10th September 2025

Licensed

"But what is Freedom? Rightly understood
A universal licence to be good."
Hartley Coleridge, *Liberty (1833)*

I'm having to renew by Driving License. In the UK, if you're over 70, this has to be done every three years. The photo on my license is so out-of-date, no one would recognise it as me anyway! And anyway, there's a tranche of new eyesight regulations about to kick-in for over 70s, so I thought I'd better get in there early!

Having an up-to-date license means I'm permitted to drive. When I was young, you needed a license to own a dog. No longer! But you still need a license to be married. I remember my father saying at his silver wedding in 1970 that it was the best 7/6 he'd ever spent. (That's about 37p in today's terms, and it's a *lot* more expensive to get a marriage license nowadays!) Licenses are needed for other things too: to fly a plane; own a firearm; run a Pub; have a street party; arrange a parade … and much more besides. (I'll not to go down the 007 route today and touch on "The license to kill". Too tricky …) A license simply means you are a fit and proper person to carry out a particular activity, and that your behaviour accords with the regulations of the licensing authority.

In this regard, I liked the affirmation quoted above by the poet Hartley Coleridge, when he was reflecting on liberty. Freedom is important, of course. But it should never be choosing to live and behave without license. For with freedom comes responsibility, and *that*, Coleridge suggests, is our license. It's our "being a fit-and-proper-person" license, our "behaving-in-accordance-with-the-regulations" license. In Coleridge's language, that's the universal license to *be* good. And to that I would add, it carries with it the responsibility to *do* good to those around us, to make the world a better place.

Just for the over-seventies? No! It's a license we have from birth. Renewed every three years? No! It's a license that calls us to be responsible *all* the time. For a particular activity? No! It covers all aspects of our lives. A cost? No! It's free to us all. It's a license, with your photo on it, your name right beside it. It's your license to do good. Make sure you use it well.

A prayer for today

Licensed to live. Licensed to love. Licensed to do good. Renewed every day!

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