

In No Strange Land

It has been nine months since – with my son’s support – I led my wife Jane into her present Assisted Living location – and she so docile and I on the verge of breaking down. And since then I have been living at our home – by myself – and the house seems absolutely empty – just me and the furniture and dishware and pictures . . . which seem to have “stopped” the way a clock does when the mind and vitality and voice and presence and loveliness of so intimate a companion is – gone!

The environment has become so impersonal – indeed, even more so when I turn on the TV: all those talking heads who have things to sell, staring in my direction but themselves “blind” to me and millions of others. Nevertheless one maintains the old routine: meals, errands, tidying up, making the bed, tossing the circulars. The computer remains the only window worth opening as well as books of interest.

And then one morning as I arose from my living room couch, where I have been sleeping every night, the living room came silently alive. I mean the coffee table, the bookcase, the mantle piece, the recliner, the dishware cabinet, the oak tree outside my window and the yard, the birds . . . In other words a radical truth emerged, things unseen began to appear . . . the usual, ordinary things. Far from being just things, mute matter, indifferent, impersonal they reflected light, took on a kind of presence or personality. I sensed them as becoming alive, actively relating to me.

And I thought: “Why shouldn’t I experience that?” After all they existed! They shared something quite radical with me: they BE, they ARE, I BE, I also AM. If you think deeply enough, I and they share “being” – the most fundamental description of everything and everyone you touch in this world. And as *Human* Beings it has been said: We are the Shepherds of Being, the caretakers, the voice, indeed the cultivators of raw being into meaningful being – like the couch I sleep on. Suddenly I didn’t feel so lonely among my many related beings, who share my space, my house, which itself once wasn’t there but now IS – and everything bearing a trace of Jane which has become also what they ARE.

Philosophers and theologians complain that we modern folk have forgotten our actual solidarity *with* as well as responsibility *for* all the beings among which we share the fact that we: ARE!

Poets, like Francis Thompson, of course, rather than complain, *proclaim* that fact – that, alienated as we may feel, we really live *In No Strange Land*:

O world invisible, we view thee, / O world intangible, we touch thee, / . . . The angels keep their ancient places— / Turn but a stone and start a wing ! / 'Tis ye, 'tis your estrangèd faces, / That miss the many-splendored thing. // But (when so sad thou canst not sadder) / Cry—and upon thy so sore loss / Shall shine the traffic of Jacob’s ladder / Pitched betwixt Heaven and Charing Cross. // Cry— . . . And lo, Christ walking on the water, / Not of Genesareth, but Thames!

Geoff Wood