

The Immoral Calendars

I

From nine o'clock at night till one in the morning, time had hung heavy on the hands of Aleš, the duty officer at the police-station. How, he thought, was he going to hold out till six o'clock (when he would be relieved), sitting over the paperwork and the newspapers when, by a dirty trick of Fate, the men on duty couldn't play his favourite card-game?

So he lay on his bed, lit his pipe and talked politics. At moments like this he would take a strong line. He became an Austrian Cato, stern and unwavering and full of distrust for the Italians, which he vented in the most forceful terms. The men lying on their beds beside him, who lacked a definitive position, listened respectfully.

'Under no circumstances should anyone imagine that the Triple Alliance will hold. Trent and Trieste will become bones of contention one day.' He sighed and looked around for a match. When somebody had given him one, he lit up again and announced that in Milan and Turin, and indeed in Rome as well, they were burning the Austrian flag at every opportunity. But they'd get their come-uppance one day. They were ripe for another Custoza, those ruffians. His agitation increased and the young policeman Pavelka, who had dropped off, began to whistle through his nose. He was woken up by the Chief, who was shouting that there were bound to be complications. All Austrian citizens . . .

In through the door came Constable Dekl, back from the beat to report: '*Melde gehorsam, nix Neues. Ich habe ein naughty calendar konfisziert.*' The official expression disappeared from Dekl's face at that point and he announced triumphantly: 'A king-size *Schweinerei*, *Herr Wachkommandant*. Some really juicy stuff. Filthy pictures to bring joy to your heart!'

He put the bundle down on a chair. And at that moment, the Chief's boredom vanished. 'Let's have it out, then, this muck of yours!'

The constable undid the bundle and gave the Chief a copy of the

confiscated item, while all the policemen clustered round.

'*Herrgott!*' said one spontaneously, looking at the title-page. 'There's a pair of thighs for you!'

'There you are!' said the Chief. 'That's the sort of thing our young people are supposed to look at! Young people not yet out of school!' His voice softened. 'Blimey! Look at this other one in the picture here! Devil take her eyes! She's stark naked!'

'And blow me!' said Constable Dekl, 'there's some nice things further on.'

'This one's not bad either!'

'Bollocks, man! The one next to her is prettier, and spicier!'

'This little beauty's got fuller hips. And the way she's posing on the couch is a bit of all right. Filthy swine! How dare they draw things like this?'

'*Herr Wachkommandant*, just read the poem underneath. That's not bad either.'

'It's pretty good; but there's a *double entendre* here. They ought to be ashamed to write stuff like that and print it! There are schoolchildren drinking in this bloody . . . what d'you call it?'

'Pornography, *Herr Wachkommandant*,' said Pavelka, supplying the missing word.

'Shocking!' said Constable Mika. 'But good stuff. These trousers are well drawn.'

'And the joke's not bad: Do you like me better with trousers, darling, or without?'

'Without, I would say, wouldn't you?' said the Chief, turning to the other policemen with a twinkle in his eye. 'The things these filthy pigs think up!'

'Go on, *Herr Wachkommandant*, just have a look at the last page but one. The dancer in the baths. Not only is she completely naked, but the attendant is handing her a sheet.'

'That's nice. They ought to stamp on things like this most severely. I say, I reckon that if you go round all the newsagents, you'll find more of the same. Commissioner Peroutka is going to have a good time tomorrow!'

II

'Beg leave to report, Commissar, that following instructions, we went round the newsagents yesterday and confiscated some calendars with

really filthy material in them. I've brought one along. I would particularly draw your attention to the last picture but one, the dancer in the baths. And then that woman on the couch. The title-picture as well. Not only is it an offence against morality, but I think the Chief Commissar would like it. I'll take the liberty of sending a copy upstairs as well. If you would be so very kind as to take a close look at the shameless bit I've marked with blue pencil. That's a serious matter. Wherever I've marked a page, you'll find first-class examples of lewd material. If you'd care to look on page thirty, you'll find a dirty poem. A special delicacy is "Intimacies of the Harem". Not only are there crass offences against morality in the text; the illustrations are a real treat. Saucy little Mohammedan girls being looked after by some poor devil of a eunuch.'

'Wow!' said Commissar Peroutka, when he had perused the contents. 'You must show this to our Councillor as well. He enjoys looking at things like this.'

III

The calendars went down well. The Chief Commissar of Police took two and the Councillor three. The copy-clerks had one each. The rest were distributed about the police-station. The police investigation into this immoral material was a very thorough one. And precisely by ensuring that reading-matter like this did not fall into the hands of those for whom it was unsuitable, they acted as guardians of public morals.