

# THERE'S ROSEMARY FOR REMEMBRANCE

BY JOHN KEEGAN

*As Memorial Day approaches, how many of our students will see it as more than a fun three-day weekend or the chance to take advantage of the latest hot sale at the local mall? How many will carve out even a small portion of the day to honor the approximately 575,000 men and women who have died in service to our country? As adults, it is our responsibility to counter the progressive loss of memory that has infected our national life and, in particular on this occasion, to remind our students that freedom is not free. We are grateful to the renowned historian John Keegan for giving us this poignant picture of the extraordinary reverence with which the British treat their war dead. It is a lesson in civic values for all of us.*

—Editor

“I WOULDN'T MIND,” I heard a woman's voice sobbing at my elbow. “I wouldn't mind if my son had been killed. I wouldn't mind—if he could be here.” Tears streamed down her kindly face. She clutched my elbow. “I wouldn't mind.” There was a scent of roses and mown grass, the reflection of sunlight from white Portland stone, a cool and gentle Mediterranean breeze, the promise of heat to come. “I wouldn't mind.”

*Oh dear, I thought. Oh dear. If only you knew. We were two English people in a primal English setting:*

*John Keegan was for many years senior lecturer at the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst, England, and is now the defense correspondent of the London Daily Telegraph. He is the author of many books on military history, including The Face of Battle, Six Armies in Normandy, The Mask of Command, The Price of Admiralty, The Second World War, and A History of Warfare. He is a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. This essay is reprinted from The American Scholar, Volume 66, Number 3, Summer 1997. Copyright © 1997 by the author.*



©MICHAEL ST. MAUR SHIEL/CORBIS

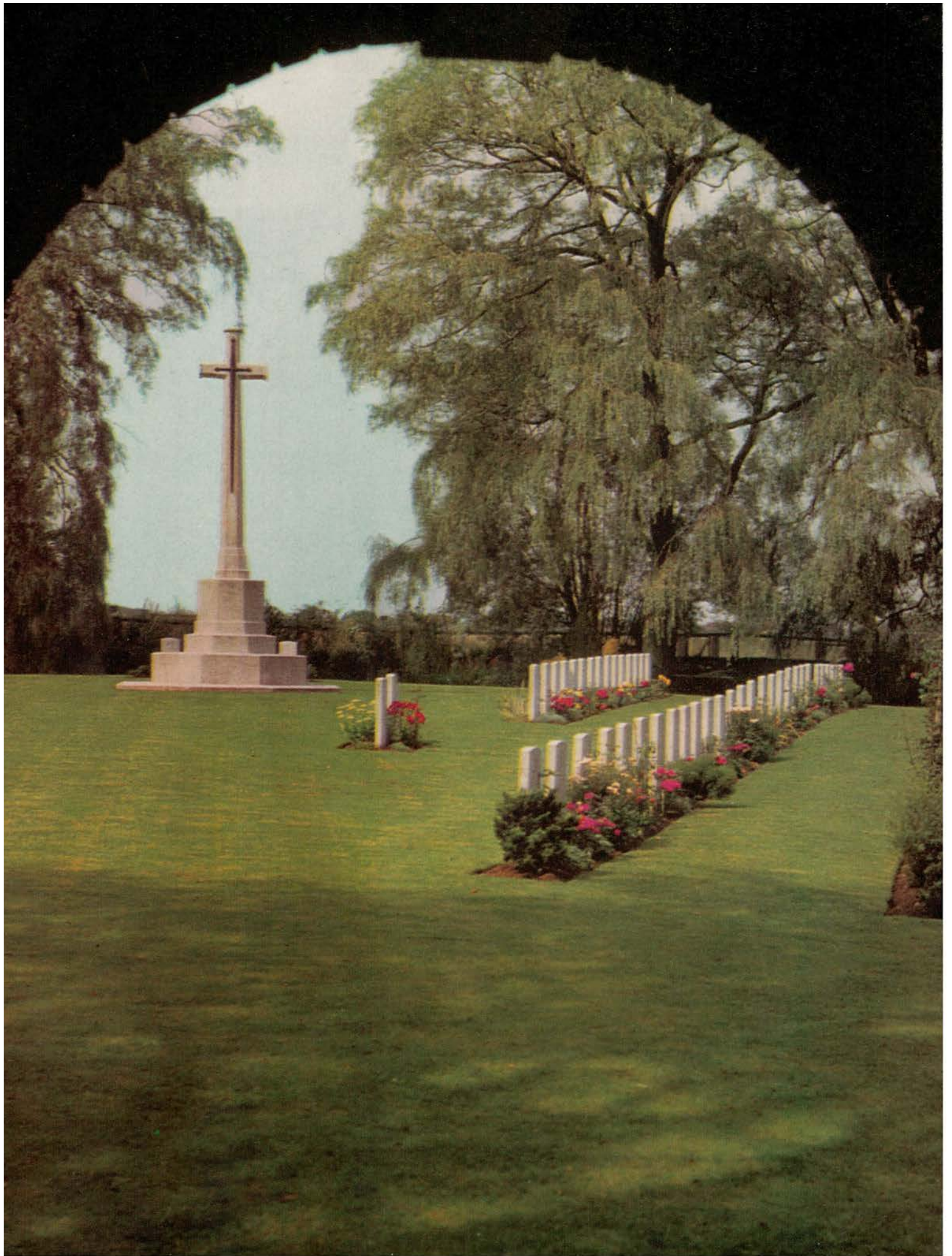
greensward, shrubs, flowering perennials, paved walks on which saxifrage rooted between the cracks, long walls, statuary, and monolithic masonry—an English enclosure far from England. Mature trees shut out the vista to the landward side, but to the seaward there was a gap in the planting to show blue water lapping the foot of limestone crags. Thyme and laurel and olive ascended the hillsides, silver and gray and black to counterpoint the garden's lighter and darker greens. “Remember, green is a color,” Gertrude Jekyll, the inventor of the modern English garden, advised her pupils; and here, below the hillsides, arid after summer drought, green was a brilliant, almost overpowering color. The grass beneath our feet was spongy with the morning's watering, and yesterday's and the days' before.

The landscape beyond the garden was ageless, with that Mediterranean agelessness which has captivated English travelers since they first began their journeys to rediscover, 300 years ago, the classical world their ancestors had done so much to overthrow; but the garden was timeless, belonging neither to the present nor to the past but to an arrested moment that exists only in the English imagination. It is a moment suffused by classicism, inspired by the temperate wilderness, but transcending both, a moment when the work of man comes into equilibrium with the beauty of nature and an ideal landscape is brought to perfection.

Where are these landscapes? They surround the English. Some are accidental, tracts of the English countryside, a highly artificial creation 4,000 years old in

*Above: Tombstone at Beaumont-Hamel, France, marks the grave of an unknown British soldier killed during the Battle of the Somme in World War I.*

*At right: A cemetery of the First World War at Le Trou Aid Post, France.*



parts, where contour and woodland—woodland surviving from the primeval or planted in living memory—combine with plough and pasture, hedge and wall, to form a vision the English call England. The English vision is particularly present in the Cotswolds west of Oxford, in the South Hams of Devonshire, in Thomas Hardy's Dorset, along the Welsh marches of Herefordshire or Shropshire, in Beatrix Potter country above the Cumbrian lakes, in the Kipling territory of remoter Kent and Sussex. Yet that vision is also present wherever population is sparse, rainfall heavy, and agriculture intense but with tracts of ancient forest land making a patchwork of settlement and emptiness, the familiar and the mysterious.

Many are not accidental at all, but the handiwork of great landlords and the artists they employed to beautify what was already beautiful in a manner quite alien to the environment that soil and climate offered them. England is natural broadleaf forest land, with deep topsoil in which stone is hard to come by and the indigenous flowering plants are retiring and modest on color. Without relentless human effort, cleared land goes back to scrub in a few seasons and to forest in a century. Despite the power of these natural forces, English landowners decided in the 17th century to create private landscapes for themselves that defy north European ecology and to impose on their immediate surroundings those elements of classicism which they knew their Italian and many of their French equivalents enjoyed by inheritance. They began to build stone palaces in classical style, to lay out severely formal gardens on their doorsteps, and to reorder the more distant landscape versions into those idealized Italian landscapes painted by Claude Lorrain and Nicolas Poussin with which they filled their picture galleries. There is, within a mile of my house in Wiltshire, one of the greatest of English ideal landscapes, the artificial lakeland garden of Stourhead. I often wonder whether the Hoare family, which created it, was not inspired to do so by the southerly vista into Dorset, which typifies that vision of an accidentally perfect England to which I have referred already. There are other such artificial and ideal landscapes at Blenheim and Ditchley north of Oxford, at Stowe in Buckinghamshire, at Castle Howard in Yorkshire, and at Chatsworth in Derbyshire, to name only some of the most famous. Every English county offers to visitors dozens of smaller, less spectacular versions of these models, and the English visit them in their millions, at the tourist season but also throughout the year, to commune with a central belief of their Englishness—that England is a garden, and that to be English is to be a gardener; that in life they are best at home in a garden; and that, in death, a garden is where they belong.

Few English people, of course, can hope to live at Stourhead or Stowe; and, perhaps, they really don't wish to inhabit such idealizations of nature. The English are homebodies, happy if in a fraction of an acre they can recreate some of the elements of that high style. They are greatly helped to do so by one of the longest running national radio programs, *Gardener's Question Time*, whose peripatetic panel of experts weekly instructs millions of listeners in the secrets of gardening practice by answering queries put by mem-



©OWEN FRANKEN/CORBIS

*British cemetery, Bayeux, France, on the 50th anniversary of the Normandy invasion, the beginning of the liberation of Europe.*

bers of a local horticultural society that has succeeded in the competition to welcome the broadcast to their town or village. I often think that the enormous popularity of *Gardener's Question Time*, which has been on the air now for nearly 40 years, is a touchstone of the difference between English and American culture. The extremes of climate in the United States, and its highs and lows of fertility and aridity, rule out the viability of a program based on the presumption of uniform temperature and cultivability. More than that, however, *Gardener's Question Time* presumes also that its listeners will have a lifetime to tend the same garden. It is a program for a people who do not move, or move at most a few miles down the road, and it would therefore be untransplantable into the restless mobility of the United States, whose people not only change states but coasts with a frequency that seems reckless, positively unnatural, to the BBC's cozy stay-at-homes.

I have been talking of the English worship of great gardens, the cathedral of their horticultural world. There is, quite as important, an alternative English gar-



©MACDUFF EVERTON/CORBIS

*Above: Christian and Jewish grave markers for the soldiers who died defending Hong Kong in World War II at the Stanley Military Cemetery, Hong Kong.*

*Below left: A child visits the grave of her father, who died in World War II, at a cemetery in Arnhem, Holland, on the 10th anniversary of VE Day.*

dening tradition, that of the cottage plot, the parish church of plantsmen and plantswomen. The great garden is formal and contrived, however artfully integrated into its normal surroundings, and its color tones are modulated and subdued. The cottage garden, by contrast, is spontaneous and informal, full of color and of plants allowed to have their head. The center point of the great garden is the paved or graveled walk running between trimmed topiary. That of the cottage garden is the herbaceous border and rambling rose. Both are equally English, though they have different origins. Toward the end of the 19th century, a new generation of English garden designers succeeded in combining these traditions into what is now accepted to be the classic English garden. Its layout draws on the 17th-century fashion for formality, on the 18th-century idealization of nature and classical civilization, and on a more recent enthusiasm for the vernacular. Some great gardens were adapted to accommodate the herbaceousness previously excluded as vulgar and unaristocratic, as at Arley Hall in Cheshire, where the beds date to 1846. Many more, the work of the newly rich, were radical reorganizations at old houses that had either fallen into decay or were designed in the new fashion from the start. Such houses were not necessarily large, but were built to the highest standards and given spaciousness by a deliberate policy of extending the architecture of the house out into the surrounding walls, terraces, summerhouses, and topiary hedges. The most sought after designer of these new houses was the young architect Edwin Lutyens, and the most inventive designer of the gardens associated with them, the self-taught horticulturist Gertrude Jekyll. They were often to cooperate. Lutyens helped Jekyll with what remains one of the most influential of all English gardening books, *Gardens for Small Country*



©HULTON-DEUTSCH COLLECTION/CORBIS



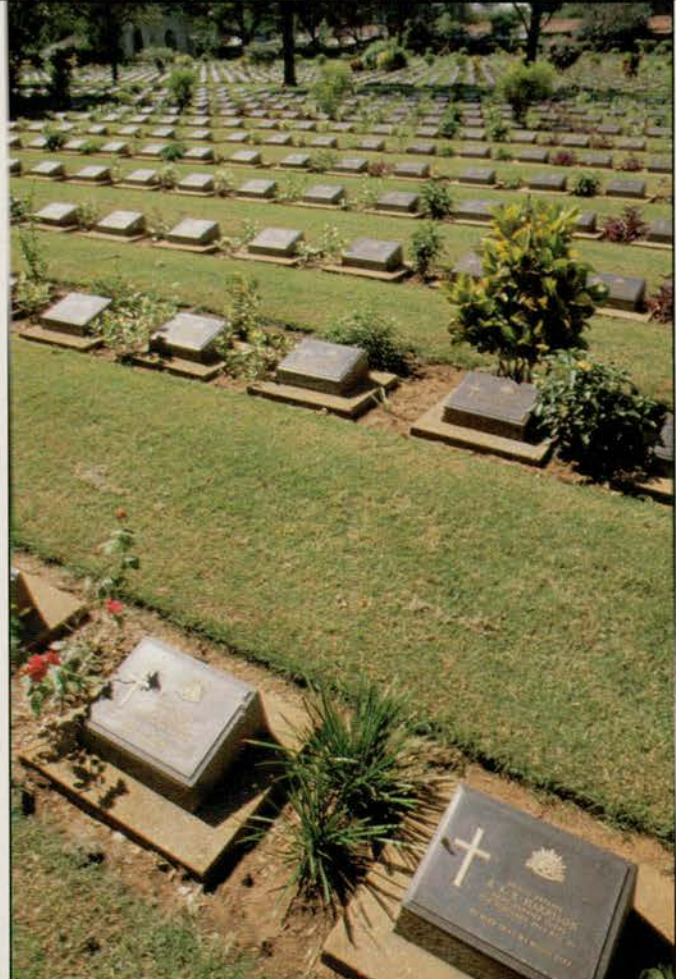
©TIM PAGE/CORBIS

*Above: A British World War II cemetery in Taukkyan, near Rangoon, Burma. At right: Graves of British soldiers at a cemetery near the River Kwai in Kanchanaburi, Thailand. They were killed by the Japanese during World War II while building the railroad in Burma.*

Houses, and the results of their collaboration can be seen at such places as Orchards, Surrey; Marsh Court, Hampshire; Ampport House in the same county; and Folly Farm, Berkshire.

Lutyens particularly favored low stone walls, paved walks, pergolas, and pavilions in stripped-down classical style. Jekyll encouraged the planting of dwarf roses, creeping ground cover, gray and silver border plants, azaleas, and climbers such as hydrangea and wisteria. Their joint purpose was to soften masonry with vegetation that liked support, to sharpen natural forms with architectural straight lines, and to relieve the grays and browns of stone and brick with blues, yellows, and purples.

**I**T WAS IN exactly such surroundings that the tear-stained woman and I found each other, when she clutched my arm and burst into her outpourings about not minding if her son were killed. I was not the least surprised by her reaction. I had heard it, in different versions, many times before in many parts of the world. We were, as it happened, on Crete, in the Suda



©STAFFAN WILSTRAND/CORBIS



© ROGER WOOD/CORBIS

Beautiful flowers adorn the gravestones at this British war cemetery in Medjez El Bab, Tunisia.

Bay British War Cemetery, where 1,571 servicemen are buried, mainly British but including large numbers of New Zealanders and Australians. Most were killed resisting the German airborne invasions of May 20, 1941, a disaster for the German parachutists involved, of whom 2,000 died on the first day, but a strategic victory for Hitler, who secured the island despite those catastrophic losses.

We might, however, have been in any one of the larger Commonwealth War Graves Commission's cemeteries anywhere in the world. The dead of the British Empire and Commonwealth of the two world wars are buried in 134 countries, from Algeria to Zimbabwe, including the former Soviet Union. In the list are the two tiny states of San Marino and Monaco, each containing two graves. The smallest cemetery is on Ocracoke Island, off North Carolina, with four graves; the largest is the Thiepval cemetery in the department of the Somme, France, where the bodies of 70,000 soldiers are buried, and the names of those missing in the great Somme battle of the First World War are commemorated. These are cemeteries proper, of which the Commission maintains about 2,000 throughout the world. Besides these are 23,000 individual graves or plots in nonmilitary cemeteries, for

which the Commission also cares. One such grave is in Kilmington churchyard, under my bedroom window, and I see it every morning when I draw the curtains. It is that of Private S. Prince, Somerset Light Infantry, who died at age 22 on May 5, 1916—home, I presume, on leave from France just before the opening of the Battle of the Somme. Every two years an official of the Commission comes to scrub the headstone—one of over a million identical headstones in the world—and to cut the grass, tidy the surroundings, and ensure that Private Prince continues to repose in dignity.

There are, of course, many more dead than headstones. In every French cathedral a plaque, inscribed in French and English, displays the text *To the Glory of God and in Memory of One Million Men of the British Empire Who Died in the Great War and of Whom the Greater Number Rest in France*. Of those killed in France, the bodies of nearly half could not be found or were unidentifiable, while most of the naval dead were lost at sea. There is a similar proportion of missing among the dead of the Second World War. In some way the Commission commemorates the names of all of them. The numbers are staggering. Nearly 1.7 million names are commemorated, of which 900,000 are those of identified servicemen and women lying in marked graves. There are over 700,000 monumental inscriptions to the missing, but 200,000 of those are on graves reading *Known Unto God*, because the remains recovered by the Commission were unrecognizable. There are other variations. Some headstones record a casualty "known to be buried near this spot"; others, two or more names of bodies too intermingled to be buried separately.

An attempt was made in the immediate aftermath of the First World War to represent in visual terms what the Empire's loss meant (*Courage Remembered* by Edwin Gibson and G. Kingsley Ward, 1989):

Imagine [the dead] moving in one continuous column, four abreast. As the head of that column reaches the Cenotaph in London, the last four men would be in Durham [240 miles away, in the north of England]. In Canada that column would stretch across the land from Quebec to Ottawa; in Australia, from Melbourne to Canberra; in South Africa, from Bloemfontein to Pretoria; in New Zealand, from Christchurch to Wellington; in Newfoundland, from coast to coast; and in India, from Lahore to Delhi. [I might interpolate for an American audience: in the United States, from Boston to Philadelphia.] It would take those million men 84 hours, or three-and-a-half days, to march past the Cenotaph in London.

These distances may be nearly doubled since the Second World War, in which another 700,000—as opposed to 400,000 United States—servicemen died.

How was this vast army of the dead to be decently interred? That was the question that confronted the British government very soon after the first mass casualty lists began to be published in the national newspapers in 1915. The dead of Britain's earlier wars, frequent though those had been, were comparatively few in number. They had been buried near where they fell, commemorated by stones raised by their friends or their regiments, if commemorated at all. It was a disposal accepted by the poor from which the bulk of the army's soldiers came. In civil life the parents of many of them would have gone to an unmarked pauper's



*Veterans from the 48 RM Commandos who landed on 'Juno' Beach pay their respects to their dead comrades at the British Military Cemetery in Douvres, France.*

grave in town or city. In the countryside a wooden cross, soon to decay, would have indicated their plot in the churchyard. In my village, a resident has calculated, 25,000 bodies have been buried in the churchyard since the Norman Conquest, yet it contains only a few dozen stones, those of the better-off and none older than the 18th century.

By the beginning of the 20th century, however, the British were as a people better off. The funeral had become a major working-class ritual, perhaps the only public event in an individual's passage through life, and a marked headstone had become a symbol of respectability, that respectability which Victorian Britain had made its chief outward value. For that reason, though for many others, it was unthinkable that the dead of a national army, dying in their tens of thousands for King, Country, and Empire, should be left in hurried, unmarked graves, marked if at all by some makeshift cross nailed together by the deceased's comrades. In practice, things were worse than that. Bodies were being thrown together into abandoned trenches, sometimes in dozens; individual burials might be marked by a stake, dozens of which were kept ready by a graves registration officer, on which was affixed a metal plate stamped from a "penny in the slot" machine of a type common in railway stations. At best, given time and a spell out of the trenches, the soldiers might dig graves in French or Belgian churchyards; those began rapidly to fill up. Moreover, the better-off among the bereaved were erecting private memorials of a type the majority could not afford, and some were repatriating the bodies. Both practices struck the wrong note in what the government represented, and the population endorsed, as a national war.

Very early on, therefore, Britain established what, in retrospect, may be seen as several remarkable and nationally distinctive principles for the burial and com-

memoration of its war dead. One was that there should be no private memorials, "on account of the difficulties of treating impartially the claims advanced by persons of different social standing." Another was that there should be no repatriation of bodies, because of the commonly held feeling that, as one officer put it, "in spite of all differences of rank, we were comrades, brothers dwelling together in unity." A third was that officers and soldiers should be buried identically and together because, as Fabian Ware, the first War Graves Commission director, wrote, "In 99 cases out of a hundred [officers] will tell you that if they are killed [they] would wish to be among their men." A fourth, the most important, was that each fallen soldier should be honored individually, so that, even in a war of mass slaughter, each should be represented as a hero in an epic of collective heroism.

These principles were to be greatly elaborated and their implementation standardized in the years to come. That was the achievement of Fabian Ware himself, a modest man who nevertheless deserves to be recognized as a major semiologist of British culture in the 20th century. Semiologist was not, of course, his purpose; semiologist was not a title he would have welcomed or even understood. That, nevertheless, is his title to fame, and it is richly deserved. Through him a peculiarly English—I say English in preference to British—language of symbols, some from nature, some from the mind or hand of man, has come to stand as a representation of how the nation wished to be seen by itself and by other nations at the end of its passage through an ordeal that tested the roots of its culture



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE COMMONWEALTH WAR GRAVES COMMISSION

Above: Belgians tidying Tyne Cot Cemetery in occupied Europe, 1942.

Below: Cemetery in Rabaul, New Britain Island.



©JACK FIELDS/CORBIS

and identity to destruction. Some representation of this language of symbols can, as I have said, be found at sites in almost every country in the world, and I can testify to its continuing power to move the emotions of those who come upon them from personal experience. Wherever they are found—and I have found them in places as far apart as Alabama, Israel, Pakistan, and South Africa—the British are moved with pride and to tears, tears shed also by people who are not British at all. Fabian Ware, by instinct rather than artifice, succeeded in creating a great cultural artifact at which, I do not think I exaggerate in claiming, generations to come will wonder—as we do at the relics of the Roman legions—long after Britain’s worldwide power is only a memory for historians.

Ware had much help. In 1915, soon after he was appointed, the French government wrote a law deeding land for the cemeteries of foreign soldiers as a *sépulture perpétuelle*. It passed, but not without opposition, for it was against the local traditions both of storing the bones of the dead in ossuaries, a cheap and compact way of burying remains en masse, and of reusing burial plots. As a result, however, British war graves were to be the resting places of individuals in legal perpetuity. He also had assistance from several foremost British architects, including Edwin Lutyens and Sir Herbert Baker, who with Lutyens was a designer of the Empire’s great public buildings. Rudyard Kipling’s role in the design of the Imperial War Graves was a poignant one. His only son, John, was too myopic to meet the army’s medical standards, and he used his influence to secure John a commission in the Irish Guards. John was among the regiment’s missing after the Second Battle of Loos in 1915. For several years Rudyard and his American wife, Carrie, toured the military hospitals in France seeking news of their lost one, without avail. At a moment of alleviation in his grief, he wrote a short poem always quoted among his selected works:

My son was killed while laughing at some jest, I would I  
knew  
What it was, and it might serve me in a time when jests  
are few.

The truth, never communicated to the parents but discovered by a regimental comrade from survivors of John’s company, was that he was last seen crying with pain from a wound in the mouth. His body, lost for decades, has only recently been identified by officials of the Commission, and his headstone is appropriately re-engraved.

It is acutely ironic, therefore, that Kipling was responsible for conceiving the inscriptions carved on the headstones and monumental sculpture of the Commission’s cemeteries. These monuments take three forms. One is a high columnar cross, bearing a bronze sword, known as the Cross of Sacrifice. The second is a monolith, the Stone of Remembrance, on which are carved words from Ecclesiasticus, adapted by Kipling: *Their Name Liveth For Evermore*. The adaptation was made to avoid giving offense to Hindus, so many of whom died in the service of India’s King-Emperor. The third is the universal and standard headstone, two feet eight inches high, one foot three inches broad. It is cut from white Portland stone, engraved with the de-



ceased's regimental badge—Private Prince's, below my bedroom window, shows the mural crown, slung bugle, and battle honor "Jelalabad" of the Somerset Light Infantry—and also with an appropriate religious symbol. Today, 1.5 million bear the Christian cross; 65,000, the Muslim crescent; 100,000, the appropriate Sikh or Hindu symbol; 10,000 the Star of David; and 10,000, Buddhist or Confucian symbols. The stone is also inscribed with the dead serviceman or service-woman's number, name, decorations, regimental title, age, and date and place of death; or as many details as could be ascertained when a body was disinterred for reburial—for example, *A Captain/Canadian Infantry*. At the bottom of the stone, relatives may place a personal inscription of up to 60 characters. These inscriptions are the exception rather than the rule, itself an indication of how heartfelt is popular acceptance of the guiding principle of uniformity of remembrance. They are quite conventional—*Peace Perfect Peace*, for example, or *He Died That Others Might Live*. Eccentric or distasteful inscriptions are not allowed. Occasionally, however, an extra tug to the heartstrings is given by a particularly apt line of poetry or some quite artless phrase of lament, the labor of a young widow or of a family struggling together to express their love for a son and brother who will not return.

Kipling also struggled to find a form of words that would dignify without mawkishness the grave of a body that could not be identified. Eventually he hit upon the brief phrase *A Soldier of the Great War Known Unto God*. Unidentified burials of the Second World War are inscribed *A Soldier [or A Sailor or An Airman] of the 1939-45 War Known Unto God*. Altogether 204,145 graves in the Commission's care are now inscribed in one of these ways. The only other variations to the headstones are the use of the words *Served As* when a man enlisted under an alias, and the phrases *Buried In This Cemetery*, *Buried Near This Spot*, *Buried Elsewhere In This Cemetery*, and *Known To Be Buried In This Cemetery* when records allow such certainties but remains were not found. *Believed To Be Buried In This Cemetery* is sometimes seen, and, for wartime graves lost and defying rediscovery, Kipling chose the words *Their Glory Shall Not Be Blotted Out*, also from Ecclesiasticus. The rarest of all variations is the substitution for the religious symbol of a facsimile of the Victoria Cross or the George Cross, Britain's highest awards for bravery.

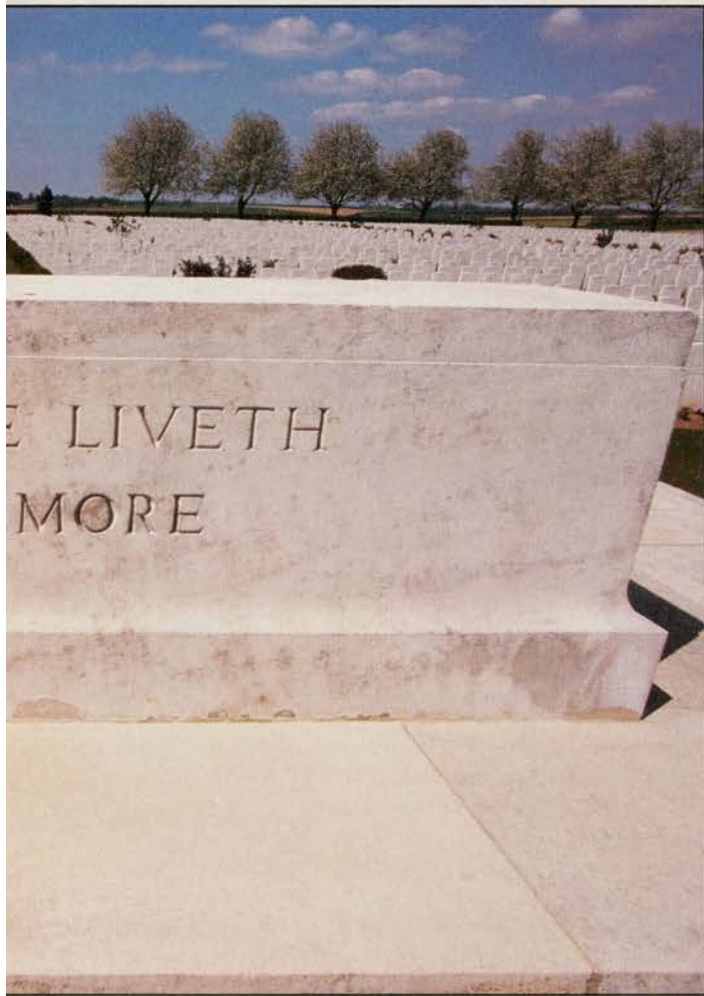
None of this symbolism could be imposed until the lost bodies of the dead were found and the makeshift cemeteries of the war reordered. Work began while the Great War was still in progress, but even at its end the condition of many burial places was deeply distressing to relatives who began to make their way to France and Belgium to find where lost ones lay. Too often the sites they discovered were patches of mud or torn earth, bereft of vegetation or covered by weed and rank grass. A scheme of order had to be devised. The task was given to Sir Frederic Kenyon, the director of the British Museum. Within the guiding principles of uniformity of commemoration and an individual grave for all recovered remains, he proposed that each cemetery should either "have the appearance of a small park or garden in no way recognizable as a ceme-



*A red floral wreath sits on the step in front of a large tomb at the Caterpillar Valley Cemetery in Longueval, France, the second largest cemetery on the Somme. The cemetery contains the remains, most unidentified, of those who fought in the Battle of the Somme in World War I.*

tery," or that it "be marked by rows of headstones of a uniform height and width, the graves themselves being leveled to a flat surface and planted with turf and flowers." The rows of headstones would "carry on the military idea, giving the appearance as of a battalion on parade."

The second alternative was adopted; but, by some creative inspiration of those who undertook the work, the first alternative was integrated with it. The Commission cemeteries are unmistakably that; but they are also unmistakably parks or gardens in the classic English style. How did that come about? We can only guess that it was because the Commission, when it began to recruit maintenance staff, decided for administrative reasons not to enlist locals but to commission British firms that would send their own staff abroad. The practical work was therefore begun not by French or Belgian laborers but by British gardeners, already experienced as horticulturists or later trained at the Royal Botanical Gardens in Kew. The style they brought with them was that which



©MICHAEL ST. MAUR SHELL/CORBIS

Lutyens and Jekyll—she actually drew up plans for several cemeteries—taught through their seminal gardening book. By March 1921, there were 1,362 gardeners employed; many were to settle in France or Belgium, marry local women, found little English communities, and put their sons into the Commission's employment. These communities still exist and now have equivalents in Africa, Southeast Asia, India, Pakistan, all trained in and so carrying on the tradition of classic English country-house gardening in the desert and the tropics as well as in temperate northern Europe.

Other, deeper, literary influences were at work. The Great War provoked in Britain, uniquely among combatant nations, a poetic response. A very great deal of it was arcadian and pastoral. That, again, should not be surprising. As Paul Fussell has noted in his famous book, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, "Half the poems in *The Oxford Book of English Verse* are about flowers and a third seem to be about roses." He does not do a similar count for First World War poetry, but the result might be the same. Certainly some of the most famous are suffused with gardening themes. I would cite first Edward Shanks's "Drilling in Russell Square," from the earliest days of the war:

The withered leaves that drift in Russell Square  
Will turn to mud and dust and moulder there  
And we shall moulder in the plains of France  
Before these leaves have ceased from their last dance.

Shanks was all too prophetic. Hundreds of thousands of the drilling men of 1914 and 1915 did moulder in the plains of France, becoming dust in the mud of the battlefields. The spectacle of their makeshift graves inspired one of the most famous of the war poems, by the Canadian John McCrae, himself to be one of the war dead. Its fame is a principal reason for the British custom of wearing a poppy on Remembrance Sunday:

In Flanders fields the poppies blow  
Between the crosses, row on row,  
That mark our place; and in the sky  
The larks, still bravely singing, fly  
Scarce heard amid the guns below.  
  
We are the Dead. Short days ago  
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow.  
Loved and were loved, and now we lie  
In Flanders fields.

Those themes were also used by Rupert Brooke in what remains the most famous of all English poems of the war, "The Soldier," which I can still repeat by heart from childhood memory:

If I should die, think only this of me:  
That there's some corner of a foreign field  
That is forever England. There shall be  
In that rich earth a richer dust conceal'd;  
A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,  
Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam,  
A body of England's, breathing English air,  
Wash'd by the rivers, blest by suns of home.

I cannot prove but I do feel—a poetic certainty—that the idea of making "some corner of a foreign field" a place that would be "forever England" was a principal motivation of the idea of the war cemetery as a pastoral, arcadian garden. It has, unconsciously or not, been the result.

**W**HAT HAS been the effect of this partly intentional, partly accidental effort to honor the hundreds of thousands of British and Imperial war dead within the principles of individual yet uniform commemoration? It is different from that achieved by the French, who also buried their dead individually, but under a cross, which produces en masse a spiky and geometrical effect altogether lacking the mood of repose so immediately felt in all British war cemeteries. It is certainly different from that chosen by the Germans, whose dead lie in multiple or sometimes in mass graves—like that at Langemarck in Belgium, where 36,000 bodies of the students killed in the First Battle of Ypres are buried under a single giant slab—and whose cemeteries, heavy with evergreens and dark oaks, speak only of collective grief and national tragedy. It is also different from that which I associate with American cemeteries. There the small size of the headstones, a pattern chosen after the Civil War, the paucity of inscribed personal detail, and, as at Arlington, the intermixture of large, private memorials, often to generals or distinguished civilians, diminishes the sense both of uniformity and of the importance of the individual; while the absence of flowering plants and horticultural design brings a harshness quite at variance with the gardenized serenity of the British equivalent. It may be for such reasons that the United States began to permit during the First World War the repatri-

ation of bodies by bereaved families, an understandable response to grief but one that undermines the principle that those who fought and died in comradeship should also be buried in comradeship.

Of the effect of the method of commemoration chosen by the British toward the end of their national tragedy of 1914-18 I have no doubt. It created a deep bond of unity between the bereaved, and within the nation as a whole, which reached out to comprehend the peoples of the Commonwealth and Empire as well. The emotional touch was so sure that it extinguished—after a brief intense controversy in 1919—all demand for repatriation whatsoever. The dead of the Second World War are buried in exactly the same manner as those of the First, and today the only demand met by the government regarding burial policy is that war widows should be assisted with travel costs in visiting their husbands' graves. This has been conceded, and elderly women are now traveling as far away as Burma and Malaysia on cemetery pilgrimages—without exception returning consoled, often positively inspired, by the beauty of the setting in which they find their husbands buried.

Often they find a husband's grave next to that of an Indian Muslim or a Burmese Buddhist, exactly similarly commemorated, and that too has had, if not a unifying, at least a palliative effect. If the British parted with their imperial subjects on the comparatively unacrimonious terms they did, that may be in part due to the fact that they chose to make no distinction in the way or in the place where they buried those who fought the Empire's wars. Certainly it is remarkable that the rarest of the War Graves Commission's tasks is the repair of desecration. Their cemeteries in former imperial or colonial territory are almost never desecrated, even at times of outburst of nationalist rancor against the old imperial master.

But then neither are they in countries that were never part of the Empire or Commonwealth—former enemy countries, like Germany, or those that have subsequently fallen into war with Britain, like Argentina or Iraq. Why should that be? To trample the graves of the enemy is an apparently universal if regrettable human instinct. One of the saddest places I have ever seen is the deliberately abandoned and untended German war cemetery at Piontek in Poland, immaculately maintained until January 1945, now a wilderness. The only explanation I can offer for the immunity of the British cemeteries is that Lutyens and Jekyll and Kipling and Ware and their army of anonymous gardeners succeeded in creating something symbolically more powerful than a site for ritual desecration, a site of universally venerable sanctuary. There is a holiness in those cemeteries both of nature and its beauties and of religion in all its forms that defies hatred and brutishness, speaks of the immortal, and touches eternity.

If foreigners are moved by those emanations, how much more the British themselves. When in 1920 they buried an unknown warrior in the national shrine of Westminster Abbey—the first of many unknown warriors later to be buried by other countries—they chose this inscription for his grave: *They Buried Him Among the Kings Because He Had Done Good Towards God and Towards His House*. In burying their

million and more warriors, known and unknown, in cemeteries that resembled and evoked the country-house gardens of the rich and propertied, they in effect buried them, if not among kings, then among knights and lords. It was a decision that ensured the individual remembrance of the most humble, exactly as members of the more famous families are remembered in their ancestral plots, an evergreen and renewable remembrance, a celebration of pedigree and a testament of continual youth.

"I always feel young when I come here" are words I remember from a visitor to another British war cemetery, which holds the dead of the Battle of Normandy in William the Conqueror's city of Bayeux. The war widow who spoke was one of a party in which all had lost their husbands 50 years before. None had remarried; the years had taken their toll, but they returned each year to place flowers on the graves of men killed in their twenties in the fight to liberate Europe from Hitler in 1944. "I always feel young," she repeated, "just as if I was the same age as when I last saw him." She had grown very stout. It was difficult to picture the bride of the months before D-Day. "Do stop, Betty," one of her friends interrupted, "or you'll make us all cry." It was I who was overcome with tears. The row of headstones of young infantrymen of the East Yorkshire Regiment, the roses growing around the feet of their widows, the strange glow of happiness that suffused their faces, were altogether too much for me. I was unable to speak, fortunately not unable to repress my impulse to embrace each in turn; to do so would have been an affront to our Englishness, to the fundamental Englishness of the place and the moment.

It is that same Englishness that overwhelmed my weeping companion in the Suda Bay cemetery on Crete. The tears I had shed in Normandy helped me to understand hers. Of course she would not, in a certain sense, have minded if her son had been killed. For Britain's war cemeteries create an aesthetic which is actually strong enough to prevail over the agony of maternal or connubial grief. To see a child to the grave brings the harshest pain human sensibility can suffer. Yet to find a child—or a husband or a father—buried as a hero, among coevals and comrades all raised to heroic states by a symbolism central to one's own culture, is to experience the transcendence of pain through the keenest emotions of pride in family and nation. The garden is a metaphor for the idea of beauty, of renewal, and of immortality to many peoples and many creeds. If this is indeed an age without heroes, seeking monuments that might still touch every human heart, the ideal garden may be what is sought. Certainly it is some image of the 2,000 English gardens we have created around the world that allows us to repeat each November on Remembrance Sunday, without any false sentiment, some of the most famous verses the Great War inspired—Laurence Binyon's "For the Fallen (September 1914)"—verses that are an epitaph for heroes of any time or place:

They shall not grow old, as we that are left grow old:  
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.  
At the going down of the sun and in the morning  
We will remember them. □

## THE TEENING OF CHILDHOOD

(Continued from page 25)

in the growing number of kid magazines.<sup>23</sup>

The seduction of children with dreams of teen sophistication and tough independence, which began with Barbie and intensified markedly in the last decade, appears to have had the desired effect: It has undermined childhood by turning children into teen consumers. This new breed of children won't go to children's movies and they won't play with toys. One of the stranger ironies of the rise of the tween is that toy manufacturers, who with the introduction of Barbie began the direct hard sell to children and were the first to push the teening of American childhood, have been hoist with their own petard. The 1998-99 Toy Industry Factbook of the Toy Manufacturer's Association says that the industry used to think of kids between birth and 14 as their demographic audience, but with the emergence of tweens they have had to shrink that audience to birth to 10.<sup>24</sup> Even seven- and eight-year-olds are scoring Barbie.<sup>25</sup>

Who needs a doll when you can live the life of the teen vamp yourself? Cosmetic companies are finding a bonanza among this age group. Lines aimed at tweens include nail polish, hair mascara, lotions, and lip products like lipstick, lip gloss, "lip lix." Sweet Georgia Brown is a cosmetics line for tweens that includes body paints and scented body oils with come-hither names like Vanilla Vibe or Follow Me Boy. The Cincinnati design firm Libby Peszyk Kattiman has introduced a line of bikini underwear for girls. There are even fitness clubs and personal trainers for tweens in Los Angeles and New York.<sup>26</sup>

Marketers point at broad demographic trends to explain these changes in the child market, and they are at least partially correct. Changes in the family have given children more power over shopping decisions. For the simple reason that fewer adults are around most of the time, children in single-parent homes tend to take more responsibility for obtaining food and clothes. Market researchers have found that these kids become independent consumers earlier than those in two-parent homes.<sup>27</sup> Children of working mothers also tend to do more of the family shopping when at around age eight or nine they can begin to get to the store by themselves. Though candy, toy, and cereal manufacturers had long been well aware of the money potential of tween cravings, by the mid-eighties, even though their absolute numbers were falling, tweens began to catch the eye of a new range of businesses, and ads and marketing magazines started to tout the potential of this new niche. The reason was simple: Market research revealed that more and more children in this age group were shopping for their own clothes, shoes, accessories, and drug-store items—indeed, they were even shopping for the family groceries. Just as marketers had once targeted housewives, now they were aiming at kids.<sup>28</sup> Jeans manufacturer Jordache was one of the first companies to spot the trend. "My customers are kids who can walk into a store with either their own money or their mothers'," the company's director of advertising explained at the time. "The dependent days of tugging on Mom or Dad's sleeve are

over." Now as the number of children is rising again, their appeal is even more irresistible. Packaged Facts, a division of the worldwide research firm Find/SVP, has said that the potential purchasing power of today's kids "is the greatest of any age or demographic group in our nation's history."<sup>29</sup>

And there is another reason for the increasing power of children as consumers: By the time they are tweens, American children have simply learned to expect a lot of stuff.<sup>30</sup> Many of them have been born to older mothers; the number of first babies born to women over 30 has quadrupled since 1970, and the number born to women over 40 doubled in the six years between 1984 and 1990. Older mothers are more likely to have established careers and to be in the kind of financial position that allows them to shower their kids with toys and expensive clothes.<sup>31</sup> Also, grandparents are living longer and more comfortably, and they often arrive with an armload of toys, sports equipment, and fancy dresses. (The products of the children's clothes company Osh Kosh B'Gosh are known in the trade as "granny bait.") Divorce has also helped to inflate the child market: Many American children divide their time between parents, multiplying by two the number of soccer balls and Big Bird toothbrushes they must own. But as we have seen before, impersonal social forces have found support in human decisions. Important as they are, demographics by themselves can't explain 10-year-olds who have given up dolls for mascara and body oil. The teening of childhood has been a consummation the media devoutly wished—and planned. The media has given tweens a group identity with its own language, music, and fashion. It has done this by flattering their sense of being hip and aware almost-teens rather than out-of-it little kids dependent on their parents. On discovering the rising number of child customers, Jordache Jeans did not simply run ads for kids; they ran ads showing kids saying things like "Have you ever seen your parents naked?" and "I hate my mother. She's prettier than me." When Bonne Bell cosmetics discovered the rising sales potential of younger shoppers, they did not merely introduce a tween line, which some parents might think bad enough; they introduced it with the kind of in-your-face language that used to send children to bed without dinner: "We know how to be cool. We have our own ideas. And make our own decisions. Watch out for us." Sassaby's "Watch your mouth, young lady" is a smirking allusion to old-fashioned childhood that is meant to sell a line of lip "huggers" and "gloss overs."

There is little reason to think that children have found the freedom and individuality that liberationists assumed they would find now that they have been liberated from old-fashioned childhood and its adult guards. The rise of the child consumer and the child market itself is compelling evidence that children will always seek out some authority for rules about how to dress, talk, and act. Today's school-age children, freed from adult guidance, turn to their friends, who in turn rely on a glamorous and flattering media for the relevant cultural messages. Recent studies have found that children are forming cliques at younger ages than in previous years and that those cliques have strict rules

about dress, behavior, and leisure. By the fifth or sixth grade, according to *Peer Power: Preadolescent Culture and Identity*, girls are gaining status "from their success at grooming, clothes, and other appearance-related variables."<sup>32</sup> Teachers and principals also see an increasing number of 10- and 11-year-olds who have given up toys for hair mousse and name-brand jeans and who heckle those who do not. What matters to this new breed of child is, according to Bruce Friend, vice president of worldwide research and planning at Nickelodeon, "being part of the in-crowd" and "being the first to know what's cool."<sup>33</sup> These "free" children "are extremely fad conscious"; moreover, according to *American Demographics*, tweens' attraction to fads has "no saturation points."<sup>34</sup> Look for the tween consumer to become even more powerful.

A diminished home life and an ever more powerful media constitute a double blow against the conditions under which individuality flourishes. Whereas in the past eccentric or bookish children might have had the privacy of their home to escape the pressures of their media-crazed peers, today such refuge has gone the way of after-school milk and cookies. And if you think that at least such children have been freed of the pressure of yesterday's domineering fathers and frustrated mothers, you might want to reconsider. As Hannah Arendt once noted, "The authority of a group, even a child group, is always considerably stronger and more tyrannical than the severest authority of an individual person can ever be." The opportunity for an individual to rebel when bound to a group is "practically nil"; few adults can do it.<sup>35</sup> The truth is, yesterday's parent-controlled childhood protected children not only from sex, from work, and from adult decisions but also from the dominance of peers and from the market, with all its pressures to achieve, its push for status, its false lures, its passing fads.

But in the anticultural filiararchy which is replacing traditional childhood, adults no longer see their job as protecting children from the market. In fact, it is not that the child's hurried entrance into the market means that parents are increasingly failing to socialize children. It's the other way around. Children are viewed by manufacturers as the "opinion leaders in the household," according to a vice president at Keebler.<sup>36</sup> Manufacturers believe that children are exercising influence over family purchases never before remotely associated with the young. Holiday Inn and Delta Airlines have established marketing programs aimed at children, and *Sports Illustrated for Kids* publishes ads from American Airlines, IBM, and car manufacturers.<sup>37</sup>

While simply turning off the TV would help, at this point television is only one part of the picture. Kids learn of their sophisticated independence from retail displays and promotions, from magazines and direct mailings. With their captive audience, schools, too, have become an advertiser's promised land: Kids see ads in classrooms, on book order forms, on Channel One, on the Internet, on school buses, and now even in textbooks. Book order forms distributed in schools throughout the country from the putatively educational firm Scholastic look like cartoons and provide children with the opportunity to order stickers, auto-

graph books, fan biographies, and books based on popular movies and television shows. Practically every Fortune 500 company has a school project, according to the *New York Times*, and many administrators expect that in the near future we will be seeing signs like CHEERLEADERS BROUGHT TO YOU BY REEBOK in school gyms.<sup>38</sup> "It isn't enough just to advertise on television," Carol Herman, a senior vice president of Grey Advertising, explains. "You've got to reach the kids throughout their day—in school, as they're shopping at the mall ... or at the movies. You've got to become part of the fabric of their lives."<sup>39</sup>

The scorched earth policy in the name of the filiararchy requires that ever younger children be treated as potential customers, once again in the guise of education. When *Sesame Street* arrived on the airwaves in 1969, no one imagined that preschoolers could be a significant market segment. In fact, the improbability of preschool purchasing power was the reason *Sesame Street* had to appear on public television in the first place; no one wanted to put a lot of money into creating and broadcasting a program for kids who had no purchasing power. How shortsighted that was! By 1994 Children's Television Workshop was bringing in \$120 million a year largely on the strength of its over 5,000 licensed products. The list includes not just educational items like books and audiotapes but bubble bath, pajamas, underwear, and Chef Boyardee Sesame Street pasta. Toy manufacturers gradually caught on to the power of the littlest people, especially where their education was concerned. The number of preschool toys exploded in the decades after *Sesame Street* was introduced, and many of them were stamped with a seal of approval from some expert or other—or with the image of Ernie or Big Bird, which in the minds of many amounted to the same thing.

And now *Teletubbies* has arrived to help carve out the pre-preschool market and to give power to the littlest people. *Teletubbies* was designed for one- and two-year-olds, and though no one has ever explained how it could possibly be educational for babies to watch television, it is clear that when toddlers see pictures of the four vividly hued plush and easily identified characters (with television screens on their stomachs) on bottles or bibs, they will cry for them and PBS will rake it in. In anticipation of opening up this new market segment, the media went into overdrive. Pictures of the characters appeared in ads in trade and consumer magazines and were plastered on buses in New York City and on a giant billboard in Times Square. The show was a topic on *Letterman*, *Today*, and *Nightline*. "If this isn't the most important toy at Christmas this year, then something desperately wrong will have happened," gloated Kenn Viselman, whose Itsy Bitsy Entertainment Company has the rights to *Teletubbies* products. "This show had more advance press than *Titanic*." Wondered one critic, "Where does it end: A TV in the amniotic sac?" But marketers were thrilled; according to the president of another licensing company, before now "the one-to-two-year-old niche hasn't been filled very well."<sup>40</sup> The one-to-two-year-old niche? McNeal has said that children become aware of the market as early as two months of age.<sup>41</sup>

There is no more unmistakable sign of the end of childhood as Americans have known it. □

## REFERENCES

- <sup>1</sup>The history presented in this article is taken from Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Gerard Jones, *Honey I'm Home: Sitcoms: Selling the American Dream* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1992); William Melody, *Children's Television: The Economics of Exploitation* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1973); Cy Schneider, *Children's Television: The Art, the Business and How It Works* (Chicago: NTC Business Books, 1987). Mark Crispin Miller, "Deride and Conquer," in *Watching Television*, ed. Todd Gitlin (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), traces the "long decline of Dad" (pp. 196ff.) and the triumph of the ironic tone.
- <sup>2</sup>Quoted in Jones, p. 42.
- <sup>3</sup>Arthur Asa Berger, *The Comic-Stripped American: What Dick Tracy, Blondie, Daddy Warbucks and Charlie Brown Tell Us About Ourselves* (New York: Walker, 1973), p. 103.
- <sup>4</sup>Spigel, p. 60.
- <sup>5</sup>The history of toy advertising and Barbie comes from Schneider, pp. 18-26; G. Wayne Miller, *Toy Wars: The Epic Struggle Between G.I. Joe, Barbie, and the Companies That Make Them* (New York: Random House, 1998), p. 67; Gary Cross, *Kids' Stuff: Toys and the Changing World of American Childhood* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), chap. 6.
- <sup>6</sup>Cross, pp. 165-166.
- <sup>7</sup>Ellen Seiter, *Sold Separately: Parents and Children in the Consumer Culture* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1993), notes this same theme (in chap. 4), and several of my examples come from there. Seiter, like other academics today writing in the Ariès tradition, believes Kid Culture can "express a resistance to the middle-class culture of parenting . . . that may be very healthy indeed," (p. 232). In other words, she finds ads genuinely subversive.
- <sup>8</sup>Example from Selina S. Guber and Jon Berry, *Marketing to and Through Kids* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993), p. 133.
- <sup>9</sup>Patricia Winters, "Pepsi Harkens Back to Youth," *Advertising Age*, January 25, 1993, p. 3.
- <sup>10</sup>Seiter (p. 130) quotes research, comparing boys' toy ads from the fifties and those of today which finds that the adult male voice-over or on-camera spokesman has almost entirely disappeared.
- <sup>11</sup>Charles McGrath, "Giving Saturday Morning Some Slack," *New York Times Magazine*, November 9, 1997, p. 54.
- <sup>12</sup>Seiter, p. 121.
- <sup>13</sup>John E. Coons, "Intellectual Liberty and the Schools," *Notre Dame Journal of Law, Ethics, and Public Policy*, vol. 1, 1985, p. 503.
- <sup>14</sup>"News/Trends—Kidpower," *Fortune*, March 30, 1987, pp. 9-10.
- <sup>15</sup>Guber and Berry, pp. 27, 78.
- <sup>16</sup>James McNeal, "Growing Up in the Market," *American Demographics*, October 1992, p. 47.
- <sup>17</sup>Figure cited in Lisa Bannon, "As Children Become More Sophisticated, Marketers Think Older," *Wall Street Journal*, October 13, 1998, p. A1. McNeal says that aggregate spending on or for children between ages four and twelve doubled every decade in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. In the 1990s the children's market picked up more steam: between 1990 and 1997, it had already tripled.
- <sup>18</sup>Jane Weaver, "Girl Scout Campaign: Shedding Old Image for Media Cool," *Adweek*, September 11, 1989, p. 11.
- <sup>19</sup>Quoted in Bernard Weinraub, "Who's Lining Up at Box Office? Lots and Lots of Girls," *New York Times*, Arts Section, February 23, 1998, p. 1.
- <sup>20</sup>Bannon, p. A8; Michele Willens, "Young and in a Niche That Movies Neglect," *New York Times*, Arts and Leisure Section, June 14, 1998, pp. 13-14.
- <sup>21</sup>Quoted in Weinraub, p. 4.
- <sup>22</sup>Bannon, pp. A1, 8.
- <sup>23</sup>The number of magazines for children almost doubled between 1986 and 1991. S.K. List, "The Right Place to Find Children," *American Demographics*, February 1992, pp. 44-47.
- <sup>24</sup>Toy Industry Factbook at [www.toy-tma.com/PUBLICATIONS/factbook98/economics.html](http://www.toy-tma.com/PUBLICATIONS/factbook98/economics.html).
- <sup>25</sup>Bannon, p. A1.
- <sup>26</sup>Laura Klepacki, "Courting the 'Tweenie' Boppers," *WWD*, February 27, 1998, p. 10; Becky Ebenkamp, "Packaging: Sara Lee Repackages Youthful Underwear to Better Draw Juniors," *Brandweek*, January 5, 1998, p. 36.
- <sup>27</sup>James McNeal and Chyon-Hwa Yeh, "Born to Shop," *American Demographics*, June 1993, p. 37.
- <sup>28</sup>Carrier Telegardin, "Growing Up Southern: The Kids Take Over," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, June 7, 1993, p. E1. According to Telegardin, "America's new housewife [is] the housekid."
- <sup>29</sup>Quoted in Toy Industry Factbook. See also "Generation Y," *Business Week*, February 15, 1999, pp. 80-88, for how this generation is changing the marketplace.
- <sup>30</sup>The psychologist Marilyn Bradford found that preschoolers ask for an average of 3.4 toys for Christmas and receive 11.6. Cited in Gary Cross, "Too Many Toys," *New York Times*, November 24, 1995, p. 35.
- <sup>31</sup>Lisa Gubernick and Marla Matzer, "Babies as Dolls," *Forbes* February 27, 1995, p. 78.
- <sup>32</sup>Patricia A. Adler and Peter Adler, *Peer Power: Preadolescent Culture and Identity* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1998), p. 55. Tellingly, by 1991 shoes and clothing were the fastest-growing categories among children up to age twelve and accounted for 13 percent of their spending, up from an unmeasurably small amount in 1988, according to Susan Antilla, "'I Want' Now Gets," *New York Times*, Education Life, April 4, 1993, p. 17. See also Carol Pogash, "The Clothing Boom in the Land of the Little People," *Los Angeles Times*, August 29, 1995, p. 22.
- <sup>33</sup>Interview by the author, July 1998.
- <sup>34</sup>Judith Waldrop, "The Tween Scene," *American Demographics*, September 1992, p. 4.
- <sup>35</sup>Hannah Arendt, "Crisis in Education," *Partisan Review*, Fall 1958, p. 500.
- <sup>36</sup>Quoted in Guber and Berry, p. 84. See also Claire Collins, "Fighting the Holiday Advertising Blitz," *New York Times*, December 1, 1994, p. C4; Matt Murray, "Hey Kids! Marketers Want Your Help!" *Wall Street Journal*, May 6, 1997, pp. B1, 8; Antilla, p. 17; Steven A. Holmes, "Shoppers! Deciding? Just Ask Your Child," *New York Times*, Week in Review, January 8, 1995, p. 4; Becky Ebenkamp, Mike Beirne, and Christine Bitar, "Products for the Sophisticated Little Nipper," *Brandweek*, February 22, 1999, pp. 1, 53.
- <sup>37</sup>See Don Oldenberg, "Consummate Consumer: Children's Business: America's 90 Billion Plus Youth Market," *Washington Post*, July 6, 1995, p. C5.
- <sup>38</sup>Deborah Stead, "Classrooms and Commercialism," *New York Times*, Education Life, January 5, 1997, p. 30.
- <sup>39</sup>Quoted in Michael F. Jacobson and Laurie Ann Mazur, *Marketing Madness: A Survival Guide for a Consumer Society* (New York: Westview Press, 1995), p. 21. See also Carrie Gorne, "Marketers Try to Get More Creative at Reaching Teens," *Marketing News*, August 5, 1991, pp. 2, 6; Judann Dagnoli, "Consumer's Union Hits Kids Advertising," *Advertising Age*, July 23, 1990, p. 4.
- <sup>40</sup>Quoted in Lawrie Mifflin, "Critics Assail PBS over Plan for Toys Aimed at Toddlers," *New York Times*, April 20, 1998, p. A17.
- <sup>41</sup>Quoted in Oldenberg, p. C5. Mary Ellen Podmolik, "Kids' Clothing Boom," *Chicago Sun Times*, Financial Section, August 21, 1994, p. 1, quotes McNeal to the effect that 10 percent of a two-year-old's vocabulary is made up of brand names.

## WHAT WE MEAN BY THE WEST

*(Continued from page 15)*

ought to be reintroduced. Some call for a revival of Western Civ, albeit updated in such a way as to accommodate new historiographical trends. Others insist on world history courses as necessary to introduce young Americans to the globalized, multipolar world they live in today. Unfortunately, world history itself has often been contaminated by what I regard as patently false assertions of the equality of all cultural traditions. Every flower has an equal right to bloom, say the multiculturalists, just as the young rebels of the 1960s said that every subspecialty had equal value in the curriculum. Neither of these propositions is true.

One cannot know everything, hence one must make choices. And just as some facts are more important to know than others, so certain cultures have displayed skills superior to others in every time and place throughout history. Simply imagine living in proximity to a competitor—be it a business, tribe, ethnic group, or nation—possessed of skills greater than yours. There is no use asserting that your culture is just as good as his. It palpably is not, and you must do something about it. Perhaps you will borrow from your rival in an attempt to catch up, in which case your differences shrink, or perhaps you will rally your people to repel the rivals to keep them at a distance, in which case your differences magnify. But one way or another you must change your own ways.

Superiority, real and perceived, and inferiority, real and perceived, are the substance of human intercourse and the major stimulus to social change throughout the course of history. Those actions and reactions, ambivalences and conflicts born of perceived disadvantage, have made human beings what we are and conditioned our behavior. Now, in terms of Western Civ and what our young people need to know about themselves and their world, it seems to me that the obvious globalization of human contacts and interactions means that the study of civilizations in isolation no longer suffices. We must teach and learn world history so as to prepare ourselves to live in a world in which the West, no less than "the rest," must respond to challenges from abroad. World history must make space for all the peoples and cultures in the world, but it must also recognize the fact that events in some places and times were, and are, more important than others. And the principle of selection is simply this: What do we need to know in order to understand how the world became what we perceive it to be today?

Thus, we must focus the attention of our students on the principal seats of innovation throughout history, while remaining aware of the costly adaptations and adjustments, and in many cases the suffering of those conquered or displaced by dint of their proximity to those seats of innovation. The main story line, therefore, is the accumulation of human skills, organization, and knowledge across the millennia, which permitted human beings to exercise power and acquire wealth through concerted action among larger and larger groups of people across greater and greater distances until we reach our present era of global interaction.

Now, in the last four or five centuries the West defined as the European core plus overseas periphery is certainly the major player. But it has not been the only one, and lately we see signs that the center of highest skills may indeed be migrating to the Pacific Ocean littoral, just as it shifted from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic littoral after the year 1650. A proper history of the world needs to make clear that such shifts have occurred in the past and may occur again in the future, and that the mechanism by which they occur is successful borrowing from the prior centers of superior skill and incorporation of such skills into a different cultural context able to make new use of them, innovate further, and so become a new center of superior skills.

That is how the West became dominant in the first place, by borrowing from China above all. China had, quite transparently, been the leading center on the globe between 1000 and, say, 1450: Just think of gunpowder, printing, and the compass. Francis Bacon was the first to state explicitly that those borrowed skills were the principal secret to the rise of the West, and he was certainly correct to a large degree. One ought to add the Chinese notion of meritocracy, the examination system for recruitment into a bureaucracy, imported to Europe in the 18th century. These four tools of power, technology, and organization Europeans took from China, domesticated into European culture, and exploited in more radical and far-reaching ways than the Chinese themselves had done.

One of the most visceral issues in our current debate over history curricula is how to reconcile this vision of the human past, which is true to the intellectual purpose of history, with the desire to preserve and pass on American institutions and cultural values, which is true to the civic purpose of history. That is no small problem because liberal multiculturalists are loath to admit the true inequality of cultures, and sometimes undermine our specific national heritage by denigrating it, while conservatives are loath to admit the contingency and possible inferiority of Western and American ways. Yet the conservative response is dangerous too. In fact, it makes the same mistake the Chinese made when confronted by the Europeans. Their past was so brilliant that they could not believe the "South Sea barbarians" mattered. Unfortunately, they found out after 1839 that it did not suffice to tell Europeans that they were immoral to trade in opium. They came anyway, bearing guns with which the Chinese could not cope.

The Turks had exactly the same history with respect to their confrontation with Europe except that it happened earlier, after 1699. They had steadfastly paid no attention to the West until it was too late for them to catch up and adjust their institutions to the European challenge.

If we Americans likewise believe that we possess all the truths that matter—for instance, those expressed by the Declaration of Independence, Constitution, and so forth—and need only recite them piously, we will not be able to react intelligently to changes that may occur, or are already in train, in the world around us. We must instead continue to adapt lest we, too, be left

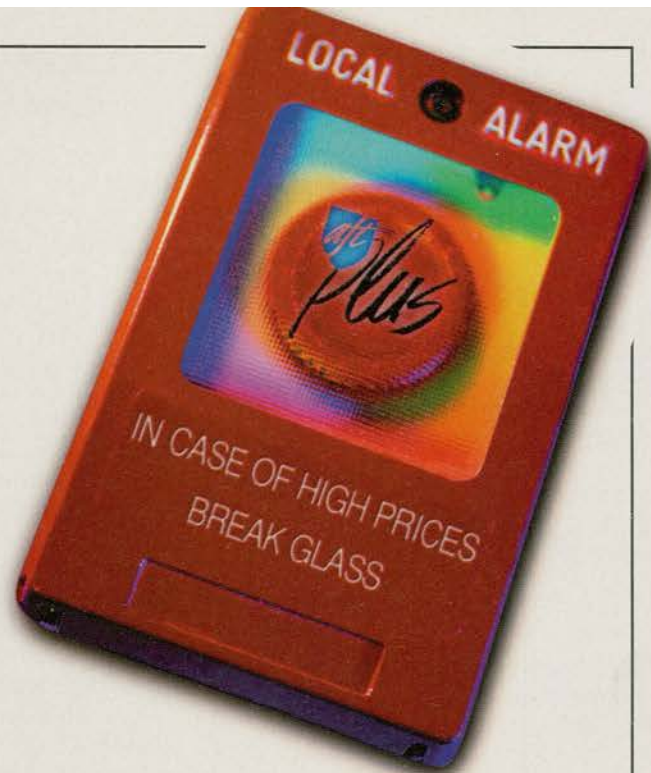
behind, and cultivate an open-mindedness towards the rest of world, and be at the ready to borrow ideas and skills of value. To do so, of course, may require that we adapt, adjust, and even reject treasured aspects of our past.

One obvious example is what I regard as Americans' almost obsessive individualism as compared to commitments made to primary groups in which fellow spirits may meet and share and make life worthwhile. I firmly believe that groups are needed to maintain that private sphere of freedom and fulfillment and creative variety that emerged so stunningly in 17th-century England. But the preservation of that zone of freedom requires that individuals in fact join in groups and choose to devote themselves to common undertakings conducive to the polity's health. That is not to say that groups organized around treasured grievances or anger against all who are different, as displayed by some of the militias and eccentric sectarians today, do not indeed threaten public order and perhaps even the wide world beyond. But for people to spurn all groups, even the family, in the name of individual satisfaction, is no less destructive of culture.

Thus, the choices we make every day about which groups to join and how fully, enthusiastically, and loyally to participate in them will shape the future of our country and the world. I must say that the Internet and other new forms of communication will presumably permit new groups to form around national, ethnic, political, professional, religious, even sports loyalties. Indeed, loyalty to everything from the nuclear family to nationhood to the human race and—if you want to get really cosmic—the DNA form of life—is the potential stuff for a group loyalty even as the rise and fall of groups is the stuff of history. Conflicts among loyalties pose the central moral problem of human life. We all belong to many groups and embody many identities, and how to reconcile them effectively one with another has been the ethical challenge to human beings ever since tight-knit, separate primary groups of hunters and gatherers ceased to be the sole form of human society.

In recent centuries the group called the "nation" has come to the fore. But there is nothing eternal about it, and no one knows what new forms of community may emerge and what new challenges they may pose. It seems to me, therefore, that understanding how groups have interacted in the past is the only preparation for responsible, effective action in the future. And that means that world history is a far better guide than Western Civ alone, which is, in the largest frame, a mere episode in the human saga: an important one, to be sure, which no rational world history would leave out, but an episode just the same.

So insofar as a concept of the West excludes the rest of humanity it is a false and dangerous model. Situating the West within the totality of humankind is the way to go, and we should in our classrooms move as best we can in that direction, believing always in the ennobling effect of enlarging one's circle of sympathies, understanding, and knowledge, and aspiring to share that belief with our students. There can be no higher calling for historians, and above all, for teachers of history. □



Discounts and savings for members only, on a broad selection of products and name brands.

Shop the



Online Marketplace.

[www.aft.org/aftplus](http://www.aft.org/aftplus)

Just click on the Member Benefits/Marketplace button!

