

By the waters of human depravity I sat down and took it's pressure – in lbs per square inch

We often forget – or at least, I often forget – on just how many ordinary, decent people the comfort of our lives depends. I was reminded of this the other day when a man from the water company called to check the quality of the water supply. Our house had been selected at random by a computer for a test, representative of the area as a whole.

The man was very polite and pleasant. He was also interesting, as such people tend to be. He told me how the water was checked chemically for evidence of bacterial contamination. In our region, such checks were carried out seven days a week by a team of 36 men. I will not again take the purity of our water so much for granted.

I asked him whether any householders refused him admittance into their homes. Quite a few, he said, and I laughed: but he said he didn't altogether blame them, as there were so many swindlers about these days. He told me of one method they employed, for example. Robbers would follow a water inspector wearing precisely the same uniform. They would wait for the inspector to leave a house and then knock on the door afterwards, claiming to have forgotten something. They would then steal from the house. A couple of his colleagues had been arrested as thieves some time ago, but were soon exonerated and the culprits caught.

Surely, I thought, there were easier ways of earning, or at least obtaining, a living? I think people who behave like this must do it for the sheer joy of evil.

The inspector showed me an electronic device with which he and all the others had just been supplied by the company. Apparently it told him if he was being followed. It also acted as a silent alarm, connected to headquarters, in case of attack. It had a microphone and a tape recorder also: surveillance these days can never be too great. Your conversation may be recorded for training and monitoring purposes.

One of his colleagues had been attacked the other day as he took samples of water from the tap.

'The assailant must have been mad,' I said.

'He was probably having a bad day,' said the inspector.

'People who have a bad day like that usually have many bad days,' I said.

I didn't know which to marvel at the more: modern technology, or the need for it.