

## ‘THIS TOO SHALL PASS’

### *Not the parish pew sheet*

*A miscellany of matter serious and not so serious*

Issue number 42: Epiphany I<sup>1</sup>

*Even in a normal year, January is a time for appreciating home comforts, so these lines from John Clare seem very appropriate:*

The woodman gladly views the closing day,  
To see the sun drop down behind the wood,  
Sinking in clouds deep blue or misty grey,  
Round as a foot-ball and as red as blood:  
The pleasing prospect does his heart much good,  
Though 'tis not his such beauties to admire;  
He hastes to fill his bag with billet-wood,  
Well-pleas'd from the chill prospect to retire,  
To seek his corner chair, and warm snug cottage fire.

*In this extract from Worship, Evelyn Underhill reminds us that worship is neither a purely private matter nor an activity confined to church:*

If by worship we mean the adoring response of the creature to the total demand of God, and the utmost contribution to His Glory which it is able to make – and Christians cannot mean less – it is obvious that so far as the individual is concerned, neither the spontaneous or liturgical saying of ‘Lord! Lord!’ nor the practising of an equivalent devotion in contemplative silence, fulfils its requirements . . . So the individual Christian is required to adore God, adhere to Him, and co-operate with Him in the sanctification of life – that is to say, the bringing of it into conformity with the Divine Perfection – and in the interests of this great purpose to give the colour of worship to every human action and desire whether overtly religious or not.

*J. G. Hava's Arabic–English Dictionary, published in Beirut as recently as 1964, contains the following definitions, which are likely to discourage anyone thinking of learning Arabic:*

*jawn*: Black. White. Light red. Day. Intensely black (horse).

*khâl*: Huge mountain. Big camel. Banner of a prince. Shroud. Fancy. Black stallion. Owner of a th.<sup>2</sup> Self-magnified. Caliphate. Lonely place. Opinion. Suspicion. Bachelor. Good manager. Horse's bit. Liberal man. Weak-bodied, weak-hearted man. Free from suspicion. Imaginative man.

*Humour is more than just a safety-valve; it has theological significance, as Peter L. Berger (in A Rumour of Angels) points out:*

Power is ultimately an illusion because it cannot transcend the limits of the empirical world. Laughter can – and does every time it relativizes the seemingly rocklike necessities of this world.

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<sup>1</sup> Observed as the feast of the Baptism of Our Lord.

<sup>2</sup> *Sic*. Someone with a lisp, perhaps?

*Which leads neatly into the following examples of fractured English. The first is from a leaflet advertising the Caves of Arta in Palma, according to which they possess a suporizing infinity of graceful columns of 21 meter and by downward, wich prives the spectator of all anaimexion and plunges in dumbness.*

*The second is reported by Malcolm Bradbury and comes from a Spanish ship on which he was travelling to the Canaries:*

Help savoring apparata. In emergins behold many whistles! Associate the stringing apparata about the bosoms and meet behind. Flee then to the indifferent lifesaving-shippen obediencing the instructs of the vessel!

*Dr Cally Hammond, in the Church Times, draws our attention to an important aspect of Biblical texts:*

New Testament books are documents for reading aloud and listening to. They are not meant to be read microscopically, with forensic attention to detail. What inspires and drives people, in all the Bible books, is the gists and impressions through which we encounter the details over a lifetime. It's not that details don't matter: rather, that, if they take precedence, they will obstruct, not communicate, the gospel.

*More useful advice from 'This England', quoting the Thames Valley Gazette:*

Reverting to a more serious tone, Cllr Winslow emphasised the fact that dentures are inflammable and could therefore have grave consequences if used as ashtrays.

*Carys Walsh, in Frequencies of God, draws our attention to the analogy between divine creation and human artistry in the thinking of R. S. Thomas:*

Thomas reflected on the poet as *intrinsically* religious. He echoed Coleridge in saying that 'the nearest we approach to God . . . is as creative beings', and that the poet *recreates* 'by echoing the primary imagination', the creative force of God which brought all things into being, and which sustains and unifies all things. And we, as humans who are also capable of imagination and creativity, dimly echo in all our creative acts that great primary creativity of God. 'The world needs the unifying power of the imagination', said Thomas, and the 'two things which give it best are poetry and religion'.

*And finally, another of those notices, this one reported from Newquay:*

No person shall walk, run, stand, sit or lie on the grass in this Pleasure Ground.

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## **Readings**

*For this Sunday (Baptism of Christ) Genesis 1: 1–5; Acts 19: 1–7; Mark 1: 4–11 Psalm 29*

*For next Sunday (Epiphany II) I Samuel 3: 1–20; Revelation 5: 1–10; John 1: 43–51*

*Psalm 139: 1–5, 12–18*

O Lord, we beseech thee mercifully to receive the prayers of thy people which call upon thee: and grant that they may both perceive and know what things they ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to fulfil the same; through Jesus Christ thy Son our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end.

*Collect for the First Sunday after Epiphany*