

‘Sugar spilt is profit lost.’

My grandfather, Seán the Grove, had a cautionary tale, if not a parable, for every little incident. He would carefully tip the last few grains of sugar from the large scoop into a strong brown-paper bag on the scales. It was one of those old-fashioned balances with the pound weight on one side and the bag of sugar on the other. Finally the sugar would have the measure of the weight and would gently seesaw itself downward as the weight went upwards, until they were in perfect balance. Granda would stop the flow of sugar exactly on the mark.

‘Don’t do the customer and don’t do yourself.’ And then would come the question. ‘How many should we have?’

‘Half a hundredweight is fifty-six pounds. There should be fifty-six bags.’

‘Good. Good. You’re not wasting your time up there with the Brothers. Now we’ll count them, to be sure.’

There would be a restatement of the lecture during the count.

‘Don’t waste. Be honest. Give every man his due.’

Of course there wasn’t the slightest need for him to be filling bags of sugar. There was plenty of help around if he wanted it. But he undertook the task for a number of reasons. Firstly, few things irritated him as much as spilt sugar. The sound and feel of grains of sugar underfoot grated on him to an irrational degree. Taking charge of the sugar himself ensured that it would not be spilt. Secondly, it kept him in the centre of things and it meant that he wasn’t idle. Also – and this was important – it wasn’t hard work. I don’t think I ever saw him break sweat.

In fact, Seán the Grove had a great lack of confidence in the potential of people with the reputation for being hard, physical workers. He held the view that they would never get much further than where they were. A great believer in exploiting and making the

best of any given situation, one of his better moves was to acquire the heart disease angina in his late middle age. He minded it and nursed it for about thirty years and at any moment would explain to you the importance of 'minding the ticker'. Mind it he did, and it improved the quality of his life. When he finally died, in his late eighties, it was not from angina but ripe old age.

He was a most successful businessman, but he rarely took his hands out of his pockets. What he excelled at was buying and selling. He would purchase quality at a bargain and sell at a profit and all parties in between would be treated fairly. He made money without making enemies. There was nobody he did not have word for, he was a great talker and his popularity was legendary. The people he did business with tended to trust him and become his friends. Commercial travellers warmed to him. One of them, Denis Guiney, asked him to become a partner in acquiring a substantial drapery business. My grandfather declined. Guiney went on to build his business, Clery's, into one of Dublin's great department stores. A very rare missed opportunity for Seán the Grove.

My grandfather was born in 1885, or so he told me, and christened John Moriarty. As often as not he was called Jack. He acquired the name of Seán the Grove from the name of his farm, The Grove, just on the edge of Dingle town under Cnoc a'Chairn, where he had been born, and to distinguish him from all the other Moriartys. It is hard to describe his daily activity in a manner which reflects his success. Every day he would walk up to the farm in the Grove and look around. I can never remember him to work on the farm, but he would question Uncle Benny, or give directions. In the shop, which was quite small, he would talk to the customers while my grandmother did the work. All he ever seemed to do was to sell men's shoes and caps and to weigh and pack the loose sugar and tea. I have no doubt but that he was given the task of fitting the shoes

because my grandmother, who was spotlessly clean, refused point-blank to be subjected to the olfactory onslaught from feet and socks just released from the hot and sweaty confines of heavy leather boots or rubber wellingtons. In fact, my grandmother would regularly advise people with smelly feet that the best cure for them was to bathe them regularly 'in your own morning water'. I never tried it myself, but I know that 'morning water', that first urination before breaking fast, was commonly advised as a cure-all for things like chilblains and other foot problems. Anyway, grandfather sold footwear to all, smelly feet notwithstanding. Nothing pleased him more than the customer who walked in in a pair of shoes, stuck one big foot on the small footstool with the request, 'Same again, Jack, size eleven.'

'You got good value out of them,' he'd reply, 'they're a great shoe and they'll last forever if you keep them soled and polished. Clark's make them well.'

'I've no complaints, Jack. I wore those shoes at every Mass, funeral, wedding and races these last five years.'

Every night he would call down to our house. Every night he would play cards with us and every night there would be political talk. Seán the Grove loved politics. Even though they held differing political views, he got on great with my father, Myko. The happenings of the day would be recounted and lessons drawn from them. He mixed general advice on living with specific advice on playing cards: 'Trust every man if you must, but always cut the cards,' or the caution, 'The two worst payers are the one who pays beforehand and the one who does not pay at all.'

No two nights were ever the same. The card game that was played in our house was '31', the West Kerry version of '25', with the best trump being worth eleven. It was a game in which every deal was a test of judgement, skill, cooperation and survival tactics. The

decisions were complex; it was not just a matter of winning a 'trick' and it was not simply about winning out. There was also the consideration of whether or not it would be better to allow someone else to win in order to prevent the leading player from getting out. But in allowing another player to take one 'trick', you had to question whether your own trump card was good enough to take the next one. We were required to take the broad view. Seán the Grove expected you to make judgements on the quality or potential of a player's hand from the early tricks and plays.

My moves came under particular scrutiny. Every mistake I made would be analysed during the next deal. 'If you had held back the knave until the following trick you could have taken the last two and Myko wouldn't have won.' 'Only a fooleen would have led with the Ace of Hearts. Didn't you know the Five was still in play? If you had waited you could have taken two tricks with a sporting chance of the last!' At the time it was humiliating, but in reality it was no more than learning and teaching through the group method and typical of my mother's people, the Moriartys. For them, everything was a lesson to be learnt. Each day's experience layered on yesterday's. I can still hear my grandfather's voice when I had made some mistake. Shaking his head in mock sadness, he would sigh, 'Níolagan wouldn't be such a fooleen, John Pheadaí would be cuter.' This was a pointed reference to two of my schoolmates, Pat Neligan and John Francis Brosnan. If the truth were known, they were two of the easiest-going of all the gang and would be horrified to think that they were being held up as examples that would show me to disadvantage. They are the same and every bit as decent today.

Myko would relate the latest views and happenings from his colleagues in Tralee Garda Station, the 'experts and the philosophers' as he always referred to them. Many of the stories originated with District Justice Johnson, who also sat in the Dingle

court. He had a wry sense of humour and was forever trying to unravel pub brawls, fair-day fights and neighbours' quarrels about rights of way. Whereas the protagonists were introduced to the court by their full baptismal names, the oral evidence from witnesses in the box would refer to people by their pet names and nicknames, so, for example, Mr Patrick James Coffey became Red Padger in the telling. The defendant might have been baptised John Savage, but nobody ever heard him called anything but Daggers. Confusion reigned. Blank looks on the faces of witnesses. Lawyers trying to relate nicknames to official names. On these occasions the good judge was in the habit of interrupting the proceedings and cross-examinations with a plea to the lawyers that they 'read out the cast in order of appearance' so that he might interpret the evidence by knowing their names both as 'players and characters'.

No doubt his experiences in the courtrooms of Kerry provided the inspiration, but Justice Johnson went on to write a play called *The Evidence I Shall Give*, which was popular among amateur dramatic groups around the country for many years.

Our house was across the road from the courthouse, so we were right in the middle of the excitement on the Wednesday court sittings. As children, we often managed to slip past the garda on the door and sneak in to the back of the courtroom to listen to local scandals and see justice being doled out. We shared that space with every layabout from the town. They were all there to glory in the discomfiture of publicans who served after-hours, the 'found-ons' as the illegal drinkers were officially termed. This was all the stuff of meaty gossip later in the evening, none more so than fair-day fights and rights-of-way disputes.



My first visit to a dentist was at approximately five years of age and

for some reason, which has been long forgotten, it was Seán the Grove who brought me. All that remains in my memory is the pain of the experience and the soft, patient voice of the dentist, Michael Fitzgerald. My grandfather was a firm believer in the importance of young people minding their teeth and constantly cautioned against losing them, as he himself had done. That was quite forward-thinking at that time inasmuch as dentists were still seen as a sort of modern-day luxury and convenience. People would do anything rather than attend at the dentist. Every conceivable method to kill the pain of toothache was tried, from whiskey and *poitín* to witch hazel and cloves, and it was only when all else failed that the dentist was brought into play. Even then it was never to save the tooth, but to 'pull the damn thing and give me some peace'.

The accepted wisdom was that by middle age we would all be losing our teeth, to be replaced by dentures, or 'false teeth' as we called them. People used to take pride in their perfect false teeth and show them off. It was the introduction of school medical examinations that brought a new education and awareness to a generation as to the importance of dental health and hygiene. Seán the Grove made sure that his own children appreciated the importance of good grinders. Teresa always insisted that we brush our teeth at least twice daily and with Euthymol toothpaste, which at the time could only be purchased in a chemist's. That confirmed for her that it was the best!

My recollection of that first dental visit is that it was occasioned by a minor playground accident, which resulted in an injury to my front teeth and gums. Eventually, three of my upper front teeth were extracted to allow adequate space for two adult teeth to come down. And indeed the two buck teeth did eventually make their appearance. My grandfather insisted on weekly reports as to how the new teeth were doing. They did fine. For a quarter of a century after

that he would ask me, ‘How are Michael Fitz’s teeth?’ They gave no trouble for over forty years, at which point it became necessary to crown one of them. They are still grinding. And when the time came, Michael Fitz always voted for me in elections. Two victories at age five.



Being a practical man, Seán the Grove gave great consideration to the future employment of his family and his grandchildren. Any of his family who were interested in getting into business could count on him for a hand-out. At one stage four of his children, including my mother, had thriving businesses around the town and another had the farm. My grandparents were unusual for their time in that they made very little distinction between sons and daughters; they each got their opportunities, regardless of gender. Third-level education was an option for all of them, even though he would prefer to see them in business. My mother, Teresa, insists that the week she matriculated and was set on doing pharmacy, he convinced her to change her mind and gave her the shop on the Mall, which he had just purchased.

Although he was certainly a practising Catholic, Seán the Grove never struck me as being particularly religious and he tended towards the iconoclastic. One of his daughters, who was a qualified and practising pharmacist, surprised us all by joining a religious order and becoming a nun. My grandfather did not appear best pleased, but said very little. He would be the kind of man who, after investing significantly in her qualification, would feel cheated that the Medical Missionaries would get all the good of it. It was not that he was mean. He was not. But he was thrifty and practical and liked to enjoy the results of his investments.

Previously, this aunt, Auntie Ita, had been in a relationship with and

on the point of engagement to a most interesting man who had been a bank official but had given it all up to become an artist full-time. They were committed to each other and it seemed as though they would marry and spend their lives together. They never did. She felt the call of her religious vocation around this time and she answered it. It was the most difficult decision.

As a nun, she spent almost all of the rest of her life in Africa, returning only when she was well past retirement age, while the former bank official went on to become the leading and most celebrated Irish artist of his day. The week of his death the newspapers carried various reports and obituaries. In one of the accounts it was reported that as a young man, Tony O'Malley's heart had been broken by a woman whom he loved, but who had rejected him, asking, 'What would she be doing with a man who had given up his steady job, had only one lung and a few old paintings?'

The report was upsetting, untrue and unfair to Aunty Ita. As far as I can establish, the statement was made, but never by her. It was Seán the Grove who apparently said it. Why? Not from any animosity towards the man himself, but no doubt because of a concern that his daughter might not be provided for by a husband in seemingly indifferent health who had given up a secure job for a precarious profession. Those were different times, when neither the State nor all of its citizens had matured to an appreciation of the contribution of art to the community.

So the pharmacist and the artist split up, but each went on to make a significant contribution in their different areas. Still, throughout our lives we have derived great pleasure from some of the early works of the young Tony O'Malley, which he gifted originally to Aunty Ita and which hang to this day in my parents' house.



One of Seán the Grove's great heroes was his uncle, his mother's brother, Fr John Martin. For some reason, within the family he was always referred to as Fr Martin rather than as Fr John. Fr Martin was a scholar and linguist, well-versed in the Classical languages and in German. He had travelled through the Continent and had been a curate in Lancashire as a very young priest. In the first decade of the last century he was appointed parish priest of Tarbert, north Kerry. Immediately prior to that he had been a curate in Cahirdaniel, in the southern end of County Kerry. As a curate he had established a reputation for taking a great interest in the affairs of the community and the welfare of the people. In fact, in an effort to stabilise prices, each Sunday he would read out, at Cahirdaniel Mass, the average prices of food by the merchants in the neighbouring towns of Sneem and Cahirciveen so that parishioners could decide in which town to spend their money that week. Clearly he had no Moriarty blood in him. The Moriarts would have been best friends of the merchants. Having no interest in wealth for himself, it was said that he left Cahirdaniel without even the travel cost to Tarbert. On his elevation to PP it was important that his new status be reflected in his trappings. As a gift for his uncle, my grandfather bought a horse in Dingle and rode all the way to Tarbert, a journey of about sixty miles, to deliver the animal. When he arrived at the presbytery, wasn't there a trade-union picket, placed by the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO), outside the priest's house!

Apparently, when Fr Martin arrived in Tarbert there was a vacancy for a teacher in the local school. A very popular local teacher expected to be offered the job, but Fr Martin had a different idea and he was the school manager. Sure, he knew a mighty good teacher from Cahirdaniel who was available and came highly recommended. Her family were the best of people. He duly proposed her for the job. Clearly the poor man wasn't very political. There was outrage.

The school principal and the teachers were incensed, as was the community, that a runner-in would take a job earmarked for the local and said that they would oppose his proposal – no light undertaking in those days when the clergy's word was law. Fr Martin was determined to stamp his authority on them and insisted on having his way. There was an immediate strike.

Seán the Grove was allowed through the picket line to his besieged uncle, who told him how he had made the choice of the Cahirdaniel girl above the local. He finished his story by asking, 'What would you have done, Jack?' My grandfather, who knew that all business is local, replied that, if it were up to him, he would have 'given it to the local girleen'. Fr Martin had no doubt been expecting the full moral support of his nephew, and snarled, 'Well, maybe then you should go outside and walk up and down with that crowd!'

Seán the Grove loved telling that story and would finish it by saying, with more than a degree of satisfaction, 'and in the end he had to give in and give it to the local'. Things obviously improved after that first *contretemps*, as Fr Martin spent the rest of his priestly career in Tarbert, which he grew to love. He became popular and respected. He also had the support of a very loyal housekeeper and there was a whispered family rumour, never proved, that perhaps the relationship was more than platonic. But then those were the days when it would not have been unheard of for a parish priest to ask his housekeeper to go up and warm the bed for him. It would be an easy and understandable thing to get so cosy and comfortable that she might still be there when the priest arrived in the bedroom.

When eventually he died, Fr Martin was buried in the graveyard beside the church in Tarbert. If you are driving past, it is easy to pick out the grave by the Celtic high cross that marks its location, to the left, at the very back of the cemetery. I find it very ironic that, while his headstone stands authoritatively and imposingly at the back,

anyone wishing to visit it must first walk past the first grave to the left of the entrance gate. It is the last resting place of a former INTO president, Brendan Scannell. Brendan was a larger-than-life character and a friend of mine. He would have appreciated the quirk of fate that has him providing a perpetual picket to the man who did battle with the INTO and who was my great-granduncle.



Seán the Grove was always looking ahead and planning. One day, when I was a young child, he asked me what I would like to be when I grew up.

‘A bishop or a carpenter,’ I answered innocently and enthusiastically, sure that my choices would satisfy him.

‘Not bad. Not bad.’

But before I could bask in the afterglow of his approval, he astonished me by advising me to become a parish priest. He claimed it was the best job of all. My childish protests that prayers and praying did not really appeal to me were dismissed as being utterly irrelevant. This had nothing whatever to do with religion. He did not even bother to explain that a bishop was also a priest, a linkage that had clearly escaped my assessment of career options. The point about being a PP was that it was a well-paid and respected position that brought with it much influence and a good house. Nobody could order you about, not even the bishop. In fact, in his estimation it was better than being a bishop, who was answerable to a number of layers of higher power. Times have changed somewhat on this one, the bishops have wised up and nowadays parish priests have to sign a contract with the bishop before being appointed. However, long before that alteration had occurred, my mind was made up that a clerical life was not for me. And Seán the Grove knew that well.

My grandfather’s world was one of farming and business, and if he

had his way that's where he would have wanted to see all of us. Sometimes he took a mischievous delight in presenting himself as being a bit naive. 'Tell me now, girleen,' he said to Joan the first time he met her, 'are ye in business or have ye land?' When Joan explained that, yes, her father had a farm, but that she was the youngest in a family of four boys and four girls and had no entitlement or expectations in that direction, he completely dismissed her protestations. 'It does not matter, girleen, some of it will fall to you.' Dingle friends loved that story. And indeed, maybe he was right. Joan's father very generously gave us the site on the farm where we built our house.



Seán the Grove always maintained that any young lad could learn a lot from being given a ten-pound note and a map of the world and told to come home in five years. He felt that every new experience should fit into a steep and continuous learning curve. I remember being with him at the Dingle races when he took me to see the 'Trick o' the Loop' man. This particular gent operated out of sight of the police. He carried with him a small wooden box on which he placed a cloth of green baize. Taking a longish, soft leather belt, he brought the two ends together, put a pencil in the resulting loop, then wrapped the doubled belt around the pencil and laid it on the table for all to view. I could clearly see the pencil in the loop.

He kept up a great chit-chat all the while.

'Now, keep an eye on the pencil. Nothing could be easier. Keep your eyes open and make a fortune. Don't ask me why I do it, but I've given four half-crowns away in the last half-hour.'

On removing the pencil from the loop he most foolishly offered the audience an even-money bet against them returning the pencil to the correct loop. He even showed us how easy it was, by holding the

pencil, pulling the belt straight and, sure enough, the pencil was trapped in the loop. No wonder he was losing money, I thought. It was simple, anyone could do it.

‘That man is going to lose more money foolishly, Granda.’

The bet was offered again. A man who was not a local placed a bet and won a red ten-shilling note. The Trick o’ the Loop man looked worried.

‘You’re making a poor man of me!’ he protested. ‘But I’m going to give you one more chance.’ Carefully and in full view he rolled up the belt again with the pencil in the loop.

‘I’m going to leave the pencil in the loop so you can all have a look. Now, any bet?’

Sure, you couldn’t lose. It was money for nothing. My grandfather finally conceded to my earnest requests for money and granted me a loan of half-a-crown. I rushed forward to make my fortune.

‘Are you sure, young fellow?’ he said doubtfully, looking around when I handed him the half-crown. I never noticed my grandfather nodding to him.

Taking the pencil from the foolish fellow I stuck it in the obvious loop with more certainty than anything I had previously done in all of my young life.

‘You can still change your mind,’ said the Trick o’ the Loop man.

Hah! He knows he’s lost and is trying to talk me out of it. ‘No, it’s this one. This is the right one,’ I said smartly.

‘All right, young fellow,’ he conceded. He pulled the belt smoothly. It came clean; the pencil was outside the loop. Someone shouted, ‘Guards.’ In one simple movement he lifted my bright half-crown and ran off with his table, muttering ‘damned Peelers’ under his breath.

There I was, bereft of fortune and naked in my scarlet embarrassment; the object of much comment and ridicule from the passing public.

There was not a day during the following month nor a week during the following year when my grandfather did not find some reason to refer to my foolishness at the races – losing a ‘lorry wheel’ to the Trick o’ the Loop man. The story became a parable to the younger generation. As a learning experience I would have to concede that it was a far more impactful lesson than a puritanical lecture on the evils and dangers of gambling.



As soon as I was old enough – and that might have been before the legal age – I was deputised to drive Seán the Grove to funerals in the estate car belonging to his son, Foxy John. These were never dull outings. Burying the dead with due respect was important and was a co-operative effort. It was done in Dingle in the same manner as the biblical civic responsibility. Attendance at funerals was much more than a mere political or business-related drudgery. Certainly, it was discharged out of a sense of duty, but it was also genuinely part of neighbourliness and community. It would be unthinkable not to attend the funeral of a neighbour, and ‘neighbour’ was a loose term that actually meant anyone in the locality. Contradictory as it may sound, dying was an inexorable and inevitable act of living. It is a purely logical fact that one has to be alive to die.

As youngsters we saw death being greeted as a natural part of life. We were never shielded from it. Young children would be brought gently to the coffin of their grandparent and spoken to in a soft voice.

‘We’ll say goodbye to Granny.’

Even the use of the colloquialism relaxed the tense and timid child.

‘Goodbye, Granny.’

‘Do you want to give Granny a kiss?’

A step too far, maybe. A slow shake of the head.

‘That’s all right, *a ghrá*. Say a small prayer.’

But sometimes there would be no demurring when the mother, holding the child's hand in her own, would quietly reach across and in the most natural way in the world place both their hands on Granny's. Curiosity satisfied and fear banished. It was a learning experience.

There always had to be a report on the funeral for those who were unable to attend. It was a reckoning of popularity; a noting of surprising absences, or perhaps surprise attendances; a naming of extended family and far-out relatives, particularly arrivals from overseas.

'Was it a big funeral?'

'The cars were stretched back around Milltown Bridge and up the High Road. In fairness, all the nephews and nieces came back for it. They gave him a fine send-off.'

Most aspects of Dingle life were competitive, and this included funerals. The language had to be carefully chosen. 'That was the biggest funeral I can remember' would be all right to say to a family member or relative of the deceased on the day, but if it were said to neighbours it could easily put them into the position of having to defend family honour by reminding the listeners of the huge gathering at their last funeral.

Because they were such a common feature of our lives, funerals did not tend to be very sad occasions. All the good done by the dearly departed would be recalled and celebrated and any bad would be hidden away. 'Never speak ill of the dead' was a given on these occasions. As a sign of their grieving and as a mark of respect to the dead, close family relatives would wear a black cloth diamond sewn on the upper arm of their jackets for a mourning period of months. Afterwards, life went on as normally as circumstances would allow.

Tommy McCarthy was a neighbour and lifelong friend of Seán the

Grove's. They grew up together. They met at the fair. They talked in the snug and they were business competitors. Their friendship never wavered. Tommy's eldest daughter, Sheila, married Seán the Grove's eldest son, Patty. The friendly rivalry of youth continued between them through life. Tommy was a publican, farmer and bakery owner. The bakery had a strong cultural impact on our lives. Normally it supplied two types of fresh bread on a daily basis – the ordinary *builín* or batch loaf and what was called the basket loaf. This was smaller in size and had a curly design on the top; my recollection is that it had a sweeter, richer taste. At Hallowe'en it produced rich, curranty, treasure-filled barm brack. Just before Christmas, McCarthy's bakery also provided an extraordinary bread called butterloaf. This was a big loaf and had different flavours; it was baked in a cooler oven, but was particularly memorable for the fact that it was a seed loaf, with copious amounts of caraway seeds mixed into the bread. As children we hated it for the appearance, taste and smell of the seeds; we thought they looked like mice droppings. As we grew older we grew to love that bread. My search of bakeries through the years has failed to yield similar bread anywhere, and to this day my mother looks forward to receiving by post, from Tommy Devane, an annual pre-Christmas gift of a Dingle butterloaf, though nowadays it is baked in Castleisland. It's as appetising as ever and stays fresh for days and days, like long ago.

The day of Tommy's funeral, my inclination was to be a little bit more deferential towards my grandfather. There was a sense of loss and sadness about him and he was quiet for a long time. The normal chat about business and family stories was missing. But by the time we were back in the town and had the car parked he had come to terms with it. We were rounding the corner from Green Street into Main Street when, with a glint in his eye, he turned to me, straightened himself to his full height, which was not that high, and

said, 'Do you know, I'm the oldest man in the town now.'

Something gained out of the day. Age was venerable in Dingle.



After the funeral of Seán the Grove's sister, we were leaving Kildrum graveyard, at the end of the Long Road outside Dingle, when he took a good look at the family tomb. There was a bit of a crack in the side of it. He turned to me and said, 'I'll be next in there. I'll give you a red ten-shilling note if you come back next week and fill in that crack. I hate damp.'

The family tomb was a large, plain affair, most unattractive. The story was that Old Johnny, my great-grandfather and a son of Daddy Tom's, bought the plot when he felt he was coming to the end of his life and built the tomb himself. When he had finished it he went home and took to the bed, which he didn't leave for the remaining six months of his life. My uncles recalled a revolting habit he had of keeping a container of rancid butter beside his bed from which he would take a dollop to drop into his mug every time he was having tea. Maybe that was what killed him.

My uncle Patty Atty, the eldest of Seán the Grove's eleven children, told me that every time a new child was born into the family, Old Johnny would call to the front door of the shop in Main Street. He would rap on the red-and-black floor tiles inside the door for attention. Having ascertained whether it was a boy or a girl, he always made the same comment: 'A poor man can't have too many of them.' Eventually, Patty Atty plucked up the courage to query his daunting grandfather about this. Old Johnny explained that where there was a small family, the children were inclined to stay to inherit the property. When the wealthy man had a large family, they would all stick around disputing the wealth, contributing nothing, protecting their own interests, and there would be endless feuding

and fighting. However, when the poor man had a large family, what little they had was shared in their rearing, there was nothing for them to stay for or fight over, so they tended to leave and fend for themselves. In all likelihood, if they did well for themselves they would be generous towards their parents and would be happier and friendlier towards their siblings. It was the type of explanation regarding the inclination towards good or evil of humankind that one might expect in the ruminations of Hobbes, Locke or Rousseau, but it came from Old Johnny and probably had a wealth of experience behind it, not to mention the lubrication of rancid butter!