

# Against the law

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The gratitude I feel towards you for having written this book extends also to many people mentioned in it — to your parents who stood by you — to Sir Robert Boothby for his ceaseless efforts in having a Royal Commission set up — to Lord Pakenham for his truly Christian attitude. It extends also to all the people who showed you and your two friends at the end of your trial their sympathy with you and their displeasure with the verdict given, and even to your neighbours at Islington who welcomed you home in so friendly a fashion after your return from prison. Doesn't it all prove how utterly ridiculous the present law in England is when it is enforced on a man who has done nothing worse than to live in the way nature intended him to, with no possible harm to minors, no question of importuning or public nuisance? Your book is bound to clear up a good many points of our problem, and, in clearing them up, it has become a wedge in our campaign for recognition. In my opinion no judge who has read your book will, in the future, be able to pass a sentence of long imprisonment with an easy conscience upon a man like yourself who stands 'accused' of something which in a case like your own — and in thousands of others — is 'unaccusable'.

As a small sign of the gratitude THE CIRCLE feels towards you, the first four pages of your book are printed below by the kind permission of your publishers. May they induce many readers to buy your book.

(If there is one criticism to make, I should like you to leave out one single word in your book and that's the word 'Germany' in your list of the countries in which witch-hunts such as those in England and the United States could not possibly occur. With Western Germany being re-armed under the auspices of the great Western Powers, the fate of German homosexuals is already turning from bad to worse.)

With the expression of my personal gratitude for your book,

yours sincerely, Rudolf Burkhardt.

## AGAINST THE LAW

*by Peter Wildeblood*

*(From his autobiography, published by Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London.)*

Sometimes, when a man is dying, he directs that his body shall be given to the doctors, so that the causes of his suffering and death may be investigated, and the knowledge used to help others. I cannot give my body yet; only my heart and my mind, trusting that by this gift I can give some hope and courage to other men like myself, and to the rest of the world some understanding.

I am a homosexual. It is easy for me to make that admission now, because much of my private life has already been made public by the newspapers. I am in the rare, and perhaps privileged, position of having nothing left to hide. My only concern is that some good may come at last out of so much evil, and with that end in view I shall set down what happened to me as faithfully and fairly as I can. I do not pity myself, and I do not ask for pity. If there is bitterness in this book, I hope it will be the bitterness of medicine, not of poison.

The case in which I was involved has become known as the 'Montagu Case'; because one of the accused men was a peer, it received a great deal of publicity. But in essentials, it was not very different from hundreds of cases which come before the courts every year. These attract little attention, but each of them implies the downfall, and perhaps the ruin, of a human being. In the last few years there has been much discussion of this question, and many authoritative men and women have given their views about the prevalence, nature, prevention, punishment and cure of homosexuality. There have not, I think, been any among them who could say, as I do now: 'I am a homosexual.' For what it is worth, I should like to offer, with all humility, this account of my life, my trial, my imprisonment and return to freedom as a contribution to the study of an urgent and tragic problem which affects many thousands of men.

I am no more proud of my condition than I would be of having a glass eye or a hare-lip. It is essentially a personal problem, which only becomes a matter of public concern when the law makes it so. For many years I kept it a secret from my family and friends, not so much from choice as from expediency, and I tried privately to resolve my own struggle in a way as consistent as possible with the moral law. During that time I do not believe I ever did any harm to anyone else; if any harm has been done since, I do not think the fault lies with me, but rather with those who dragged out into the merciless light of publicity things which would have been better left in darkness. When the searchlights of the law were turned on to my life, only a part of it was illuminated. I am not proud of what was exposed; most people, if they were honest, would admit that their private lives would not bear such a relentless scrutiny. It will be my task, therefore, to turn on more lights, revealing, in place of the blurred and shadowy figure of the newspaper photographs, a man differing from other men only in one respect.

I must begin by trying to show what this difference is. The whole question is so surrounded by ignorance, moral horror and misunderstanding that it is not easy to approach it with an open mind. I shall not try, at this stage, either to explain or to excuse it, but simply to describe my condition. Briefly, it is that I am attracted towards men, in the way in which most men are attracted towards women. I am aware that many people, luckier than myself, will read this statement with incredulity and perhaps with derision; but it is the simple truth. This peculiarity makes me a social misfit from the start; I know that it cannot ever be entirely accepted by the rest of the community, and I do not ask that it should. It is up to me to come to terms, first with my own condition, and secondly with other people whose lives quite rightly centre upon the relationship between a man and a woman. If it was possible for me to become like them I should do so; and nothing would be easier for me than to assume a superficial normality, get married and perhaps have a family. This would, however, be at best dishonest, because I should be running away from my own problem, and at worst it would be cruel, because I should run the risk of making two people unhappy instead of one.

I think it is more honest, and less harmful, for a man with homosexual tendencies to recognise himself for what he is. He will always be lonely; he must accept that. He will never know the companionship that comes with marriage, or the joy of watching his children grow up, but he will at least have the austere consolations of self-knowledge and integrity. More than that he cannot have, because the law, in

England, forbids it. A man who feels an attraction towards other men is a social misfit only; once he gives way to that attraction, he becomes a criminal.

This is not the case in most other countries, where the behaviour of consenting adults in private is considered a matter for themselves alone. Britain and America are almost the only countries in which such behaviour constitutes an offence, and in America the law is reduced to absurdity by the fact that it applies officially, also, to a variety of acts between men and women, whether married or not; it has been estimated that a strict application of the law would result in the imprisonment of two-thirds of the adult population, and as a result it is seldom invoked, even against homosexuals.

In Britain, however, the law is very much alive, and heavy penalties are incurred by anyone who breaks it. A homosexual who gives way to his impulses, even if he is doing no conceivable harm to anyone, therefore runs appalling risks. The fact that so many men do so shows that the law, however savage, is no deterrent. If, as people sometimes say, homosexuality is nothing but an affectation assumed by idle men who wish to be considered 'different', it is indeed strange that men should run the risk of life imprisonment in order to practise it.

The truth is that an adult man who has chosen a homosexual way of life has done so because he knows that no other course is open to him. It is easy to preach chastity when you are not obliged to practise it yourself, and it must be remembered that, to a homosexual, there is nothing intrinsically shameful or sinful in his condition. Everywhere he goes, he sees other men like himself, forbidden by the law to give any physical expression to their desires. It is not surprising that he should seek a partner among them, so that together they may build a shelter against the hostile world. One of the charges often levelled against homosexuals is that they tend to form a compact and exclusive group. They can hardly be expected to do anything else, since they are legally excluded from the rest of the community.

