thinking
Steadfastly would cut across.
Now it tiptoes; downcast, dismayed,
Naked, blinded by the sun;
Fearful of the deadly nightshade
Fallen over everyone.

Now it tiptoes; downcast, dismayed,
Naked, blinded by the sun;
Fearful in the deadly nightshade
Fallen over everyone.

13 Immaculate Deception (3.11)

This Cancel Culture song was done and dusted when I found, in his 1859 essay “On Liberty”, philosopher John Stuart Mill had already pointed out that “...if any opinion is compelled to silence, that opinion may, for aught we can certainly know, be true. To deny this is to assume our own infallibility”. In one fell swoop, Mill had encapsulated in the most direct way possible a concept it took me twenty-four lines to express! (That said, my tune’s better...)

Now, I’m like you. I’m a martyr to a certain cerebral prowess.
I take my views from the on-line news and am satisfied, more or less,
That by renown when the chips are down I’m alive to what is what.
I recognise, and can emphasise, realities that most cannot.
I’m so at ease with my expertise which in fairness is wide-ranging;
And quite by chance, my partisan stance that’s remarkably unchanging.
Some friends have held that I feel compelled to reluctantly refuse
To countenance any awkward stance that will contradict my views.

There’s little doubt, so I now find out, that others’ opinions vary.
As you will guess, I try to suppress everything that is contrary.
A point I make for clarity’s sake is, whatever people call us,
You can rely on the kind of guy who knows his views are flawless.
I cannot share any moment where I’ve ever been inconclusive.
Yes, some allege at the cutting edge, I often may seem abusive
But my expertise can be shown with ease; it’s laid out for all to see;
From end of life, through cultural strife, to epidemiology.

I’ve had my fill with the rumour mill distributing malicious fictions.
I tell you now that I can’t allow any room for contradictions.
From near or far, whoever they are, they come a-flocking to my standard –
Maybe because no one ever was even once so sorely slandered!
Any surmise I might compromise is a total misconception
I’d call bizarre; and I’d go this far, an immaculate deception!
Though I dismiss any thought, “Is this an arrogance worth pursuing?”
It may seem odd, but I hope to God that I know what I am doing!

14 I’m Sorry! (3.28)

British comedian Bob Monkhouse once opined, “In show business, sincerity is everything. If you can fake that, you’ve got it made!” Bob was ahead of his time! With squads of 21st Century wokerati demanding their bodyful of flesh over perceived indiscretions, is it surprising responses from those accused now seem slightly formulaic?

Remember the trend to attack to defend?

Well, that has all gone by the board.
We reasonable people have found in the end
It's something we cannot afford.
We now have a strategy, tested and tried –
A useful procedural wheeze –
Used every day to direct and to guide
Celebs who are brought to their knees.
No matter the venom the virtuous hurl
It comes with a full guarantee,
So that's why I'm willing to give it a whirl;
Now that it's happened to me...
Now that it's happened to me...

I feel I must share that I've been made aware
How my hurtful, incendiary tweet
Was offensive to masochists everywhere;
So humbly, again I repeat
That beginning today my career is paused –
I've joined a retreat's programme.
I understand truly the pain that I've caused –
That isn't who really I am!
My journey's intended to help me address
The evils that led me astray.
I know nothing less than a rehab process
Can help in a meaningful way,
Can help in a meaningful way...

I behaved like a clown and I've let you all down.
What possessed me, God alone knows!
I guess I could argue a night on the town
Was reason enough to compose
The tweet that I candidly ought to have known
Failed any longevity test.
Looking back now, I could never condone
The offensive view I expressed.
I apologise most unreservedly
And am yearning for absolution,
Accepting I must be eternally
Confined to an institution,
Confined to an institution...

Sincere and devout, they don't mess about
When the pack converge on their quarry,
Taking the time and the pains to point out
I made a mistake. I'M SORRY!
I've been on the rack, I've taken it back,
Discovered a different way;
Bought all the double-think, soaked up the flak
Like everyone has to today.
Renewed, I insist I'll emerge from this mist
To join the self-righteous inane.
We all know you can't beat a masochist!
Oh, bummer! I've done it again...