

MATTHEW PARRIS

PEOPLE should not be Members of Parliament before they are 30. I think that I got my priorities wrong. I should have learnt how to kiss (still can't), learnt how to read a balance sheet (still can't), learnt how to cook (still can't), learnt how to ski (still haven't), contracted a serious skin disease in dubious circumstances (still haven't), properly mastered at least one other European language (still haven't), spent a weekend in Paris (still haven't), visited Florence, Venice and Rome (still haven't), bought two really good suits (was always too stingy), mastered the elements of snappy dressing (still haven't), seriously betrayed someone I loved (how can we say that we've lived until we have known how treachery feels?), experienced addiction to a hard drug (or how can we pontificate?), killed a man with my own bare hands (well, maybe that's taking it a bit far, but you know what I mean).

Instead, what did I do? I became a Tory Boy at 25, joined Mrs Thatcher's staff at 27 and entered Parliament at 29. This was not living.

That was not life. What did I know of the world? What did I know of my own country? Now I look down into the Chamber of the House of Commons and contemplate how little I understood, even of politics, how worthless my opinions were, and what a waste of space I was.

People should have lived before they become politicians. They should have fought, and loved, and sinned, hit the top, hit the bottom, and made a real horlicks of something.

Their cupboards should be full of skeletons. Mine was full of small furtivenesses and blue rosettes.