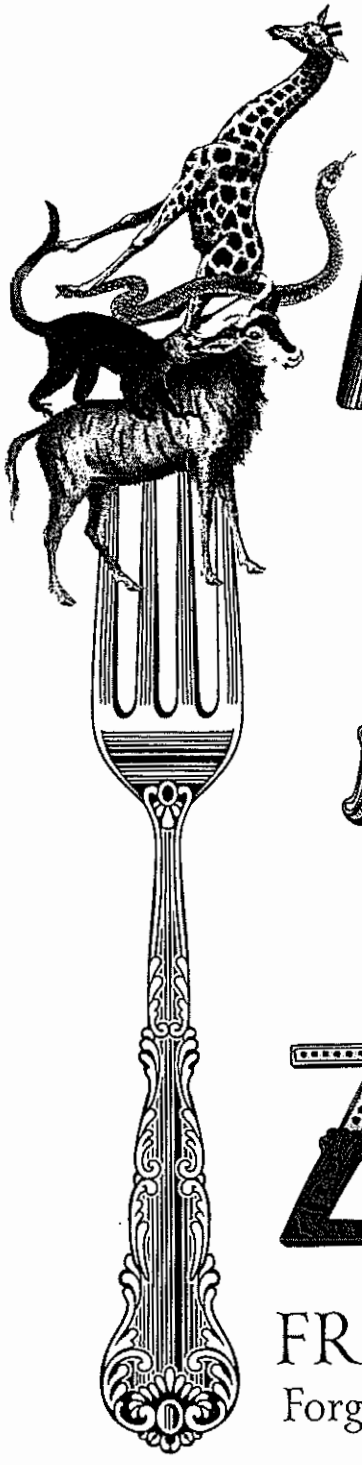
RICHARD GIRLING

THE MAN WHO ATE THE ZOO



FRANK BUCKLAND

Forgotten Hero of Natural History

THE MAN WHO ATE THE ZOO

CHAPTER THREE

Tiglath-pileser

Having followed his father to Winchester, the obvious next step for Frank was William's alma mater, Corpus Christi, Oxford. Even in the 1840s, however, nepotism had its limits. Frank's talents for autopsy and bonhomie were not enough to compensate for his lukewarm relationship with the Greats. Despite his father's eminence in the university, Oxford did not open its arms to him. Dissected dogs didn't count; what it wanted was Homer. Although William did his best to coach him, Frank failed the entrance exam to Corpus Christi. Magdalen, too, refused him a scholarship. Instead he had to enter Christ Church as a commoner,* though even here he seems rather to have staggered over the threshold. In Frank's scrapbook at the Royal College of Surgeons' library I find this letter from his old headmaster, Dr Moberly, to William Buckland, dated 16 July 1844:

> My Dear Sir,
>
> On taking leave of your son Frank from Winchester, I am most anxious to express to you my high sense of his great good conduct and attention while he has been under my care. He

* An undergraduate admitted to the university without obtaining a college scholarship or exhibition.

has been unfailingly steady and careful in every thing which he has had to do: and carries away the character of a most amiable and right-minded fellow. – I was very sorry to find that he had made so many mistakes in his examination at Christ Church – sorry, rather than surprised, I must say: for I know how strong his propensity to *blunder* is, even in matters which he knows. But I do trust that when he comes to be known, he will be forced to have more grammatical proficiency.

Frank took up his place in October of that year and was given rooms on the ground floor of the somewhat dilapidated Fell's Building (this would be replaced forty years later by Sir Thomas Deane's Venetian-style Meadow Building). The scrapbook contains a copy of Frank's letter requesting admission to the college, which tradition required him to write in medieval Latin. I am not competent to translate this, but no one can be surprised by Burgess's opinion that the grammar was 'somewhat deplorable'. It would be a while before Frank could take any pleasure in his new situation. Only a month earlier his younger brother Adam had died, apparently suddenly, at the age of nine (that is according to his sister, Mrs Gordon; another account gives his age as six). The boy was buried alongside another brother, Willie, and a sister, Eva, in a vault at Christ Church Cathedral. To recover from their bereavement, William took his family on a geological field trip to the Jurassic coast of west Dorset.

Despite all this, the Frank who arrived at Christ Church was the very same Frank who had departed Winchester. One of his contemporaries there, Herbert Fisher,* first caught sight of him

* The historian Herbert William Fisher, author of *Considerations of the Origin of the American War*, who was tutor to the future Edward VII and Keeper of the Privy Seal.

on the Oxford coach. Frank struck him as 'a very strange-looking little fellow . . . but [I] saw at once that he was unlike anyone else'. Fisher was impressed firstly by Frank's unstoppable flow of talk, and then by his impish precocity. When the coach changed horses and one of the replacements turned out to be lame, Frank darted down from the box, lifted the affected foreleg and – 'much to our amusement and that of the coachman and ostlers' – confidently diagnosed the injury. When the coach got under way again, Frank removed his hat and took out a large moth, which 'he began to examine carefully, calling our attention to its characteristics'.

'Recalling that journey,' wrote Fisher, 'I cannot help remarking that Frank was exactly then what he always continued to be. For of all the men whom I have known, I should think that he must have changed the least with advancing years.' Frank's way of growing up was simply to become a bigger boy – 'a child of nature', as Fisher put it, 'with a mind full of child-like mirth and gaiety; yet rendered serious by the eagerness with which he scanned all natural objects, so intense that no room was left for the slightest thought of self. He seemed to assume that everyone must take as much interest in these things as himself, and this imparted that freshness to his conversation which made him so attractive a companion to people of every kind; for he knew no distinction of persons.' Fisher might have been surprised by just how far *people of every kind* eventually might stretch.

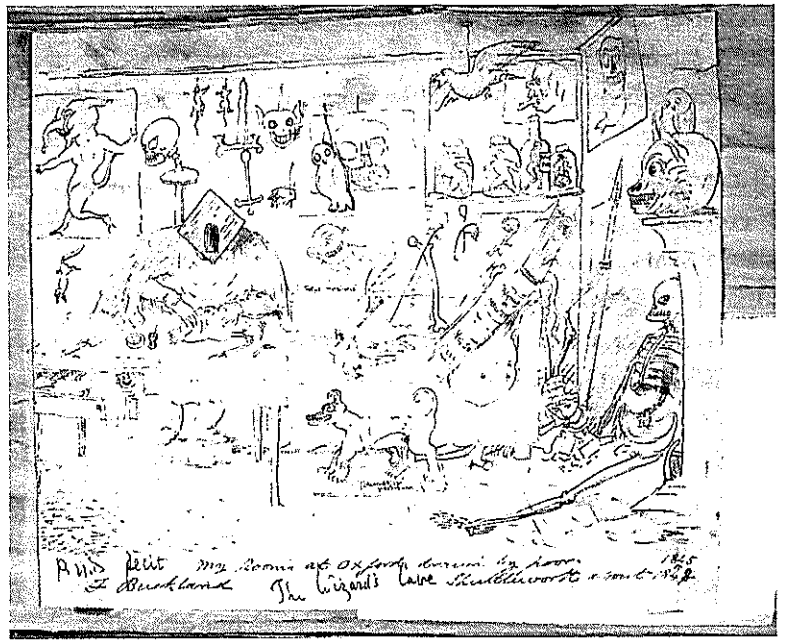
At Oxford, according to Fisher, Lord Dufferin ran 'a small debating society'* whose members were expected to submit essays for discussion. Earnest young gentlemen liked to pontificate upon great issues and great men – solid, well-worn subjects

* Frederick Hamilton-Temple-Blackwood, 1st Marquess of Dufferin and Ava, a future Governor General of Canada and Viceroy of India. The 'small debating society' was the Oxford Union, of which he was president.

like Charles I and Oliver Cromwell. Frank's first topic was 'Whether Rooks are Beneficial to the Farmer or not', which he followed with a dissertation upon Egyptian natural history, for which his authority was Herodotus, and a history of the dodo. The young gentlemen 'were of course almost dying with suppressed laughter at this delicious innovation'. Fisher implied that this was some kind of jape on Frank's part, but it sounds more like a straightforward expression of things that interested him. Of course there was laughter. With Frank there always was. But it didn't mean he lacked seriousness. Bompas, writing forty years later, cited yet another fellow student, the cleric and academic Richard St John Tyrwhitt, who put Frank's eccentricity into its rightful context.

> It is not quite satisfactory to look back from the present, when the natural sciences are fully and effectually taught in Oxford, and when earnest study in any of them is sure to meet encouragement and ample reward, to a time when an energetic student of physics and born field-naturalist was considered simply off his head for caring about nature.

Overcoming the opposition to natural science was one of the great causes célèbres of Frank's life. Even now the victory is far from complete. Despite the interest in wildlife encouraged by Sir David Attenborough and his followers, children remain shockingly unaware of how living things relate to each other and why they matter. A public school headmaster told me recently that he wanted ecology to figure more prominently in his school's curriculum, an idea he seemed to think was both new and enlightened. It is a not altogether reassuring illustration of how far Frank Buckland was ahead of his time.



'The Wizard's Cave' – a sketch by Philip Ughtred Shuttleworth of Frank's room at Christ Church

Tuckwell as ever was the man for detail. He described Frank hosting 'unique breakfasts' in his rooms, dressed in blue pea jacket and German student's cap, and 'blowing blasts out of a tremendous wooden horn'. It was not just the menus that made these occasions impossible to forget. Frank's free-range menagerie was, if anything, even more intrusive than his father's. Tuckwell noted marmots, a dove, monkey, chameleon, snakes, eagle, jackal and pariah dog. Bompas added guinea pigs, squirrels, dormice, tortoises and green frogs as well as skeletons, stuffed specimens and 'anatomical preparations'. There is no record of a fox, but this did not stop Frank from hollering his *view halloos*. Unsurprisingly, Bompas and Tuckwell both expended many words on Frank's bear cub. Despite Byron's example at

Cambridge, an ursine at university was still a rare and alarming sight, guaranteed to attract attention. Ruskin, a passionate admirer of Byron, came over all lofty about this. Frank, he declared, 'was too fond of his bear cub to give attention enough to the training of the cubbish element in himself'. That might be arguable, but there can be no doubt that the animals responded anarchically to the looseness of Frank's control. For the eagle, Oxford provided a pleasantly varied smorgasbord. It killed a hedgehog, chased and nearly caught a terrier, killed and ate (in Frank's own words) 'a beautiful little kitten, the pet of the nursery . . . Several Guinea pigs and sundry hungry cats too paid the debt of nature through his means . . .' At the breakfast table it ravaged a ham before making off through the window with a partridge. It next turned its attention to the college chapel, where it lurked by the door and attacked anyone who tried to enter. The chapel had a particularly hard time of it. As if the eagle were not enough, it had also to put up with the bear. According to Tuckwell, this resourceful animal

> found [its] way into the chapel, at the moment when a student was reading the first Lesson, 2 Kings xvi, and had reached the point at which King Ahaz was on his way to meet Tiglath-pileser, King of Assyria, at Damascus. So far as that congregation was concerned, the meeting never came off; the bear made straight for the Lectern, its occupant fled to his place, and the half-uttered name on his lips was transferred to the intruder.

For the rest of its life the bear was Tiglath-pileser, or Tig for short. He had arrived in college at the age of six months, when Frank had fitted him out with academic cap and gown, taken him to drinks parties and boating along the river. Sir Charles Lyell, author of *Principles of Geology* and a close friend of Darwin,

described Tig's attendance at a meeting of the British Association at Oxford in 1847. Frank formally presented the bear to Lyell himself, then to the Prince of Canino (Charles Bonaparte, a nephew of Napoleon) and to various other grandees whose reward was to have their fingers seized and vigorously sucked. According to Bompas, Tig was cornered by the poet Richard Monckton Milnes, the future Lord Houghton, who attempted to mesmerise him. 'This made the bear furious, but he gradually yielded to the influence, and at last fell senseless on the ground.'

This was all too much for the dour and humourless Dean of Christ Church, Thomas Gaisford. 'You or that animal, Mr. Buckland, must quit the College.' Tig was rusticated firstly to Islip, a village seven miles from Oxford, where, for historic reasons, Frank's father held the living. A series of catastrophes (terrifying the cook, chasing sheep, sucking unsuspecting fingers) climaxed in a raid on a grocer's shop, with Tig 'devouring the sugar and sweetstuff, and terrifying the shop-woman out of her wits'. In November 1847 he was shipped off to the Zoological Gardens in Regent's Park, where according to Bompas 'he died some time after in an effort to cut his teeth'. We shall next meet him stuffed, guarding a passage in the Westminster Deanery.

There is a temptation – easy to fall into, hard to resist – to depict Frank through a series of ripping yarns in which he appears as an amalgam of Dennis the Menace and Doctors Frankenstein and Dolittle. This is to get him badly wrong. The 'cubbish element', as Ruskin put it, had nothing to do with any weakness of character. Ruskin was confusing style with substance (a dangerous habit for an art critic). Frank's dedication to science, and to the work that went with it, was beyond Stakhanovite: in middle age it would become literally self-destructive. Tyrwhitt confessed to having shared Ruskin's misapprehension. 'I think that the rest

of us, who only thought of Greek and Latin reading, if we read at all, never quite understood the reality of the value of the work Frank was engaged in, or that he was in fact educating himself much better than most of us were doing.'

Frank spent the long vacations of 1845 and 1846 at the University of Giessen, under the tutelage of the great German chemist Justus von Liebig.* To make sense of Liebig's lectures he first had to learn German, and did so at a speed that might have impressed even Ruskin. His letters were full of colourful observations about the way the Germans dressed (quaintly) and ate (with 'perfect indifference' to fat or lean). Old habits died hard. A hunter in the forest handed him a dead polecat which, to strip the flesh from the bones, he parked on an ants' nest. He was annoyed when some unseen hand removed it, but was soon diverted by his upstairs neighbour at Giessen, an anatomist whose dog had 'a silver tube in his stomach, which is stopped up with a cork; the object is to get gastric juice fresh for the lecture; the dog seems very well but rather unhappy'. Outside, Frank took a particular interest in Giessen's unusually noisy frogs. 'I have bought some . . . They are half green, their legs being brown as the English frogs; I inflated one and squeezed the air towards his mouth, and out of the sides of his jaws sprang two bladders. I suppose these are used to make the curious loud noise for which they are remarkable.' A dozen tree frogs, kept in a bottle, accompanied him on his journey back to Oxford and angered his sleep-deprived fellow passengers with their racket. In the end, though Frank got them safely home, they fared little better than the polecat or the ants. On his second day back, a 'stupid housemaid'

* Founding father of organic chemistry, discoverer of nitrogen, father of the fertiliser industry and, by descent through his Leibig Extract of Meat Company, the Oxo cube.

opened the bottle. One of the frogs 'croaked at that instant, and so frightened her that she dared not put the cover on again. They all got loose in the garden, where I believe the ducks ate them.'

On his next journey home, in the following summer, he took some German red slugs. These too caused anguish. He woke at midnight to find that two of them had escaped and were making tracks across the bald head of a sleeping passenger in the coach. He left them where they were and quietly hopped off at the next stop. The interaction of his specimens with other people was a cause of irritation, merriment and farce throughout his life, though this was a rare instance of him ducking the consequences.

The previous year, 1845, had seen a profound change in the Buckland household. The Dean of Westminster, 'Soapy Sam' Wilberforce, became Bishop of Oxford and, on the recommendation of Sir Robert Peel, William Buckland was invited to replace him. Shortly afterwards William was granted the living of Islip – an ancient piece of patronage which, as Mrs Gordon explained, had been 'bequeathed by Edward the Confessor to the Abbot of Westminster'. Here it was that Tiglath-pileser embarked on his final rampage.

The move delighted everyone. Peel declared that he had 'never advised an appointment of which I was more proud' – an opinion which Mary Buckland warmly endorsed in a letter to Sir Philip Egerton.*

> I think Sir R. Peel has shown much moral courage in making choice of a person of science, for it was sure to raise a clamour, and among good people too. It has always been quite unintelligible to me how it happens that on the Continent,

* Sir Philip de Malpas Grey Egerton, palaeontologist, expert on fossil fish and Conservative Member of Parliament.

> where there is far less religion than in England, a man who cultivates Natural History, who studies only the works of his Maker, is highly considered and raised by common consent to posts of honour . . . while, on the contrary, in England, a man who pursues science to a religious end . . . is looked upon with suspicion, and, by the greatest number of those who study only the works of man, with contempt. Perhaps you can comprehend this anomaly, I cannot.

It is true that there had been scant respite from the hostility which science in general and geology in particular aroused in the Oxford fundamentalists. A few years earlier Baron von Bunsen, soon to be Prussian Ambassador to the Court of St James's, had observed in a letter to his wife: 'Buckland is persecuted by bigots for having asserted that among the fossils there may be pre-Adamite species. "How!" say they; "is that not direct, open infidelity? Did not death come into the world by Adam's sin?" I suppose then that the lions known to Adam were originally destined to roar throughout eternity!' A hundred and seventy-five years later, anti-scientism still flourishes. Many people of faith, like William himself, have managed to accommodate a changed view of life's origins without letting go of their beliefs, but there are many within the Islamic, Judaic and Christian traditions who abhor the theory of evolution, and many more for whom science is the antagonist of nature and, hence, of its creator – not quite a conspiracy of infidels, but almost. William recalled being invited by a rector in the West Country to agree with him that the great geologist William Smith, author of the first nationwide geological map, was *an ignorant old humbug*. Another told him: "'Tis very well for you to humbug those fellows at Oxford with such nonsense, but we know better at Mugbury!"* And so it goes on.

* Probably a misspelling of Musbury, Devon.

Wherever natural or medical science is at the cutting edge – in gene therapy, for example – there you will find religious conservatives erecting barricades. Mary Buckland's *anomaly* may have changed its polarity – in most advanced societies now it is the fundamentalist, not the scientist, who commits the thought crime – but for all that the two strands may intertwine, they cannot be fused together. This was the difficulty that pursued William into Westminster, and that would create such a dilemma for Frank.

It is a rare father who is a hero to his son, but William was idolised by Frank both during his lifetime and afterwards. Even in death he was an inspiration, the superlative to which his son always aspired. Academically Frank never quite made it. His destiny lay far beyond the margins of academic teaching. He didn't want to learn: he wanted to *find out*. There was never any professorship on his horizon, and his exam successes seem to have been more of the 'bare scrape' than 'flying colours' variety. His college life after William's move to London continued much as before. The troublesome eagle found a new home in a courtyard next to Westminster Abbey, but it made little difference to Frank's propensity for annoying the elders. The security arrangements for his snakes were so lax that the mellow tranquillity of Christ Church was frequently shattered by stampeding undergraduates and college servants. The theologian Henry Liddon, quoted by John Upton in *Three Great Naturalists*, saw Frank as a kind of grubby precursor to *Just William*.

> One day I met Frank just outside Tom Quad. His trousers' pockets were swollen out to an enormous size; they were full of slow-worms in damp moss. Frank explained to me that this combination of warmth and moisture was good for the slow-worms and that they enjoyed it. They certainly

were very lively, poking their heads out incessantly, while he repressed them with the palms of his hands . . . The jackal was, I might almost say, a personal friend. He was fastened up outside Fell's Buildings; and I recollect, under some odd and painful irritation, he used to go round and round, eating off his tail. Frank expressed great sympathy with him, modified by strong curiosity – he wondered how far Jacky would eat up into his back!

What Jacky did eat was four or five of Frank's guinea pigs, which he cornered beneath the sofa. Frank meanwhile continued to satisfy his own epicurean curiosity. One of his friends was Edward Cross, proprietor of the Surrey Zoological Gardens at Kennington, who one day told him his panther had died. This was too good a chance to pass up. 'I wrote up at once to tell him to send me down some chops. It had, however, been buried a couple of days, but I got them to dig it up and send me some. *It was not very good.*'

In October 1847 Frank failed his BA. We can't be sure how much of a surprise this was, but we can see from the scrapbook how he felt when he passed at the second attempt in May of the following year. He had made his own hand-ruled calendar for the months of February, March, April and May, ticking off each day in the countdown to 12 May, where he added the portentous and possibly dread words: 'Public Examinations commence'. The examinations were public indeed. Such was Frank's popularity that, according to Henry Liddon, 'almost the whole undergraduate world of Christ Church' turned up to watch his viva voce on 15 May. On this day Frank recorded in exuberant scrawl: 'Hurrah!! FTB through. *Labor omnia vincit.*'

Tucked between the scrapbook's fluttering pages is a packet containing two small lozenges of once-white gauzy material on

a thin white ribbon – the formal neck-bands that Frank wore for his examination. They rest weightlessly in my palm, and I wonder if he was still wearing them when he inscribed his *Hurrah!!* For him they were precious mementoes of an important day; for me they are an intimate hands-across-the-centuries connection with a man whose mind I am slowly beginning to understand. He might not have been squeamish but he was not empty of feeling. Frank Buckland was a deeply sentimental man, and it was sentiment that propelled him. But it did not keep him in Oxford. He pocketed his degree, rounded up his menagerie and headed for London.

The Westminster Deanery had plenty of room for them all, animals and people alike. Mary Buckland did not record the number of rooms – perhaps she never totted them all up – but she did count the staircases. There were sixteen. It did not, she felt, 'look like a very lively abode, for it opens into the Abbey and contains the Jerusalem Chamber'. This was, and is, one of the most historic rooms in England. It was in front of the fire here that Henry IV died in 1413; here that the authors of the King James Bible convened in 1611; here that Sir Isaac Newton was laid out in 1727 before being buried in the Abbey in the presence of Voltaire. Here, too, very likely, that Frank's menagerie wandered, sniffed and demonstrated its lack of house-training. The Bucklands did not have the house all to themselves. Mrs Gordon remembered 'the excellent portress Mrs Burrows' who worked before the fire in the Robing Room 'to air the linen surplices of the canons in residence, as it was highly necessary that these elderly dignitaries should be protected as far as possible from the well-known deadly cold of the Abbey'.

Rats ran everywhere, and the upper rooms were so cold that the servants were unwilling to sleep in them. They complained

of 'queer noises' and of strange gusts, like the breath of poltergeists extinguishing their candles. Terror reigned when a length of wainscoting fell down one night, opening up a deep hole like a well. Frank and his younger brother Edward seized the chance for adventure. They let down first a lighted candle to check the air, and then a rope which they descended to find a crumbling and worm-eaten bedstead and table. According to Mrs Gordon, this had been the hiding place of Francis Atterbury, Dean of Westminster from 1713 to 1723. He had needed it because of his support for the Jacobite Pretender, but it did not save him from arrest. He was marched off to the Tower of London in 1722, and exiled to Paris, where he died in 1732.

No period of Frank's life would leave a deeper impression. William Buckland was a gregarious man for whom the exchange of ideas was as essential as air and water. He kept open house at the Deanery, where a never-ending stream of visitors braved the hazards of breakfast, lunch and dinner. Conversation would not have lingered long on the weather or even on the hedgehog, tortoise, potted ostrich, rat, frog and snail that now graced the menus ('Tripe for dinner,' reported one guest, 'don't like crocodile for breakfast'). I doubt that even affairs of the Church would have detained them for long. As Mrs Gordon modestly put it: 'The house was the centre . . . to which men of science resorted, and where many of their discoveries were explained or illustrated.' By *men of science* she did not mean the occasional jobbing apothecary. Guests recorded in Frank's diary included Sir Humphry Davy, Sir John Herschel, Thomas Henry Huxley, the geologist Sir Roderick Impey Murchison, Sir Charles Lyell, Richard Owen, Joseph Hooker, Michael Faraday, William Whewell (the polymathic Master of Trinity College, Cambridge, originator of the terms *scientist* and *physicist*), Isambard Kingdom Brunel, Robert Stephenson, Baron von Bunsen and the Swiss

palaeontologist Louis Agassiz. From the worlds of politics, theology and the arts came the Duke of Wellington, the social reformer and former Lord Chancellor Lord Brougham, Lord Rothschild, Sir Robert Peel, the Archbishop of Dublin Richard Whateley, the poet Samuel Rogers and John Ruskin. 'If a man is known by the company he keeps,' observed John Upton, 'certainly Frank Buckland in those days was entitled to be regarded as a man of cultivated tastes and high attainments.' This might be pitching it a bit high for a young man yet to make his mark, but his grooming was impeccable.

William's influence was important in another way too. His ideas were not just learned abstractions, for what was the use of theory without practice? The boys of Westminster School were particular beneficiaries of his zest for reform. Before William, this ancient institution within the Abbey precincts had fallen into disrepair and disrepute. 'In that foundation,' wrote Sir Roderick Murchison,

> education could be no longer obtained except at costly charges, and even when these were paid, the youths were ill fed and worse lodged . . . All these defects were speedily rectified by the vigour and perseverance of Dean Buckland. The charges were reduced; good diet was provided; the rooms were well ventilated, and the buildings properly under-drained; so that, these physical ameliorations accompanying a really sound and good system of tuition, the fame and credit of this venerable seminary was soon restored.

This bland encomium disguised one of the great cornerstones of William Buckland's character: the strength of his convictions, and his grit in the face of adversity. Sanitation in London during the 1840s was little better than medieval, and

had been kept that way by men with a medieval mindset. Only a very few forward-thinkers, William among them, had begun to see the connection between sanitation and health. It would not be until 1854 that John Snow would conclusively disprove the prevailing *miasma* theory of disease transmission and introduce the world to *germs*. The school's lavatories drained into a ditch filled with what Mrs Gordon euphemistically described as 'black mud' – evidently a creek of the Thames which 'came up as far as these buildings; but apparently no tide ever succeeded in washing back to the river any of its murky contents'. William needed all his determination to face down the sceptics. One Westminster schoolmaster, the Reverend E. Marshall, doubted that 'any one with a less commanding scientific reputation than Dr. Buckland, even with all the power of the Dean, could have overcome the prejudice which at that time was entertained against the alterations'. William proved his point the hard way. In May 1848 workmen broke into some old drains in Little Dean's Yard, which resulted in a number of people, William and two of his daughters among them, contracting typhoid (also called 'Westminster fever' as the outbreak was confined to the Abbey precincts). Unlike some of the other, more unfortunate sufferers, William and the girls recovered their health, and Mrs Gordon reported that he 'lost no time in applying his scientific knowledge to the thorough cleansing and making of sewers. The system of pipe-drainage which he introduced was the first of its kind ever laid down in London.' Four hundred tons of 'foul matter' were removed during the clean-up, but this did not stop the more idiotic of his opponents claiming it was William's own reforms that had caused the outbreak. This was one example among many of William Buckland's commitment to change, and his faith in science as a force for public good. On 15 November 1849 he

preached a sermon in the Abbey which would do credit to any modern socialist firebrand.

> The greater number of the poor who perish are the victims of the avarice and neglect of small landlords and owners of the filthy, ill-ventilated habitations in which the poorest and most ill-fed and helpless are compelled to dwell. Fatal diseases are continually engendered from lack of adequate supplies of water, withholden from the dwellings of the poor by the negligence of the owners, or by the jealousy of interference by public officers or public Boards of Health . . . It will be the fault of man, and of the selfishness, or the folly, or avarice of the owners of poor houses, or of the jealousy or pride of officers and interested individuals, and it will be the fault of Parliament also, if we do not instantly begin to remedy these crying evils.

We need look no further for the root of Frank's idealism. Burgess believed that his reason for taking up surgery was to please his father. This may be so – it surely did please him – but I am certain that Frank wanted to *emulate* William as much as he wanted to make him happy. What could be more William-like than this entry from Frank's diary, written in 1848? 'My object in studying medicine (and may God prosper it!) is not to gain a name, money, and high practice, but to do good to my fellow-creatures, and assist them in the hour of need.' The reasons were all Frank's own. In May of that same year, only a few days after taking his degree, he began his surgical training at St George's Hospital.

For Frank, the Deanery offered limitless opportunities for adventure. Even before he took up residence there, his exiled

sea eagle had made its presence felt. The various accounts of the day, including Frank's own, muddle the detail. My favourite is Mrs Gordon's, so I'll begin with her. The 10th of April was the date marked for the event that was supposed to transform the fortunes of the British working class – the great Chartist demonstration at Kennington, opposite the Houses of Parliament in south London. Violence was anticipated, and 'every preparation was made to secure the Abbey and its precincts from any rough treatment by the mob'. In the event, the demonstration was a damp squib that fizzled out in the rain, effectively destroying both the movement itself and the reputation of its leader Feargus O'Connor. Earlier in the day the omens had looked propitious. 'As Feargus O'Connor was earnestly addressing the petitioners . . . an eagle was seen to be soaring over their heads and flying towards Westminster! This naturally was hailed as an excellent augury!' The eagle was Frank's, enjoying what would turn out to be its last hurrah on what in many ways was a typical day for both of them. Frank later confessed that he often had fights with this bird, which 'was of a rather savage disposition', and described what happened after one of its misdemeanours at Oxford:

> One day I had a row with the eagle about something or other – I think it was about a dead cat – and, pouncing down from the bough where he was kept, the rascal fastened both his claws into the front part of my right thigh, causing the blood to flow copiously, and, at the moment, giving intense pain; the claws had to be taken out one by one, beginning with the hind claw, and I ordered a broomstick to be put within the grasp of the bird, and he clutched hold of the broomstick with the tenacity of a vice. I did not want to spoil my bird by cutting his claws, but nevertheless I punished him by putting wine corks on to his talons, and I made him do penance in them for a week.

It was through experiences like this that Frank was able to represent himself as an expert on how to treat dangerous birds.

> It is very easy to handle an eagle . . . if only you know how. The brute always strikes first with his claws, and then pecks with his bill. Remembering this, – allow the eagle, hawk, or owl, to clutch something or other, say a broom-handle or a walking stick; then quickly throw a Scotch plaid, or a blanket, over his head, when you may release the stick, let him clutch a bit of the plaid, tie his legs, and he can be carried anywhere.

It was indeed a plaid that settled the issue on 10 April. After perching on a high pinnacle of the Abbey and attracting a throng of excited onlookers,* the eagle was lured back to its courtyard by a sacrificial chicken tied to a stick. 'Whilst he was busily engaged in devouring the chicken, a plaid was thrown over his head, and he was easily secured,' explained Frank. The bird's reward was to follow Tiglath-pileser into exile at the Zoological Gardens in Regent's Park. Tiglath-pileser himself had now been stuffed and, with Billy the Hyena, haunted the passage between the Deanery and the Abbey. Whatever consternation these two aroused, it was nothing compared to the panic caused by Frank's loitering snakes. There was also the pet monkey Jacko, and a female ape, Jenny, brought from the Rock of Gibraltar, which, said Bompas,

* An escaped eagle would have caused a sensation. Even in 1965, when a male golden eagle, Goldie, spent twelve days on the loose from London Zoo, it dominated newspaper headlines and television bulletins across the world, and caused severe traffic jams around Regent's Park.

'used to lift up her hideous face and kiss her master with great profession of affection'. It can't be imagined that many kisses were forthcoming from the young woman who sat down at the Deanery piano to play quadrilles, with the reasonable expectation of enjoying an evening of music and dancing. Telling her to be a 'good girl' and not make a fuss, Frank coiled a snake around her neck, and one round each arm, while she went on playing. His assurance that he had extracted their fangs might have soothed her mortal fear, though it might not entirely have restored her pleasure. Frank at this time failed to understand that his enthusiasms were not shared by all, and the best that could be hoped for at the Deanery was that people would adjust to his ways. 'His sisters', wrote Bompas, 'were so often bedecked with similar reptilian necklaces and armlets, that they became used to the somewhat clammy, crawling sensation, which is a drawback to such ornaments.' Frank also kept a collection of fifty or sixty rats, and these too were (Bompas again) 'brought up at evening parties for the amusement or torment of the visitors'. The rest of the menagerie included hedgehogs, tortoises, cats, bats, hawks, owls, 'an aviary of various birds', lizards, goldfish and newts. But it wasn't all about alarms and nuisances. The Deanery could also present Frank with uniquely Frank-like ways of making himself useful. When a cat expired in the diapason pipe of the rebuilt organ in the Abbey, he was able to call upon his angling skills and fish it out with a salmon hook.

St George's Hospital, now removed to Tooting, is still one of Britain's biggest teaching hospitals. When Frank began his surgical training in May 1848, it had not long moved from Chapel Street to Lanesborough House at Hyde Park Corner, a grand design by William Wilkins, architect of the National Gallery, University College London and many of the nineteenth-century buildings of Cambridge University. It is now the Lanesborough,

reputedly London's most luxurious hotel. It's hard to know who would be more surprised by the contrast – the patients who suffered and died in its 350 beds in the nineteenth century, or the royal personages, political grandees and celebrities who luxuriate in its suites in the twenty-first. Here it was, having sworn to his diary that he would 'be a great high priest of nature, and a great benefactor of mankind', that Frank embarked upon the dangerous, hit-or-miss enterprise that was nineteenth-century surgery.