

26th June 2024

Friends

**“Old friends are the great blessing of one's latter years –
half a word conveys one's meaning.
They have memory of the same events,
and have the same mode of thinking.”**

Horace Walpole, *in a letter to Sir Horace Mann (1776)*

I've always valued friendships, and, like Horace Walpole, I've come to value them more and more in *my* “latter years”. There are many aspects to this, some of which are simply beyond analysis. But I was recently introduced to a new metaphor about friendships which I found really helpful.

For a gathering of volunteers in a charity with which I've been involved for a number of years, each of us was invited to bring a book which meant a great deal to us, to include in it a little note as to its significance in our lives, and to offer it for sale for the charity. My book was *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* by James Hogg. Dating from 1824, this fascinating exploration of the human psyche, wrapped up with the religious norms of the day, has been on my bookshelves all my life. I've lost count the number of times I've read it. Every time I do, it offers me something new. At different stages of my life, it has provided me challenges and insights, disturbance and clarity, and always – *always* – fascination.

Sitting with a friend at the event, we discussed each other's books, and the whys and wherefores of how much they meant to us. “And do you know,” my friend said, “that a precious book is like an old friend. No matter how long it has been since you've met up, there's always something new.”

In that analysis, built on the metaphor of a familiar and well-thumbed book, you have all you need to know about good friendships. No matter how often you meet, and even if there are long gaps between one meeting and another, there is always something new to discover, a challenge here, an insight there, a meaning one day, a pleasure another. A precious friendship is, indeed, like an old book – you never tire of one another's company, and it's always invigorating to spend time together again.

Horace Walpole wrote to his friend, “Old friends are the great blessing of one's latter years – half a word conveys one's meaning.” For Walpole as for me, this will be a meaning that really matters – every time.

A prayer for today

Thank God for old friendships that never age, especially when they're forever new. Amen

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