

HIP, HIP, HOORAY, 'TIS NEARLY SPRING

IF WINTER COMES, as come it has, can spring be far behind? Having eaten into the first couple of months of 1996 it is comforting to know that spring is officially with us on March 20th and by then we can look forward to a more mellow weather pattern.

Regular readers of "The Wychwood" who are kind enough to cast an eye over my load of old codswallop will have realised by now that I can get a wee bit hot under the collar about occurrences that in any way harm the countryside and environment of these still beautiful British Isles of ours.

Since I last wrote we have suffered the renewal of bomb outrages on the mainland perpetrated by those despicable monsters we identify as the I.R.A. and now we have the tragedy of that wretched oil tanker "Sea Empress" which managed to impale itself on the rocks of Milford Haven, resulting in a massive discharge of oil to pollute miles and miles of beautiful coastline. Sure enough it wasn't long before the T.V. Newsreels were showing us countless bewildered, pitifully stricken seabirds and many more beyond help.

The tragedy will continue to unfold for there are still many other species like Puffins and Shearwaters yet to follow in the weeks to come as they return to their normal breeding grounds only to discover that a holocaust has taken place, for the 'Black Death' will of course have

drastically reduced their natural food supply as well.

Mercifully there are organisations that are genuinely concerned about this ecological disaster and are working around the clock to clean up the oiled birds as they are discovered and brought to them, but experts estimate that it could be 15 or even 20 years before this coastline, which includes the wildlife reserves of Skomer and Skokholm, will be clean again.

The question has to be asked how long will it be before there is some legislation to stop these frequently rusting, flags of convenience hulks threatening our native shores, and just when are they going to insist that any container ships that visit British waters are fitted with double skinned hulls. In short, how many more "Torrey Canyons", "Braers" and "Sea Empresses" do we have to suffer before someone in high places stops talking about it and actually gets something done!

Whilst we are touching on the subject of pollution, this time with reference to the English language, is it me or have you noticed that the word "thanks" or "thank you" seems to have been superseded by the word "cheers", which I always thought was the acknowledgement you made when someone had stood you a drink at the bar.

A few months back most of us agreed that Jane Austin's "Pride and Prejudice" serialised on T.V. was the sort of stuff you didn't mind paying

your television licence for, because you would be hard pressed to find any fault with the entire presentation.

In Miss Elizabeth Bennett and Mr D'Arcy's world there was of course time for meticulous manners and polite conversation. I couldn't help comparing phrases that Mr D'Arcy might have used with modern day terminology from, shall we say, "Eastenders".

For instance Mr D'Arcy might say "Would you care to take a turn around the garden Miss Bennett?" Any of the young oiks in Eastenders, admittedly deprived of a garden, would more likely enquire "Fancy coming outside?" Similarly "Have a care Sir, I fear you are going too far" would become "Ere what's your game", and "I think you have the advantage of me Sir" would be translated as "Oo are you", and so on.

If this is put forward with a certain amount of tongue in cheek it nevertheless does give an insight into the deplorable decline of our native English tongue. I have nothing against dialects which are fascinating and enrich our language, so in my choice of comparison of the Cockney influence in Eastenders I assure you I'm not knocking the homely Londoner but I do hope that you will accept my point that the art of conversation has reached a very low ebb in recent years.

Remiss of me I know, but I haven't acquainted you lately with the menagerie in the household.

Happily the three dogs are in excellent health although Rastus (real name Rossie) known also as The Old Gentleman has, like his master, put on a few extra pounds and what we both need is healthy lungfuls of the fresh stuff pacing up and down the delightful Swinbrook Road.

The problem is that I am at present wobbling about on crutches having recently been fitted with a right hip replacement to match the one on the other side. The prospect of me coping with several pounds of energetic terrier as well as the afore-said crutches, doesn't bear thinking about.

Casual visitors to the household may have been a trifle puzzled as to why our conservatory was festooned with pages of old newspapers. Closer inspection would have revealed "William" the Bantam cockerel in residence having nearly died in the severe cold weather of recent weeks. Happily he is now restored to his adoring girls back in the hen house.

Sadly, however, I have to report the passing over the last few months of Brunhilde the bewildered, and Attila the hen, both gone to that celestial fowl run. I hope that poor Brunhilde has sorted herself out, or was it himself?

Footnote:- March 3rd. A hen blackbird was seen this morning collecting nesting material in the garden. 'Tis nearly springtime, and you heard it here first!

Tony Boardman