

Home

BOLDRE STILL AND BOLDRE (December 2021)



Winter dawn - St John's Boldre, Vicarage

*The Reverend Canon Andrew Neaum became the "House for Duty" Anglican priest of the lovely Boldre Benefice in August 2013. The Vicarage in which he and Diana live is on the edge of the New Forest, a couple of miles north of Lymington in Hampshire. He is old fashioned enough a priest to visit his flock in their homes, but "house for duty" clergy are supposed to work only two days a week and Sundays, which means visiting everyone in the parish takes a long time. The following are the **December 2021** weekly ruminations, aired prejudices and footling observations that in the weekly pew sheet augment his visits and help keep folk in touch week in and week out. Earlier articles are available from the Article Page on this Website:*

<http://www.andrewneaum.com/articles.htm>

(431) “This and That” - 19 December 2021

700 years before Christ the Greek poet Hesiod, with great prescience, anticipated the Church of England. He wrote, ...*observe due measure. Moderation is best in all things.* It’s sound advice. If pre-Christians were eligible for canonization, he would merit the honour.

Incense reeking sanctuary rats

Anglicanism prizes itself on moderation. It sits uncomfortably with fanaticism and wild enthusiasm. A minor poet and versifier, with whom I am on the most intimate of terms, begins a piece of verse thus:

*Be they bible-thumping brats,
Or incense-reeking sanctuary rats,
Fanatics ruin, wreck, besmirch
Our quiet, temperate English Church....*

It’s not a short verse, a fifth stanza goes:

*The English Churchman’s proper diet
Is gentle, understated, quiet;
Allows for compromise and doubt,
Welcomes all, kicks no one out....*

Stanza seven begins a dismissive consideration of the more fanatical elements that at times pop up to disturb and threaten classic Anglicanism:

*But crude, fanatic rabble rousers
And manic, cyclopean wowsers,
Deplore restraint, disdain sweet reason,
Despise all compromise as treason....*

Then, after acknowledging the ineffectiveness of taking up fanaticism’s cudgels to do battle with fanaticism, a final and eleventh stanza concludes:

*..... the truly English way
Lets fanatics have their say,
Disdains to fight, with well bred hauteur,
And drowns the fools in milk and water!*

Sitting lightly on the 39 Articles

The verse portrays Anglicanism as I have known, experienced and loved it down through the years. A version of the Faith notable for inclusiveness, comprehensiveness, and reasonableness; ready to compromise and lacking in dogmatic certainty.

It is unsurprising, then, that it has often claimed to be the *Via Media*, the middle-way. At the time of the Reformation, between Lutheranism on the one hand and Calvinism on the other. Two very different theologies. It ended up more Lutheran in practice and Calvinist in doctrine. This is why many of us sit lightly on the 39 Articles. They are too Calvinist to be wholly acceptable.

With the advent and rise of Anglo Catholicism, in the 19th century, the *Via Media* came to be reinterpreted by the Tractarians as a middle way between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. The golden mean. We claim to be both Catholic and Reformed.

The sky is green

There’s a downside to the middle way of moderation and compromise. It is too easy to dismiss as being neither one thing or the other, wishy-washy, vacillating, permissive, an attempt at both having our cake and eating it.....

*The English Church equivocates,
In long debates deliberates,
It tolerates and vacillates,
Accommodates, procrastinates.....*

There is also what is known as the False Compromise Argument to point out how fallacious it can be to assume that the truth is always, or even often, a compromise between two opposing positions. One person maintains the sky to be blue, another that it is yellow, so they compromise and conclude the truth to be the sky is green, for green is created by combining blue and yellow.

The road best taken

The middle ground between two opposing positions is not necessarily the truth. Be that as it may, the road not taken should rarely, if ever, be the *Via Media*.

(430) “This and That” - 12 December 2021

“Hence loathèd melancholy...”, begins Milton’s great poem *L’Allegro*. With its companion poem *Il Penseroso*, it has been set gloriously to music by Handel, and so can be revelled in and enjoyed doubly, as both literature and music.

The lark’s song and rooster’s din

The narrator of the poem orders melancholy out of his life, advising it to go and make its home among the Cimmerians—an ancient nomadic people, mentioned in Homer’s *Odyssey* as dwelling at the world’s edge, in a land devoid of sunlight and the entrance to Hades.

To replace it, he invites into his life the goddess of joy, Euphrosyne, to fill it with mirth as a new spring day dawns and the song of the lark and the din of a rooster chase the last of the darkness away. The sun rises, robing the clouds in flames, a ploughman in the field whistles, the milkmaid sings a song, the mower sharpens his scythe and shepherds count sheep under hawthorn trees. Smoke curls from a chimney cottage and young and old come out to play. Once the sun goes down, storytelling begins over ale.

Staring down doom and gloom

Hence loathèd melancholy indeed. Last Sunday morning all traces of it were driven from my mind and heart on receipt of an email from an Australian “Friend of St John’s”, which ended:

...I am a not very active 99 ¾, but still managing to live in my own home at Dhurringile. The wonders of science and modern aids certainly make a difference. With a wet winter and spring we are having an incredible season. My garden has never been so luxuriant and colourful. To quote someone I know, may I wish you both “blessings abundant” and the Compliments of the Season, if you have any energy left....

She’s one of many parishioners from my past who, by staring down doom and gloom, help make parish priesting both life and soul enhancing.

An epidemical disease

The world’s first great scholar of melancholy was the hugely erudite Robert Burton (1577-1640). Suffering himself from the condition throughout his 63 years of life, he wrote about it at length in *The Anatomy of Melancholy* a tome of 516,384 words. He describes his affliction as:

.....a kind of imposthume in my head, which I was very desirous to be unladen of and could imagine no fitter evacuation than this ... I write of melancholy, by being busy to avoid melancholy. There is no greater cause of melancholy than idleness, no better cure than business.

It is a disease, he says,

so frequent in our miserable times, as few there are that feel not the smart of it..... an epidemical disease, that so often, so much crucifies the body and mind

He published his great work under the ironic pseudonym “Democritus Junior”, an allusion to the philosopher, Democritus, known as the “Laughing Philosopher”. Burton himself didn’t find it easy to laugh. It was said of him that....

In an interval of vapours he would be extremely pleasant, and raise laughter in any company. Yet I have heard that nothing at last could make him laugh but going down to the Bridge-foot in Oxford, and hearing the barge-men scold and storm and swear at one

*another, at which he would set his hands to his sides, and laugh most profusely. Yet in his college and chamber so mute and mopish that he was suspected to be *felo de se* (suicidal).*

So with Milton let's bid melancholy farewell and instead:

*Come, and trip it as we go
On the light fantastic toe,
To hear the lark begin his flight,
And singing startle the dull night,
From his watch-tower in the skies,
Till the dappled dawn doth rise;
Then to come in spite of sorrow,
And at my window bid good-morrow....*

(429) “This and That” - 5 December 2021

A London “Friend of St John’s” and seasoned reader of *This and That*, suggests there to be a growing nostalgic and elegiac quality to these weekly articles. He could be right. For in matters comedic, the staple fare at the Vicarage is ‘*Dad’s Army*’, ‘*Porridge*’, ‘*Open All Hours*’ and ‘*The Two Ronnies*’, all of them from yesteryear.

Moreover if, by accident, we’re subjected to a snatch of contemporary comedy, such as ‘*Live at the Apollo*’, we opt out with alacrity. It is dispiritingly unfunny. Bawdy wit and clever innuendo are fine. Shock-tactic filth is not.

Pallid, bosomy and archly suggestive

We watched, last week, the actor Sir John Mills and the popular pianist Mrs Mills parodied in a song and dance routine. Ronnie Corbett was a diminutive, moustachioed, impeccably-uniformed and swagger-sticked John Mills, Ronnie Barker a large, pallid, bosomy, mock-coy and archly suggestive Mrs Mills. Their lyrics, superbly sung, were witty, laden with innuendo, and very funny. See for yourself:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r6RGWA1NItE>

The sketch reminded us both of a poem by Louis MacNeice celebrating Florrie Forde, the queen of the “everyone sing along” sort of music-hall act.

Born in Australia in 1876, she made her first London appearance in 1897, popularising songs like ‘*Hold Your Hand Out, Naughty Boy*’ and ‘*Down At The Old Bull And Bush*’, as well as First World War favourites such as ‘*Goodbye-ee*’, ‘*Pack Up Your Troubles In Your Old Kit bag*’ and ‘*It’s A Long Way To Tipperary*’. The troops loved her and she was hugely popular in Music Hall. MacNeice’s poem is an acute, affectionate tribute with a perfect ending.

Death of an Actress

I see from the paper that Florrie Forde is dead -
Collapsed after singing to wounded soldiers,
At the age of sixty-five. The American notice
Says no doubt all that need be said

About this one-time chorus girl; whose role
For more than forty stifling years was giving
Sexual, sentimental, or comic entertainment,
A gaudy posy for the popular soul.

Plush and cigars: she waddled into the lights,
Old and huge and painted, in velvet and tiara,
Her voice gone but around her head an aura
Of all her vanilla-sweet forgotten vaudeville nights.

With an elephantine shimmy and a sugared wink
She threw a trellis of Dorothy Perkin roses
Around an audience come from slum and suburb
And weary of the tea-leaves in the sink;

Who found her songs a rainbow leading west
To the home they never had, to the chocolate Sunday
Of boy and girl, to cowslip time, to the never-
Ending weekend Islands of the Blest.

In the Isle of Man before the war before
The present one she made a ragtime favourite
Of 'Tipperary', which became the swan-song
Of troop-ships on a darkened shore;

And during Munich sang her ancient quiz
Of Where's Bill Bailey? And the chorus answered,
Muddling through and glad to have no answer:
Where's Bill Bailey? How do we know where he is!

Now on a late and bandaged April day
In a military hospital Miss Florrie
Forde has made her positively last appearance
And taken her bow and gone correctly away.

Correctly. For she stood
For an older England, for children toddling
Hand in hand while the day was bright. Let the wren and robin
Gently with leaves cover the Babes in the Wood

Home