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# COMING OUT OF THE BLACK COUNTRY

*A review, by Brooke Lunn, of the memoir by Stanley Underhill*

Stanley became a Brother of our Community here at Sutton's Hospital in Charterhouse in 2003. For his contemporaries here he seems always to have been a pillar of our Community, so well does he adorn it. But he does more than adorn. In March 2011 Sutton's Hospital in Charterhouse issued two publications, both edited by Stanley—*The Oil Paintings of Charterhouse*; and *Handbook and Guide CHARTERHOUSE ART 2011*. Both were the result of meticulous research, and were comprehensive records. Much of this rich heritage was then well displayed around Charterhouse. Subsequently the major plumbing and electrical works, and other actions, led to a decline in display.

On Thursday, 4th October 2018, a goodly company assembled in Great Hall for the book launch which saw the publication of Stanley's memoir. Several of those involved spoke, and then Stanley. For him, both the writing and the going public through publishing had been very demanding but significantly therapeutic. There is a therapeutic process in making public what one has been bottling up inside oneself.

Stanley's early years in the Black Country between the two World Wars must seem to many readers today almost too difficult to imagine. It was a time of the financial and industrial slump of 1929 and subsequent years, known as

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the Depression; a time of the General Strike, the Jarrow March, unemployment, poverty, back-breaking labour; and before the arrival of the NHS and the Welfare State. Such was the context of Stanley's formative years. Then came the long struggle towards coming to terms or, more precisely, making a positive acceptance of his sexual orientation, while at the same time refusing to accept the unfair and unjust social attitudes prevailing at the time.

We all need to have a good self-esteem and to feel that our society accords us a good value. The absence of these good values would give fertile ground for depression. These are some of the challenges which dogged much of Stanley's life. Yet these challenges came up against an indomitable spirit determined to survive, even to thrive. This memoir witnesses to an exercise of honesty and courage.

Stanley's Christian faith that encouraged him to persevere in the face of so many obstacles and challenges evokes in this reviewer memories of another Christian journey of life, recorded in the classic *Pilgrim's Progress—in the similitude of a dream*, by John Bunyan. There too are met the Slough of Despond, Despair, The Valley of Humiliation, Shame, Vanity Fair, and so many other vicissitudes; yet eventually Christian comes to the Celestial City.

Charterhouse is not the Celestial City, but it is a good place for Stanley to be in this stage of his life pilgrimage. Bunyan's pilgrim exists in the similitude of a dream. Stanley's pilgrimage is in real life. So, as Bunyan wrote:

'Who would true valour see,  
Let him come hither;'  
...and read Stanley's memoir. 🍷

*Editorial note: We requested the above review, which was submitted before we were aware of the review requested by Stanley, which appeared in the last issue. Stanley wishes that this other review also be published.*

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