

## NOTES OF A MEETING OF CANTERBURY ROTARY BOOK CLUB

held at the home of Jennifer on 27th February 2020

1 PRESENT: Pauline , Caroline, Judith, Richard, Gill, Jennifer, Neil, Deborah, Brian

2. APOLOGIES; Georges, Alan, Viv, Tony

3. BOOK: "Factfulness" by Hans Rosling was suggested by Viv , who sent in a long email bewailing his inability to attend due to the the meeting falling on his birthday, for which Pauline was treating him to a football match featuring his favourite team ( which I believe won)

Rosling, who died in 2016, was a medic and statistician , and the book starts with a test for the reader by asking which of 3 alternative figures for each of a dozen or so population statistics is correct. Using actual survey figures he shows how, for all of them, most people's misinformation and prejudices lead them to give wildly inaccurate answers . As Viv said " Whilst we all focus on all the ills of the world, the brutality, the conflicts and the deep inequalities, we fail to recognise that there have been some surprising positives and achievements... Critically , the information is based on proper statistical analysis. In particular, the dramatic improvement over the past 30 years in worldwide health - life expectancy and reduction in child mortality. This has come about through an international effort, co-ordinated by the UN, and it shows what we are capable of if we all work together"

The chapters are short , each dealing with a different subject, and we considered them in turn. The first is about the "gap instinct" by which we imagine a huge gap between "us" and "them" - Deborah pointed out that often such gaps either no longer exist or are much mixed up - for example poverty is a relative for children in the UK. On the negativity instinct Neil quoted a fisherman in Folkestone giving his view and said how we are fed nonsense by a media only interested in bad things . The straight line instinct referred to the tendency to regard graphs and figures as continuing indefinitely in a straight line , shown as nonsense by considering that children never carry on growing at the same rate (and how big they would get if they did!). The fear instinct was put in perspective by showing that contrary to most prejudices, deaths from natural disasters over the pst hundred years have halved. The size instinct arises from our propensity to be overawed by a single large figure - which should be put in perspective by, for example, calculating it as a proportion of the population - always get something to compare a single figure with. The generalisation instinct was made memorable by an anecdote about a visit to an African tribe which sought to reward Rosling and a Danish friend of his by giving them a meal of large larvae , which Rosling avoided eating without causing offence by explaining he and his friend were from different tribes, and that Swedes never ate them, while Danes did - a generalisation the African tribe could understand - showing the importance of not generalising from one tribe to another. . The destiny instinct wrongly leads us to say , for example, that African nations can "never" catch the West - and hence that there is something inferior in ,their DNA - thus ushering in all sorts of eugenic arguments`, still held by many people. The perspective instinct urges us to look at things through different perspectives to acquire a balanced view: the blame instinct urges against finding a scapegoat for when things go wrong - rarely due to one person or cause. We had interesting discussions on all these topics, and some wondered if Viv's experience as long term Local Government officer , where he would have had to work through numerous alternative choices to arrive at an acceptable solution predisposed him towards the book. However, all who had read it enjoyed it as presenting a new way of thinking and we agreed

9/10

4. OTHER READS: Neil - "Rebel Yell" S C Gwynne - about "stonewall" Jackson in the U S Civil war - notwithstanding he was a top Confederate General, he apparently paid for the emancipation of his slaves (but have I got this right - why did he have to pay for own slaves?) - interesting insights; "Wolves eat Dogs" Martin Cruz Smith, and "Day of the Triffids" - John Wyndham - Neil really enjoyed this book , written when the Cold War was at its most menacing and he thought some of the imagery (the vicious plants) arose from the terror of the times. Pauline - Joseph O'Connor " Star of the sea" - about the Irish famine and emigration. Caroline had read nothing she could recommend. Judith - Kate Mosse " The Burning Chambers", Benjamin Black - "Prague Nights", Robert Galbraith "Lethal white". Deborah - Victoria Hislop " Those who are loved" - a

gift from Jeff, and about the Nazi occupation and subsequent Greek Civil war - a family suffers on both sides of the conflict easy and enjoyable read. Richard had been reading up on bees in anticipation of the season. Gill - halfway through "The Salt Path" about a couple setting off together on a long walk when the husband is diagnosed with a terminal illness. Jennifer - Ian Rankin "Westward" (regrettably this one was so exciting that she could recall nothing about it), Adam Kaye "This is going to hurt" - supposed to be the amusing side of doctoring but a bit too near the bone. Santa Montefiore - "The Gypsy Madonna" - good bedtime reading. Brian - Jenny Uglow - Biography of Edward Lear and William Dalrymple "The Anarchy" about the East India Company - both early wip

THINGS DONE: Neil - had been to a posh book launch at Hatchards - book was about Dresden in 1945 when thousands of Germans died - but a Polish woman in the audience asked why the bombing of Dresden was chosen and not the Warsaw Uprising when hundreds of thousands of Poles died. He had also been to Bath and was delighted by no empty shops (and no out of town ones either) and general quality and order. Pauline had been frequenting the cinema - "Emma" - not like the book, but it was full of humour, with good music - and Bill Nighy hadn't had to learn a word for his part; Personal History of David Copperfield - light hearted; enjoyed 1917 despite absence of real plot; Little Women - lovely - and a screening of La Bohème from ROH for a good weep (Richard says it is a 2 hanky opera!). Caroline films - enjoyed the Oscar winning "Parasite" from S Korea but "The Irishman" was better and "The Two Popes" very good. Visit to 2 Temple Court (on the Embankment) for their annual free exhibition - this time of items from 6 women's textile collections - some lovely and very interesting things - and to the Wallace Collection for a special exhibition of works by Indian artists associated with the East India Company - some really lovely pictures including many on natural subjects and some later ones with human figures where tensions with the British were becoming obvious. Also, a trip to York and an interesting arts society talk on The Beatles and art. Judith had been to the arts Soc talk too, to another talk on Abbey Road and another Art Soc talk about Grayson Perry. She had also been to a Bridge History Soc talk and archive film made by Sidney Bligh (an ex Canterbury RC club president) about the short-lived miniature railway at Higham Park that was built by Count Zbrowski in the 1920s, the materials from which were used for the Romney Hythe & Dymchurch railway after his death in a racing car in 1925/6. Also the film "Once" about a Dublin busker. Deborah had been on hol to Marakesh, staying in the medina, which was all a bit grubby, and gone into the Atlas Mountains, Films 1917 and Emma - both very good. Richard - saw Frank Skinner in a show; had been going to Samaritan type men's groups in Margate and Herne Bay and was starting another such in Whitstable - "toxic masculinity" - object is to get to would-be abusers before they become the actual perpetrators - there was a huge amount of counselling to be done for inadequate and fragile men. The problem is that men do not talk to each other about their problems of inadequacy, often sexual. Gill had been to the 2 Arts Society talks, to a ballet transmission of "Cats", "The Taming of the Shrew" at the Marlowe, 1917, Jojo Rabbit, Little Women and the Oare Gunpowder works, followed by the Shipwrights. Jennifer had been to the RA to see the Laura Knight and Picasso exhibitions, which both had lovely paintings well worth seeing. She had also been to ballet transmissions of Giselle and Sleeping Beauty (Siberian Ballet) - lovely - saw lots of other Rotarians in there. Brian Buddhist exhibition at British Library, exhibitions at the Wallace and 2 Temple Court, several films, a walk in the Ardennes with elder son, mock interviews with numerous other rotarians at Spires and Abbey schools.

NEW MEMBER: Peter Woolnough of Sunrise had asked to join the Book Club and we all agreed he would be welcome. Peter is a friend of Caroline and formerly accountant to Bretts - [peterbwoolnough@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:peterbwoolnough@yahoo.co.uk)

DONM: Wednesday 15th April 7.30pm chez Jennifer. Book - "Tender is the Night" by F Scott Fitzgerald. For the next read after that, Gill suggested "Unreliable Memoirs" by Clive James

FINALLY - many thanks to Jennifer for her usual friendly hospitality