

Moravian Women's Association
Home and Overseas Paper – October 2015

“Worry about money”

Some final thoughts on poverty, before the Moravian Church's conference at Ockbrook on 31 October 2015.

Kathleen Raine (1908 – 2003) was a well known poet and natural scientist, who led an interesting life. As well as writing her own poetry, she was an authority on WB Yeats and William Blake (also poets). She grew up in a Christian home, and obviously knew her Bible well, and often wrote on spiritual themes.

Here is a well known poem by Kathleen Raine.

Worry About Money

*Wearing worry about money like a hair shirt
I lie down in my bed and wrestle with my angel.*

*My bank-manager could not sanction my continuance for another day
But life itself wakes me each morning, and love*

*Urges me to give although I have no money
In the bank at this moment, and ought properly*

*To cease to exist in a world where poverty
Is a shameful and ridiculous offence.*

*Having no one to advise me, I open the Bible
And shut my eyes and put my finger on a text*

*And read that the widow with the young son
Must give first to the prophetic genius
From the little there is in the bin of flour and the cruse of oil.*

The poem expresses very clearly and simply the mental and physical exhaustion of having to worry about money when going to sleep at night, and again waking up in the morning. Money worries are likened to wearing a hair shirt or wrestling with an angel all night long. Its impossible to wake refreshed and ready to face the day with such a load of care. The writer cannot think about her life in any terms other than the dreaded bank account. The shame of it makes her feel that she has committed some crime, and doesn't even deserve to exist. She is also tormented by the feeling that she – who has no money, should be giving, although she has nothing to spare.

The last three lines refer to the Bible. The story is in I Kings 17:7-16. A widow with a young son had only a tiny amount of flour and oil, but because she was feeding Elijah the prophet her food never ran out.

Many people tell stories of opening their Bible at random when they are in the depths of despair to find comfort, hope, and reassurance. At first sight she must have been devastated to read that she must share what little she has. It would however, be nice to think that the last three lines offered the writer a glimmer of hope.

The poem is a powerful reminder that poverty is relentless and grinds down sufferers in so many ways, that they can lose all hope, dignity, and respect for themselves, and fall into depression.

Naomi Hancock