

HE WAS NOT SOCRATIC:

Editor's Introduction

He was not Socratic, yet in his last years his friends thought of him as Plato did of Socrates: 'a man of whom we may say that of all whom we met at that time, he was the wisest, justest and best'.

So wrote Noel Annan, the late Provost of King's College, Cambridge, of David Chipp's beloved don, Dadie Rylands. It was Dadie who taught Chipp how to speak and act, skills that stood him in good stead his life long. And it was a long life. And one in which he spoke and acted in all manner of places: from an hysterical drag act in the theatre at the British Legation's compound in Peking, to an arresting reading at the wedding of his friends, Alex and Kimberley, in the Henry VII Lady Chapel at Westminster Abbey, half a century later. Weddings, christenings, funerals: he was always invited to assume a central role in his friends' rites of passage, and he relished these opportunities. Such relish must have been evident when, after reading in King's Chapel for the last time, at the wedding of his friends, Leon and Karen, a lady in the congregation asked whether he was a professional actor. As he rejoiced in recounting to us all so often, "Not a professional actor, just an old ham."

Annan's *The Dons* was my first encounter with Dadie, the Chapel, and the King's that David had known and loved so much. Before returning the volume that the author had inscribed for Chipp, I copied the previous quotation from it into the front of a copy of Alan Bray's *The Friend*, a study of male friendship in English history, which seemed an utterly fitting gift for my friend. Many of David's friends might well write the same thing of him; for he was indeed the wisest, justest and best of all whom we were likely to meet at that time.

He was, however, perhaps a little more Socratic than Annan suggests Dadie was. Socrates, of course, was the short, balding ex-warrior with a snub nose, who only bothered to dress up if he was going to a friend's party, and whose interest in talking to youths was ultimately to result in a death sentence. When one thinks that Chipp delighted in recalling that he was once described as the 'worst-dressed editor in Fleet Street', the similarity is still only remote. When one recalls that more than one of his numerous obituarists was intrigued by his special ability to communicate with the young, the most Socratic aspect of his character becomes resoundingly clear. As for the Socratic qualities of his nose, *res ipsa loquitur*. Plato tells us in the *Symposium* that although Socrates was said to be physically unattractive, the youthful Alcibiades (who, by his own admission, was as handsome as handsome gets) was utterly infatuated by the inner-beauty of the aged Socrates, and bitterly disappointed when the latter repeatedly resisted his advances, "As if I were the lover and he my young prey." Like Socrates, Chipp might have had a deceptively Silenus-like appearance. However, also like Socrates, he did not need Marsyas's flute to cast his spell upon people.

David Chipp was a singular man. Like much about him, his vanity was singular: he loved to be told how well both he and his window boxes were looking. I remember him rejoicing in one such compliment as we were walking from Peterhouse to King's after the Adonians' annual breakfast. We encountered a rather patrician-looking non-resident member of St Catherine's, who had been up at the same time as Chipp, and who was visiting with his rather younger-looking wife. She exclaimed excitedly, "I say, Chipp, you're looking *fantastic*. What's your secret?"

"I don't need Viagra," the champagne-soaked Chipp replied without missing a beat. That wasn't the secret that she wanted to hear. But no doubt she turned a blind eye on account of the twinkle in his. That twinkle was his hallmark. I once found myself drinking with a Franciscan friend of mine in his friary, when conversation turned to Chipp. He said, "I think we once shared a taxi back from a reception and he offered to take me to the Garrick. Short man ... rather stout ... thinning hair ... and a twinkle in his eye." I was confident from the last remark that we had the same man. However many short, stout elderly men with receding hairlines there might be in the Garrick, there was none other with that twinkle in his eye. And it was hardly a surprise to find that they had encountered one another. Indeed, when talking to the Second Bursar of King's, it transpired that he too had met Chipp recently at one of Chipp's favourite English cathedrals, Salisbury, when they were attending the funeral of Chipp's old friend, Canon Pat Magee. "What a small world it is!" the Bursar smiled.

"It is when you know Chipp," I replied. It is true that he did seem to have met almost everyone. His great friend, Len, loved to say, "There was a crisis last night at Covent Garden: there were three people in the crush bar whom Chipp didn't know!"

If he was Bustopher Jones, the cat about town, he was also Old Deuteronomy, a cat who had lived many lives in succession. He saw many changes in the world in which he lived. Although he despised the rise of political correctness and the evils of Blairite England, such as the ban on foxhunting and smoking (which he regarded as one of the only two pleasures of the working classes), he was willing to concede that British immigration policy had made a positive impact on society: "The other day, an Asian lady stopped me in the street and said, 'I hope you don't mind my saying this, but I thought you'd like to know that your fly's undone,' and I thought, isn't that wonderful, because – you know – only thirty years ago they were foreigners here, and now they've settled in so well that they feel comfortable telling Chipp that his fly's undone, which an Englishwoman would still never dream of doing." So his fly stands as testament to one of the great success stories of British immigration. He despised the concept of 'Britishness', however, and was proud to tell you that despite all the temptations that he had succumbed to in life, he remained an Englishman, as did the asparagus that he was serving you, which was consumed with the fingers according the custom of all true English gentlemen.

The life of the English gentleman, however, was but one of the many lives of David Chipp. An earlier one in his succession of lives was at the Geelong Grammar School in Australia. He was an Englishman who retained a lifelong affection for the Australian

continent, the Australian way of life, the Australian physique, and, most of all, his Australian friends. Many an Australian, no doubt, retains an affectionate image of him as the quintessential English teapot – short and stout – always willing to show you his handle – or was it his spout?

The most prominent feature of all Chipp's lives is that they were all happy ones. He was a man who, even in his last years, rarely spoke of dissatisfaction with life. One tremendous source of grief was the loss of his two lifelong friends, Len and Dick, who were always the first two names on the guest list when he was planning a party. The other source of displeasure was the frustration he encountered in trying to get his memoirs published. This volume goes some way towards redressing the lesser evil.

Chipp's long awaited memoir, *Mao's Toe*, had its genesis in an earlier manuscript that he wrote, *Hell's Barking Cur*. Literary agents seemed unwilling to take on the manuscript on account of its amphibious nature: Chipp blended historical analysis of English journalism with autobiography. This combination did not prove to be commercially viable, and he was encouraged to tease out the different strands of the manuscript. Thus, he decided to concentrate on his memoirs of reporting China in the 1950s. This manuscript had been submitted to various agents and publishers before the author's death, although no offers were forthcoming.

The author, however, was satisfied at the time of his death that this memoir was ready for publication. A slightly edited version of it forms the core of this volume. As this is a private edition and does not need to appeal to the vagaries of the book trade, the final version of the memoir of life in Peking has been reunited with selected chapters from the earlier work on the history of journalism. In this way, we can place his remarks about life as a foreign correspondent in China in the broader context of his thoughts on English journalism. As a posthumous publication, it now takes on an additional significance as a memorial volume. So it has seemed right that further material should be included in order to provide a comprehensive picture of Chipp's life. Accordingly, the volume consists of three books.

Book One, *On Lips of Living Men*, contains a selection of writings by and about David. They have been selected in order to present as many facets as possible of a remarkably multi-faceted life in the fewest possible words. This has inevitably meant relying upon the fewest number of contributors, though we might be sure that there can be no shortage of others who could contribute an insight into some other precious facet of his life. Still, this collection goes some way towards capturing much of the man that Chipp was: Chipp the Kingsman, Chipp the newspaperman, Chipp the oarsman, Chipp the High Anglican, Chipp the raconteur, Chipp the royalist, Chipp the Wagnerian, Chipp the historian, and Chipp the family man and godfather.

The first part of this book, *A Boy So Full of Life Should Go Far*, contains an autobiographical essay about Chipp's family history and childhood. It is drawn from material in various drafts of *Mao's Toe* and *Hell's Barking Cur*; material that did not necessarily fit in either of those works, but which is invaluable to those who desire a complete picture of Chipp's life. This is complemented by a piece written by Chipp's sister, Mrs

Rosemary Wight, who has previously undertaken researches into their family history. I have also invited Professor Edwina Cornish, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research of Monash University in Australia, to contribute a tribute which reflects upon the life-long association that David has had with her family in Victoria.

Messing About in Boats, the second part, is concerned with two institutions with which Chipp had a lifelong association: King's College, Cambridge and the Henley Royal Regatta. Rowing is the obvious link. However, I have chosen to focus on his relationship with King's. This is not just because he felt that King's made him the man that he was, but because the multifaceted institution reflects the multifaceted personality. It was a place of personal development for Chipp: intellectual and social, physical and spiritual. Mr Patrick Delafield (President of the Leander Club and Steward of Henley Royal Regatta), has kindly permitted me to include the address he delivered at Chipp's funeral. I take a liberty in including a sermon delivered in King's Chapel by his friend, Mr Peter Avery, a Fellow of King's College. Although I do not know whether Chipp heard or read that sermon, I believe that it speaks of a faith with which he would be of a piece. Peter had particularly encouraged me to compile this volume in the weeks between Chipp's death and his own.

The third part, Journalism Should be Fun, speaks to his professional life. His professional life involved his service at Reuters and the Press Association. The years spent in Asia as a foreign correspondent are comprehensively treated in the memoir, *Mao's Toe*. Chipp intended to write a chapter about his time editing the Press Association; however, I could find no evidence that he ever began drafting this. So I have included a number of newspaper clippings about him which I found in a file amongst the material for the book, and which I assume he would have drawn upon when writing an account of this period of his life. To these I have added one obituary that is representative of the host that followed his death. Addresses delivered by two journalist friends, Mr Reg Evans (a former Associate Editor of the Press Association) and Mr Guy Black (a former Director of the Press Complaints Commission), at a memorial service held in St Bride's, Fleet Street, on November 20, 2008, and a piece by Professor Robert Pinker CBE (a longstanding lay member and sometime Acting Chairman of the Press Complaints Commission) on his professional activities during his early retirement years complete this picture of Chipp's professional life.

The Gods' Immeasurable Goodness, the fourth part, deals with one of the strongest themes in his life: friendship. I have included addresses Chipp gave at the funerals of his two dear friends, Len and Dick, not just on account of the significance that these relationships had for his life, but for what they reveal about his attitude to friendship. I have also asked several of his friends, Mr Lee Casey, Dr Paul Fox, Dr Christian Jensen and Mr Joe Stuppel, to write short pieces dealing with different aspects of his life around which he formed deep and enduring friendships: journalism, the Garrick, music and the opera.

In addition to sport, music, and conversation, another abiding diversion was literature. I have incorporated this interest in the form of the third appendix. This appendix

consists of entries from Chipp's commonplace book. This 'book' was in fact a lever-arch folder in which he placed references which he wanted to keep. Some of these were sent to him by friends; some were clipped from a newspaper, magazine, or order of service; some are copies of entire poems and speeches; some are lists of quotations that he typed up from historical and literary works that he had been reading. In making this selection, I have excluded the entries dealing with journalism, on the basis that he drew on this material when writing *Hell's Barking Cur*. The arrangement of the material that I have included is of my own device: there was no logic to the way in which he collated the entries.

Book Two in this volume is the memoir, *Mao's Toe*. In preparing the current edition, I have drawn on the draft chapters of the final version of the manuscript of the memoir. These were left in various states of revision, some requiring more editing than others. In some cases, I have only had to do minor sub-editing; in other cases, I have felt obliged to reorganise the order of the material within a chapter, or cut material that repeats another chapter. However, the copy is essentially as he left it. The only chapter that had not been drafted was Chapter XI. He had, however, left a sketch of what was to be included, and a file of sources that he intended to draw on. The first section of Chapter XI, as it appears in this volume, is drawn from a feature article that Chipp wrote on his journey to the Northwest in 1956 and a copy of a letter he wrote to his mother whilst on the journey. This is followed by the journal he kept on the trip. Whilst this might be gratuitous in a study of China in the 1950s, I believe that it is justified in a book about Chipp, as it provides interesting little insights into his experiences which would otherwise be lost (perhaps because he would not have thought them of interest to anyone else).

Hell's Barking Cur, Book Three in this volume, comprises material written in 2002–06 which Chipp decided not to include in the last revision of his memoir, *Mao's Toe*. In putting these essays together, I have edited the original material in accordance with notes Chipp left for an abridged version which was subsequently abandoned. I have been guided by twin aims: to present Chipp's work as an historian; and to present the values that mattered to him most in journalism, and perhaps in the conduct of his own life – the promotion of individuality and suspicion of authority.

What, then, is Chipp's ideal journalist? Amongst his papers, I found the following description of Northcliffe by A. G. Gardiner:

with his eager interest in the moment, his passion for sensation, his indifference to ideas, and his dislike of abstract thought ...

To this was appended the following gloss: “– the good reporter DAC.” It has been my lot to edit these papers. In doing so, I bring to bear my experience as an academic philosopher, one who specialises in ideas and abstract thought. Perhaps that ought to have disqualified me. I shall offer one abstract thought, however. Kierkegaard wrote in his journal in 1843:

It is perfectly true, as philosophers say, that life must be understood backwards. But they forget the other proposition, that it must be lived forwards ... And if one thinks over that

proposition it becomes more and more evident that life can never really be understood in time simply because at no particular moment can I find the necessary resting-place from which to understand it – backwards.

I suspect that Chipp might well have been able to teach the philosophers one or two things about what it means to live a life well, for his was a life lived very well. Now, he is in his resting-place and we have the necessary resting-place from which to understand his life – backwards. Understanding a life is different from remembering it. A life such as David's, I suggest, can only properly be understood in writing when we try to draw together the different threads: his reflective writing on his own life and that of other people and institutions that he valued; his historical study of his trade; reports written about him during his lifetime, and afterwards by those who remembered him; pieces of writing that inspired him, or which he found memorable for other reasons; and his creative writing. When we put all of this together, how do we understand this life? There are certain themes that run through his personal and professional life, notably admiration of individuality in himself and others, and scepticism of authority. We can see how these develop in his personal life; the interaction between personal and professional lives; and the importance that his sense of his role as a professional had for his self-conception: "we took our work seriously, but never ourselves". We also gain insights by connecting up different people's memories. In this way, we obtain a more comprehensive picture than any particular set of memories affords. This volume, I believe, allows us not merely to remember but to understand David a bit better by looking back at his life. Thus, whilst my experience in editing this volume suggests that Edward Gibbon might have been correct that "to illustrate the obscure monuments of the life and death of each individual would prove a laborious task," at no point have I found the task "alike barren of instruction and amusement." I hope that the reader's experience will also be alike instructive and amusing.

We all owe an especial debt of gratitude to Mr Murdoch MacLennan (Chief Executive, Telegraph Group) and Mr Paul Potts (Chief Executive, Press Association), whose organizations' generosity has met the cost of designing and printing this private edition. This, together with the efforts of Ms Joëlle du Lac (Director of Development at King's College, Cambridge), has enabled the book to be distributed free of charge and has afforded subscribers the opportunity to donate to King's in the author's memory and in lieu of payment. On a personal note, I am indebted to many people for contributing to this project a range of expertises which I lacked. Particular mention should be made of Mr Liu Xinyi, of Darwin College, Cambridge, who has assisted me with the proofreading and Romanization of Chinese words and with the Chinese calligraphy, and of the University Orator (Dr Rupert Thompson, of Selwyn College, Cambridge) for similar assistance with European languages. I have been supported in too many ways to mention by David's niece, Mrs Margaret Pianta, and three of his friends, Mr Guy Black, Mr Grant Butler, and Mr Daniel Klineberg. I know that an expression of my appreciation will be a source of negligible satisfaction to them when compared with the sense of pride which I know they, as I, feel in having been able to honour the memory of our friend through this publication.

The last time I saw Chipp was when he came up to Cambridge to attend a drinks party in my rooms, a couple of weeks before he died. His eyes twinkled as always, although he left at about 10.00 pm. As the party finally broke up, some time after 1.00 am, a graduate student at King's, whom Chipp had met for the first time that night, lamented, "It's a pity Chipp couldn't have stayed a bit longer." When I subsequently informed him that this was the only sour note sounded about the party, he e-mailed back from his BlackBerry, "Sorry too that I could not stay for longer but the years ..." Yes, the years; Time's winged chariot was hurrying near: perhaps it was the only force that Chipp was not interested in befriending. Though he could not make his sun stand still, yet he did make it run – right up until the end.

I suspect that upon hearing of his death, a good many of us felt the same sentiment: It's a pity Chipp couldn't have stayed a bit longer.

Non omnis moritur

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St David's Day, 2009.