

## **Out With the Old, In with the New: Cares and Blessings**

Well, Janus, the two faced god is in our midst, offering us much we can be happy to be shed of and much to give us new cause for concern. Thankfully, the Pandora's box of unbelievable disasters that was 2022 has been emptied out and most of us here in N. Dakota have survived it. But "we've seen fires and we've seen rains, we've seen wrack and woe from crazy hurricanes; peace in one house, slaughter in the next; Surely Lucifer was author of that text/ So much for living in interesting times./ The eleventh hour is nearly gone/ I can almost hear the chimes.

But I'm going to put those bad days out of mind;/ each day holds something hidden but sublime.

Shelly, the poet "had an eye for such mysteries," despite life's perfidy: "We look before and after/ And pine for what is not/ Our sincerest laughter/ With some pain is fraught./ Our sweetest songs are those/That tell of saddest thought."

On the bleakest coldest day of that last sub zero siege, I took my usual 3 o'clock drive out to see if any pheasants were desperate enough to endure the roadside blast in quest of seeds with grit. It was foggy and miserable and I had about concluded that no wildlife was crazy enough to venture into that miasma. Only "mad dogs and Englishmen," like myself, are that lunatic.

But then, to my astonishment a jubilation of snow buntings exploded from the road side like a bomb of big confetti, and they spun and sported in that blast in obvious delight. Clearly they were in their element. Snow buntings are white with rusty patches visible to sharp eyes. So when they do their mass explosion the effect is breath-taking-joyous life reveling in utter bleakness.

Had I been walking it would have been a "Darkling Thrush" moment like the one Thomas Hardy captured, describing his amazement at hearing a thrush sing

beautifully in an evening gloom and drizzle most would shun. “So little cause for caroling”/ he harbored with his aire,”Some blessed hope whereof he knew/ But I was unaware.” My point is Hopkins’ “There hides the dearest freshness/ Deep down things.”There’s a robin singing somewhere/ In some sheltered copse he sings./ We must not forget the rainbow/ When the drizzle soaks our wings.

I’m having fun trying to write this thing in rhyme, so now it’s back to prose. On a more somber note, I was watching the English sparrows in our bird feeder pecking up seeds with gusto right in the chill of that same bleak storm, but perched off to one side was a tiny tree sparrow that had somehow gotten left behind by the flock he was flying south with. It sat there bravely weathering the blast, but he had his beak stuck into his feathers, no doubt trying to keep it from freezing up. Perhaps it had already frozen up. But I was certain of one thing, he would be dead by morning. And the next day he lay dead below my feeder, which had probably enticed him into staying behind. I’m going to miss him, but Nature abhors pity.

On the human front, a couple of hopeful things emerged from the mayhem of everyday life. When Daman Hamlin, playing for Buffalo, got lethally injured, both teams knelt down to pray for him. I know he’ll make it. If God let him down all the atheists would hold a celebration, dead certain they were right. God will bring something amazing out of that near tragedy. And I was heartened to see how many believers joined in that prayer.

Frankly, any soldier, or athlete in a violent sport is nuts if he thinks he doesn’t need some divine protection when human projectiles of solid muscle are being thrown at him on every play. Evangelist Andrew Wommack describes the firefight he was in in Viet Nam and hearing the bullets whizzing around him as he prayed for the NVA he was shooting at. He survived it all, unscathed, and now, looking 50

at 70, he still preaches full-time while directing Cheri Bible College which he founded in Colorado.

Thomas Hardy of course captured war's irony: "Yes quaint and curious war is/  
You shoot a fellow down/ You'd treat if met where any bar is/ Or help with half a  
crown."

I'd still like to advocate a new holiday for all, who like me, wish the January  
molasses would scat. It would climax on the eve of the 31<sup>st</sup>, and the theme would  
be, "Janus, with this toast, we kick you lovingly out of our annus; hope to see you  
next annus in Hawaii! (Annus is Latin for *year*, in case you were wondering.)

But thankfully, this annus, so far, we're suffering mainly fog. The three-week  
endurance tests of 25 below seem to have departed with "global warming." The  
catch phrase in those by-gone bone-chilling days was "jumper cables."

But I have little to lament. A good friend of mine, who moved to Nevada to  
escape our winters, recently wrote that he had fallen three times and broken bones  
in his hips and shoulders. All that while his wife is suffering from Alzheimer's.  
Moreover, thanks to global warming, our fuel bills are staying almost bearable.  
I'm learning to remind myself that if I've got a pain somewhere, 90% of my body  
has no pain at all. Count your blessings, and be thankful you live in America. "If  
winter comes, / Can spring be far behind?"

Gene Pinkney/ 23-01-12- for the Daily News.