

the history of their country, the best, simplest way to begin is to learn about its kings and queens. The personal principle is a civilised one, but it can easily be corrupted — as in totalitarian leadership cults — or neglected — as in bureaucracies. It is successfully embodied in our monarchy.

Our monarchy also represents another principle which is more and more neglected in modern society, and that is altruism and duty. The Queen symbolically stands for power, which is why she holds the sceptre, but in practice she represents the voluntary laying aside of power — the quality of mercy. She spends a huge part of her life giving attention to all those who try to help other people — visiting schools and hospitals and churches and old people's homes and youth ventures, being the patron of charities, and giving her blessing to good works. And she is seen to be doing this, not in order to aggrandise herself and become more famous and powerful, but simply to uphold what is kind and gentle. The idea of being disinterested is now so rare that many people do not know the true meaning of the word. It applies to the monarch, and it is hard to imagine it applying half so strongly to anyone else.

Finally, a protest: many people are concerned, I am sure, about democratic accountability. Many are also concerned for national independence. What an absurd distraction it is to worry about the minor shortcomings of our monarchy when both of these are severely threatened. By far the biggest present assault on our rights comes not from the Crown or the House of Windsor but from the starry diadem of European Union.

The above is adapted from a contribution to Power and the Throne: The Monarchy Debate, edited by Anthony Barnett, and published on 21 July by Vintage in association with Charter 88 at £5.99.

'SHE'S ITALIAN, YOU KNOW'

Carla Powell decides, after thirty years of union with the English, that we simply can't mix with the Europeans

AS A VERY Italian Italian, married to a very English Englishman for 30 years, with two sons who represent perfectly the two facets of our union, I know that what makes for happiness is not integration but harmony. And that harmony must be based on the recognition of unconquerable differences.

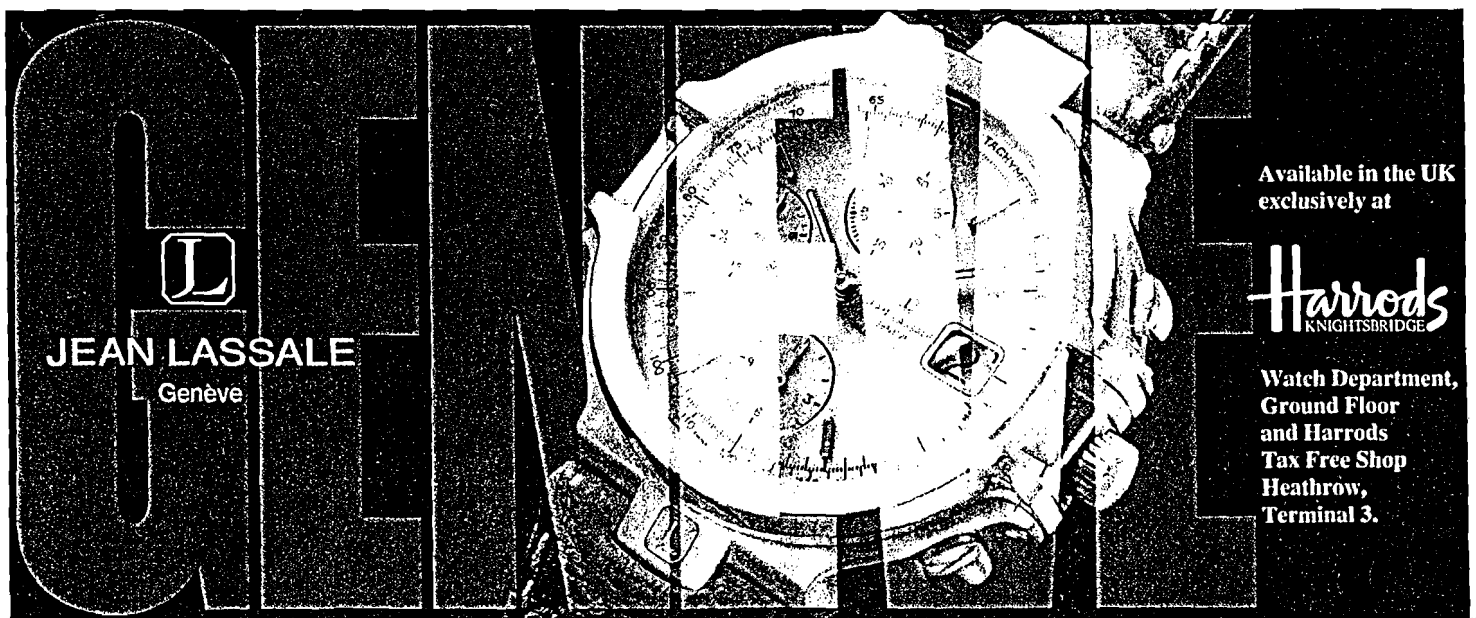
Thus I know from my own life that the sort of European union sought by the federalists of Brussels, such as Jacques Delors and Jean-Luc Dehaene, will not work — at any rate if Britain is part of it. I say this not because I do not love the English, but precisely because I do. They are highly civilised and ultra-sophisticated. They are warriors, brave as lions. They are self-disciplined and fair. They love honesty and they have a passion for the ridiculous. I have always found them deceptively romantic, too.

But it does no good to deny that there are unbridgeable gaps between Britain and the Continent, on both the personal and the national level. Language is one. We foreigners have made intense and continuous efforts to master English. There has been no reciprocation. It infuriates me

when English friends, who can speak barely a word of any other language, become patronisingly incomprehending when I make a fairly minor mistake in their own: 'Really, Carla, what *can* you mean?' All I had said was desert, meaning dessert. They go for my spelling, too, these career women and social ladies, even though they are notoriously bad at it themselves.

The English seem to feel that all Europe should not only speak English but do so without fault. Anything less is eccentric, even perfidious. Yet very few English people take advantage of the new language-teaching technology and the endless foreign travel they indulge in to come to terms with French, Italian or German. How many English people have read a book in a foreign language this year? I would not call myself a reading woman, but I have got through half a dozen in English, fiction and non-fiction.

Then there are different ways of thinking. We mainland Europeans love to weave abstract concepts and entertain big ideas. We need dreams; during much of our post-war history we did not have much else to keep us warm. This passion for dreams



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operates at both national and personal levels. I fantasise endlessly about retiring to Tuscany or Umbria, and having a *casa colonica*, like the ancient Romans when they grew too old for the Senate. My husband shatters my dreams in a succession of down-to-earth sentences. When will we ever be able to afford to retire? Who wants to live, in practice, in a farmhouse? And will Italy, at the rate it is going, be worth retiring to in ten years time? Everything is taken so literally. Do you always have to be so down-to-earth and dismissive — or pragmatic, as you prefer to call it? I imagine Jacques Delors felt just like I did when Margaret Thatcher took her pragmatic handbag to his dream of European union. He probably knew in his heart that his version of the Tuscan farmhouse was really a castle in the air. But the brutality of her assault stiffened his resolve to build it.

The truth is we Continentals adore what you call guff: we treasure grandiose phrases and rich cadences, we like to dazzle each other and ourselves with rhetoric. We relish hyperbole. We want not just to be loved but to be told so, and this is a point English husbands and British governments should both note. Your reserve may be dignified, but it makes us feel disdained. We like to hear enthusiastic phrases, even if we know they are a bit insincere. Guff has advantages over strict reason, especially when you are trying to seduce others into doing what you want. I will surrender to fine words where I will resist cold logic. The wartime slogan should be revised: idle talk costs nothing.

Then there is pomp and circumstance. The British are better at state occasions than any other people on earth. But they don't always recognise the European version. We love summits, supreme councils, declarations. We know that a lot of it is just bombast and vapourings (as you would say) but we like it all the same, and you

should respect our wishes. It's my experience that English husbands will go to almost any lengths to avoid celebrating a wedding anniversary. And similarly British governments pooch-pooch our attempts to create European ceremonials. You laugh at our 'Ode to Europe', forgetting it's by Beethoven as well as the Union's national anthem. It's important to remember that Ruritania is a European country too.

Then there is organisation. I now know that virtually every Englishman over a certain age personally organised the D-Day landings. And no doubt you are good organisers by yourselves. But try organising anything with the English and you get a shock. You are quickly told that foreigners have 'no judgment'. They are 'all over the place'. They are 'unreliable'. But on the basis of my experience the Englishman's organisational approach is to lay down his point of view and sulk if anyone differs from it.

The truth is that you are not good co-operators. Your independent spirit is too liable to degenerate into isolationism. We Continentals are much more willing to compromise for the sake of a quiet life, or to please others. You, on the other hand, can find a point of principle under every pebble. I have never come across people with so many peculiar principles of their own, and so unwilling to recognise the principles of others.

We must, in short, face the fact that the peoples of Europe are different and not getting any less so. The idea that we are becoming Euro-clones is a fantasy — thank God. I used to relish the way Margaret Thatcher introduced me to Downing Street visitors with the simple explanation: 'She's Italian, you know' — as though that would excuse me if I emptied the flower vases over Denis's head, or anything else I chose to do. Well, I am different. We all are. I share the Gaullist, Thatcherite, Goldsmithian vision of a Europe of inde-

pendent nations working voluntarily together within the framework of a free enterprise Europe.

Britain, in particular, will never be forced into an artificial framework. I warn the federalists of Europe not to try and cuddle the British hedgehog. After 30 years here I marvel that even union with Scotland has survived (well, sort of). I see no hope of the British making a union with anyone else. Nor should it. I have learned over the years that the British tradition of stability, steadiness and calm good sense is directly linked to their sturdy sense of independence. Allow your independence to be undermined and you lose your quintessential virtues too. Marriage to Europe is a bridge too far. Stay single.

Lady Powell is the wife of Sir Charles Powell, Lady Thatcher's former foreign policy adviser.

Mind your language

POLITICIANS have been disappointing me recently with their clichés. Not by using them — for a politician is as easily identified by his clichés as a jay by its plumage — but by getting them wrong.

So there was some government or opposition spokesman on the wireless the other day saying that people would 'give their back teeth' for something or other. No, no, no, as Mrs Thatcher used to say. People would give their eye teeth; back teeth are what they are fed up to.

There are, of course, deeper misapprehensions in the fossil world of cliché. Mr Major is always 'in the firing-line', by which political commentators mean he is being shot at. But when Lord Hartington (as he then was), writing in the *Daily Telegraph* on 2 May 1881, said that 'General Stewart was obliged to put every reserve man into the firing line', he did not mean that he arranged for them to be shot at, but to be in the line doing the shooting.

Lines feature widely in clichés. The bottom line is what people come down to, whether or not they realise it refers to accountancy. Politicians also desire frequently to draw a line under things — not to underline them but to render them as if by magic no longer operative. Another politician was expected to draw a line in the sand, though for what purpose did not appear. The party line is toed (or towed in those newspapers which think it is like a clothes-line). Yes, among the cliché-mongers it is, as Pliny said of the assiduous artist Apelles, 'nulla dies sine linea'. But then who are we penny-a-line merchants to complain?

Dot Wordsworth

