

April, 1940.

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The Abinger Chronicle

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WILFRED SCAWEN BLUNT'S GARDEN.

It lies derelict and neglected now, I am told, and the house empty and dilapidated. A hundred years ago Ibrahim Pasha, enclosing thirty acres of fertile land on the edge of the desert outside Cairo, planted the garden and stocked it with fruit trees from the Hedjaz of Syria, so that in the time of his grandson Tewfik the fruit was of such excellence that it was sent as a yearly present to the Sultan at Constantinople.

The ladies of Tewfik's harem were conveyed every Friday to spend the day in the cool of the garden, named after the Sheykh whose tomb still stands, half ruined, outside the walls.

In the ruin of Ismail's fortunes the garden came into the market and was purchased by Wilfred Scawen Blunt, poet and traveller, who had camped under its walls one year, when on his way to Syria with his wife Lady Anne, Byron's grand-daughter, and had wondered at the beauty of the apricot-trees in full flower.

Mr. Blunt built a house in the garden and came every year to pass the winter at Sheykh Obeyd, then the only house built on the desert strip between Merj and Matarieh.

Long years afterwards when Mr. Blunt had ceased coming to Egypt, another Englishman, thanks to his kindness, became the happy tenant of the enchanting house and garden, and his memory of it is perfumed with the scent of the orange trees that grew in profusion in plots bordered by pomegranates; and the creaking of the wheels of the sakkiehs which irrigated the garden, echoes still in his ears.

Crops of barley, maize and corn were cultivated and at all times was the garden green, so rich was the growth of tree and shrub.

Wilfred Scawen Blunt's Garden

Tall bamboos and lebbek trees were grouped around the house and formed grateful shade and a refuge for the migratory birds, blue-winged rockers, bee-catchers and hoopoes, who every spring and autumn visited the garden on their flight to and from Europe.

In a great lebbek tree that over-shadowed the house vast numbers of night-herons roosted by day, taking flight every evening as they set out, with raucous cry, for their nocturnal fishing.

Two white owls lived in an empty store-room in the basement of the house and their hooting broke the silence of the night, to the accompaniment of the barking of the foxes that made their home in the garden, where no gun had ever been fired since the days of its occupation by Wilfred Blunt.

The garden is no longer isolated; a railway and a main road from Cairo now passes it; the great new suburb of Heliopolis joins Zeitoun, that joins Matarieh, Ein Shams and Ezber el Nakhla, making a chain of suburbs that reach to the garden, robbing it of its seclusion and destroying its charm, a victim of the all-encroaching progress of modern Egypt.

ALFRED LAMBART.

Old Surrey Saws and Sayings

Collected and communicated by Sir Max Beerbohm,
P.R.A. (Professor of Rural Archaeology).

It isn't the singing kettle that scalds the cook's hand.

Snow in January, woe in February.

A word from the Parson is worth a screed from the Squire.

Old Surrey Saws and Sayings

Better a mouthful at dawn than a bellyful at sunset.

*There's many a catch
'Twixt Hammer and Hatch.*

Light i' the head, strong i' the arm.

He that has no teeth has no toothache.

*Bookham for thinking, Stonebridge for doing,
Dorking for talking.*

A dumb woman sees more things than a blind man hears.

What hasn't been lost can't be found.

Don't beat the bounds before you've baked the apples.

It's poor grass that cannot be cropped under a waning moon.

*A red sky at night
Is a shepherd's delight,
A red sky in the morning
Is a shepherd's warning,
A sky that looks bad
Is a shepherd's plaid,
A good-looking sky
Is a shepherd's pie.*

There's never a dam without a sire.

Hounds turn tail when a mad bull gores the running fox.

What Abinger thinks to-day, Dorking will think to-morrow.

These, Polly, are some of my childhood memories which I have strung together for you :

THE AUNTS

It was in the early summer of 1869, or thereabouts, that my father took me by train to Edenbridge. I was then a little girl between five and six years old, and this was my first journey in a train, and in itself a great adventure. It was pleasant, however, to get out at Edenbridge into the sunshine.

I see my father, elderly but upright, with a fine silky beard, and a fringe of greyish hair peeping out from beneath the brim of his beaver. Hand in hand we descended the hill leading directly to the quiet little town.

It must have been May-day, for there passed us a curious apparition. It looked to me like a tall cylindrical moving bush; it was a kind of cage entirely covered with green boughs. My father told me it was "Jack in the Green" come to welcome summer in. I didn't want to hear his explanation that there was a man inside.

There was open country on either side until we came to the High Street, whose houses straggled up the hill. As far as I could see there were no shops: the tradespeople used their bowed or bayed front windows in which to show what they had to sell. There was the tailor's (up a few steps) with a few samples of cloth in the window; the tiny sweet-shop lower down with its bottles of lollipops and dishes of rosy apples in the rounded window; the bakery with the delicious scent of new bread coming from it.

We were interrupted by a new excitement: a little crowd of children were watching the antics of a Tumbler. Yes, it was certainly May-day, and the children in their gay holiday frocks were revelling in its joys; and these pleasant people journeying from village to village were celebrating it too, while making what money they could out of the expansive feeling of relief in the very air that winter was over and gone. The Tumbler, dressed in tights, stood in the road on a little square of carpet, and proceeded

The Aunts

to throw himself into all sorts of fantastic attitudes. Then, as I watched him with wondering eyes, he tossed a number of balls high into the air and caught them with what seemed to me miraculous skill. A little tug at my hand reminded me that I couldn't stay there all day, so, after adding a few pennies to those on his mat, we went on our way.

The swinging signboard of The Crown Inn next attracted my attention, stretching as it did from one side of the street to the other: a delightful arrangement, I thought.

Now we were at the foot of the hill where the great stone bridge crosses the River Eden, and the road began to wind gently up hill again, but we did not follow it: we had arrived. At the left of the bridge stood the Cornmill, whose wheels were turned by the river flowing past. My two aunts, my father's sisters, lived in the little house adjoining, and there they were at the door to welcome us, and with them we entered the house.

At once I became conscious of a curious pulsating rhythmic sound that never ceased. I looked at the grown-ups who were now engaged with tea and talk, expecting to find my own astonishment reflected in their faces. But it seemed to be for me alone, for no one took the least notice of the sound.

After my disappointment of the morning, when I had been told that there was probably a chimney-sweep inside the walking bush which had so much pleased me, I decided not to enquire into the origin of the sound: grown-ups are so fond of explaining away all the mysterious happenings of life.

Edenbridge was my father's native town. "The Aunts", so they were always collectively called, had never lived elsewhere, and it was there, with them, that I spent the greater part of my childhood, as I was held to be a delicate child needing country air.

I see a picture of my bedroom: the four-poster bed with its white dimity curtains for the summer, and its red damask ones for the winter; it had a step which ran

The Aunts

alongside it so that one could mount into it more easily. When the curtains were drawn at night one felt one was in a little room inside a room, as it were. I remember the sound of the mill-wheel which followed me there and lulled me to sleep; when I awoke in the morning it soothingly enveloped me as I lay listening to the sounds outside in the street: the water-barrels being filled from the millpond opposite; the splashing of the water; the heavy trundle of the barrels, and the voices of the men as they filled them. Merging with these were the sounds of children clodhopping to School in their heavy boots, and hurrying, as the clang of the School bell became more insistent.

Then, in that delicious drowse " 'twixt sleep and wake " I could hear the rhythmic trot of horses out for their morning exercise as they came over the Bridge—increasing—diminishing—fading away.

I became suddenly wide-awake and sprang out of bed.

SARAH SHOREY GILL.

(To be continued.)

EXILE.

In California

Bright flowers glow

And warm airs blow;

The bluebird spreads his wings,

And bougainvillea flings

Her blossoms like a veil

Across the land;

The tasselled seeds

Of pepper trees fall among fragrant weeds.

Still 'El Camino Real', The King's Highway

Rears mission bells to point where fathers pray;

Strange shapes of cactus sprawl across the sand

And in the hills 'God's Candles' blaze a trail.

Exile

The squat, pale houses with their doorway screened,
 Hide sun-browned children with their faces cleaned
 For Spanish fiesta,
 Or noontide siesta.

'El Rancho' offers chicken in 'the rough'—
 (The meat is tender though the guys are tough)
 The bakers slice their loaves,
 Mules plough the citrus groves,
 And where the palms and waters seem to meet
 Lies the Great Fleet.

How quiet it rides
 Upon the restless tides.
 Thousands of lights are flashing,
 Thousands of cars are dashing;
 All is so colourful, so different, gay—
 And yet—I would not stay,

Though back in England now
 Cold winds prevail,
 And snow and hail;
 The war planes spread their wings,
 A nightly black-out flings
 Its mantle like a pall
 Across the land.
 The air-raid shelters pit the ground like graves
 And on the waves
 Murder and sudden death take toll of all,
 While wrecks bestrew the strand.
 But I would fain
 Go home again,

Though ways are altered where I used to go
 And sandbags hide the lineaments I know;
 Though streets are hushed and houses, lacking eyes,
 Keep their blind watch against a dread surprise,
 I yearn to greet again that troubled shore,
 That little land which all my fathers bore,
 Who, in the days long past, their fealty swore.

Let me share danger or, if need be, death—
 In my own land I draw contented breath.
 Let me pluck homely flowers in the lanes,
 See village spires with their twinkling vanes;
 Oh! God, before my trivial journeyings cease,
 Let me see England once again,—*at peace*.

M. POYNTZ-WRIGHT.

California, March 1940.

BETWEEN TRAINS.

In the Waiting Room on the Oxford platform at Didcot there is a framed picture above the dusty fireplace, a giant great picture containing four photographs, inset in a cross of once-white cardboard. Here are four ruined castles, Pembroke, Carew, Kenilworth and one other, I forget which.

Above, in heavy gold lettering is written,

Great Western Railway

and beneath them in the same golden fancy,

Places Interest

There were two evening hours to be spent here, waiting for a train to Oxford in a light too dim to read by, so I let fancy free and looked long at the castles. Memory whispered echoes, dying, dying, dying . . . the splendour falls on castle walls . . . , oh but does it? I looked again at these great dilapidated ivy-clad fortresses, glad at once that I did not have to live either then, or now, in such places. Pity for the Sackvilles at Knole, the Butes at Cardiff and the King at Windsor, swept my friendly breast. Monstrous it was, ever to be confined like this, behind three solid feet of masonry. Couldn't something be done about

Between Trains

it? The answer was No, nothing at all could be done. So I left the owners to their sad destiny and began to wonder at these four stupendous attempts at safety.

Was it really comforting in 1540, say, to be invited by Uncle Edward to stay in a place like this? You, the niece, came perhaps from a sober little country house near Bath and, see now, once inside the big tower, in the third best bedroom, did you really feel: "Well, nothing can happen tonight. Uncle Edward's moat is deep and wide, and the bridge went up after I arrived. No Jackanapes could get in here." What place today could give such assurance? An Air-Raid Shelter (one of those very grand private ones)? An island home in the South Seas (never seen one)? My own diminutive home in the woods where the walls are fourteen inches thick? What nonsense! I looked up from the fire to the castles. There was the G.W.R. telling me quite frankly that (for a consideration) it would convey me right there, as they say over the sea, and there were the photographs, giving hints of a hundred ways in. Insulting, if you came to think of it. What would the owners have said, they who decreed that no one—absolutely no one—was to come over the drawbridge without their permission? And here was a railway, a mere train, offering to bring any citizen or countryman right up to the mossy gaps in the wall.

That grey wraith of the owner has not been as angry since that last shattering incursion by Cromwell's ally, when stone after stone splintered, shrieking, under a never-ending hail of puritan cannon ball . . . far into the night, till dawn forced the small white flag of surrender up on to the last inner turret left standing above the relics of those proud battlements.

It is not the walls, my lord. Whatever strength they once had, today they stand shorn and helpless before any child or dog or seagull coming that way. Wet and fine, in snow and sunshine, wind and lightning, the old castle lies bare to the owls that hoot and the cats that mew, so hopelessly incapable of defence are Kenilworth, Carnarvon, Pembroke, now.

Between Trains

Five hundred years hence men and women and birds may fly over a derelict Maginot Line or a solitary sky-gun emplacement, wondering at our strange little protective devices in the Twentieth Century. And these things that we devised at such great sacrifice of time and life and leisure, they may well some day seem outmoded, in the light of more devastating, more tragic conflicts—interplanetary ones?

Heart doubted whether any lasting comfort was to be gleaned from such colossal attempts at safety. Heart suggested that they were inspired by our very transient, delicate and unreliable humanity, beset with fear. Heart even went so far as to suggest that a sweet familiarity not only with life, but also with death would dispel the desire for this kind of protection, when a porter yelled,

OXFORD ONLY!

and I leapt out of the stern little waiting-room, just in time.

S.S.

BAD WEATHER.

The little thorn trees in the lane
Hold their lightless lamps again,
The floods are out upon the plain,
The hills with canopies of grey are crowned.

Green as an apple is the grass,
In each sour field a triangle of glass;
For shewing her how sad a face she has
The day has flung her mirror to the ground.

SYLVIA LYND.

HORIZON

EDITED BY CYRIL CONNOLLY

Review of Art and Literature

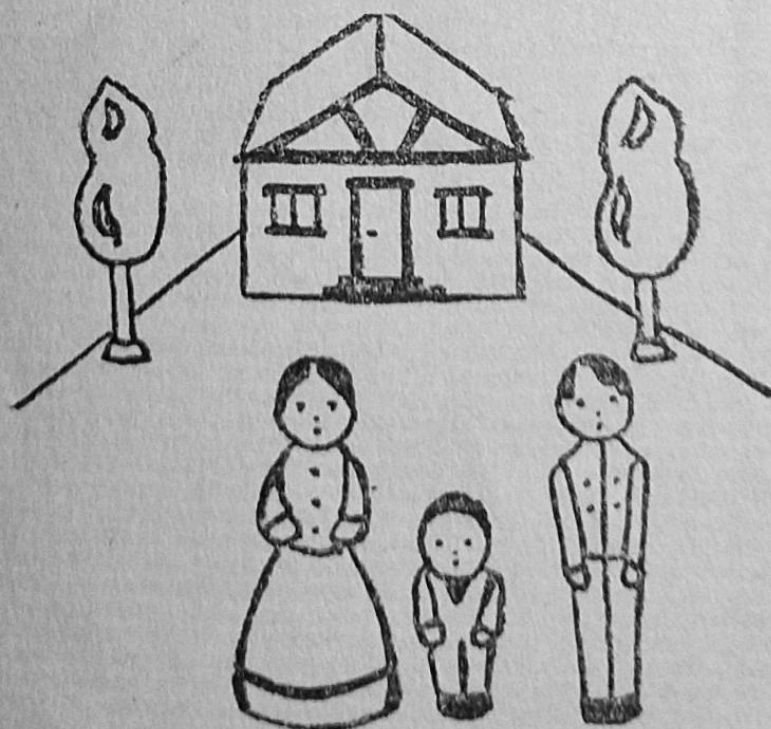
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