

## ‘Let there be LIGHT’ \*

When I moved to secondary school, ‘I put away childish things’, (1 Corinthians 13.11) ‘sold all that I had and bought it’. (Matthew 13.46) *It*, my ‘pearl of special value’, was a hand-cranked, silent, 9.5mm Pathé projector. One of the first films I acquired, was Mickey Mouse in ‘Mickey’s Choo, Choo’. (YouTube 1929 b/w version) The conclusion, shows Mickey and Minnie disappearing into a dark tunnel - *‘The End’*. But my recollection, as I turned the handle faster and faster, is one of

them hurtling down a decline into a tunnel, and seeing the pin-prick of light getting larger and larger; out into daylight, then disappearing into another tunnel, and out again. Now maybe I have the wrong film in mind, or maybe as an eternal optimist, I just envisaged ‘the light at the end of the tunnel.’

Edmund Bradbury wrote in 1884 under his pen-name ‘Strephon’, about a journey he made on the footplate of an engine, as the train travelled through a two-mile tunnel in the Peak District. (Beware, this is pre-decimalisation!) It concludes, ‘Right in front is the tunnel mouth, in size looking like a threepenny bit: it gets larger: now it assumes the dimensions of a sixpence: it grows into a shilling: soon it appears like a florin: and presently resembles a five-shilling piece. Another half-minute in this vile vault, and then we bust into summer sunshine again.’ (All about Derbyshire) Clearly the engine was steam driven and coal-fired, the coal no doubt having been hewn from the ground by hand, ‘by the blinking and promiseuous Light (sic) of a candle.\*\* I was once entombed in the dungeons of the famous, nay infamous, Lancaster Castle, owned by the Duke of Lancaster, one Queen Elizabeth 11; ‘yes’ she is a Duke too. The door was slammed shut; the darkness was absolute, save for the perpetual light inside my eyes. *I* was merely a visitor, and was let out within minutes; but what of those who languished there for indeterminate lengths of time, often dying of goal-fever before they could be introduced to the hangman’s noose? There are of course, many bioluminescent creatures, such as the glow-worm and the firefly, which create their own light by chemical reaction within themselves; alas, not *homo sapiens*.

At the opposite, bright, end of the light spectrum, come quasars, which of course everyone has *heard* of. This is what Oliver Morton writes of them, ‘In the far reaches of the sky there are sun-bright discs as wide as solar-systems ... What does it serve to know that they are converting matter to energy at the rate that equates to the complete annihilation of a planet the size of the Earth, ten times a second? Or that all the fires of the sun, from its birth to its death, would be a few weeks’ worth of work to one of them? ... Boggle and move on.’ \*\*\* But before we do, ponder a moment; the same Creator, created the glow-worm and the quasar, the darkest and the brightest, the smallest and the greatest. Bishop George Berkeley famously asked in 1710, “If a tree falls in a forest and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound?” Ignoring his own *metaphysical* answer, surely ‘No’, since sound is a wave only detected by the ear. So similarly with light, light is only detected by the eye. Dr Samuel Johnson is quoted by Boswell, replying to a friend, (10 April 1776) “We all *know* what light is, but it is not easy to *tell* what it is.” Well light is energy.

The Bible opens and closes with light, ‘God said, “Let there be light; and there was light.”’ (Genesis 1.3 read also 15-17) ‘There shall be no more night, nor will they need the light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will give them light.’ (Revelation 22.5) Throughout scripture, light is used to symbolise God, faith and holiness. Job, who probably had the darkest existence possible, but didn’t give in, mentions light 29 times; even the book of psalms only mentions it on 14 occasions. John’s gospel spells it out beautifully for us, ‘In God was life, and that life was the light of mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness cannot extinguish it. Jesus came as a manifestation of that light. The true light which gives light to everyone. (John 1.4-9) When Jesus was taken to the temple by his parents, according to the law, Simeon holds him in his arms and says of Him, ‘A light to lighten everyone.’ (Luke 2.32), commonly referred to as the Song of Simeon or the Nunc Dimittis. So that Jesus later says, ‘I am the light of the world.’ (John 8.12) and then, ‘You are the light of the world. So let your light shine.’ (Matthew 5.14 & 16) reiterated by St Paul, ‘You are all children of light.’ (1Thessalonians 5/5) ‘Walk as children of light. (Ephesians 5.8)

Between 1851 and 1853, the Pre-Raphaelite, William Holman Hunt painted one of the most famous works ever. “The Light of the World”: (Ed. Insert illustration please) You can see it in the side-chapel of Keble College chapel; I say ‘it’, because he painted a much larger version, which is hung in St. Paul’s Cathedral, and a smaller one, on display in Manchester City Art Gallery. It depicts the risen Christ wearing the crown of thorns, knocking at a door which has no handle, hence it can only be opened from the inside. It represents Revelations 3.20, ‘Behold I stand at the door and knock’, an allegory for Christ’s invitation to us, to welcome him into our hearts and our lives; or justification by faith alone; he is there waiting, we only have to invite him in. There are in fact two lights; the lamp he is carrying, is the light of conscience, and his halo is the light of salvation.

The opposite allegory, from light into darkness, is illustrated in the play, within Shakespeare’s play, Hamlet, which he dubbed ‘The Mousetrap’!, Claudius wracked with guilt can stand it no longer and rushes out shouting, ‘Give me some light’; (Act 3 Sc 2) all he can see, is the darkness of his actions, he craves the light of salvation. Similarly, on the dying of his father, Dylan Thomas wrote the lines, imploring him, “Do not go gentle into that good night, rage, rage against the dying of the light.”

For me, some of the most beautiful words in the English language, are written in the third collect for Evening Prayer (Evensong) ‘Lighten our darkness, we beseech thee, O Lord ...’ So as we travel through the dark days, the tunnel, of Lent, let us anticipate the glorious light at the end of the tunnel, the blinding light of the risen Christ on Easter Day.

*May I wish you light at the end of your tunnel.                      A Very Blessed and Joyous Easter.*

\* Genesis 1.3

\*\* Charles Cotton ‘The Wonders of the Peake’ 1682

\*\*\* ‘Intelligent Life’ January/February 2016

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