

The Secret Drawer

In his delightful book *The Golden Years* the British writer Kenneth Grahame (1859-1932) speaks of adults as the *Olympians* – residing somewhere up in the clouds, remote from the world where children play. *On the whole, the existence of these Olympians seemed to be entirely void of interests . . . their habits stereotyped and senseless. To anything but appearances they were blind. For them the orchard (a place elf-haunted, wonderful!) simply produced so many apples and cherries: or it didn't . . .* The Olympians had reduced the world to “objects” or “things” – a robin to a *turdus migratorius* - scientifically speaking.

In one episode a boy-narrator tells of his being introduced to an old writing desk in an attic “*H’m! Sheraton!*” remarked his uncle, referring to its 18th century make. He then revealed the desk’s pigeon-holes and drawers. “*There’s a secret drawer in there somewhere.*” The uncle then left, but the boy remained stirred by *those magic syllables* – “*a secret drawer*”. It *conjured up images of a sliding panel, bullion, ingots, Spanish dollars, hidden treasure*. He approached the desk, probed every smooth surface in search of some knob or spring that might release the secret drawer. Unyielding, the old desk stood, *guarding its secret*. He grew discouraged but then *with a sort of small sigh . . . the secret drawer sprang open*. Excited he carried it to the window. But his excitement gave way to disappointment for the drawer contained no ingots or silver but only two tarnished gilt buttons, a crayoned picture, some foreign copper coins, a list of birds’ eggs and where they had been found, and one ferret’s muzzle. Nothing of any worth at all! And yet as the boy viewed the contents a warmth crept back into his heart, for he knew them to be the hoard of some long forgotten boy like himself - treasures he had stowed away one by one and had cherished secretly awhile: and then - what? Well . . . one would never know . . . *but across the void stretch of years I seemed to touch hands a moment with my little comrade of seasons long since dead*. He then replaced the secret drawer with its contents.

Obviously to that earlier boy every item in that drawer – despite their being mere objects of no significance to others – had heartfelt meaning. They were relics of experiences that thrilled him in some way. The ferret’s muzzle – retaining the memory of a once beloved pet; the crayoned picture worth saving as much as a Rembrandt portrait; the list of birds’ eggs so speckled and colorful, so oval, so fragile that he had to record where and when he found them -- just as the Bible records the Exodus from Egypt or the birth of Christ as momentous, meaningful events requiring dramatic preservation. Don’t we all have a secret drawer somewhere within our being – with events, tarnished gilt buttons or a bagfull of marbles or an old rosary . . . ?

Today’s second reading speaks of your *old* self and your *new* self. Instead of your *old* self may it not really mean your *current* self as an Olympian, your mind preoccupied by a world where even people are mere “objects” or “things”; landscapes unseen as you speed down Highway 12; so much forgetfulness of what really exists? And may not this *current* self need to be re-created – anew - to re-experience reality as inexhaustibly meaningful - as it began, before adult chatter erased your wonder? What was it Jesus said?
Unless you become as little children . . .

Geoff Wood