

The Stately Ones

There are three things that are stately in their stride, four that move with stately bearing: a lion, mighty among beasts, who retreats before nothing: a strutting cock, a he-goat, and a king with his army around him – Proverbs 30:29-33

The Lion

Meditations

Lions

Ah, look at the lion! Stalking across the Serengeti, his proud mane stiff. Those zebra behind had better look out, once he gets going! Look, he's seen them! He's turned towards them! He's... lying down and going to sleep. I wonder where the rest of his pride is? Ah, yes, look! Three lionesses, stalking the zebra, watch, sh, see them sliding from tussock to tussock, they must be close en- Yes! They're going for it! They've got him! Pulled the zebra down, he seemed just an edge slow, bit elderly, perhaps? Anyway, they've killed, and they're just beginning their well-deserved feast – Oh! Look! The lion's woken up! He's going over to share the kill – no he's not! He's driving the lionesses away! From their own kill! He's hogging it himself, when they've done all the work! Well!

Ah, look at the Sales Director! Walking confidently out of the boardroom! The customers won't know what hit them when he gets going! He's off towards the sales office now; he's through the door, he's... picked up his golf clubs. I wonder where his staff are? Ah, yes, look! They're getting a presentation together; just finishing. Here's the customers, sitting in the theatre – watch how smoothly it all goes! See the team picking out the weakest target, see them focus, flatter, persuade – they've got him! Look, there's the contract! He's signed! Now watch the team congratulate each other, and here's the managing director to congratulate them in pers- Just a minute! The Sales Director's back! He's cut them out! He's even blaming them for not signing more clients! He's taking the credit – when he never lifted a finger! Well!

Ah, look at the President! Proud of himself, proud of his country! No scandal will taint his land while he's in charge! Like that business with the refugees, for instance – now he's been told, he's going to stand up, walk right up to that microphone and... ignore it! He's pretending it's not happening! Well, at least the Church is doing something. Getting publicity, paying fees, pressuring the police, hiring lawyers... Well, it's taken long enough, but it's done now, and at least the Church will get the credit – hey, wait a minute! What's the President saying? He's saying he did it! He's claiming the credit! He's even demanding to know where the Churches were, why weren't they backing him! Well!

Prayers

A Few More Thoughts on the Lion

Right, now the lion. Proverbially king of beasts, but with his royalty somewhat exploded by the wildlife programmes on the TV! Bone idle, viciously jealous, useless by himself. Almost the only prey he kills are other lions' cubs. My, what bravery!

It would be interesting to know just how much of this was known to the writer. To judge by the company Leo is keeping, probably rather a lot.

The Cock

Meditations

Prayers

A Few More Thoughts on the Cock

You're not allowed to call the male chicken a cock anymore, because the Americans use 'cock' for the male genitals. You have to say 'rooster' – even though both cocks and hens roost. Well, tough. If you're so scared of sexuality that even a homonym offends you, I recommend one of two courses of action: (1) get a life or (2) grow up. The Bible isn't scared of sexuality; you'll find a lot worse words than 'cock' even in the translations, and the originals are even franker.

But sex, getting a life and growing up are very much the core of this particular picture. The cock strutting round the farmyard trying to impress the hens, crowing to frighten off the competition, without realising that he doesn't actually have any competition! And, when anything real does happen, like a polecat getting into the coop, he's totally useless.

The cock is the picture of the man flattered by his own body, blinded to his own inadequacy, conned by his own sexuality into believing himself the best thing since sliced bread – in every sphere – when in fact he's a waste of space. In our society, of course, this is by no means confined to males.

Get a life – and grow up.

The He-goat

Meditations

Friday night

Watch the boys, every Friday night, rolling out of the clubs and pubs, clutching their cans of lager, still trying to pick up a girl on the way to buy a curry at the takeaway. Watch the girls, too, stuttering out arm in arm in arm, giggling, shouting obscenities at the lads, counting their money for a taxi.

They're just enjoying themselves, you say. What's wrong with that? They're having a good time.

There's nothing wrong with having a good time. There's nothing wrong with enjoying yourself. No, Friday night isn't what the Christian worries about. Nor even Saturday morning. Go instead to Tuesday afternoon. Listen to them talking. Listen to what they are really saying.

The problem with Friday night isn't what they do then. The problem is that they don't do anything else. Friday night is what they talk about. Friday night is all they have. A good Friday night is all they live for, all they look forward to, all they have to look forward to.

Don't pray to take away their good Friday night. Pray that they may know an Easter Sunday.

Prayers

A Few More Thoughts on the He-Goat

The he-goat has always been the symbol of male sexuality – and in particular of brainless male sexuality. The footballer, the jock, the lager lout. How this is handled in worship is an interesting problem, in view of the nerdish attitude to sex that still pervades our Churches.

Before the hordes of capriphiles howl for my blood, I should point out that this is not at all fair on the real he-goat. Outside his annual testosterone surge he is really quite an intelligent beast, although not particularly friendly. If you wish to avoid the sexuality issue, you might consider the effective way he can use his horns in defence.

The King

Meditations

New Brooms

They come in with such confidence, don't they! I'm going to make a difference, they say. None of the old sloppy habits, none of the old inefficient organisation. Things are really going to change around

here! From now on, I'll be running a tight ship, a lean mean machine, a model office for the twenty-first century.

And some things do change, for a little while. Then, little by little, reasons for the old ways become more obvious. The atmosphere changes. Then, little by little, old habits creep back. Old ways come back, renamed perhaps but still the same underneath. Old ideas slip back into speech, old methods come back into use.

Little by little the new broom becomes buried in the old dust. But curiously enough, the new broom hardly ever notices.

Of course, our religious lives are quite different. Although conversion is very much a new broom, very much a new boss coming in and throwing out all the old sins, all the old bad habits, all the old bad ways of thought, conversion never slips back, never drifts down to the old ways, never becomes buried in the old dust.

Does it?

Prayers

A Few More Thoughts on the King

The King with his army; the King going forth to lead his army; the King before his people, the King against whom there is no rising up. Make up your minds, translators! The Hebrew of this verse is obscure? Now there's a shock.

Let's make a guess at a common theme here: the picture we get is of the *untested* King. The King who is smugly confident *before* the battle, who has never been tested by a rebellion, the King speaking to a safe audience.

This would fit with the others in the group: the lion, brave against weak opponents; the cock, crowing on his little dunghill as if it was the greatest hill in the world; the goat, his brain processes entirely located at his rear end.

Pride goeth before destruction, in fact, and an haughty spirit before a fall.

Some Final Thoughts on the Stately Ones

Oh, yes, what a wonderful, what a glorious set of pictures of real majesty! The lion, the cock, the he-goat, the king with his army... Just a minute, do I detect an ever so slight touch of sarcasm here? The he-goat, the proverbial and universal symbol of the male with his brains in a bag between his legs; the cock, blinded by his own arrogance to the fact that he isn't actually of any importance at all; the lion, notoriously bone idle, leaving the lionesses to do all the work while he lolls in the sun, and the king... Mm? No, surely not.

On the other hand, it does go on to say... No, but after all, this is the Bible, not a Women's Lib tract. No, it couldn't mean that... Could it?