

*Christmas, 1939.*

*Vol. 1. No. 1.*

# *The Abinger Chronicle*

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# *The Abinger Chronicle*

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## LOCAL MUSICIANS

**I**T is said that in the parlour of the average Englishman you will usually find "The Soul's Awakening" hanging on the wall, "The way of an Eagle" in the bookshelf and a volume of Bach on the pianoforte.

We un-musical English have taken John Sebastian Bach to our hearts.

A young exquisite once said to me, "I don't like Bach, he is so bourgeois", to which I probably answered that being bourgeois myself I considered Bach the greatest of all composers.

It is Bach's intense humanity which endears him to me and my fellow bourgeois. The proletarians (if there were any in this country) would be too much occupied with their wrongs, and the "governing classes" (if indeed they existed outside the imagination of the 'New Statesman') would be too much occupied in preserving their rights to have time to be human.

The warm human sentiments are reserved for the bourgeois; therefore of all Bach's works it is those great choral expressions of his personal and anthropomorphic religion which appeal most to us country and small-towns folk.

It is my privilege once a year to conduct our local choirs in concerts of great music and of all that great music it is Bach, his Matthew Passion, his B minor Mass, his Church Cantatas which seem to come most naturally to our minds and our hearts.

My business on these occasions, is to come in at the last minute, wave a stick about and say 'very good', but I know well that the real hard work has been done elsewhere, namely at those weekly winter evenings with their devoted leaders and enthusiastic singers who for the sake of music will after a hard day's work endure arduous toil and drudgery for an end which only gradually appears in view.



*Local Musicians*

Week by week these dedicated hierophants trudge miles through mud and snow to a cold but stuffy village schoolroom lit by one smelly oil lamp which usually goes out half-way through.

The only accompaniment is a strange array of broken keys and snapped wires which was once a pianoforte. They are but a small body, there are probably only two tenors and one of these being the village doctor, is invariably called out in the middle to officiate at one of those happy events which are so frequent in our prolific neighbourhood, leaving Mr. Smith of Kosikot to struggle with the cruelly high tenor part alone.

However, nothing daunts us (if I may for the moment identify myself with this glorious company of apostles). There we sit, week after week, wrestling with this strange mystery of music and saying in our hearts, "I will not let thee go unless thou bless me."

We are not experts, many of us have at first but the vaguest idea of what sounds are represented by these curious little black blobs and straight stems at which we stare, but this weakness is also our strength; until we have made these sounds bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, we cannot attempt to sing them. The expert can pass from one musical experience to another, lightly, easily and forgetfully, but we, when once great music has burnt into our minds and souls, have it for an everlasting possession.

For a while we work by faith alone, then one day suddenly revelation comes to us, the notes we are singing are, all at once, not mere sounds, but symbols of a new world, something beyond mundane experience. We have looked through the "magic casements, opening on the foam of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn."

But the end is not yet. On a certain day in Spring we shall meet all the other small bands of singers who like us have been struggling alone.

Then we shall realize the profound mathematical formula of all choral singing:  $2+2=40$ . By the very force of numbers we have each magnified our own power and imagination tenfold. Not that we have lost our own individuality, but that we have merged it in harmonious



*Local Musicians*

concord with the other devotees who like us have been working for this same end. (Is this not perhaps a microcosm of what we all wish for the whole world?)

By faith, hope and love we have achieved that, compared with which the achievements of the greatest virtuoso, if he be not also informed by these three, is but as sounding brass and tinkling cymbal. We have unlocked the heart of music's mystery, we have found our faith and have proclaimed it to all such as have ears to hear.

Some indeed have not such ears—we are not “news” nor do we wish to be. The “intelligentsia” ignore us, the clever young men who “do” the music for ‘advanced’ journals have (thank God!) never heard of us. The most we ever achieve is a patronizing paragraph in one of the daily papers. We are in fact local musicians and are content to remain so.

I believe that it is better to be vitally parochial than to be an emasculate cosmopolitan. The great names in music were at first local and the greatest of all, John Sebastian Bach remained a local musician all his life.

History emanates from the parish pump. We musicians of hundreds of Abingers all over the country are making history because we are laying well and truly those foundations from which alone the great artist can spring.

RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS.

## FRIENDS

These were dear and quiet hours  
far removed from strife and hate.  
How we plucked each other's flowers  
in our converse long and late!

S.S.



## LITTLEHAMPTON, JANUARY 1939

Why is the sea so sad  
 (even tinged with moonlight  
 as it was tonight)?  
 It will not make me glad.

The ceaseless wavelets moaned;  
 moon-touched crests they wore.  
 Then, on the shore  
 the salty pools spread and foamed.

There was no break or gap.  
 Relentlessly sea water moves  
 in dangerous grooves,  
 like a death-bringing sap.

O the sound of the sea is grave  
 with omen of tempest death,  
 of still stranger life beneath  
 the everlasting wave,

where fantastic plants and fish  
 are never alone or still,  
 seem alive without will  
 and survive without known wish.

Sea water is all tears  
 for partings the ocean claims,  
 for forgotten names  
 and long-forgotten fears.

High heroism and despair,  
 and rescuings fiercely brave :  
 all this in a wave  
 is hidden unaware.

Thus is the sea so sad  
 (even tinged with moonlight  
 as it was tonight);  
 it will not make me glad.

S.S.



## A PLEA FOR THOMAS

Sixty years ago I was very modern. I was deeply interested in Queen Victoria, and about her predecessors on the English throne I cared not a rap. Twice, with my hand in that of my nurse, had I seen that rare appearer in London, seen her drive past, with her two Highlanders behind her, on her way from Buckingham Palace to Paddington Station. It profoundly puzzled me that she looked so like a woman. This strange similitude of hers intensified for me that sense of great and glorious mystery in the midst of which she dominated her subjects. In my little breast I toyed irreverently with the idea that she was somehow a human being, after all.

Victoria, 1837. Even her date was dear to me, for it was the last of all those dismal numerals which in my schoolroom, with my sisters, I was required to recite so often. Would that she had reigned from 1066 onwards! Less to me than the shadows of shades were any of those other Sovereigns. Nothing human about *them*. There were at the end of Mrs. Markham's book two pages of little woodcuts in rows, purporting to be portraits of them, but signally failing to convince or stir me. For Henry I. I had a vague liking because his date was an easy one. The names of Stephen and John stood out from the rest agreeably. But oh, that palely weltering procession of Edwards and Henrys, Richards and Jameses and Georges! To this day, in social intercourse, I find it hard to be on really cordial terms with men thus named. And I daresay that among the countless readers of *The Abinger Chronicle* (with which, I like to think, is incorporated *The Reigate Remembrancer*, *The Gomshall Mercury*, *The Albury Monitor* and other local papers) many are beset by the same difficulty. Others of them perhaps are themselves named thus, and to such I hasten to say that I have doubtless exaggerated my distaste.

Noble families especially abound in these misnomers—continuing to justify, in this respect, Matthew Arnold's gentle accusation that they were not very receptive of ideas. It is true that many of the female figurantes in Debrett have been christened freely and daringly enough. You will find Ethelburgas among them, and Gwendolyns and



## *A Plea for Thomas*

Maureens. Some of the males, too, have second and third names that aren't savourless. But the first names of nearly all of them put Mrs. Markham staring you in the face. Nor is there much solace in the huge supply of prae-Guilliamine Arthurs and Alfreds. I am all for loyalty to the Crown. But I am all for piety too. Has the nobility *never* read the Bible? Even if it never has, it must surely be aware that many of us, and they among the worthiest, are Marks, Josephs, Matthews, Peters, and so forth? Is there anything wrong with those names? If so, my Lords, what? And I ask you with special emphasis how you dare despise Thomas.

The question is a jarring one, I know. Even I, if I were taken unawares, should be slightly perturbed by the possibility of a Lord Thomas So-and-So. But I am on my guard, I have thought the matter out quietly, I know my ground—ground not unscored by many illustrious footprints. A'Becket, Wolsey, More, Moore, De Quincey, Carlyle, Huxley, Hardy, weren't nobodies. But not so much on the strength of them do I stick up for Thomas as because the bearers of that name seem to me the very backbone of our polity. They are the strong and pulsing core of that great middle class of which I am a member. It is only an accident—and an unfortunate one—that I myself am not one of them. A few months ago I received the honour of Knighthood, and was greatly pleased by it, as a token and seal of sterlingness. But it irked me that I could not be bidden "Arise, Sir Thomas". In Whitaker's list of Knights Bachelor I have counted as many as thirty-six Thomases; and there is a vast number of others with T. among their initials: Thomases, to a man; not a Terence or a Timothy among them, I'm certain.

Let the patrician caste continue to sneer, if in the narrowness and frivolity of its soul, and even in these levelling times, sneer it must. Let it continue to contain no Thomases. And let us suffer with a light heart its abiding slur on us. For I have high hopes in a higher quarter. The Throne is not the remote thing it was in Victoria's time, and her successors have shown a fond, warm, active sympathy with all classes of their subjects.



## A Plea for Thomas

Judging by photographs in the daily and weekly press, I feel sure that the Princess Elizabeth is good-hearted, and has moreover an open mind, and a will of her own. Some day, under Providence, she will be a wife and mother, and perhaps she will—surely she will, in her enlightened way—insist that her eldest son be christened Thomas. And amidst the general gladness how especially glad of this bright gleam will be the little reciters of those dates to which I have gloomily alluded!

MAX BEERBOHM.

## MR. GOSSE AND PROFESSOR COLLINS

Early in the Eighties, Mr. Edmund Gosse, (afterwards Sir Edmund), wrote a small treatise on a literary subject. It was called *From Shakespeare to Pope*. Admirable title, admirable subject. For how interesting, how important, to investigate and bring to light the reasons, the mysterious reasons, which caused the English Muse to prefer Belinda and Achitophel as successors to Desdemona and King Lear; to give us *The Rape of the Lock* instead of *The Rape of Lucrece*; and the formality of Pope—the symmetry, (as of Kedleston or Holkham), of:—

“Willing to wound, and yet afraid to strike,  
Just hint a fault, and hesitate dislike;”

in place of the wild beauty and shifting caesura of Christopher Marlowe:—

“Upon a rock, and underneath a hill,  
Far from the town (where all is whist and still,  
Save that the sea, playing on yellow sand,  
Sends forth a rattling murmur to the land,  
Whose sound allures the golden Morpheus  
In silence of the night to visit us)  
My turret stands; and there God knows I play  
With Venus’ swans and sparrows all the day.  
A dwarfish beldam bears me company,  
That hops about the chamber where I lie,  
And spends the night, that might be better spent,  
In vain discourse and apish merriment.  
Come thither.”



*Mr. Gosse and Professor Collins*

Not only was it an admirable subject—Mr. Gosse had almost all the qualities necessary for its treatment. But not all. He wrote with charm and lucidity, he could bring an image before his reader's eye, he had imagination and an ear. In fact he had all the necessary qualities but one. He wanted accuracy.

Professor Churton Collins on the other hand had one quality in full measure, but one only. He was accurate. Taste and discrimination might be lacking, he might see little to choose between the verse of Marlowe and the verse of Cowley, between Fletcher's songs and Dryden's, but he was an omnivorous reader, and his memory portentous. Daring too, for had he not gone so far as to accuse Lord Tennyson of plagiarism? He was learned, but his learning was wide rather than deep.

In this world, however, the accurate mind has an *immediate* advantage over the perceptive mind. The man who tells a winter's tale about the sea-coast of Bohemia, is at the immediate and temporary mercy of him who points out, how convincingly, that Bohemia has no sea-coast. It is true, but it is not important. Perdita and Florizel live more vitally beside the foam of that fabulous ocean, than do Enoch Arden and Annie on the indubitable sea-coast of Hampshire. The geography of Fairy-land is not a defect in a *Winter's Tale*.

But Mr. Collins was a disappointed man. He was aware of his one great virtue, he was unaware of his deficiencies. He had applied for the Merton Chair of English at Oxford,—and Professor Napier had been appointed. And now his old friend,—whom he had always looked upon with amused contempt, dear Gosse, with aptitudes maybe, with gifts of eloquence no doubt, who was unable to remember the date of the publication of Hobbes's *Homer*, or of John Philips' poem on cider-making—what could such a dilettante know of what belonged to an academy? Why he, Collins, could remember the dates of books that Gosse had never read. And now Gosse, the fortunate man, was appointed Clark Lecturer in English Literature in the University of Cambridge. He had



*Mr. Gosse and Professor Collins*

delivered a course of lectures there, in the Great Hall of Trinity College. He had printed them in a book. It appeared in 1885. "*From Shakespeare to Pope; An Enquiry into the Causes and Phenomena of the Rise of Classical Poetry in England: by Edmund Gosse, M.A., Clark Lecturer in English Literature at Trinity College Cambridge.*" The pride of it!

The book, however, was declared to be most readable; it was received with a chorus of praise. Reviewers competed in eulogy. As poor Collins pathetically complained, "one of our leading literary journals, in a six-column review, did not point out a single fault". Mr. Gosse's cup was full. He walked to and fro between his house in Regent's Park and his office at the Board of Trade in Whitehall, with a lighter step. He wore a Gardenia in his buttonhole. His friends rejoiced in his triumph. His family were proud of him. Even the "pink Gosse sprawling in its tub," of R. L. Stevenson's letters, must have crowed a little.

Alas, there was a snake in this garden, a reptile in Regent's Park. The Lord had prepared a worm to devour this pleasant gourd. Mr. Gosse's triumph was short-lived.

It was really more than Churton Collins could stand. He read the eulogies. He read the book. And he noted its slips with exultation. He decided to review it himself. And in October, in the *Quarterly Review*, where Keats had been bludgeoned, and Tennyson sneered at, his article appeared.

In the *Quarterly Review* for October 1886 appeared an article—anonymous of course, but frankly acknowledged by its confident author, Mr. Churton Collins—an article so savage, so terrifically castigating, that the reviewer seems to dance round his subject knife in hand, with howls of triumph, giving him a stab from time to time, the thrusts growing more savage and venomous with each return of the dervish, and his howls of triumph louder; until, satiated at last, he reluctantly dances off, leaving his victim for dead. That he was not quite dead is a tribute to Mr. Gosse's vitality.



### *Mr. Gosse and Professor Collins*

Gosse attempted a reply in *The Athenaeum*. Collins reiterated his charges, referring contemptuously to his victim as "him that died o' Wednesday".

Poor Gosse. The *Quarterly* article reverberated through the town. Not only the *Athenaeum*, but the *Pall Mall Gazette*, and the *World*, were filled with correspondence. The clubs were agog. Mr. Gosse avoided the clubs. He scarcely dared to open the daily newspaper. His tread, as he made his way to his office at the Board of Trade, had lost its elasticity. The *Gardenia* was gone. But worse was to follow. Even his home was not immune. The comforter of his domestic retirement, his cook, gave notice. And on Mrs. Gosse's enquiring the reason, replied, "the Master is too much in the papers".

In the St. Martin's Summer, in the brief hey-day of his triumph, before the blow fell, Mr. Gosse had received, (it had been the brightest jewel in his crown) an invitation to tea with Lord Tennyson at Farringford. He had hastened to accept it. Now, in the altered circumstances, this jewel hung like a threatening rock above his head. He thought of pleading indisposition. Too obvious. No, though the pleasure was out of it, it must be gone through with.

Gosse set his teeth; he set out for the Isle of Wight. He crossed the Solent. He crossed the island. He approached the poet's home. At the door he was told that tea was in the garden. He passed through the yew-hedges and came out on to a noble lawn, where at a table under the trees, the guests were seated. And at the end, under a tall cedar, in cloak and sombrero, the Laureate himself.

Gosse, trying to approach as inconspicuously as possible, crept across the wide open spaces of the lawn. Suddenly Lord Tennyson caught sight of him, and roared out in his great voice, "Hullo, Gosse, what do you think of Churton Collins?" Everybody turned towards him. Gosse, as he afterwards admitted, wished that the lawn would open and swallow him up. It didn't. He remained a small black St. Lawrence broiling in the midst of a vast green gridiron. "I think," the poet went on, "that he's a Louse upon the Locks of Literature."



*Mr. Gosse and Professor Collins*

Mr. Gosse, in repeating this story, remarked that he never felt so grateful to anybody in his life. With that one sentence Lord Tennyson had removed his reproach. On his return to London, he was not slow in reporting it, and the phrase was repeated everywhere. Tennyson was the king of Letters at that time and his power was immense; and he had used it to raise the victim and overthrow the victor.

From that day Mr. Gosse's recovery began. Soon he was publishing delightful lives of John Donne, and Thomas Lodge, and William Congreve, an autobiography, and collections of essays; he was made C.B. in 1912, and knighted in 1925. His article on Verlaine in the *Savoy* (reprinted in his *French Profiles*) has the very smell of Paris, of the Quartier Latin, the Boule Miche, and the Luxembourg Gardens, and indeed is worthy of the author of *les Fêtes Galantes*.

So much for the victim. What of his assailant? He became, in 1904, Professor of English Literature in the University of Birmingham. In 1908 he spent his usual summer vacation at Oxford, and went on to Oulton Broad, near Lowestoft, on the Suffolk coast; and there, in a ditch, he was found drowned on the 12th September 1908.

Only one thing remains to add. By the impishness of fate Mr. Gosse had spent his summer holidays that year on the Suffolk coast near Lowestoft.

OLIVER W. F. LODGE.





The Abinger Chronicle appears monthly.  
The chief contributors are Max Beerbohm, E. M.  
Forster, Ralph Vaughan Williams, Desmond  
MacCarthy, Oliver W. F. Lodge, Robert Trevelyan  
and others.

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