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Going, Going,

I thought it would last my time –
 The sense that, beyond the town,
 There would always be fields and farms
 Where the village louts could climb
 Such trees as were not cut down;
 I knew there'd be false alarms

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In the papers about old streets
 And split-level shopping, but some
 Have always been left so far;
 And when the old part retreats
 As the bleak high-risers come
 We can always escape in the car.

10

Things are tougher than we are, just
 As earth will always respond
 However we mess it about;
 Chuck filth in the sea, if you must:
 The tides will be clean beyond.
 – But what do I feel now? Doubt?

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Or age, simply? The crowd
 Is young in the M1 café;
 Their kids are screaming for more –
 More houses, more parking allowed,
 More caravan sites, more pay.
 On the Business Page, a score

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Of spectacled grins approve
 Some takeover bid that entails
 Five per cent profit (and ten
 Per cent more in the estuaries): move
 Your works to the unspoilt dales
 (Grey area grants)! And when

25

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You try to get near the sea
In summer ...

 It seems, just now,
To be happening so very fast;
Despite all the land left free
For the first time I feel somehow
That it isn't going to last, 35

That before I snuff it, the whole
Boiling will be bricked in
Except for the tourist parts –
First slum of Europe; a role 40
It won't be so hard to win,
With a cast of crooks and tarts.

And that will be England gone,
The shadows, the meadows, the lanes,
The guildhalls, the carved choirs. 45
There'll be books; it will linger on
In galleries; but all that remains
For us will be concrete and tyres.

Most things are never meant.
This won't be, most likely: but greed 50
And garbage are too thick-strewn
To be swept up now, or invent
Excuses that make them all needs.
I just think it will happen, soon.

Philip LARKIN,
High Windows, 1974
(*Collected Poems*, faber & faber, 1988)

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The same sort of Bank Holiday entertainment (though without the sea) is provided, by immemorial custom, on Hampstead Heath, where there is a big fair on Easter Monday and the Spring and August Bank Holidays. This has always been the Cockney's festivity, and he makes the most of it. Gypsies in their gaudy caravans take possession of the Heath, tents and roundabouts and booths spring up everywhere, and for a day or two the quiet slopes and footpaths are transformed into the heaving, shouting, good-natured tumult that is summed up for Londoners by the affectionate phrase « 'Appy 'Ampstead ».

The increasing ease of travel, and the levelling-up of incomes, have made great changes in the way the English spend their summer holidays. All kinds of people go abroad nowadays. Parties of school-children from grammar or even primary schools go to Paris, charter flights take holiday-makers to the Mediterranean, and people confidently sign on for a motor-coach trip to various countries on the Continent even if they cannot speak a word of any foreign language.

If, however he decides to spend his summer holiday in England, the Englishman has an increasing variety of choice even there. He may still like to go to some modest hotel or guest-house at one of the sea-side resorts where there is a promenade and a pier, good bathing, good sands for the children, a golf-course, and so forth. But it is quite likely that he will prefer one of the big holiday camps, which so ably cater for the holiday hopes and wishes of many thousands people every year. No one need be lonely in a holiday camp. Everyone else is also looking for congenial company. Through sport or dancing, in the swimming pool or the bar or in some competition, a young man might perhaps meet the girl of his dreams. A tired housewife from London can relax in a deck-chair outside her chalet and exchange notes about backache with a tired housewife from Birmingham, while their children are entertained in the children's playground.

Other kinds of people contrive other kinds of holidays. Young people make for the Youth Hostels which will provide them with cheap shelter in country surroundings. Families who cannot afford, or do not care for, the more gregarious holidays often invest in a caravan, and with this towed behind their car set off for some remote part of Britain where they can enjoy sea-air and bathing without being overdrawn at the bank. There are trailer camps in many pleasant places nowadays, where a neat garden around some of the caravans seem to indicate that the travellers have come to anchor for a while. There are of course many people who go back year after year to the same little fishing village or the same isolated farmhouse, and for whom those particular holiday surroundings are almost a second home. But there is much less of this than there was. Motor travel and air travel have made it more attractive to try new places.

Yet, though much has changed in the pattern of English holidays, the Englishman himself does not change. His requirements are in effect much the same as always. He wants sunshine, relaxation, and either an exotic foreign environment or else good English fresh air. He wants congenial company, a drink when he needs it, and different (but not too different) food. His wife most ardently wants a rest from housekeeping, and would like to look at shops. In actual fact the weather probably lets him down. The beds are bad, his companions annoy him, the hotels are not as good as they ought to be; he sleeps badly and has indigestion. On the last day but one of his holiday he is thankful that it will soon be over. On the last day of all he begins to be a little sorry all the same. By the time he has been at home a fortnight, and he has had his holiday films developed, he has forgotten that there was ever anything to complain of. He remembers nothing but long, sunlit days, amusing companions, wonderful bathes, delightful explorations, in fact a holiday without parallel. He shows his photographs to everyone who can be persuaded to look at them, and settles down happily into his old slippers and his old routine. His next summer holiday, wherever it may be spent, will be like this one, a doubtful pleasure while it is in progress, but a miraculous success when he begins to look back.



Tony Ray-Jones (1941-1972), *Glyndebourne*, 1967, black & white photograph