

12th July 2022

Robins

**"Art thou the bird whom Man loves best,
The pious bird with the scarlet breast,
Our little English Robin;
The bird that comes about our doors
When autumn winds are sobbing?"**

William Wordsworth, *The Redbreast Chasing the Butterfly*

When I was writing recently about swallows, a touching family story came to mind that leaves me with a warm feeling as I recall it here.

When my late aunt was preparing her Will, she had to include my personal details as her Executor. She got my name and address right. But she got the house-name wrong. It wasn't *Swallows' Nest* but *Robins Nest* she'd told the Solicitor. (And, once again, we'll not debate the use, or non-use, of the possessive apostrophe ...) Fortunately, it didn't invalidate the Will, but, from that day, I'll always associate the robin with my aunt. I can't see a robin without smiling at the memory of a lovely lady.

In ancient times, the robin was considered to be a "storm-cloud bird" and was sacred to Thor, the god of thunder in Norse mythology. More recently, a different side of the robin was evidenced in the traditional children's tale, *Babes in the Wood*, where robins cover the dead bodies of the children. Yet for most of us, I suspect, it's the robin's association with Christmas that comes to mind. With stamps, Christmas cards and tree-decorations, the robin and Christmas have become synonymous.

There's a legend that when Jesus was dying on the Cross, the robin, then simply brown in colour like the sparrow, flew to his side and sang in his ear to comfort him in his pain. The blood from Jesus' wounds stained the robin's breast, and now all robins carry the mark of Christ's blood on them. An alternative legend has it that the robin's breast was scorched fetching water for souls in Purgatory. But it's more likely that the robin/Christmas association arises from the fact that postmen in Victorian Britain wore red jackets and were nicknamed "Robins".

"You pays your money, and you takes your choice" as they say. And me? I'll still remember my aunt with great affection – and, the truth is, I don't always need a robin to help me do that.

A prayer for today

Thank you, God, for memories that even the smallest thing can bring to mind. Amen

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