

Categorie concurs: *Premiu special*

Tip text: *Literar*

It was in the playground of Chesham Prep that I tripped and fell on my face one morning and broke my nose. At the time my nose was a cute little button — if any part of me has ever been cute — and the accident, although bloody and loud, was unremarkable in the life of a small child. Over the years however, my nose grew and grew and it became apparent' by the time I was fourteen that, like its owner, it was not growing straight. From time to time through my teens and beyond I would say, 'I must get this damned nose straightened one day...' to which a gushing chorus would always reply, 'Oh no, Stephen, you mustn't... it's so distinguished.' There is of course nothing distinguished about a bent nose. A duelling scar may rightly be called distinguished, as might a slightly cleft chin or a glamorously imperceptible limp, but a bent nose is idiotic and unpleasant. I suppose people were trying to be kind and protect me from the humiliation of discovering that, even after an operation to straighten my ridiculous nose, I would still look a mess. The trauma of finding out that a straight-nosed Stephen looked every bit as unappetising as a bent-nosed Stephen might have tipped me completely over the edge.

We keep our insignificant blemishes so that we can blame them for our larger defects. The problem of my bent nose comes to mind when I have regular arguments with a friend on political subjects. He is firmly of the opinion that the existence of the monarchy is absurd, unjust and outdated. It would be hard to disagree with that. He believes, however, that in the name of liberty and social justice they should be abolished.

This is where we part company. I think of the monarchy and aristocracy as Britain's bent nose.

Foreigners find our ancient nonsenses distinguished, while we think them ridiculous and are determined to do something about them one day. I fear that when we do get rid of them, as I suppose we shall, we are going to let ourselves in for the psychic shock of discovering that the process has not made us one jot freer or one ounce more socially equitable a country than France, say, or the United States of America.

There will be great psychological damage done to us if we take the step of constitutional cosmetic alteration. The world would stare at us and whisper and giggle about us excitedly, as people always do when friends have had some sort of plastic surgery. We would unwind our bandages, present our new, straight-nosed constitution to the international community and await the fawning compliments and gasps of admiration. How hurt we will be when we see that the international community is actually yawning and, far from being dazzled by the blaze of justice and freedom and beauty that radiates from our features [...]. Britain would suddenly have no absurd minor blemish to blame for its failures, which are of course no more than the defects of being human. If we concentrated on our real defects [...], then we might indeed be better off. The trouble with doing a thing for cosmetic reasons is that one always ends up with a

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cosmetic result, and cosmetic results, as we know from inspecting rich American women, are ludicrous, embarrassing and horrific.

Stephen Fry, *Moab is My Washpot*, Random House, 1997