

1st August 2021

Changes

“A permanent state of transition is man's most noble condition.”

Juan Ramón Jiménez, Historic Reason

I reflected recently on a distillery tour in Speyside. There are many metaphors which I could use from that day – and I may well return to some others at a later date. But the one I've chosen for today is “change”.

For a start, because of Covid restrictions, the nature of the tour had been changed. The tour party was smaller in number because of social distancing, and we weren't permitted to move around the working parts of the distillery. So the information about whisky-making had to be imparted by means of displays and animations on screens. The guide was excellent, but, as she admitted, the tour was different from usual. The indoor café was closed, so we ate outside in a newly designed seated area. Lots of alterations had had to be made to make sure staff and customers were safe. More hard work ... More changes.

But the ultimate concept of change was in the making of the whisky itself. I'll not go into all the subtleties, because I'm not sure I really understand them all. But it's all about changes of one sort or another: the germination of the barley; the effect of the yeast; sugar turning to alcohol; the creation of the necessary spirit; the use of oak barrels; the choice of sherry or bourbon casks to change the colour, “nose” and taste of the whisky; the differences over time that result in a twelve-year-old, a fifteen-year-old, a forty-year-old single malt, and the like. Nothing, it appeared, was static. It was all about changes, some controlled, some understood, and some – to the uneducated mind – quite miraculous.

Juan Ramón Jiménez's “a permanent state of transition” could easily be applied to whisky. “A most noble condition”? Maybe that too, especially when it arrives at the stage when it's suitable for my palate – and pocket! But my point today is this: are all of us, all of the time, not in a “permanent state of transition”? We are different today from what we were yesterday, and tomorrow we shall be different again. Might recognition and acceptance of these continual changes be good for us? Might being in a permanent state of transition be *our* most noble condition too?

A prayer for today

Changeless God, if I am to be changed today, please let it be for the better. Amen.