

Arthur H. King.

Latter Days

(Monday, Aug. 4, 1969.)

The trees are still in mist this August morning:
chestnut and beech first scorched by sense of Autumn,
and the rest just dull vert between vague seasons.
The swirl of Ceres disciplined to stubble
reduces the whole seasonal cycle's plumed
harvest heads to the rank of interim
waiting empty for the next fulfilment —
presumably the firing of the stubble.

The guns in Hyde Park sound a little distant:
for the Queen-Mother's birthday, not the Queen's;
she came in April, quite a time ago,
an interim.

And fifty-five — since Monday
August the fourth, nineteen-fourteen — brief years
an interim. That was Elizabeth
Bowes-Lyon's fourteenth birthday; a day for call-up
and mobs, not parties; far too large for sickles,
the scale demanded combination harvesters
to reap unseasoned stands in muddy fields.
And yet meanwhile the dragon's teeth sprang wider,
till now the moon can host a bloody harvest.

Back to the trees again! Yes, backs to them,
muffle your eyes in mist! The guns have stopped.
For an interim? Guns, too, are out of season
for execution searing out the scene
from Sandringham to Clarence House or Windsor
and the familiar back-drop of the once
“Great Wen” burst, charred
(unlike Persepolis, past recognition —
granted Macaulay’s Antipodean were
conceivable, he drifted Thamesward, and
some local ghost, if even a ghost remained,
could note his pitiless ignorance) — burst, charred,
and year by year barren (of couch, dock, nettle,
or fireweed favoured by a milder Blitz
than this last) — burst, charred, bare, the once Great Wen
that “laughing” corn must wait to “reassume”
till the Millennium.

Trees will be lost to site one August morning.

NOTE ON “LATTER DAYS”

The first paragraph is associated with my morning drive to Guildford, Surrey; the second with the guns heard from Hyde Park in my office at noon. In the fourth paragraph ‘Back to the trees’ is a ‘back to nature’ call — a flight from the ‘bloody harvest’; but since I am using natural images, I cannot flee to nature from reality. So I twist ‘Back to the trees’ into ‘backs to them,’ to face a firing squad, with eyes ‘muffled in mist.’ But a firing squad image is itself a flight from the even grimmer reality: nuclear explosion. We are most of us going to be executed by that firing and we cannot go ‘back to Nature’ until ‘Nature’ re-becomes reality in the Millennium.

5th paragraph: trees will be not only ‘lost’ in mist and therefore to ‘sight’, they will be utterly consumed from ‘site’ and the ‘site’ will remain bare until the Millennium. However, it is a ‘site’ for trees, and they will therefore be restored in their proper place then.

We do not sufficiently face the last days in our Church. The prophecies are clear enough, and we can see them being fulfilled. We must be prepared for the obliteration of most that we know before the Millennium. Hence the poem.

A.H.K.