

## WHAT TIGGERS LIKE BEST

I guess we all have our favourite characters in Winnie-the Pooh, and probably that would give a psychiatrist a field day - we can even do it for ourselves. I had a breakthrough with a couple in understanding why they fought so much when I asked them what animal they saw themselves as - one said a lion, and the other a tiger. So closely related, and yet so different. Well, one of my favourite characters is Tigger - which is no doubt the result of Wobbly Spelling of tiger. He represents to me that entirely loveable, and yet entirely infuriating person who bounces through the world not really aware of what is going on either in himself or outside.

In the story 'Tigger has breakfast' we are introduced to him - and so is Pooh. Unfortunately this is in the middle of the night. Pooh is very sleepy, but Tigger is his natural bouncy self. Pooh has to be very firm that night is a good time for going to sleep. I see a parallel here with people who are taken by surprise when they encounter Jesus. They are not quite sure what to make of him - and what they need is time to get things in perspective. The Lord of the Dance is all set to swirl them into the throng, but they need time to sleep on it. In terms of the story that is wise. The other animals are infected with Tigger's enthusiasm, but they also need to earth it - in fact at once stage you may remember they have a plot to 'unbounce Tigger'. Enthusiasm in religion has had a mixed press over the centuries - but in general terms it has always been encountered with much the same reaction as they have to Tigger. It has an appeal, but it generates suspicion and discontent as well. You can see it right through Christian history, in the Montanists of the later 2<sup>nd</sup> century right down to charismatics in our own. And of course it doesn't have to be simply charismatic groups and individuals who become Christian Tiggers - some of you may remember a quiet different sort of enthusiasm with Buchman and the Moral Re-Armament movement in the late thirties and forties.

The difficulty with all enthusiasts, whether religious charismatics or train-spotters, is that they assume that everyone can and indeed should get bitten with the same bug. That is why the other animals find Tigger so irritating. Tigger doesn't make moral judgements, but plenty of Christian Tiggers do. They set up their own set of conditions which make people into 'real' Christians, or 'committed' Christians. Both those expressions are perfectly valid ones, but they are sometimes given a quite specific meaning by some people - which usually amounts to 'are you one of us?' I get a little weary of it sometimes. If the thing which they see (whatever it may be) as the true way, the right worship, the perfect Christian life really *were* what they claim, then it would be quite obvious to everyone. You hear of churches desperately copying what some other church has done successfully, as if that will be a panacea, an automatic success for them as well. Of course it won't, because God in his goodness has made us all different. So imposing on a community, or indeed on an individual, a set of values and practices which are Right with a capital R is terribly dangerous - not only because that thing may not be right for that person or place, but also because it prevents that person or place getting on with the search for what *is right*. I tend to feel alongside Eeyore, who when he is introduced to Tigger is told

'He's just come' explained Piglet

'Ah!', said Eeyore again

He thought for a long time and then said

‘When is he going?’

The story of Tigger is in part the story of Tigger learning to differentiate himself from the rest of the world, and to know himself as he really is. On that first morning with Pooh, Tigger is found staring at his reflection in the looking-glass:

Hallo, said Tigger, I’ve just found somebody just like me. I thought I was  
the only one of them

Developmental psychologists tell us that this is the process we all go through in early childhood - learning to know ourselves as separate from our mothers - learning where I ends and you begins. You remember Alexander Pope’s great warning in the Essay on Man

Know thyself, presume not God to scan

The proper study of mankind is man.

I disagree with Pope in the end of the day - I think the proper study of mankind is God, but I also agree with him that in order to know God, we have to know quite a bit about ourselves. Apart from anything else, it helps to know where I stop, and God begins - because as we have already thought, we have the potential for projecting ourselves onto God, and making him like us.

Tigger then assumes that he is like everyone else. This is worked out in the great hunt for his breakfast. Pooh has only one culinary delight to offer him of course - but that is no problem because apparently Tiggers like everything. That is Tigger’s theory, but we then hear otherwise;

Tigger took a large mouthful of honey...and he looked up at the ceiling with his head on one side, and made exploring noises with his tongue, and considering noises, and what-have-we-got-*here*-noises...and then said in a very decided voice: ‘Tiggers don’t like honey’

And so the search begins. Tiggers then like everything except honey, until he tries Piglet’s haycorns, which means he likes everything except honey and haycorns, and until he tries Eeyore’s thistles, which leads him to understand that he can add thistles to these minor exceptions to his all-embracing diet. The fascinating thing is that when he discovers what Tiggers really *do* like best is something someone else - Roo, as it happens - finds very unpalatable - that is to say Roo’s strengthening medicine, which is Extract of Malt. What is appalling to Roo is sheer heaven to Tigger

That is why Tigger ends up living with Kanga and Roo - he has found out enough about himself to know where he is at home, where he can find his needs met and can be content.

A lot of religious dissatisfaction comes from people being Tiggers who haven’t yet discovered their spiritual Extract of Malt - the things that will sustain them and feed them adequately. I am not talking now so much about the trifling arguments people have about whether they use the Book of Common Prayer or Common

Worship, whether they sing hymns with organs or guitars, and all the multiplicity of non-events that get people so worked up. I am more concerned, as I hope at root we all are, with the more basic thing of why people reject Christianity and religion in general so completely. This Good Friday the majority of our town will not give the crucifixion of Jesus Christ a moment's thought. In normal times, in towns and cities where Christians parade through the streets with a cross, there are countless passers-by who think no more of it than if it were a demonstration against a new road - in fact, probably less. The story of the girl in the jewellers who asked a customer who had requested a cross and chain whether she wanted a plain one or one with a little man on it is probably an entirely accurate reflection of how things are for a large number of people. We comparative enthusiasts, we minor Tiggers, who know who the little man is, and sit in churches, potentially for three hours because of that knowledge on Good Fridays, find that hard to credit. We have to accept, I regret to say, that it is true. What we have to guard against constantly is the temptation also to be Tigger-like in assuming that everyone will like what we like to eat spiritually. Because it is also disturbingly true that many many people who will never darken a church door are asking very profound religious questions, and we are failing to provide them with the answers. I found this working incognito, as it were, as a counsellor. There are many people who assume that we Christians have no answers. But they are certainly asking the questions to which I believe we *do* have answers. In many cases that is because they assume that what they are asking has no relationship to what we have to offer. They want fish, and we are a butchers. They don't see it is likely that we can meet their need.

Now that may be true - but that doesn't entitle us to demand that we make everyone eat our food, or none at all. We dare to claim today that Jesus died not just for those who like haycorns and thistles, but those who like Extract of Malt - actually *like* it! Jesus died for the **whole** world, and we need to be open to the tremendous variety of religious experience that may engender. It may not be to our taste, but that doesn't not mean it is necessarily poisonous. We need the Tiggers to remind us of that, and of the infectious nature of enthusiasm. And Tigger, after all, is willing to try anything once. I think it was Beecham wasn't it, who said we should try everything except incest and folk-dancing! In religious terms, we are maybe unadventurous, even if the result of our adventures is bit a like Tigger's encounter with thistles and honey - we all need to know what we like best, and what will give us the strength we need. And we cannot deny that room to experiment to others either.