

INAUGURAL ADDRESS:
MIGRATION AND NEMESIS

by

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INAUGURAL ADDRESS: MIGRATION AND NEMESIS

AMONG PLANTS, migration in space and time results in remarkable changes in attitudes toward them. The weed of one place may be the treasured garden flower of another. The admired ornamental of one generation may seem worthless to later gardeners. Equally great variations occur in the esteem of human beings when they move to another place or are viewed in the perspective of a different period. One of the characteristics of these changes is unpredictability. Neither botanical knowledge nor human psychology can forecast with assurance the effects which migration will produce.

Let us turn our attention to a physician who, a century ago, migrated from Chicago to London with results which he did not foresee. It is without avail to think that he should have anticipated the consequences of his migration, for then, as now, the

INAUGURAL ADDRESS: MIGRATION AND NEMESIS

English look with less favor on murder than does the American judicial system. However, we view the matter in the perspective of a hundred years. Retrospection is notably fallacious in judging behavior but it provides its moments of entertainment to students of human nature in unusual circumstances.

Our anti-hero, Thomas Neill Cream, was born on May 27, 1850, at 61 Wellington Lane, Glasgow. His father, William, was a man of good repute, persevering and prosperous. He emigrated with his wife and small children to Canada in 1854 or 1855. Neill (as he was usually known) was 4 or 5 years old when he first set foot on the North American continent. The father became manager of a thriving shipbuilding and lumber firm in Quebec. Having prospered, he apprenticed Neill to the shipbuilding trade but already the young man's sights were on other things. At the age of 22 he entered McGill College for the study of medicine and in 1876 he received his M.B. with merit. He was thought to have gained some distinction in his student days from an essay on chloroform. The medical school years were not without interest. He was well supplied with funds by his father. These provided for flashy clothes, excessive jewelry and a stylish carriage and pair. Such tastes could readily make a financial supplement desirable. At the beginning of

INAUGURAL ADDRESS: MIGRATION AND NEMESIS

his sophomore year, Neill insured his personal effects for \$1,000. Curiously, there was a fire in his rooms 20 months later just before his graduation, the detailed claim for damages amounting to \$978.40. Arson was strongly suspected but the insurance company settled the claim for \$350 and brought no criminal charges.

A few months before this, he was forced into a "shotgun" marriage to a girl on whom an abortion had been performed. The reluctant bridegroom left next day, ostensibly for England to pursue his medical training. Since nothing was proved in either case, he may readily have felt that such peccadilloes as abortion and arson would go unnoticed when perpetrated by Thomas Neill Cream.

At any rate, he was in London a few months after he received his M.B. and in October, 1876, he became a post-graduate student at St. Thomas's Hospital. Failing his examination for the Royal College of Surgeons in 1877, he passed those of the Royal Colleges of Physicians and of Surgeons in Edinburgh.

With this double qualification he set off for Canada once more and opened a practice in London, Ontario. Not long after, the body of a chambermaid was found in a privy behind the premises occupied by Cream, a bottle of chloroform by her side. This recalls the student essay on that very chemical. It

INAUGURAL ADDRESS: MIGRATION AND NEMESIS

came to light that she had been frequenting his office to procure an abortion. The medical evidence ruled out suicide and indicated murder, the verdict being that she "died from chloroform, administered by some person unknown." The good folk of London, Ontario, took so dim a view of the situation that his practice was ruined.

The Doctor next appeared in Chicago, where he did himself rather well by setting up practice at 434 West Madison Street (now 1255). In 1880, this was a neighborhood of substantial houses, green lawns and fine trees. Horsecars provided good public transportation for his patients and fair weather seemed ahead.

However, he quickly acquired a reputation as an abortionist. When that on Julia Faulkner ended fatally, Cream was arrested but the evidence was not conclusive and he went scot free. Four months later, his patient, Miss Stack, died after taking medicine prescribed by Cream, and the body was found in an outhouse behind his home. A month after the death he tried to blackmail the pharmacist who filled the prescription. This persecution was put to an end by a more serious problem for the Doctor.

It so chanced that at that exact time our versatile physician was advertising a specific cure for epilepsy. The disease in 1881 was a good one for a profitable nostrum since its cause and effective treatment were

INAUGURAL ADDRESS: MIGRATION AND NEMESIS

then unknown. The ensuing century has brought rational therapy and some clarification of cause, but both still are imperfect. In 1881, the disorder was as common as it is today but few then suffering from it reached the neurologists practicing in Chicago, though there were several distinguished ones. Most epileptics relied on patent medicines, attracted more by flamboyant labels than by medical considerations.

Daniel Stott, a 61 year old station agent on the Northwestern Railroad in Grand Prairie, Illinois, suffered from this disorder. Not being able to come frequently to Chicago, he sent his pretty wife of 33 to get the famous remedy. In fact, she made the trip for fresh supplies at ever shorter intervals, as the attraction between the young woman and the 41 year old benefactor of epileptics ripened into more than friendship. On June 11, 1881, yet another prescription was required and it was filled at a nearby drug store. Mrs. Stott asserted later that Dr. Cream added a white powder to it and also to some rhubarb pills, which she got for her husband at the same time. Three days afterward, Mr. Stott took the medicine and died within twenty minutes. Meanwhile, Cream had been trying to insure his patient's life but the policy was not yet in effect.

The death was readily attributed to an epileptic seizure and all would have been well had matters

INAUGURAL ADDRESS: MIGRATION AND NEMESIS

been left to rest. However, Cream informed the coroner of Boone County that the pharmacist had put too much strychnine in the medicine and demanded an exhumation. Receiving no cooperation from the coroner, the Doctor next approached the District Attorney, who took action. On analysis of the exhumed body, four grains of strychnine were demonstrated in the stomach.

At this point the Doctor found his troubles compounded, since he was out on bail for a charge of sending scurrilous matter through the mails. His flight to Canada ended near Windsor, Ontario, where he was taken into custody. He and Mrs. Stott were indicted for murder on his return to Chicago. Mrs. Stott turned State's Evidence and indeed was probably a passive onlooker. After due meditation by the jury, Dr. Cream was found guilty of murder, but in the second degree. On November 1, 1881, he began a life sentence at Illinois State Penitentiary at Joliet. At that point, McGill struck the name of Thomas Neill Cream from its roster, a casual way to treat one of its well remembered graduates.

The official description at that time recorded him as of stout and solid build, with massive head and thinning hair. He was 5 ft. 9 in. tall and there was a squint to his light gray eyes.

The years at Joliet passed quietly, perhaps too quietly for his taste. In 1890 he wrote to Pinkerton's

INAUGURAL ADDRESS: MIGRATION AND NEMESIS

National Detective Agency, asking it to trace Mrs. Stott in the hope that she would give an affidavit in his favor. She was never found.

Meanwhile, Cream's father had died in 1887, leaving him \$16,000, a substantial capital in those days. Edmund Pearson describes the sequel somewhat brusquely:

Sympathizers thought that the time had come to give the poor fellow another chance, with the opportunity to enjoy himself and his inheritance. An agitation was begun to effect his release; Mr. Stott was dead, and doubtless anybody who opposed the commutation would have been denounced as revengeful.

At any rate, Governor John W. Fifer on June 12, 1891, reduced the sentence to 17 years with allowance of time for good conduct, bringing the term to its conclusion on July 31, 1891, after not quite ten years in the Penitentiary. Perhaps the Governor felt that to deny the Doctor his patrimony was "cruel and unusual punishment," and that is forbidden in the Eighth Amendment.

So the doors of Joliet swung open and Prisoner 4374 again became Dr. Thomas Neill Cream, L.R.C.P. and L.R.C.S. (Edin.) and in a strong financial position. He hastened to claim as much of

INAUGURAL ADDRESS: MIGRATION AND NEMESIS

his patrimony as his father's executors would let him have, ostensibly to visit England for his health.

Chicago seemed to attract our anti-hero no longer, but he may not have paused long enough to sense the vigor and intellectual ferment that had come to it in his decade at Joliet. The city had quite suddenly developed into a world center of modern architecture, with Adler, Sullivan and the young Frank Lloyd Wright designing such monumental buildings as the Auditorium, the Ryerson Building and, in domestic architecture, the Charnley residence. It is true that not all the building was so forward-looking, for the Potter Palmer pseudogothic mansion struck a reactionary note, to say the least. But the owner had already begun to embellish its walls with French Impressionist paintings, eventually to become one of the most distinguished collections in private hands and to exert a significant force in the recognition of these artists.

Neither did he pause long enough to learn that the Chicago Literary Club, a lusty infant when he entered Joliet, was now grown to full stature as a social and intellectual institution or to realize the significance of the fact that Clinton Locke was preparing to give his Inaugural Address a month hence on "The Making, Giving and Receiving of Taffy."

There had been a few changes in the neighborhood of West Madison and Racine and those were

INAUGURAL ADDRESS: MIGRATION AND NEMESIS

for the better, since cable cars had replaced the horsecars he remembered. In so substantial a neighborhood, Cream would have been justified in feeling that its good people might not readily entrust their medical problems to a newly released murderer. He could not know that the district in a few years would begin the *descensus Averno* which was to become so extreme. A recent visit showed that the desolation was absolute. No footsteps broke the silence of the sidewalks and no car passed along the street. The site of Cream's dwelling is now a vacant lot, with the low building of the American Offset Company hard by. The rest of the block is occupied by sleazy shops, most of them untenanted, and across the street there is the Stop and Eat Grill, an injunction which I did not heed.

In view of the activities coming events showed Cream to have already in mind, he may not have considered the advantages offered to carry them out in Chicago. The police force was meager, with 1680 patrolmen to cover 181 square miles or 1 to 715 inhabitants. The officers were mostly concerned with assault, arrests on this charge having increased 30 times while Cream smoldered at Joliet. Prostitutes were available in numbers, for a newspaper of the day stated that efforts had not eliminated "the polluting presence of abandoned women who wandered through the streets."

INAUGURAL ADDRESS: MIGRATION AND NEMESIS

With advantages ranging from creative architecture to uncontrolled prostitution, how could the good Doctor have looked elsewhere? But that is precisely what he did. He took passage on the *Teutonic* and arrived at Liverpool just two months after Joliet sent him forth. As befitted a man newly come into his inheritance, he chose this newest and finest ship of the White Star Line. It was so grand, in fact, that when the Prince of Wales was showing his nephew, Kaiser Wilhelm II, its splendors, Kaiser Bill remarked rather grandly, "We must have some of those." What elicited the Kaiser's envy should surely have been adequate for Dr. Cream. Among the amenities of the ship, there was a barber shop with an entrance resembling a cathedral vestry, and inside it, the hairbrushes were driven by electric motors. The woodwork everywhere was dark mahogany; stained glass and electric lamps abounded. Electricity was then a novelty and rare even in the stately homes of England.

The Doctor traveled alone. Perhaps this was again due to a desire for creature comforts unalloyed. Even though the *Teutonic* held the Atlantic Blue Riband for a passage of five days, 16 hours, 31 minutes, a lady would have required corsets rigid with whalebone stays and petticoats in number and variety, to say nothing of the voluminous dresses — broadcloth for morning strolls on deck, grenadine

INAUGURAL ADDRESS: MIGRATION AND NEMESIS

for afternoon tea, velvet brocade for evening and voided velvet for the Captain's Dinner.

No, he traveled without feminine companionship, or so he thought. But he was quite wrong. There was a woman with him all the way. She encroached on his living quarters not at all, for her luggage consisted only of a measuring rod, a bridle, a sword and a scourge. She stayed by his side even unto the end, but his end, not hers. And she was invisible, for this was the goddess Nemesis, the bringer of divine retribution.

Unaware of his ghostly companion, Dr. Cream disembarked on October 1 at Liverpool and proceeded at a leisurely pace to London, not arriving until the fifth. This was wise, for a busy month lay ahead. The devil within him, long caged, had come out roaring. Consider the dates — October 1, landed in Liverpool; October 5, arrived in London; October 7, moved into permanent lodgings; on or before the 12th, bought strychnine; 13th, first murder; 20th, second murder.

Now for a closer look at these activities. On arrival in London, he registered as Dr. Neill at Anderson's Hotel in Fleet Street. Next day, he engaged a front room on the second floor of 103 Lambeth Palace Road under the name of Dr. Thomas Neill to which he moved the following morning. The street wanders along the South Bank of the

INAUGURAL ADDRESS: MIGRATION AND NEMESIS

Thames past Lambeth Palace, the home of the Archbishop of Canterbury. This great edifice was to be a mute onlooker to the strange scurrings of the Doctor, as he rushed about in flowing coat and stovepipe hat, bent on devil's errands. Dr. Cream was not the first nor the last evildoer that the grim and holy pile had watched, for the streets around it were then seedy and depressing. The years have changed them greatly by the development of new buildings for St. Thomas's Hospital in the 1960's, in which Dr. Cream's lodgings were demolished. A physician in the full professional dress of the day could hardly have been an inconspicuous figure in such surroundings.

The evening between engagement of his new home and moving in was wet and dismal (as evenings often are in a London October). Solace came when he met a woman of the streets named Elizabeth Masters in Ludgate Circus near his hotel. The silent majesty of Wren's masterpiece watched unmoved as the girl and her companion drank wine at the King Lud pub and then went to Gatti's Music Hall. When they returned to the pub to round out the evening, they were joined by Elizabeth May, a friend of Masters. When it was time to say good night Cream promised another meeting. Three days later, an appointment having been made by letter, the two girls watched at their window, only to see the

INAUGURAL ADDRESS: MIGRATION AND NEMESIS

Doctor come along the street with Matilda Clover, whom they knew slightly. She was a pleasant looking brown-eyed girl with prominent teeth. May and Masters followed and saw the couple enter Clover's home and they waited for him, but the Doctor had not emerged after an hour.

About three days after this, the poison book of Mr. Priest, chemist, recorded the purchase of strychnine by "Dr. Thomas Neill, M.D." On the next day, a man in Waterloo Road noticed a girl leaning against the wall and then falling to the street. He went to her assistance, though such an event was common enough in that neighborhood as to occasion little notice. Her name was Ellen Donworth, another prostitute of the area. She was in great pain but was able to explain that a tall gentleman had given her "white stuff" from a bottle. Convulsions developed and she died on the way to the hospital, where a post-mortem proved poisoning by strychnine. This became known as the Lambeth Mystery, which was deepened when a letter signed "A. O'Brien, Detective" offered to name the murderer for the small fee of 300,000 pounds. Another letter from "H. Bayne" to W. H. Smith and Son, named a member of the firm as the murderer but offered to save him if H. Bayne was retained as barrister. A paper was to be posted on the window as acceptance.

INAUGURAL ADDRESS: MIGRATION AND NEMESIS

Following police instructions, this was done but H. Bayne remained elsewhere.

Exactly one week later, the screams of Matilda Clover, whom we have met before, broke the night quiet of Lambeth Road at 3 A.M. In pursuit of the oldest profession in the world, she again received that evening the tall man in flowing overcoat and tall hat. During a momentary respite in her agony, she said she had been poisoned by pills given her by "that man." The death, however, was certified as due to alcoholism.

About a month later, Dr. William H. Broadbent of Portman Square received a letter from one "M. Malone," accusing him of murdering Matilda Clover with strychnine (which was the first time that poison had been mentioned). Dr. Broadbent was one of the most distinguished London physicians at the time and was later knighted. His name is still familiar to medical students, for Broadbent's sign remains important in the diagnosis of adhesive pericarditis. Again on police advice, a trap was laid but M. Malone was reticent. In December, the Countess Russell, who was staying at the Savoy Hotel, received a letter accusing her husband, the Earl, of the murder.

With these exciting events accomplished, the devil within was satiated and for three months it rested. Then it sprang forth with redoubled ferocity.

INAUGURAL ADDRESS: MIGRATION AND NEMESIS

On April 11, a police constable saw Emma Shrivell let out of her lodgings at two A.M. a man in a tall hat, a street lamp giving the officer a good opportunity for observation. Within an hour, shrieks rent the night air not only from Shrivell but also her companion, Alice Marsh. Between convulsions they told their landlady that a tall man had given them capsules, which they dutifully swallowed. Marsh died on the way to the hospital but Shrivell endured her sufferings for five hours more.

Scotland Yard now realized that it was dealing with a systematic murderer, operating by the use of strychnine on prostitutes specifically in Lambeth. Exhumation of Matilda Clover's body was not easy, as fourteen coffins had to be moved to reach it. Autopsy showed that her death, too, was due to strychnine and not alcoholism.

It soon became known to the police that not all the intended victims were so docile as to take the medicine so generously provided by the Doctor. To Violet Beverly he offered an "American drink" but she was loyal to her British heritage and chose beer. Her patriotism was much to her advantage, for the drink almost surely contained a good quantity of the Doctor's white powder. It also may be regarded as a tribute to her palate, considering what some London hotels and pubs still serve as an "American cocktail."

INAUGURAL ADDRESS: MIGRATION AND NEMESIS

From January 7 to April 1, 1892, Cream was traveling in Canada, crossing the Atlantic less grandly than before. In Quebec he ordered the printing of 500 circulars for delivery in London, stating that Ellen Donworth's murderer was employed at the Metropole Hotel and the lives of its guests were in danger. These extraordinary leaflets were never used.

In May, one month after the double murder, Sergeant McIntyre of Scotland Yard met by accident one Dr. Neill. The doctor said he was being followed and harassed by the policemen who accused him of murdering Marsh and Shrivell. This was news to the police. He also said that he had a letter written before their deaths stating that they should beware of a Dr. Harper, lest he serve them as he had Clover and Lou Harvey. This was the first that had been heard of Lou Harvey. Efforts to find her body were unavailing, for the good and sufficient reason that she turned up alive, healthy and able to give the police some interesting information. On her second meeting with the tall, silk-hatted man, he offered her some pills for her complexion but she was astute enough to drop them surreptitiously on the ground.

Early in June, Dr. Neill was arrested for blackmail, which charge was altered to murder a month later. The trial at the Old Bailey in October was

INAUGURAL ADDRESS: MIGRATION AND NEMESIS

for the murder of Clover. It touched upon legal problems of the time at only one point. This was whether evidence of the other crimes could be admitted to show system and method. The judge ruled that it could, at which point conviction was a certainty. Girls who had seen him with Clover, the constable outside Shrivell's house and Lou Harvey all identified the Doctor. He was found in possession of strychnine. It took the jury only ten minutes to find him guilty and on November 15, 1892, Nemesis exacted her final retribution in the yard of Newgate Prison.

This strange tale has attracted many writers, good, bad, and indifferent. Shore's account is the most detailed but Pearson's is the most entertaining by virtue of what I have called his "delight in evil." De Quincy, over a century ago, laid down the criteria for including a murder in the select group of vintage crimes in his essay "On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts." Let us see how far Dr. Cream meets the requirements.

One is that the murderer should have previously led a blameless life. In this respect, the Doctor notably fails to qualify. A career that included arson, wife desertion, sending improper material through the mail, criminal abortions with fatalities, and blackmail could hardly be said to have been blameless.

INAUGURAL ADDRESS: MIGRATION AND NEMESIS

Another criterion is that there should be no gross violence. One thug beating another thug to death is for the newspapers and not the connoisseur of murder. Cream meets this requirement — a little white powder, a short period of agony while the murderer is far away and the deed is done. There is some disagreement among the experts on the inclusion of poisoners in the select group of murderers. De Quincy decries them, but Pearson comments "Of all sly deviltry the art of the poisoner is unsurpassed." I agree with Pearson.

There is the requirement of all the authorities that the victim should be a relative or close friend, for such an act tries the crassest soul to its depths. Here Cream is marginal. All the London girls he had seen not more than two or three times before he favored them with his medicine and in the Chicago exploit, it was the wife of the victim and not the victim himself who was his friend. Perhaps Cream made friends with unusual speed and speeding is dangerous.

Then, too, the arbiters decree that there should be an element of mystery or terror. In this case, one element of mystery has been created by the biographers themselves. This regards Cream's nationality. The facts are plain enough — born in Scotland, reared in Canada, first tasted the heady wine of murder in Chicago and in London drained the cup.

INAUGURAL ADDRESS: MIGRATION AND NEMESIS

British writers usually describe him as an American doctor. Pearson remarks:

There is often a marked tendency, outside this country, to be hazy about the birth-place or political allegiance of such Americans as Sargent, Whistler, and Edwin Abbey — and this is natural. The English journalist, to do him justice, usually awards us Doctor Crippen, but he errs on the side of generosity when he also attributes Doctor Neill Cream to America.

A more genuine bit of suspense is afforded the sensitive observer as he considers whether each girl will take the medicine or discard it quietly. There would have been a strong element of mystery, or no story at all, if the doctor had not persisted in his idiotic elaboration. Of the murderer, Pearson writes:

If he can keep his head, if he does not talk, and if he is remorseless, human society, it has been said, is at his mercy. There have been murderers so equipped, but they have usually tried to repeat their success too many times.

Cream was completely remorseless but in keeping his head he was an utter failure. It is true that his activities were repetitious but that alone is not sufficient. In fact, Pearson has pointed out that his Rule 4 for murderesses applies equally to men —

INAUGURAL ADDRESS: MIGRATION AND NEMESIS

"If you commit murder for insurance money, or for mere pleasure, make it wholesale. Never stop at one."

What impelled the man Dr. Cream is a moot question. It was surely not for insurance money. This appeared only in the Chicago episode, but the murder occurred before the policy was in effect. There is no evidence that he wished to legalize a relationship with Mrs. Stott. Was it for mere pleasure? Very possibly, if pleasure be construed as satisfaction in giving full rein to a trait of personality unacceptable to the laws and conventions of society.

Was the mental structure of this man so warped that he would be called insane? Insanity has legal definitions but its medical limits are less easy to delineate. Cream was tried under the M'Naghten rulings. In simplified form, these state that a person is responsible for his crime if at the time it was committed he knew right from wrong and that what he was doing fell into the latter category. His elaborate attempts to protect himself after the event are sufficient evidence to show his own knowledge that he had committed crimes for which he might suffer penalty. Taken with the other evidence, there can be no doubt that the verdict of Guilty was justified at the time of the trial.

But would it be to-day, nearly a century later? An astute defense attorney would point to the in-

INAUGURAL ADDRESS: MIGRATION AND NEMESIS

eptitude of the coverup, the multiplicity of the murders and lack of motive as evidence of insanity. The systematic poisoning of prostitutes, each with an identical poison, would now tell in his favor, instead of being his Nemesis, as in 1892. The same evidence, bolstered by expert psychiatric testimony, would almost surely result in a verdict of Not Guilty by Reason of Insanity. Then would follow a period of incarceration in an institution for the criminally insane until his reason should be thought to have returned. Cream was a plausible fellow and made friends all too readily, as we have seen. It is quite likely that he could have quickly convinced his examiners that he had regained a full state of mental health. He would then be free to do it again until the number of his exploits could have equalled the conquests of Don Giovanni in Spain — "mille e tre."

The legal interest in this case lies in two points. We have already considered the admissibility of evidence from other crimes to show method, which is still decided individually in different cases and may be favorable to the prosecutor or the defense, depending on the circumstances.

The other long-range legal consideration is its relevance to capital punishment. Those who favor this penalty point out that at least four young people could have lived to know the joys and sorrows of many years if Governor Fife had taken an attitude

INAUGURAL ADDRESS: MIGRATION AND NEMESIS

more like that of the English judiciary system. To me, capital punishment is repugnant but I also view with some alarm the speedy release of murderers judged insane when they receive an inheritance or are simply "nice fellows."

In another respect, this episode fulfills the requirements for a notable crime — that it should be remote in time and divorced from the emotions and pressures of the day in which we live. Almost a century has passed since the stirring deeds of Dr. Cream. It is an exercise in social history to recapture the atmosphere in which they took place. The ancient monuments that watched over these memorable events remain unchanged and unchanging, but the modes and pace of daily life have altered beyond recognition. In attempting to bring into focus this little segment of the past, I am encouraged by a statement of G. M. Trevelyan:

To discover in detail what the life of man on earth was like, a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand years ago is just as great an achievement as to make ships sail under the sea or through the air. How wonderful a thing it is to look back into the past as it actually was, to get a glimpse through the curtain of old night into some brilliantly lighted scene of living men and women . . . warm-blooded realities even as we are.

INAUGURAL ADDRESS: MIGRATION AND NEMESIS

If I were to choose one day from this story as most worth recall, I would select October 6, 1891, when the Doctor rushed about the streets in quest of lodgings, until the rainy, dismal evening brought respite in wine, music hall and feminine companionship. St. Paul's watched, serene and aloof, while the pagan goddess Nemesis guided his footsteps through the wet, dark streets with their fitful gleam of gaslight, as he strode inexorably onward to the culmination at Newgate.

But it is not the Ultimate that the insubstantial goddess of rod and bridle, scourge and sword should bring a final retribution. More often than not, Time will clear away the rubble of our daily round and expose to view the Wise, the Noble and the Compassionate. That is the substance of our hope.

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