

THE GARDEN REMAINS

THIS GREEN TIME OF YEAR, as I plant seeds and dig in compost and trim raspberry canes, I think of the original garden from which, according to one legend, our putative ancestors were expelled. I wonder many things about that garden. For one, when God enjoined Adam and Eve to “dress it and keep it,” did our ancestors consider their assignment work? It wasn’t work in the sense of standing outside the gates of Eden and starting the human race on the road to serfdom, slavery, day shifts, and leveraged buyouts. Rather, such dressing and keeping must have reflected a natural instinct to be engaged with what nurtured them.

How it nurtured them is given relatively short shrift in this legend, particularly regarding what must have been the enormous beauty of that garden. In many ways the garden is taken for granted: it was good, but then things got bad. This seems to me, as I look around the Vermont hillside on which my wife and I reside, a much deeper failing than partaking of knowledge, the supposed original sin. Why isn’t the green world enough for us?

There is no shortage of answers—the specter of mortality, sheer restlessness, cupidity and anxiety. To reside in the pagan world of celebrating the harvest god is to acknowledge the difficult truth that life is cyclical rather than linear. It is to give primacy to what is in front of us rather than what is behind the scenes. And it is to lay to rest a degree of our inherent uncertainty about this world. The seasons come and go; so do we. That is that. The excitable news of

the linear world is so much palaver.

I tend to think that once human beings entertained notions of the infinite, it was all over. Such a scale had nothing to do with the human race and, in its imaginative potential, everything to do with the human race: it dealt with overwhelming, impos-



sible questions like, Why are we here? and Where are we going? Overwhelming questions tend to call for overwhelming answers. The garden answers those questions too, but in a very different manner, a much milder one. The garden tells us that we are here as part of all that lives and dies and that where we go is at once plain—back to the earth—and mysterious. We can celebrate both ends.

Alas, the human race never has been very good at appreciation. We’re active and for-

getful creatures who tend to be glib. To build a culture of appreciation for the finite and reside there may be the largest task facing the human race. It certainly won’t be accomplished by being busier and creating more labyrinths of money. Weeding and hoeing are much more important. So is cooking. So is any imaginative endeavor that makes us feel at home on earth.

When the song “Woodstock” proclaimed that “we’ve got to get ourselves back to the garden,” it wasn’t as hippie-foolish as it might have seemed. The backers of the blind certainty that perpetually afflicts human affairs and demands blood sacrifices in the name of ideologies, nation-states, and ethnic hatreds might ponder the peace that resides in that line. We may have left something very crucial behind; yet the good news is that anyone can see the garden any day on earth. It’s called *grass or tree or fruit or flower*.

Maybe the gift of the green world is more than we can bear. Maybe that is the legend of the garden. Maybe the shame and guilt that go with our exile are more real than any of us can bear.

We blew it and continue to blow it. Do we have to? I don’t think so, but the image of two stricken, cowering people is what it is. In one unforgettable sense that is the human race.

Today is beautiful, one of those I-can-feel-everything-growing days. I will go outside and affix pea tendrils to the fence. The tendrils know what to do, but I can help them. I can stand there and linger for long, fulfilling moments and simply take it in. It seems the best of all worlds. 🐸