

Snowdrops at Ditchley Park

Beneath a February sky not yet prepared, though shifting cloud scenes, quite to open, here is the square-clipped beech-hedge, whose sere leaves, yet inhabitant, voice the wind with a noise of water talking to itself; here is the beech-tree planted by the Queen in nineteen-fifty-nine—it has done well for a tree planted after such a drought; here the contemplative pavilion; and now, where the formal path and the thick turf gave way to soil round the pavilion corner, here, as they were last year and years before, are the snowdrops (still in a lee of moss and leafmould—or else their buds are still too clenched to tremble—under a light net thrown of swaying shadows from ash and hazel saplings)—a myriad snowdrops (but not white like snow: not assertive enough for candor, not cold and crystalline, but cool and ivory veined with green) here as they always were, their regular indifference earth's ultimately most acceptable and truest welcome, its heart of charity: being themselves, waiting for me or anyone to turn the corner into grace.

They stay;
or rather,
they will go and come again.
Not I;
this may well be the last time that I see them; or there will be a last time as for those—even—who live here now. And yet I hope (turning some seasonal corner when it comes, my turn to leave time when no time is left) to see the Galaxy not as Winter Street but like this bank of snowdrops; where deity may walk in the cool of the year, projecting spring.

—Arthur Henry King