

NOW WE ARE SIXTY

BY
CHRISTOPHER
MATTHEW

DECORATIONS BY
DAVID
ECCLES



NOW WE ARE SIXTY



By the same author

A Different World: Stories of Great Hotels

Diary of a Somebody

Loosely Engaged

The Long-Haired Boy

The Crisp Report

Three Men in a Boat (annotated edition with Benny Green)

The Junket Man

How to Survive Middle Age

Family Matters

The Amber Room

A Nightingale Sang in Fernhurst Road

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BY CHRISTOPHER MATTHEW
DECORATIONS BY DAVID ECCLES



JOHN MURRAY
Albemarle Street, London

For
Bertie Lomas

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(With sincere and affectionate tribute
to the genius of Ernest Shepard)

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INTRODUCTION

The film actor Tony Curtis was once asked by the host of an American TV chat show how he would sum up his life. 'When I was a very young man,' Curtis said, 'I arrived in Hollywood without any money, checked into a cheap motel, showered, shaved and then I came here to talk to you.'

Having recently turned sixty, I know just how he feels. One minute I was looking at my parents and their friends and wondering what it would be like to be as old as them; the next thing I knew, I was. Mind you, in their day sixty-year-olds *were* old. Elderly, certainly, and resigned to a slow, slippered twilight. I, on the other hand, am nothing if not a product of my age, and thus do not feel a second older than I did ten years ago—or even twenty.

Who am I kidding, though? Another ten years and my Biblical quota will be up. Like it or not I have joined the ranks of the zimmer brigade. This collection is by way of marking, if not celebrating, my new-found status.

I could have waited for a year or two to ensure a first-hand account of the pleasures and pains of

being an oldie, but decided I'd better crack on while the going is good and before someone asks me to show my bus pass.

How best, though, to run the unfamiliar gamut of geriatricity? A *vade mecum* for the elderly, however liberally laced with jokes, could all too easily decline into a catalogue of whinge and woe. Pith, wit and pleasure are more the order of the day—tempered with the merest touch of melancholia.

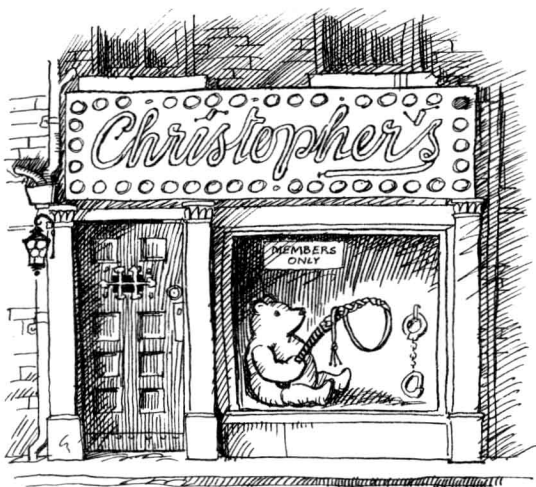
And then it suddenly occurred to me. Here I am, even more baffled by life than when I was a small boy. I had already purloined A.A. Milne's title and twisted it to my purpose, so why not pick the best of the poems he wrote for six-year-olds and re-write them for sixty-year-olds?

So I have.

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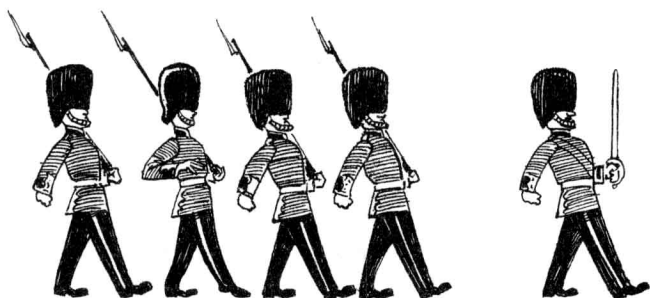
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CLUBMAN
(after SOLITUDE)

I have this club where I go
 When I'm feeling unwanted,
I have this club in Soho
 Where I can be me;
I have this club—whacko!—
 Where no one ever says 'No';
They all know what I'm there for—and
 Just look after me.



LET'S ALL GO MAD
(after BUCKINGHAM PALACE)

'They're changing sex at Buckingham Palace!
Murgatroyd mutters with undisguised malice.
'Roger is marrying one of the guard—
Bugger whose bearskin reeks of pomade,
Called Alice.'

'They're a goal or two short of a chukka at
Highgrove!
Gutteridge growls and gesticulates. 'By Jove!
There's luvvies and duvvies and comics galore;
They say Stephen Fry had to sleep on the floor
In an alcove.'

'They've all gone bonkers down at the Bailey,
Skeffington shrieks like a capercaillie.
'One of the judges—you'll never guess who—
Summed up in the nude and crooned to a u-
kelele.'

'They're losing their grip at New Labour Towers,'
Butterworth bellows and groans and glowers.
'They used to have men in the Cabinet Room;
Now it's woofers and poofers and goodness
knows whom.

All showers!'

'They're out of their trees in the Lord's Pavilion,'
Somerville splutters, his face vermilion.
The Long Room has been irrevocably lost;
It's a loo now, for ladies, and what's more, it cost
A million.'

'They're going bananas round at the Garrick,'
Henderson hollas in tones tartaric.
'Milne left a fortune, to everyone's glee,
But they still charge a fortune for afternoon tea.
Barbaric!'



CUTTING EDGE

(after HAPPINESS)

Tom had a
Brand New
Personal Computer;
Tom was
Plugged
On the
Internet;
Tom had
The Works,
But was
Techno-illiterate,
And that
Was pretty
Much
That.





INSOMNIA
(after IN THE DARK)

I've been to dinner,
And over-eaten,
And drunk a brandy or three;
I've taken a couple
Of Alka-Seltzer,
And had a jolly good pee;
I've settled the cat,
And I've locked the back door,
And I've turned on the burglar alarm,
And I've laid up for breakfast,
And kissed the wife,
Which never does one any harm.

So—here I am in the dark awake,
The clock has just struck two;



I've counted sheep
And bonked Bo-Peep,
And still I'm nowhere nearer sleep;
Here I am in the dark awake,
What *am* I going to do?
I can't turn the light on and watch the telly,
I can't read a book or quote bits of Shelley,
I can't nip downstairs and eat tagliatelle,
It'd only wake up the old moo.



I'm kissing Nicole Kidman . . .
I'm winning the Nobel . . .



I think I must be dying—
I'm well.
I'm halfway up Mount Everest . . .
I'm milking a prize cow . . .
I'm a two-time Oscar winner . . .
I'm a WOW.
I've won a boardroom battle . . .
I'm feeling really chuffed . . .
I'll be all right tomorrow . . .
.
I'll win the fight tomorrow . . .
.
I'll see . . .
the light . . .
tomorrow . . .
(Heigh-ho!)
I'm stuffed.



SIR JOHN'S FANCY
(after KING JOHN'S CHRISTMAS)

Sir John was quite a vain man—
He liked his share of praise.
When people didn't speak to him,
He'd sulk for days and days.
And when he put his gear on
And jogged around the park,
He wouldn't go when it was light,
He said he thought it wasn't right,
His Lycra shorts were much too tight—
He went when it was dark.

Sir John was quite a vain man—
He fussed about his weight.
He wished that it would disappear
So he could have a date.
And every day he weighed himself
And crossed his fingers hard,
And groaned and grumbled loud and long,
And said, 'This damned machine's gone wrong,
I'm not surprised, it's from Hong Kong,'
And threw it in the yard.