

3rd September 2020

Cheerfulness

**“I have tried too in my time to be a philosopher;
but, I don’t know how, cheerfulness was always breaking in!”**

Oliver Edwards, quoted by James Boswell in ‘Life of Samuel Johnson’

A late minister friend once remarked of a colleague, “He has the kind of face that could turn water into vinegar.” He also described him as having a permanent black cloud over his head even on the sunniest of days. Given the lugubrious nature and mournful countenance of a man I also knew well, I considered my friend’s descriptions to be fairly accurate.

Consider the 18th century English lawyer, Oliver Edwards, therefore, to be a suitable antithesis to a sour-faced and gloomy clergyman. I don’t know why Edwards considered *philosophers* to be dull, but I’m delighted to learn that “cheerfulness was always breaking in” to his serious thought.

The English writer, Samuel Smiles (Oh, how aptly named!) wrote at the end of the 19th century in *Self Help*, “Cheerfulness gives elasticity to the spirit. Spectres fly before it.” Self-help indeed! Would that more of us could find such “elasticity of the spirit” to expand our life and thinking beyond seriousness and gloominess, as well as banishing our spectres.

We live in serious times, and, of course, the issues of the day have to be taken seriously, and approached with care, dignity, sound sense and genuine gravitas. No one wants important aspects of our lives to be trivialised or dismissed. But do we have to be serious *all* the time? Might a little bit of cheerfulness not be allowed to break in from time to time?

The poet Joseph Addison wrote in *The Spectator* in 1712:

Mirth is like a flash of lightening that breaks through a gloom of clouds, and glitters for a moment: cheerfulness keeps up a kind of day-light in the mind.

I like that! If the world needs anything at the moment, it’s a bit of “day-light in the mind.” So, perhaps, each of us is called upon to play our part in that. Whether we are a clergyman or philosopher, poet or writer, lawyer or friend, a bit of cheerfulness will cost us nothing, but it might make a huge difference to someone if we give it away today.

A prayer for today

Lord, when you give me the gift of a smile, give me the grace to pass it on. Amen

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