

OUCH! – Mine's Bigger Than Yours

A literary kick in the pants. Reported by Reg Green



A few days ago I was thinking of a friend I knew in England who told me once that at his first job all levels of management to emphasize camaraderie wore identical white coats like doctors, except for the color of their bow ties. You could get away with being slightly offhand with a blue tie, he said, but should always be respectful of red and servile to purple. I have always doubted the literal truth of this pleasing picture but for years a similar image from Piers Brendon's iconoclastic book, "The Decline and Fall of the British Empire," has stuck in my mind, waiting to come out when needed. I checked the book this week and, yes, there it was: when the British invaded Burma in the late 19th century they found rank in government service determined the size of your spittoon.