

Dear Michael - Margaret -

Daisy Cottage,
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Christmas 1983

A very Happy Christmas to you and yours! Christ, says the writer to the Hebrews, (9.26), has appeared once and for all "at the climax of history" to abolish sins by the sacrifice of Himself. His description of the First Christmas Day as a Happening unparalleled by any other event in history, past present or future, is brought home to us by this striking phrase from the New English Bible; and if (to use a modern expression!) we "identify" with this good news, the happiness of our Christmas is assured, however few turkeys and plum puddings we consume!

Mention of the New English Bible reminds us - and many of you who have been generous sponsors of the project - that 1983 has been "the Year of the New Testament Word Finder", a dictionary of 1,300 key words and more than 5,000 references, based on the N.E.B. translation, but useful for all. I cannot quite say that "its sound is gone out into all the world", but at least it appears that the first edition of 2,500 copies looks like being exhausted in little over a year, when we shall have to embark on a second impression, thanks very largely to the efforts and enthusiasm of the Rev. John Frankland of Hale, my northern colleague. Our hope is that this little book will open new windows on to the Gospel for many young Christians - and older ones too! Please pray that it may be so!

Now for some family news. Margaret was recently awarded the Freedom of the British Highways and Byways by passing her Driving test, a more exacting procedure than that obtaining in 1927, when on a fine autumn day (having attained my 17th birthday) I walked into Trowbridge Post Office, deposited my five shillings on the counter, and was let loose on the roads. Fortunately I haven't bumped into many things or persons in the intervening years; I have travelled hopefully, and by and large I have arrived. At least, I have arrived at retirement, - and a warm welcome to Alaric and Mary who have now joined this (fairly) select company, and whose retirement is chiefly notable for the discovery, in the course of moving, of a large surplus of cured tobacco leaves, some of which I am even now smoking, as of now, at this moment in time. Like Stanley Baldwin, (though with him it was "Three Nuns") I find that "my thoughts grow in that particular aroma", and I recall with delight the poet Calverley's Ode to Tobacco: "Thou, who, when fears attack, Bids't them avaunt, and Black Care, at the horseman's back Perching, unseatest; Sweet at the dawn of day, Sweet, when they've cleared away Lunch, and at close of day Possibly sweetest..." So, a thousand thanks to you, Alaric and Mary, and may you be suitably rewarded!

Thoughts of the retired state bring to mind the definition given of a pension as being "deferred pay" - a comforting concept! If it is true, then the whole of retirement can be regarded as "deferred living" - the grand opportunity of filling in the things there was no time for earlier on. For Olive and me it has been a case of changing our roles: Olive has her Vestry Class (seven have been confirmed this year!), and I'm being initiated, after forty two years' exemption, into the mysteries of the Monday wash, - the "double rinse" (note the technical jargon), the apparently racist procedure of separating the whites from the coloureds, and much besides. I've not yet graduated (like Michael) to shirt-ironing, but hopefully this will follow. Also plumbing. For some time the hot water tap in the bathroom basin has been leaking, and now I have mended it. When, on engaging the faucet (technical jargon again), you find the water does not run, leave the faucet open, and turn the hot water tap in the bath on and off smartly many times: when this doesn't work (who ever thought it would?), turn back to the basin, and be thankful that there is plenty of cold water. Ask any doctor, and he will tell you that hot water (like smoking, sugar, milk, butter, salt, in fact, pretty well everything) is not at all good for you. After doing this, I went upstairs, and dealt with the problem of the "reluctant loo". I keep on finding things to do to improve this property. With its historic background. Only a few weeks ago I was planting out cabbages when I observed a small disc-like object which the coin curator at the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge identified as a "third bronze" bearing the head of the Emperor Constantius II (A.D. 337 - 361). Thus proving that the ancient Romans planted and enjoyed the English cabbage. Also apples, for nearby is a venerable apple tree whose gnarled trunk and branches would indicate that it dates back to the Roman Occupation. One can just picture this

ruddy Roman Legionnaire enjoying his well-earned retirement in Cottagium Daisyum, It is a hot summer's day in the late 300's A.D., and he is out in the garden planting a few ordines of cabbagiums; perspiration drops from his ruddy brow, and he pulls out his sudarium, not noticing the tertium bronzum (rather like a farthing) which had got caught in its folds, and which flies out into the cabbagium patchum. He rests for a moment or two on his spadum to catch his breathum, and contemplates the nearby apple-tree, and immediately invents a jingle to instruct the simple savages he is living amongst in the four meanings of the Latin word "Malo" :-

"Malo - 'I would rather be'; malo 'in an apple tree'

Malo - 'than a bad boy be'; malo - 'in adversity!'

Who ever would have imagined that generation after generation of English schoolboys and schoolgirls would rise up and bless this their unknown benefactor and Latin tutor, - a ruddy, retired Roman Legionnaire living in the then little publicised village, or hamlet, of Wickham Occidentalis? But then who again would have recognised some hundreds of years later, in the shy young scholar named William, then living in this same village, (who, because of the extreme courtesy of the villagers towards him coined the celebrated phrase, "Manners Makyth Man"), that William of Wykeham who went on to found first Winchester School, and then New College Oxford? Who indeed? The story must be true, because the same extreme courtesy persists in the village to this day.

We like our little piano: I do not try to emulate Olive's Mozart, Clementi and Eric Coates, but every morning before I take up her tea I serenade her with one or two verses of a hymn, - on Sundays usually an Easter hymn, to remind us that "every Sunday is a little Easter Day". I think Pope said that "music hath charms to soothe..." but it doesn't seem to have much effect, because when I greet her, "Hullo Beauty!" all I get in reply is "Hullo Beast". Our young friends from Olive's class and my "Young Turners to Christ" (alas! my two-year period came to an end this summer!), also enjoy playing, with varying degrees of skill but the same boundless enthusiasm, - during the tea-break in their wood-turning etc. They make all kinds of things from miniature mice to large doll's houses (only one of these, and with a good deal of help and encouragement from us!).

For our summer holiday we had a flat in Hunstanton for a week; when we were not being blown into the Wash by stormy weather, like King John before us, we had an enjoyable time. It is a very pleasant old-fashioned town. We went apple-picking in the Queen's orchards at Sandringham, and brought some Royal Apples home for our young friends, teaching the girls to curtsy before taking their first bite. Some of them took their apples to school, and let their friends have a Royal Bite. Now, some months later, the children of Balsham, and further afield too, go about with a rapt expression on their faces, as in a trance.

And now for the good news! I am re-issuing for the year of our Lord 1984 to those of my Young Turners to Christ, and to anyone else who would like them, my duplicated daily notes, "Read Mark, and Learn", which I send out monthly. If anyone reading this would care to be on my mailing list, I would be quite chuffed. Any number of copies supplied - it just means turning the handle of the duplicator once more. In the words of the Immortal Bard, "Have a Go!" Just a post-card will do, with "Yes Please!" on it, and the number of copies required.

Fr. Harry, Rector of Balsham where Olive has her Vestry Class and where I am privileged to assist at the Sunday services, has completed the Winter Church, shutting off the vast nave by a magnificent velvet curtain and panels of transparent plastic filling in the space above the chancel screen, the wooden struts painted to tone in with the colours of the screen itself. When we retired, I had hoped that at last Olive and I could sit together in church. Things have turned out even better! We do sit together for Evensong every other Sunday, (when I am not taking the service), but in the mornings we are severally on the Lord's business, and as I go through her vestry, where her young charges are assembled, we give each other a conspiratorial and holy wink.

My pipe, (and with it my inspiration, such as it is), is nearly out: I have just enough puff left to sincerely wish you (!) every blessing in this coming New Year.

From

Do-a-Jo