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### **BOLDRE STILL AND BOLDRE (March 2022)**



#### ***Early Spring - Vicarage Garden***

*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 **March 2022** 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>

## (444) “This and That” - 27 March 2022

The road from hell to heaven this morning was short. From Putin-wrecked Ukraine on the bedroom radio, to a Mass for boy’s voices by Michael Haydn in my study.

### Sursum corda

Johann Michael Haydn wrote over thirty works for his “dear choirboys” of the Salzburg ‘Kapellhaus’. The *Missa Sancti Aloysii*, composed in 1777, is joy-jubilant. Though hell’s proximity to this heavenly joy is underscored by the initial occasion for the Mass being *Holy Innocents’ Day*. Herod’s infanticide, or Putin’s, take your choice.

A little later we headed for the beautiful city of Wells to visit a part of our family not seen for many Covid-thwarted months. Our favoured route was by way of Shaftesbury, a *sursum corda* of *sursum cordas*. As too was wandering around lovely Wells. In bright sunshine, the west end of its great cathedral was a dazzling reminder of humankind’s creativity, a balance to the Putin orchestrated, death-dealing destruction of current news reports.

### Chuckling, snorting peals and cackle

Another recent beam from the gates of heaven was a short video phone-clip from my daughter. It shows her blowing onto the face of her four month old babe and his chuckling, snorting peals and cackles of delighted laughter in response. Earlier I had sent her another of the past week’s delights, a minor miracle, from contemporary poet A. E. Stallings, and so, so suitable to Mothering Sunday:

#### First Miracle

Her body like a pomegranate torn  
Wide open, somehow bears what must be born,

The irony where a stranger small enough  
To bed down in the ox-tongue-polished trough

Erupts into the world and breaks the spell  
Of the ancient, numbered hours with his yell.

Now her breasts ache and weep and soak her shirt  
Whenever she hears his hunger or his hurt;

She can’t change water into wine; instead  
She fashions sweet milk out of her own blood.

In such poems the multitudinous and limitless chaos of words are miraculously ordered into sense, beauty and truth. Reality is shaped into recognisable being.

### Dental shenanigans

My mother, a vicar’s daughter, vicar’s wife, vicar’s mother and vicar’s grandmother was fond of quoting the prophet Jeremiah on human nature: *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?*

Her cynicism came to mind when I read of a dentist in Wisconsin who deliberately damaged clients’ teeth in order to repair them, to his great profit. He made millions of dollars by installing crowns on sabotaged teeth. From his photographs, unlike Mr Putin, he appears a lovely, open-faced and delightful fellow. One of us.

On the surface his crime seems just grubby greed rather than high order evil. Yet, as a betrayal of trust, it is truly villainous and shows how easy it is for any of us to tip over into serious wrong doing and downright evil.

A time honoured characteristic of the Christian faith is its ability to convert people, to turn them round, bowl them over and totally redirect them. An encounter with Jesus can turn drunks into tea-totallers, whoremongers into celibates, slavers into abolitioners and killers into peaceniks. It is a gift

that we make too little of, preferring, in our tradition at least, to inch our way towards good and God. It's not good enough. The sort of evil encountered in Hitler, Stalin or Putin needs challenging by more than just incremental creep, it requires conversion, a total turn around. The Christian alternative to the assassin's bullet.

### **Hoping to kiss your lips**

Another of last week's delights is a romantic couplet from a translation by Dick Davis of a Persian poem:

I'll hide within my poems as I write them  
Hoping to kiss your lips as you recite them.

## **(443) "This and That" - 20 March 2022**

To see an old woman slumped and dumped like a sack of potatoes in a shopping trolley is outrageous. There to be bumped over difficult terrain by loving relatives to escape a bombed and shelled Ukrainian city is horrific.

### **Stoical grandma**

It should all but reduce us to tears. The lovingness of it all is what chokes us up. Suggesting, as it does, that we are by no means all hopeless materialists. We can't be, if among the most precious of a family's possessions is an old, stoical grandma, never allowed to be past her use-by-date. Or am I just being sentimental?

### **Margaret Thatcher's favourite song**

There is a particular song that deeply moves me in much the same way. It is so mawkish, I'm almost ashamed to admit it. It was a favourite of Margaret Thatcher's though, and no one would accuse her of sentimentality.

The song's story belongs, in part, to Juliana Horatia Ewing, (1841-1885). She was one of ten children of the vicar of Ecclesfield in Yorkshire and she grew up to write highly regarded children's stories, notable for their "sympathetic insight into children's lives, an admiration for things military, and a strong religious faith."

Roger Lancelyn Green, himself a children's writer, and also a biographer, academic and member of the "Inklings" literary discussion group, along with C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien, calls Ewing's works the "first outstanding child-novels in English literature". Rudyard Kipling claimed to know Ewing's novel *Jan of the Windmill* almost by heart. Her story *The Brownies* gave the Baden-Powells the idea and name for junior Girl Guides.

### **Did you think I would leave you dying?**

Her best selling children's story, *Jackanapes*, is notable for being the possible origin and inspiration for the song *Two Little Boys*. The song dates from 1902 and its words were written by Edward Madden (he also wrote *By the Light of the Silvery Moon*). Set to a tune by Theodore Morse the song became a music hall favourite when sung by Harry Lauder. Every time I hear it sung by the now disgraced Rolf Harris, my eyes well up. Is this mawkish sentimentality? I think not. For it is Gospel truth. A portrayal of sacrificing love in practice. To be moved by such truths is to be at one with Mary at the foot of the Cross.

### **Jackanapes and Tom**

The story *Jackanapes*, is about the eponymous hero and his friend Tom, who having ridden wooden horses as little boys, end up together on a battlefield. Jackanapes rides to the rescue of the wounded and dismounted Tom and replies to Tom's entreaties to save himself, "Leave you"? "To save my skin"? "No, Tom, not to save my soul". He unfortunately takes a fatal bullet in the process.

### **Hornbill ivory**

My age-addled brain is not all forgetfulness. Words not used for years still pop unexpectedly to mind. In my journal last Monday I observed, without a thought: "the magnolia tree's flowers are about to burst their velvet casques". The word casque goes right back to my happy bird watching days in Rhodesia.

Many hornbills have enlargements of the bones of the upper mandible or skull, that form a sort of helmet called a casque. One sort of guinea fowl grows them, as do some species of chameleon and Australia's cassowaries.

It was the hornbills that fascinated me in Rhodesia. The males immure the females in a tree cavity, using their own dung mixed with soil or regurgitated food to make a protective wall with only a small slit, through which they deliver food for up to five months.

The casques of the south east Asian helmeted hornbills are huge and solid. Males fight over territory on the wing, ramming each other with their casques, aerial jousting. Females accompany males during an approach to an aerial joust, but veer off in opposite directions for the collision. The dense casque is also the source of hornbill ivory, a carving material more valuable than elephant ivory.

## **(442) “This and That” - 13 March 2022**

In 1340, when the French fleet was destroyed by the English at the Battle of Sluys, Phillippe VI's jester told him the English sailors “don't even have the guts to jump into the water like our brave French”.

### **Ribalds and bastards**

There can be no jesters in Vladimir Putin's court. His face would sour honey, clot cream and curdle custard. Yet powerful people need jesters to laugh and mock them out of self-importance and to apprise them of truths that their sycophants dare not tell. The best of court jesters in the middle ages were permitted familiarities without regard to deference. Their truths, because told in jest, tended to sting more than wound and so were tolerated.

Henry VIII's jester, Will Somers, became one of the king's most trusted advisors and although of no social standing is portrayed in a painting of the king and family at the Palace of Whitehall and he appears, with his monarch, in the Psalter of Henry VIII that was made for the King and is now in the British Library. It was a dangerous post to occupy though and he did occasionally go too far. In 1535 the King threatened to kill him with his own hand when he allowed himself to be dared into calling Queen Anne “a ribald” and the Princess Elizabeth “a bastard.”

### **Patrons saints of insanity**

Another famed jester, Triboulet served both King Louis XII and Francis I of France. A contemporary describes him as “a fool with an unsightly head, as wise at thirty as on the day he was born; with a small forehead and large eyes, a big nose and squat figure, a flat, long belly, and a hump back. He mocked, sang, danced, and preached in derision of every one...” He too, like Somers, didn't always please his listeners and was frequently beaten by those he'd offended. He once angered his King by making fun of the queen, whereupon his execution was ordered. The story goes that because of his many years of good service, he was allowed to choose the manner of his death and so, after a little cogitation, he told the king “Good sire, for Saint Nitouche's and Saint Pansard's sake, patrons of insanity, I choose to die from old age.” This so amused the king he had Triboulet banished instead of killing him.

### **A mezzotint never forgets**

On Monday mornings the fragments of memory, vague ideas, notions and thoughts drifting idly in my mind are plundered and ransacked for these weekly articles. It is a satisfying task to select and clothe the more remarkable of them in words, albeit in my footling, amateurish way.

Are they any the better for being captured and imprisoned in paragraphs, sentences and words? It's a question posed of artists and painters in the following poem by Nicholas Salaman:

### **Gallery**

The pictures look at the people  
Like animals in the zoo,  
the landscapes growl and thump the bars,  
the gouache goes twitawhoo.

The still-life slides along the wall  
In search of devourable faunas,  
The portraits gibber and show their parts  
And play with each other in corners.

The people throw them critical buns,  
And sometimes they want them for pets,  
For an etching is jolly to have round the house  
And a mezzotint never forgets.

But the pictures remember the forests  
and the waters' imponderable roar,  
And some grimace back at the people,  
and some keep watching the door.

And at night when the full moon is blowing  
The moon-silver dust on the blind,  
They howl for the madness and freedom  
They had roaming wild in the mind.

### **(441) "This and That" - 6 March 2022**

The explorer James Cook visited Tonga in 1777. He took away with him, as a gift, the word "taboo" to enrich the English language. How did we manage without it?

#### **Violating taboos**

The earliest of taboos was God-given to Eve in the Garden of Eden and violated almost immediately. An early taboo in my own life was parent-given in a different garden of Eden, the island of Tristan da Cunha: it was the F-word. I recall violating it as an eight year old and having my mouth washed out with soap and water. There's insufficient soap in all of the United Kingdom to wash away the daily violations of that taboo nowadays.

In these weekly articles politics are taboo. Not because church and politics don't mix, they do, but because there's little to be found in politics to inspire and enchant. Furthermore, we're inundated with political commentary from folk wiser and more experienced in such matters than I am. To those who are God-haunted and desire....

To see a World in a Grain of Sand  
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower  
Hold Infinity in the palm of their hand  
And Eternity in an hour,

the mundane and commonplace are the best bailiwick.

#### **Volodymyr Oleksandrovych Zelenskyy**

Not quite always though. There's one politician whose words and performance have deeply moved me over the past few days. Volodymyr Oleksandrovych Zelenskyy, the embattled president of Ukraine, has reminded me of another Jew who faced impossible odds, irrational zealotry, vile enemies and implacable hatred with resolute courage: Jesus of Nazareth.

As I write these words on Monday morning, Zelenskyy's future appears as bleak as did Jesus' in Gethsemane Garden. His courage in staying put, his calm demeanour and measured pronouncements reveal humanity at its very, very best and are deeply moving, inspiring and heart-warming. May he survive and triumph.

#### **Stir frying**

Both my parents were good cooks, in an altogether traditional English fashion. My mother considered the use of paprika daring, and her most exotically spiced meal was the fag end of Sunday's roast turned into a mild curry. Soft raisins floated in its thin yellow liquid like blood-bloated ticks pulled from the dog.

It was only years later, in country Australia, when my children were still at school, that I was introduced to stir fries and began to make them regularly. My son tells me that they left much to be

desired and all tasted exactly the same: underdone diced vegetables, smothered in oyster sauce with a sprinkling of Chinese five spice powder. They have improved since, but it took three nights without electricity at the Vicarage to bring them to perfection.

Our only source of warmth was the sitting room's open fire which works itself up to intense heat. Woks and electric stoves are not the best of friends, but when perched on blazing logs our wok began to show off. Fiercely hot in an instant it sizzled small chicken nogs to perfection in seconds and likewise diced aubergine, courgette, red pepper and onion. On the hearth, with forearms seared hairless by the fire's heat, I stirred in noodles and a cunningly spiced sauce to serve up so memorable a candlelit supper we repeated the performance the next evening. Minor disasters can lead to major triumphs, major disasters to minor ones.

### **Skint**

In the winter of 1971, decimal currency was inflicted upon the United Kingdom, a postal strike was unleashed and I arrived in London, skint. I intended to earn a living supply teaching for a while. Mobile phones were yet to be invented, public phones were jammed and there was no postal service. This meant that my qualifications couldn't be authenticated and that I was required to live on nothing or find a job other than teaching. It was a cold and depressing time that returned me to full faith and eventually to offering myself for the priesthood. Minor disasters can lead to major triumphs, major disasters to minor ones.

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