

IN DEFENCE OF THE TRUE PEN

This Letter was originally sent to The Times, but, due to an editor's Oversight, never saw the Light of Day. It is published here, in Professor Leary's estimable Compendium, for the first Time. (Dr. C. R. A. Peeps)

Dear Sir,

I write to express my great Sadness and profound Regret regarding the Temper of these Times. There is much to lament but I shall content myself with merely the briefest of Opinions by addressing the Story of the true Pen. As you will have no doubt realised, this Missive itself is written with Shakespeare's Tool. I dare venture that it is many a Year since you received a Letter written with a Quill Pen. (At least, since my last Letter, *Regarding female Attire*; which you failed to publish, I note.)

And what of a Quill Pen you ask? I will tell you, Sir.

Plainly put, the Quill Pen is the very finest writing Instrument ever crafted by the Children of Adam and Eve. I will grant that Writing, and Knowledge are Part and Parcel of our Downfall, but it is the Quill Pen that redeems. Did not the Monks of Lindisfarne set down the Scriptures with a Quill? Did not the Bard record his Sonnets with a Quill? Did not Dr. Johnson prepare his Dictionary with a Quill?

Western Civilisation was written into Existence by the Quill Pen.

And what do we see today? The Abandonment of the sacred Stylus, the Symbol of the Scribe, and its replacement by the *Mechanical* Pen. There was Nastiness enough when the steel Tip entered our Lives (an Experience akin to writing with a Scalpel) but with the Rise and now universal Use of the abominable 'Fountain' Pen we have come to a pretty Pass indeed. The very Name grates. A Fountain is a Vision of Loveliness and has nothing to suggest this brutish Thing.

I am no Reactionary. It is obvious to any Man of Reason that it was a Necessity to improve on Sticks, wax Tablets and Clay. The Black Board, once universal, is all that is left of the Universe of the Delible. The Quill Pen is an inexpensive, but supremely, nay, sublimely, functional Instrument that has conquered all before it, and by Merit. It is available to any Prince, Poet, or rude Mechanic who wishes to immortalise their Words in a Medium that, with decent Respect to its Fragility, will bring Pleasure to Generations to come (or Laughter, for I am not unable to see the humourous Possibilities of a literate *ηοι πολλοι*).

Allow me to elucidate the Advantages of the Plume over the Sac.

The Criticasters berate the Quill Pen for Slowness. Ah, such a Hurry and Scurry to scribble their Thoughts, which, no sooner appearing, do rush to the Page on a Stream of squirted Ink.

One does not rush with the Quill, and there lies its principal Glory. The Business of maintaining, and inking the Nib requires the Writer to pause at regular Intervals. These Moments give rise to Contemplation. And precisely this Commodity it is that is found most wanting today. A Pox on Modernity for forgetting the hardest-learnt Lesson of History: He that doth not think writes Shite.

The Plume teaches Humility. There is no easy Path to good Penmanship. Every Step of the Way must be comprehended and mastered.

First select your Goose. A healthy Specimen will provide Feathers that offer a firm but flexible Point. Avoid scrofulous Birds. Their Quills are sold cheap for good Reason (only the Fool and the Miser confound Cheapness with Economy).

Having chosen your Feather (Tail or Wing, there are Aficionados of both) you must prepare it for literary Use. A keen Blade is essential for the Pointing and Slitting of the Nib. Make certain to remove all stray Down that might attach to the Calamus so that no Ink may wander from the Slit. It is a purely personal Decision whether you trim the Barbs. Some prefer *au naturel*, while others incline to Neatness. *Chacun son goût*. It is one of the great Advantages of the Quill Pen that it caters to all Tastes. Not like the 'Fountain' Pen, which, being a Product of Darkness (see below), enslaves the Hand that works it.

Calligraphy is the Art of writing by Hand. There is no Place here for a Dissertation on this important Subject. It is sufficient to say that One does not pour Ink onto the Page from a Hose, like a Fireman; rather, One applies the Line with Precision and Control, like an Architect. For this Purpose only a good Quill Pen will suffice. Use the Inkpot sparingly; both your Purse and your Publisher will thank you for this Consideration.

The World, too, will thank you for restoring the Quill, for it is of the Bounty of Nature. We not only consume the Goose, we employ its Feathers to write. When its writing Days are done, the Feather returns to the Earth, and feeds the Worms. The confounded Waste of these Times could be much mitigated by use of the Quill. What self-respecting Worm will banquet on a rubber Balloon?

The 'Fountain' Pen is a false, sucking Servant. In exchange for the Convenience of using its leech-like Talent to draw, and bloat so that the Author may dribble at will (like an incontinent Prick), the Leech sucks the Vitality of the Work. Consideration is lost to Shallowness. Clarity is quite flooded by Muck such as found in an untended Stable. Legibility, no longer *à la mode*, is replaced by the Art of Doodlery.

I speak not only of the intellectual Content of these Jottings, but to the Handicraft. Spidery Meanderings have replaced the use of recognisable Letters. By recognisable I mean the Symbols pertaining to the twenty-six Bricks that form the very Foundation of Writing, viz. the Roman Alphabet. Naturally, One must admit foreign Scripts where appropriate and necessary, it is

only educated and civilised to do so, but to confuse your English with your Hindoo or your Arabic is to make a practical Pudding of the Sense.

The Plume is the Symbol of Ascension. Honoured by the Ancients, used in Worship by the Heathens, the Feather is known to all Mankind for its Benefits and Sanctity. And what, pray tell, does the Mechanical Pen represent? Profit (to the Mill Owners), Haste (the quicker to damn yourself), and Waste (Time, Paper, Ink, etc.). Where is the Sublime in *that* unholy Trinity?

I have heard that the mechanical Mania of the Age is about to scale new Heights. In the Rooms of the Publishers there are already to be found printing Contrivances that operate with fiendish, clockwork Ingenuity. The world has been plagued with the Levers, Buttons, and Gears of the dark satanic Mills for some time now. Mill, Printing Press, or Counting House, all were surrendered long ago to the Forces of Mechanisation. In the Bohemian Language there is a Word that describes those that toil in Manufactories such as yours, viz. Roboty. It is a word we would do well to add to the English Lexicon. We will have need of it, I fear.

Presently, the Darkness is stealing from the Mill and, even as I write, sweeps down on the World of Letters like a Pestilence. The Engineers (may they suffer for all their sitting at the Drawing Board with eternally inflamed Piles) have devised a writing Machine that is such a Miniature that it may be transported in a Satchel. The Machines now walk! Roboty indeed.

I have not seen an Example of such a Contraption yet, but I am informed that ever more Hewers of Words are employing these Devices to harvest Text as if they were operating some Species of threshing Engine. Unlike this agricultural Tool of admitted Utility, the writing Engine does not sort the Wheat from the Chaff.

I have no Doubt that there is, somewhere, an evil Genius plotting the next Generation of Marvels. I note the current Fad for Magnetism and I confidently predict that in leaving the World of the Gear for the Age of $\epsilon\lambda\epsilon\kappa\tau\rho\nu$ we shall soon all be writing by Telegraph. It is not hard to imagine the Consequences this will have for the Craft of Writing. By Dots and Dashes we shall communicate the very briefest and thinnest of Observations. We will be reduced to writing the graphic Equivalent of Grunts and Murmurs such as were used by our earliest Ancestors. When this comes to pass our Evolution will have completed the Cycle and we will be back at the primitive State from whence we started our long Ascent to Civilisation.

We would do well to remember the Adage: The Climb may be long, but the Fall is short.

Yours, most sincerely,

Christopher R. A. Peeps, Ph. D. (Oxno.)