

Some Delightful Things

This afternoon the sky is blue and iced with powder like a delicious confection spangled with castor sugar. Flocks of clouds migrate and graze appearing with the cooling evening like creatures too well clothed for the height of noon. Against these shades of gray or white the wheeling flights of pigeons wear and whirry in shoals of silent splendor, gamboling in gratitude for their awaited sunshine.

As the sporting squadrons turn the uniform aspect of their wings beats the setting sun into coruscating glints of fulgent white. Then a swerve and tilt occults them to the gray invisibility of their backdrop. Another sweep another revolution and their shimmering shower dives again.

Finer than the magnesium bursts of our barbarous Autumn ritual are these, who proclaim their life before the infinity of the darkening skies, for they thank for life in their own way, scorning to gloat upon death.

In the gloaming of a Winter afternoon years ago an undergraduate mixed silver nitrate with ammoniacal liquor in Sonia Dunstan's laboratory and precipitated a storm of shimmering silver snow which billowed and convected around his test tube intestinally kneading itself like some meiotic cell about to engender a new sentience. Try as he might the experiment was unrepeatable. Was it that the pH was not quite right, the concentrations, the temperature? What trace catalysts were lacking what surface effects what unknown and adventitious preconditions of chemistry?

And yet the circling pigeons and the swirling silver are evanescent things the artifacts of circumstance metaphors of the greater Reality of which they are a part, unique and yet replicable.

One of the strangest metaphors I have read is in the paeon to Charity of First Corinthians Thirteen. Much of Paul is dourly hortative and rather odd so that one wonders whether Thirteen is a plagiarism or an interpolation, so scintillating is its brilliance. As the author finishes his tender and powerful encomium upon the virtue of love he makes an assertion as startling and as anachronistic as it is famous: "For now we see through a glass, darkly;"

To us, familiar with glass and optical prosthetics of all kinds this may seem less than an original simile. But to the Romans, without telescopes, microscopes, cameras and only with window panes and tableware in the precincts of the rich this must have seemed well nigh incomprehensible. Why such a wrought metaphor, appealing it seems to a knowledge of technologies yet unborn?

Some would say that the ancients knew of these things because they were befriended by extraterrestrial animals who have since forsaken us. Some would say that this is the revealed Light of Christ who anticipates all things since He comprehends the track of time. Some shrug it off as one of those things, appealing to the proverbial troop of monkeys who given sufficient time replicate The Bard's *ouvrage* on a typewriter.

Perhaps the school of pigeons teaches us that things which are there may remain invisible. They may for ever stay invisible lost against the incanous background of the infinite. Then they may turn, so without adjustment of their magnitude or range, they become apparent or even obvious. Maybe as our apposition to The Light modifies we discern where we once gazed in ignorance.

The glinting shower of silver flakes was latent in the clear and colorless fluid of my tube. It awaited only the conjunction of forces which would congeal. A different balance of influences would have born a jet-black colloid of minute motes of this brightest metal: Or a veiling mirror upon the glass that would have reflected my own face. Indeed "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known".