

The Times they are a-changin'

My brother-in-law will be buried tomorrow back in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. He lived to be 94, a Marine veteran of World War II, as good, dependable a man that you would want to meet – and if you did, he'd do the listening while you did the talking. That's how comfortable he was with himself and others. Polish/Lithuanian descent. I remember he attended one of the many Catholic High Schools of our hometown – part of a system that by 1920 enrolled 1.8 million students taught by 42,000 teachers (mostly members of religious orders). The Catholic high school system duplicated of the Public high school system – and the City Championship contests were a revival - in less bloody terms – of the 16th century Wars of Religion. Would you believe it? His all male high school had a student enrollment of 4,200. *The school is closed today – as are so many other parish elementary and diocesan high schools.*

Lewis Carroll, author of the Alice books, was a 19th century prophet. I think he had in mind changes in his world that are even more rapidly taking over nowadays. After Alice follows a talking rabbit down his rabbit hole she lands in a world where none of her standards apply. First she found herself falling in slow motion for ever so long a time without mortal consequences. Then she landed in a hall lined with locked doors and one moment Alice was small, the next she was very tall. Next she kept meeting animals who talked with an air of superiority that reversed her notion of the hierarchy of being wherein humans were top dogs (oops) and mice held superior attitudes. I mean Alice was treated as quite ignorant to speak fondly of her cat to a mouse. *Dear, dear! How queer everything is today! . . . I wonder if I've changed in the night? . . . Was I the same when I got up this morning? . . . But if I'm not the same, the next question is, 'Who in the world am I?' - a question a college senior might ask today after four years of college. To hold fast to her normality Alice began to recite the multiplication table, but it came out wrong. How can math be wrong? Numbers tell the truth, right?*

So also with those disciplinary poems she had learned: *How doth the little busy bee / Improve each shining hour/ And gather honey all the day/ From every opening flower!// How skillfully she builds her cell!// How neat she spreads the wax!// And labours hard to store it well / With the sweet food she makes.// In books, or work, or healthful play,/ Let my first years be passed,/ That I may give for every day / Some good account at last.* But when Alice tried to remember it, it all came out – unintelligible: *How doth the little crocodile / Improve his shining tail, / And pour the waters of the Nile / On every golden scale! // How cheerfully he seems to grin, / How neatly spreads his claws, / And welcomes little fishes in, / With gently smiling jaws!*

Philosophers have been saying our world, which for the past 2500 years has held to a configuration that puts “reason” on top and prides itself on its technical know-how, has become shaky thanks to our forgetfulness of how to read a book. Poets write things like *Things fall apart; the center cannot hold* (nor can the top). More popular lyrics say the same:: *Come gather 'round people / Wherever you roam / And admit that the waters / Around you have grown / . . . Then you better start swimmin' . . . / For the times they are a-changin'.* Surely it's time to awake from a routine to a vital, thoughtful faith – life is too short not to think deep. At 93 I'm just beginning.

