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1

Moon; Lord

What is this moon,
mingling through darkness
to light,

cruising through clouds
to shine?
hope in the night?

Hope, bringing grace
in a worrying world,
facing the plight of wars
we never imagined would happen;
would never be involved in.

And so, Moon, Lord,
we look up and see You,
cruising through clouds,
to shine, and give us all
Hope in the Night.

This poem was written a few days after the '9/11' tragedy (11 September, 2001), but it would seem to be relevant to all the continuing wars and battles for power since then. I had been looking up at the sky above the cottage, after watering my garden in the moonlight.


2

Helping each other out

Watching an excellent Channel 4 television programme a long time ago, about the 1987 hurricane and the City market crash in London, reminded me of that and other times when we have had to face the need – the compulsion, to help each other out.

When that more or less unexpected hurricane smashed in on us, there were instantly people in our community, as in many others, trying to help as best we could. No power, so those of us with solid-fuel Rayburn stoves set up soup kitchens. Getting independent old people to accept what some considered as ‘charity’ was difficult. Coaxing them to contact us was even more difficult! In the end, however, we did help many people, and they were grateful. That gratitude was reward enough. One of our few failures was with an elderly parishioner who, when I went to see her, said I needn’t have bothered – she had a camp stove fixed up in her garage!


During and just after World War 2, helping one another was something all those families round me – then a small child in rural North Wales – did, and did without question. If we had bread and the Hayes family next door didn’t, and asked my mother for some, she would give it to them, without hesitation. At the time, she received coupons worth one and a quarter loaves a day – for a family of five. I never heard her complain.




At the age of ten, I remember biking a mile, at seven in the morning, up to a market garden, where I queued, in the hope of buying a pound of tomatoes to have on toast for breakfast. I did this many times, without a fuss. When I was unlucky because the tomatoes had run out, I biked back, dejected.

“Never mind, darling,” was all Mummy would say, “We’ll have marmite on toast instead.”

Then came the Tsunami. In a splendid, re-scheduled ‘Songs of Praise’ on BBC 1 that January, we learnt how those who had survived the disaster just got on with helping each other. No hysteria. No whingeing. Just the need to keep things as near to normal as possible. And those who went out from other countries to help, behaved likewise.



This need for mutual care should be – no, is – a timeless one. Organisations like Christian Aid and Make Poverty History REMIND us of this need.



3

The Fallowing

Allotment holders, with a limited amount of space, tend to plant and seed it with the produce they wish to grow and harvest. That said, the savvy ones often choose to leave a small patch bare, and use it again the next year, or the year after.

With one-third of an acre of garden at Pear Tree Cottage, it was something of a relief to leave a *big* patch bare. I usually did this, for most of my 27 years stewarding the space, growing crops in the rest of the un-grassed areas in a three-year rotation.

That all sounds clever and organised, but staring down at a piece of ground only slightly sprinkled with weeds, I was often tempted to throw something in there.

Many years ago, the old shoe repairer in Arundel suggested just using a bit of the fallow land.

“Just dig a big hole, and chuck in some potatoes. Cut ’em in half if you’re short – and cover ’em up well. You’ll get a fine crop.”

The horticultural purists might not approve of this, but it works! And by the time you’ve washed, and boiled, roasted or fried the potatoes, what ‘nasties’ could there be in them?

In general, though, leaving land fallow is a good notion. Richness in the earth has a chance to re-assert itself; useful worms delve, undisturbed. If nettle beds are left untouched, the bees and

butterflies will be delighted. (And soup made with young nettles is delicious, as one of my neighbours taught me.)

Nevertheless, the three-year rotation of crops requires not only a good memory (do we all write down what we grew in different plots in the previous year?), but annual pre-organisation.

Some of the vegetables we grow don't appear to be in the groups they're supposed to be in. We err sometimes. (Where did those parsnips come from? I don't remember planting them *there*. And these spring onions have appeared in quite the wrong place, too...)

In much the same way, it is a good idea to let our minds lie fallow from time to time. Certainly, in my case, it works. I suddenly realise I've run out of thoughts, ideas. It could be alarming to one (not just me) whose mind races along at a vast rate of knots. But it is essential, however difficult it may prove to be.

This was written as I sat at the open window of my log-cabin suite at a hotel high up in the Madeira mountains. I grew so relaxed, I could have lain down and slept, or just rested, on and on.

It had taken me two days, though, to get to a blissful, blank-minded, slow-moving state, having completed a difficult twelve-hour journey from home to reach this magnificent mountainous place, with huge peaks rising up dramatically before me, and terraced gardens full of brilliant flowers below. (How they manage to reach the slopes around to sow and reap, I have no idea, but good crops were growing there.)

A further two days were needed before I could cease wondering WHAT I SHOULD BE DOING? hour by hour. On the fourth day, I finally stopped worrying about anything – except if there'd still be left the thick, creamy, hotel-made yoghourt, with which to begin each gargantuan breakfast!

Warm sunshine, the gush of rock springs, a cock who crowed incessantly (he's not unique: I had one just like that, next to the cottage). No need to do anything; go anywhere.

Mmmmmm. Think I'll just have a snooze...