

Death, ill health and resurrection?

Cian O'Neill reflects on the cruel world of politics and warns of a dangerous Samurai-like final thrust from the Broom.

So goes Edward, last of Crooked Joe Kennedy's boys, under the uncomplaining earth: a great legislator, a bad driver, but above all a man who liked to eat lobster. That American summer is ended, and so too is the wild rush of optimism surrounding the Presidency of Barack Obama, who is being wracked on the private healthcare lobbyists' wheel. Obama was himself a beneficiary of Ted Kennedy's expressed kindness at a critical juncture during the Democratic campaign, and while he came into office looking awful big, it would take more than a lion of the Senate to safely escort Obama's Healthcare reform through both Houses of Congress now. The industry has risen like Belial, seeming 'for dignity compos'd, and high exploit'. But in its designs and effect it reveals itself to be most false, most wicked. Some 45 million people in the United States are without healthcare coverage and they live in mortal dread of a head-cold. Well, let them eat aspirin, say the fiscal conservatives.

Obama has betrayed a naïveté, even an arrogance in his attempt to cast away the lies of the Right in America with but a gesture, and also by not going to Main Street, as the commentators like to say, sooner. He has sought to deploy reason and sense in the battle of TV words over the issue, which is folly. As JFK's career could have told him, TV is not about truth, nor is truth within its ken, and no man ever campaigned to have his pocket emptied. So the President should be fighting the private healthcare lobby with gloves off, if he truly means to fulfil his promise of change, and in so doing honour the legacy of Ted, who in his youth brought healthcare reform to the floor of the Senate when it was as unpopular as gout.

Which is about as popular as the SNP is in Westminster right now, thanks to its interesting decision to free the dying Abdelbaset Al-Megbrahi and send him home to Libya. This in turn made it pos-

sible for the families of IRA victims to finally secure the 'faciliatory' assistance of the UK Government in their bid for compensation from Gaddafi, that great [former?] friend of Gerry and the Boys. Jeffrey Donaldson has found himself, to his evident frustration, back on the evening news bulletins, and we wish him well or aspirin. But there is great constitutional interest in all of this: namely, could Scotland become de facto independent through a series of political manoeuvres by Downing Street to leave unpopular, properly governmental decisions to Holyrood? That remains to be seen, yet in this instance the Scottish Nationalists took the poisoned chalice of Al-Megbrahi's repatriation and paraded it proudly before the eyes of the world, happy to look like a sovereign government. It was an awful thing to have to do to help the UK – and that still includes Scotland – get a dram or two of the largest oil reserves in Africa. But they did it with aplomb, and Kenny MacAskill has surely taken the title of 'Most Implacable Scottish Cad' from George Galloway, who may now determine upon a new life in the service of something other than Self or Mammon, sometime after hell freezes over.

Hell will have to freeze over for Labour to start believing that they can upset the odds at the next election, which will come on fleet feet once Parliament has sat again on October 12th. The blue blood is up for the Tories and they shall come back from their long vacations with a terrible certainty in their minds: victory is ours. However they may find that Brown becomes a more difficult foe than they currently anticipate precisely because his defeat seems so inevitable. Any basic reading of politics, or bushido – the way of the [Samurai] warrior, would teach that an opponent who is certain of death may just come to accept it, at which point he becomes terribly dangerous because he has nothing left to lose. Brown is a dead man walking, they say,

yet he spent long weeks of his youth in a darkened room to save the one eye left him after a rugby accident, and later underwent experimental surgery at Edinburgh Royal Infirmary to secure that partial sight. Marked by defatigation, bled dry of his dignity by a superb Tory media operation he is, yes, but he may discover a new lightness, the closer he gets to the dole queue. Those antique enough to remember Thatcher's last appearance at the dispatch box may anticipate with relish such bravura, such a last hurrah. Hell may, or may not, freeze over. But whichever way it is going, the days are certainly getting colder, and the Big Show is swinging into view.

