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Reflections

Usually in life we choose our times of reflection and thought, but sometimes we are forced to confront something at an unexpected moment. Reality breaks in on our lives, and we must respond to it or try to pretend it isn't there.



One of the most visible of these moments often occurs when a hearse drives through the middle of the town. Suddenly and unexpectedly as we go about our business, we see something which, for a group of people we don't know, is a tragedy and a loss. We are faced with the moment at which a lifetime comes to its end, and the final journey of another human being.

Once upon a time when this happened in Petersfield, everyone would stop what they were doing, hats would be doffed and heads bowed until the hearse had passed, and then life would continue. It only cost a moment, but it was an act of deference to the unknown departed, an act of sympathy to those in mourning, and a reminder of our mortality and the value of our days on earth.

Today, the response to a hearse is more varied. There are some who stop and give a moment, some cars which will allow the hearse to pull out in front of them. But there are others who will drive through the narrowest gaps to pass the coffin, and even those who will sound their horn when held up by its slow progress. There are those who will turn their heads and hurry by, rather than having to acknowledge the scene before them.

Reminders of the great certainties of life are important, and they will never come at the perfect convenient moment. There will always be places we need to be, and reasons why now is not the right time. But that is why it is so important to take them when they come, to accept the moment when it is given to us, and to give it, and them, for a short while, the attention they deserve.