

16th July 2021

Growth

**“Now I am here, what thou wilt do with me
None of my books will show:
I read, and sigh, and wish I were a tree;
For then I should grow
To fruit or shade: at least some bird would trust
Her household to me, and I should be just.”**

George Herbert, Affliction (1633)

I reflected recently on a trip across Europe with a band of intrepid workers heading to a friend's renovation project in Tuscany. My friend had a passion for clearing the overgrown terraces above and below the old farmhouse and planting new vines – in keeping with the banks of vine-covered terraces on the hillsides around us. I was foreman of the “clearing squad”, and with chainsaws and machetes we set about our task with vigour and enthusiasm. Eventually, the time came for the planting of the first vine. The lads were called together. Our host carefully put the fragile vine in its place. It was “heeled in” and watered, and he addressed the little plant – in the Scottish vernacular – “All the best, wee man! An' here's to more like you.” And there was a rousing cheer on a Tuscan hillside.

My friend no longer has that farmhouse, so I have no idea what happened to it or the terraces of replanted vines. But I do know from that small beginning there was growth enough to furnish me with a bottle of *Vino Novello* the following year – and it wasn't too bad either.

Any horticulturist – far less an aspiring *vigneron* – will tell you that growth will happen, no matter what. But if you want even the most fragile of vines to produce something worthwhile, a lot of hard work is necessary.

In the Bible's Book of Proverbs we read this:

I passed by the field of the sluggard and by the vineyard of the man lacking sense ... It was overgrown with thistles; its surface was covered with nettles.

“Sluggard”? “Lacking in sense”? It's a tragedy if the vineyard in which we plant our good things isn't properly prepared and cared for. Or when the Fruits of the Spirit should be growing well but are choked with thistles and nettles, are we depriving God of the *Vino Novello* of our service?

A prayer for today

Nurture me, Lord, so that I might produce good fruit for you. Amen.