



AN ALMS-BASKET

In celebration of the 75th Anniversary of
The Almshouse Association

Who was it said
The past is never dead. It's not even past.
We know the truth of this.
Let me tell you a story.

One woman, one man,
this is how things begin.
For those without to shelter within
you've opened your arms for a
millennium.

Quite often, when we enter,
there's something in the air
common to hallowed ground
– a church or cloister, a secret garden.

A freight of memories,
a flight at one remove
from circling atrocities, a place where
we sense
more nearly what we can be.

Care is so hardy.
You lop branches, you modify,
and your guardian trees multiply.
In each constituency they thrive.

Here the humdrum
and prodigious walk hand in hand.
Community and dream
– their common stream the human
heart.

There's no reason to labour this.
A decent provision for the poor
is the true test of civilisation.
The words of Dr. Johnson.

An old boy accosted me.
Your almshouses! What are they then
when they're at home?
Not Pubs? Not Safehouses?

I did my best to explain.
'Some ancient, some modern,
They're local, affordable, a charity.
For those in need – and our own.'

Ah! Got it. Go on, then!
Onward, yes. Today and tomorrow. . .
Dear friends, this is the story.
You are the story.

Kevin Crossley-Holland FRSL
August 2021

