

## From the Back Verandah

Almost since the First Fleet anchored in Sydney Cove in 1788, river and harbour ferries have been a part of the Sydney scene, with the first being built just a few months later to provide a link to the food-producing outpost at Parramatta.

By the late 19th century Sydney Ferries Limited had become the world's biggest ferry operator, but with the opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge in 1932 its fortunes changed drastically. And with competition from trains, trams, buses and the family car, ferry patronage would fall even more.

All over the world the ferry cutback story was the same. Take London, for example. Before the Metropolitan Underground Railway was established in 1863, Londoners had

done most of their east-west travelling by ferry.

The river journey was often accompanied, would you believe, by the quite exhilarating exchange of insulting language. According to James Boswell's *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791):

It is well known that there was formerly a rude custom for those who were sailing upon the Thames, to accost each other as they passed, in the most abusive language they could invent, generally, however, with as much satirical humour as they were capable of producing . . .

Johnson was once eminently successful in this species of contest; a fellow having attacked him with some coarse raillery, Johnson answered him thus,

"Sir, your wife, under pretence of keeping a bawdy-house, is a receiver of stolen goods."

— Fizzgig

# BIKWIL

The Newsletter of Quiet Enthusiasms

Editor: Tony Rogers

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## In This Issue

- 2 News from Cyberspace (TR)**  
A far-flung audience begins taking notice
- 3 Game Plan (TR)**  
The Sydney Olympics in context
- 6 Begin (bohdan yuri)**  
A poet at exam time
- 8 On the Trail (E. Roy Strong)**  
Another tall (but allegedly true) story from Sleepy J ack Hanrahan
- 14 Plum Tree (Bet Briggs)**  
Life after death
- 15 Web Line (TR)**  
Now that *Bikwil* is doing it, we'd better ask, "Does any good really come from putting a print magazine on the Internet?"
- 16 A Word in Your Pink Shell-like (Harlish Goop)**  
The odd chance remark rears its head again
- 19 Quintessential Quirky Quotes**  
Quotes from Fred Allen, Sir Winston Churchill, Clifton Fadiman, Jerome K. Jerome and Alexander Woollcott
- 20 From the Back Verandah (Fizzgig)**  
Ferries — here and there

## News from Cyberspace

Thus far, our infant Internet site [bikwil.zip.com.au](http://bikwil.zip.com.au) is getting but a modest visitor count. Mind you, it's already been registered by over 45 major search engines and ezine directories, so we must be doing something right. Next issue, in the *Web Line* column, I hope to refer you to some Internet places that have been particularly kind to *Bikwil*.

For the benefit of newer readers or those who don't have Internet access, here is an extract from our Web site that explains *Bikwil's* genesis. I have quoted this because questions have been asked in Various Houses as to the significance of the recently added

prehistoric watermark behind the Colophon box below.

Here's the background. In the mid 1990s, while a group of like-minded friends were enjoying lunch together,

. . . the phrase "small dinosaur" got coined to convey the meaning "we are small creatures who enjoy waxing passionate on topics of value that most of the modern world appears to deem 'old-fashioned' or even 'extinct'" . . . Tony [Rogers] and several other compatible types were soon recruited into this proto-society of neo-Mesozoic iconoplasts. Many conversations later, *Bikwil* came into being as a . . . newsletter, with the aim of sharing our enthusiasms with a wider community.

Iconoplasts?

### Colophon

Bikwil  
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[info@bikwil.zip.com.au](mailto:info@bikwil.zip.com.au)

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*Back Issues Are Still Available*

*Gertrude Stein is the mama of dada.*  
Clifton Fadiman

*I like work; it fascinates me. I can sit and look at it for hours. I love to keep it by me; the idea of getting rid of it nearly breaks my heart.*  
Jerome K. Jerome

## Quintessential Quirky Quotes

*Sir Alfred Bossom? Bossom? What an extraordinary name. Neither one thing nor the other!*  
Sir Winston Churchill

*The scenery was beautiful but the actors got in front of it.*  
Alexander Woollcott

*He writes so well he makes me feel like putting my quill back in my goose.*  
Fred Allen

A month later, Collins, having already concluded that the site was unsuitable, departed with his prisoners to establish a settlement (now Hobart) in Van Dieman's Land.

Buckley, in the meantime, had managed to survive by living off the land, and was soon made welcome by the Wathaurong-speaking Koories, whose country is around present-day Geelong.

Perhaps because of his pale skin colour and his height (he was nearly two metres tall), they regarded him as a reincarnated man of authority, a position that afforded him rights and also responsibilities. In the 32 years he spent with these people, he was taught their language and acquired an intimate, detailed knowledge of their ritual and customs. The tribe also gave him a wife.

In July 1835 Buckley surrendered to a survey party led by J. H. Wedge, in order to prevent some Aborigines from robbing a visiting ship and murdering the crew. By now Buckley had almost forgotten how to speak English and could only be identified by his initials tattooed on his arm.

Wedge thought Buckley would make a useful interpreter between

the local Aborigines and Europeans, and managed to obtain a pardon for him.

As an interpreter, Buckley was no great success, but in the years to come he would grow to be famous as a guide for white settlers who wished to see the wonderful scenery along the Barwon River, particularly the Falls that now bear his name. Buckley's account of his time among the Wathaurong was published in 1852, and is an important source of information about the Aboriginal people in the region south-west of Melbourne.

In this way was the legend of Australia's first wild white man born — a man whose chance of survival in the bush had indeed been "forlorn" and "slim", but who beat the odds dramatically, and maybe even gave his name, not only to a waterfall, but more significantly for Australian sceptics and word lovers alike to the very idea of having all probabilities stacked against one.

Yes, I for one am happy to accept both of Wilkes' conjectures.

How about you?

— Harlish Goop

## Game Plan

It won't have escaped your attention that for the past half-dozen years or so Australia has been girding its athletic loins tighter and tighter for a certain event that's taking place here this September.

Not so well known overseas, perhaps, has been a concurrent attempt at what is known as Aboriginal Reconciliation — a process of healing the spiritual misery and material deprivation inflicted over a period of 120 years by ethnocentric whites on the original inhabitants of this land.

For many people a significant impediment to reconciliatory closure has been the fact that our Prime Minister, John Howard, has vowed that he shall not utter the word "Sorry" on behalf of the nation. And while he might maintain that today's Australians should not be made to take the blame for the past, he is really motivated by a fear that billions of dollars' worth of compensation claims will land on his desk.

Now, having established *Bikwil* as a refuge from negativity, I of

all people would not be casting disapproving glances at anyone or anything were it not for a creative feller named John Morrison Clarke. Originally a New Zealander, John Clarke came to Australia in the late 1970s, bringing with him a scathing satiric humour rarely equalled, together with a sophisticated ability with words in which to couch his lampooning intentions.

From that period he will be remembered fondly in the guise of Fred Dagg, and for being the person who first put us in the picture regarding the little known sport of farnarkeling, but in 1999-2000 Clarke has for the most part been applying his caustic wit to a larger congregation of competitors.

In a two-series half-hour ABC-TV programme entitled *The Games* he has provided viewers with what might be described as the Australian *Yes, Minister*. Depicting hopeless contractors, inept bureaucrats, devious politicians and equally underhanded spin-doctoring Olympics officials, *The Games* stars Clarke himself as "Olympic Supremo" in charge of

Administration and Logistics for the Sydney Games, together with Brian Dawe and Gina Riley (as his financial and marketing off-siders, respectively).

This team were appointed to “supervise the mounting of the biggest event in Australia’s history”, by constructing “the complex web of strategic alliances and industry contacts which would bring the Olympic dream to life”. In addition to coping with an increasing cynical media and staff, they are faced with provocative challenges like the Millennium Bug, a 100 metres track that is not quite long enough, Olympics transport breakdowns, an IOC official found dead in a Kings Cross hotel room in scandalous circumstances, and so on.

As in all politico-bureaucratic settings, however, by fair means or foul (usually the latter), all obstacles are eventually surmounted or carpets found to crush them under.

In the first series Clarke and co-scriptwriter Ross Stevenson had briefly used the idea of the impersonation of a Prime Minister. In that case the piece was performed over the phone by Aussie mimic Gerry Connolly pretending to be ex Australian PM Bob Hawke. As funny as

that was, on Monday 3rd July this year (Series 2, Episode 3) they applied a wonderful twist to that notion, and outdid themselves in a totally unexpected way.

Inspired and inspirational, I call it. Here’s how it went . . .

Our Supremo, Mr. Clarke, is taken aback by a visit from a special U.S. Ambassador who reveals that the rest of the world is becoming increasingly alarmed about Australia’s human rights record in respect of its indigenous people, a concern that threatens Sydney’s ability to host the Games in a respectable manner. Previously blithely unaware of this historical reality, Mr. Clarke gradually becomes convinced on the issue and finally leaps into action by immediate application of Management Rule One: he delegates the problem to someone else — PR person Ms. Riley.

Now it so happens that there is a distinguished actor and Aboriginal rights activist in Australia who suffers from the affliction of being named John Howard. (He features prominently in the Aussie TV show *Seachange* in the character of Bob Jelly.) Why not have this John Howard make The Apology? Overseas people, who wouldn’t know our PM from a bar of Sunlight soap, could be

**Buckley’s chance (show, hope)**  
A forlorn hope, no chance at all

[Origin obscure. Connections have been suggested with ‘the wild white man’ William Buckley, the convict who absconded from Port Phillip in 1803 and lived for thirty-two years with the natives. He gave himself up in 1835 and lived until 1856. Another suggested derivation is a pun on the name of the Melbourne firm of Buckley and Nunn.]

That sounds more like it. Or does it? Surprisingly, no quotations are given in any of the above dictionaries that are dated earlier than 1898 — *The Bulletin* (OED2), W. H. Ogilvie *Fair Girls and Gray Horses* (DAC).

Well, let’s have a look at some other dates, then. The Melbourne department store of Buckley and Nunn first opened its doors in 1851, and in its heyday was a store with as fine a reputation as David Jones (1838) or Farmers (1840) in Sydney.

It was especially popular with women of style. In 1914, for example, elegant frocks were the main feature of its mail order catalogue, and in 1939 it was happy to display chic female nightwear in its shop window. As early as 1912 it had been the acceptable cause of much congestion in Bourke Street outside its

doors, as photos of the day show, and by the 1920s the Buckley and Nunn tastefully appointed tea room was one of the most fashionable meeting places for Melbourne ladies.

The name was thus a household phrase, and could well have served as the source of the *Buckley’s and none* pun. But only provided that William Buckley’s story had captured the public imagination already.

It sure had.

In 1802, after 14 years of progress with its colony in New South Wales (Sydney, Paramatta, Toongabbie, Windsor, Newcastle), the British Government had resolved to set up a new penal settlement in Bass Strait at Port Phillip Bay (the current site of Melbourne), and Lt-Col. David Collins was placed in charge.

Among the 300 convicts was William Buckley (1780-1856), who had been transported for receiving a bolt of cloth knowing it to be stolen. On Christmas Day, 1803, he and two others escaped. Soon they were starving and Buckley’s companions decided to return to the settlement, but were never heard of again.

## A Word in Your Pink Shell-like

*Bikwil* has seen a number of discussions on the meanings and etymology of words — not only in this column, but also in R.K. Sadler's occasional pieces *Interesting Origins*. And there are more to come. However, lest we get to expect that everything can be etymologically pinned down, let us remind ourselves that, try as they might, lexicographers now and then come up against words and phrases for which nothing conclusive can be discovered of their derivation.

James Murray's policy with such items for the *Oxford English Dictionary* was as follows:

Of many words it has to be stated that their origin is either doubtful or altogether unknown. In such cases the historical facts are given, as far as they go, and their bearing occasionally indicated. But *conjectural etymologies* are rarely referred to, except to point out their agreement or disagreement with the historical facts; for these, and the full discussion which they require, the reader is referred to special treatises on etymology.

The problem is particularly vexing with slang, even in a country as young as Australia,

where you'd perhaps assume that the derivation of all colloquialisms would be recorded. A good case in point is the Aussie expression *Buckley's*, most commonly heard these days in the sceptical opinion "You've got Buckley's". This is an example of a word for which only conjectural etymologies seem to exist.

This is what *OED2* has to say, for example:

**Buckley's.** *Austral.* and *N.Z. colloq.* [Of uncertain origin.]

In full *Buckley's chance* (or *hope*, etc.): a forlorn hope, no chance at all.

*Macq2* puts it this way:

**Buckley's.** *noun Colloquial*

1 Also, **Buckley's chance**, **Buckley's hope**. a very slim chance; forlorn hope:

2 **Buckley's and none**, (*humorous*) two chances amounting to next to no chance.

[? from William BUCKLEY, influenced by the pun on the name of the former Melbourne department store, *Buckley and Nunn*]

G.A. Wilkes' 1978 *Dictionary of Australian Colloquialisms* (ISBN 0 00 635719 9) has this:

easily fooled by a televised speech into believing that Australia's human rights credentials had been redeemed, and the Sydney Olympics could thus proceed unjeopardised

Good evening. My name is John Howard and I'm speaking to you from Sydney, Australia, host city of the year 2000 Olympic Games . . .

So out goes the transmission, accompanied by this press release: "As a gesture of goodwill the Olympic organisers would like to pave the way for reconciliation".

All is well again at Administration and Logistics — at least till the next crisis.

Now the quite remarkable thing about the John Howard speech is this. As you watch it in the context of all that has led up to it (in reality and in *The Games*), you first see it as high farce, but in the space of those three minutes and 410 words you find yourself becoming captivated by the emotional atmosphere and before you know it you are inextricably caught up in the speech's sincerity and gravity. The impact is breathtaking. Beautifully done, Clarke and Howard.

Well, the positive response from the public at large has been

overwhelming, too. Newspaper columnists have been wholehearted in their praise — for example, John Huxley in *The Sydney Morning Herald* and Susan Mitchell in *The Australian*. The ABC phones and Web site have run hot with congratulations, too, as have the letters pages in many an Aussie newspaper.

When I last looked at the Web site there must have been several hundred "Good on yer" messages from viewers, some of whom have even reported starting out laughing and ending up weeping. "Gut wrenching", "supreme speech", "riveting" — such have been other testimonials.

I'd love to quote the complete speech, but for copyright reasons I dare not. On the other hand, perhaps I'm over-anxious about it, because when you Internet surfers go to *The Games* subpage at the ABC TV site (<http://abc.net.au/thegames/default.htm>) you will see the following Clarkian proclamation preceding the speech transcript:

Any other John Howard who wishes to make this announcement should apply for copyright permission here, which will be granted immediately.

— TR

## Begin

I walk to class across the green,  
 holding my books  
 and in good form.  
 A brisk cool wind  
 reminds my soul  
 that winter  
 is next on call.

I studied hard for this term quiz,  
 to make the grade  
 on next year's entrance exam.  
 Then two more years  
 of fine tuned canons  
 and life begins  
 in some law firm.

Just enough thoughts:  
 let's review  
 some ancient lost chapters,  
 recount a slanted system,  
 or true.  
 The time,  
 it never lasts  
 on morning calls.

## Web

Today I'm going to talk very briefly about magazines on the Internet, my emphasis here being on periodicals that existed in print first before they appeared on the Net.

In other words, I won't be covering those designed specifically and exclusively as on-line periodicals.

It really is surprising what quite different approaches magazines take with the amount of content they allow you access to. Some, like *Reader's Digest Australia*, offer little magazine reading matter for free (apart from a contents list of their current issue), but instead serve more as advertising sites for their printed products.

Others are more generous, providing free articles from older issues, or giving you a small selection of articles from the current printed issue.



## Line

Of course, from the reader's point of view, the nicest sites are those openhanded places that (thanks no doubt to their on-line advertisers) seem prosperous enough to

let us read just about everything, even in the latest issue. My current-affairs favourites in this regard are *Time* (US version) and *New Statesman*, but there are many others to be found once you start searching.

And if you ever want to look for magazines by type, why not try Web Wombat's *Online Magazines*? This site conveniently lists about 50 categories so you can narrow down your search needs — architecture, consumer affairs, family issues, gardening, literature, publishing, science, travel . . .

— TR

### Internet sites referred to above:

[http://www.readersdigest.com.au/rd\\_content.asp](http://www.readersdigest.com.au/rd_content.asp)  
<http://cgi.pathfinder.som/time/magazine/>  
<http://www.newstatesman.co.uk/>  
<http://www.webwombat.com.au/intercom/magazine/index.htm>

## *Plum Tree*

The old plum tree is dead:  
severed from the earth  
so long its home  
to give place to the new.

Only the stump,  
like a brown ancient rock  
reposes in kindly ground  
and defies axeman's stroke.

Let it stay.  
The gentler blade of time  
will whittle the wood  
lovingly to its core.

Earth's quiet creatures,  
faithful in ritual  
will bear it deep in the soil  
for resurrection.

Its ruin will be nurture  
for another, its dust a home,  
fruit of the earth  
tree out of tree will grow.

— Bet Briggs

A short cut  
through the grass,  
leaves struggle  
to clear my path.

All told,  
I'm set to face this test  
that's handed  
from the maker's own hand.

Begin,  
page turned,  
pencil poised,  
leg raised,  
crossed over the other,  
and there it is,  
the answer . . .  
a fallen leaf,  
stuck into my shoelace,

. . . it's fall.

— bohdan yuri

## On the Trail

[ From *Come Spin Us a Yarn, Sleepy Jack* ]

It's not often that anyone at a loose end gets the chance to while away the time by pursuing a miscreant in the shadows, but that that's exactly what Sleepy Jack Hanrahan accomplished one night forty years ago. We were reminiscing over a tableful recently and when I happened to comment how tediously some evenings seem to drag these days, he reminded me of the events in question.

Now, in his time, Jack has been notorious for fancying himself as many things apart from a celebrated teller of tales — washboard player extraordinary, NSW omelette gargling champion, to list but two — but I'd forgotten our linguist's steadfast yearning for after-dark bloodhounding.

Mind you, now that I've heard the story again, I find myself even more convinced that his natural curiosity was made worse on this occasion in 1960 by boredom brought on by a dearth of his very lifeblood: conviviality in abundance and, even more indispensable, a captive audience.

Anyway, get that salt-shaker ready, as he relates his evening adventure.

— E. Roy Strong

You and I, Roy, were flattering at Elizabeth Bay at the time, with Tom Day — to say nothing of the other casual inhabitants who drifted in and out at random, some with keys, like Bob Norman, and others who had to knock, like Sam Owen.

As you remember, the unit was in Onslow Avenue, opposite the Arthur McElhone Reserve, a little park that looms large in my

memory for the simple law-and-order reason that I was a bystander to two assaults there.

One occurred the afternoon when Sam and I were fired upon there by a brainless thirteen-year-old with an air rifle, the pellets peppering Sam's packet of Rothmans which he'd placed beside where we were sitting. The fags were ruined, as was the air rifle, Sam having pursued the boy over

that of one who rather have been out chasing youthful car thieves at great speed through Granville or harassing back-lane harlots wherever he could find them.

Undaunted, I pressed on and told him my tale. He took my name and address, saying, "I don't think your statement will be needed, sir. Thank you anyway."

Well, I ask you.

Look. Even I — with modesty, tolerance and patience to spare — have my limits, Roy. There was I, flushed with the success of what I consider to be my finest hour in a life's unremitting dedication to Truth, Justice and the Australian Way, and there was that indifferent sergeant, absolutely unmoved by my civic-mindedness, snapping shut his notebook, obviously with the cast-iron intention of being far away as soon as ever he could.

I mean to say, what was the world coming to?

It's a bit ripe, isn't it, when a law-conscious but self-effacing citizen offers to give compelling evidence about a robbery and an assault, and all the local constabulary can do is ignore him and start scratching around for heftier beef to boil.

Somewhat at a loss for words (gobstruck, more like it), I gazed upon his impassive features for a moment or two, hoping, I suppose, for some encouraging sign of belated interest in my news.

None being forthcoming, I departed his presence and started to wander aimlessly around observing the camaraderie of the taxi drivers, ruminating "I could have been part of this". Life can sure dish out its bitter pills, can't it?

In lonely desperation I went up to a couple of Red Deluxers, who were leaning against a cab, no doubt swapping old assault stories or talking football.

"I saw the whole thing."

"Yeah?"

Another bored response, uttered without either man looking at me, I might add.

That settled it. Frustrated and perplexed, I set off from that foul place of unconcern to plod my weary way homeward, resolving to leave civic duty to others in future. Far preferable, I realised, would be to devote my shattered ego to prolonged meditation on the more readily solvable of life's mysteries — the identity of the Man in the Iron Mask, for instance. Or Jack the Ripper's.



Pausing at the corner, he struggled for what seemed ages with his momentous decision, and then turned left.

The cab driver and I slowed our pace even more, so that when I reached the intersection, our two leading men were stumbling along not very far ahead at all.

I've got to say it. Their perseverance was exemplary, the one driven by a compelling need for justice, the other — well, who knew what demons, apart from a passionate desire to escape apprehension, empowered his shaky tread?

Still no police.

Despite the downward slope of Elizabeth Bay Road, our progress remained exasperatingly unhurried, dependent as it still was on the ever-diminishing capacities of the felon. Events began to overtake us rapidly, however.

No sooner had we arrived in Elizabeth Bay Crescent, at the bottom of E. B. Road, and our intoxicated desperado had begun to grasp the unwelcome fact that it was a *cul-de-sac*, than a stream of taxis began to pour into the area, twenty of them, I'd say, followed closely by a police car, a Black Maria and an ambulance.

(How anyone knew an ambulance would be needed, Roy, I'm unable to say. Perhaps it's a normal precautionary measure in cases of taxi fare theft, more likely we owed it to some faceless stay-indoors flat-dweller who phoned in about the assault.)

The ambulance men had some difficulty persuading the injured diver to accompany them to the hospital (he wanted to be sure he got his money), but before long they succeeded in their endeavour, and he was whisked away to X-ray and the plaster room.

In the meantime, the villain of the piece had made a stumbling bid to enter one of the private driveways and vanish. No such luck, mate. Into custody he went, post-haste.

As the police van drove off, I approached the sergeant and identified my status in the scheme of things.

Not what you'd describe as hanging on my every syllable, he kept looking over my shoulder. Having hastily checked the direction of his gaze and found nothing special of interest, I was able to form the strong opinion that his thoughts were elsewhere. Indeed, his general demeanour was

the ornamental bridge and furiously yet cheerfully smashed the weapon against the stone wall. The boy's mother wasted no time in laying charges against Sam for destruction of property, but finally allowed him to settle out of court to forestall the airing in the public domain of her son's ill-advised shooting spree.

The other attack took place on a Tuesday night when I had the apartment to myself. You were visiting your parents, and Tom as usual was playing silly buggers at the University Regiment. Abnormally, there were no itinerant guests.

About 8.30 the disc had just reached *Ave Formosissima (Blanziflor et Helena)*, which leads into the reprise of *O Fortuna* that concludes *Carmina Burana*, when I became aware of an altercation in the area outside the garages of our building. To the triple-*forte* accompaniment of Carl Orff I peered down surreptitiously from the window, and a brief inspection revealed immediately that the *dramatis personae* were, from stage left to right, a taxi driver and his passenger, the latter well the worse for wear.

The Chinese taxi driver was doing his resolute best to persuade his fare to cough up an

appropriate sum, but the other was equally adamant in his reluctance to acknowledge the fairness of the arrangement proposed. Indeed, even as they were disputing the case, he was preparing to vacate the locality as rapidly as his erratic legs would carry him. Down the slope of the driveway he swayed, and though he was in no fit state to appreciate the physics of gradients, this initial part of his journey highlighted the sort of respectable speed he might yet be capable of on future downhill stretches.

As I surveyed the arena, the taxi driver ducked into his cab to report the situation over the two-way radio. Then, retrieving his money-bag, he locked up his vehicle and set off in pursuit of his intoxicated adversary.

For my part, I'd decided to cast my own fate to the winds in order to observe from closer quarters how things panned out and, never being one to shirk my community duty, perhaps to lend unobtrusive assistance, should propitious circumstances permit.

My veins seemed full of quicksilver as I turned off the record player, donned my shoes and grabbed my key, yet by the time I hit the street both absconder and pursuer had vanished from view.

But not from earshot. For, while I stood there at the bottom of the driveway scanning the immediate vicinity, there came from my left the repeated cry, “He has stolen my money!”

There was little doubt that the protagonists had gone round to the back of the reserve, into Billyard Avenue. I, of course, knowing my way around the district, had only to traverse the aforementioned ornamental bridge to catch them up, which I now proceeded to do, except that my innate sleuth’s discretion dictated that I need not rush things.

I was crossing the bridge and about to step down into Billyard Avenue when the taxi driver’s hitherto repetitive shout suddenly acquired a new message:

“Help! Help! He has stolen m . . . Aargh! Aaaargh! . . . he has broken my arm with his bottle! Aargh! Help!”

This assault put a much different complexion on things. I’d have to be more than circumspect now: a civic attitude, however laudable, in no way demanded recklessness.

A fine night-beat procession we made along Billyard Avenue.

All that was missing was that march bit at the end of Prokofiev’s *Peter and the Wolf*. Yet, although we were destined to an overall forward motion, no one could have called it very swift progress at all. Our total journey would be only about 700 metres, but it took us over half an hour.

The reason being, certainly, that every few steps the individual *en état d’ébriété* would pause to gaze lovingly at the bottle he was carrying and then involuntarily danced left or right a bit before staggering forwards. A few cautious paces behind him followed his wounded Oriental nemesis, still intermittently crying out his grievance to what was increasingly looking like an utterly apathetic neighbourhood.

A diplomatic dozen metres further back — yours truly.

He could hardly be portrayed as a runaway in the literal sense of the word, our erstwhile taxi passenger. Yet what he lacked in steady strides he surely made up for in stubbornness — a trait that showed every sign of prevailing. Once he’d got a whiff of his domination of the situation, it seemed, only a state of unconsciousness would stop him.

What staying power! Totter and sway he might, reel and lurch he did, but onward ever onward he proceeded, toward some secret destination that he himself had perhaps only the vaguest awareness of.

But where were the police? So far they had failed to find their fugitive — assuming always that they had been informed and were searching at all.

In the meantime, the principal players in this night-time drama — one wobbly malefactor, one wronged coachman, and one public-spirited citizen — had arrived at the end of Billyard Avenue and had begun to make their conscientious way right into Ithaca Road. Careful not to approach too closely, for fear of further injury, the taxi man maintained a wary distance, but never left off his pursuit, despite his obvious pain.

For my part, I was beginning to have third thoughts. All the available evidence pointed unerringly to the fact that there wasn’t going to be an arrest featuring vital key witnesses, so what was the point of my involvement?

And anyway, neither of the other two was even aware of my

presence. This, of course, had been my deliberate policy from the very start of this outing, but now, in the absence of any encouragement whatever from them my position was fast becoming untenable. I was just contemplating the unthinkable — retiring from the scene — when I realised that the leader of our gloomy parade, notwithstanding his insecure steps, was about to attain the busy corner of Elizabeth Bay Road.

It was clear to me that if he turned right he was going to end up in Kings Cross. Two considerations, however, stood in the way of such a deviation rightwards.

The first was the bright illumination of that Garden of Earthly Delights, which even the befogged brain in question would have surely wanted to avoid. The second was the pure effort of struggling uphill against that Newtonian force by which all bodies tend to be attracted towards the centre of the earth.

To turn left would be the obvious way to go, and taking several deep breaths I resolved to continue if he made that choice, otherwise to pack it in.