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# *The Abinger Chronicle*

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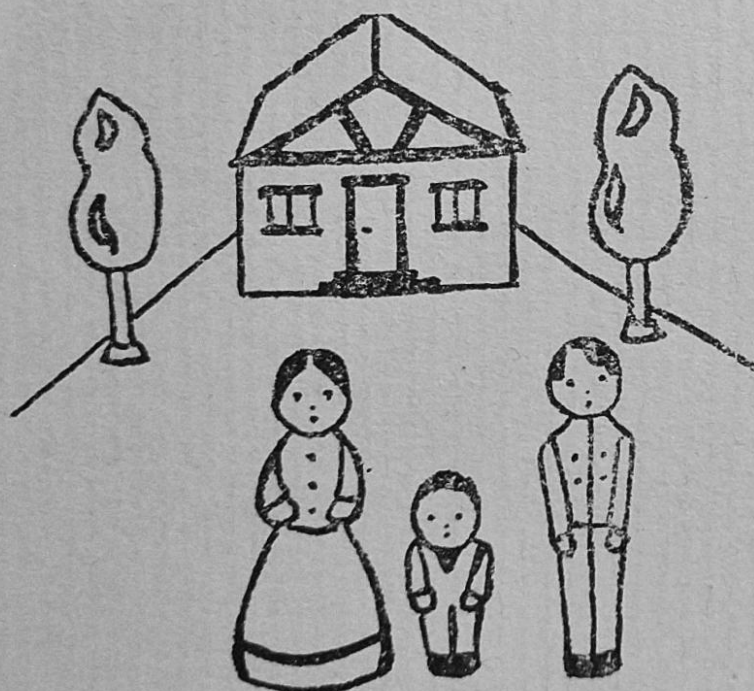
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# *The Abinger Chronicle*

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## BLIND OAK GATE.

*The Abinger Chronicle* is not one of those magazines which give you a bang for your sixpence. Those who want buffetings must procure them elsewhere; several excellent periodicals purvey them, and liberally. Abandon all despair, ye who enter here. Expect a more temperate response. Here is nothing cosmic, basic, mantic, maieutic, materially dialectic, cataclysmic, seismic. This accords well with the soil of our parish, which consists of greensand and of chalk, and is unpropitious to earthquakes. Since the days of King John, who once behaved very badly indeed near Paddington Farm, tragedy has averted her face. The Tillingbourne is too shallow to get drowned in, the banks of the Smugglers' Lane too sloping to be leapt off fatally, and though there are wells, millponds, quarries, a tower upon Leith Hill and several high Wellingtonia Firs, these may not rank as natural dangers; they are artificial death-traps which have been constructed by man for his own destruction, often unsuccessfully. Similarly with the mechanically-propelled vehicles which certainly do rush along at lethal speeds; they have always gathered impetus outside the parish boundaries, and similarly with the aeroplanes. Left to itself, there is not a safer place in England than Abinger, and it would be unfitting if it produced a volcanic chronicle.

Yet if not a bang, there is a whimper. On the back of this journal there is sometimes printed a wood-cut of a ferocious animal—of a bull, even of a lion. "M'm, Under other circumstances I might injure you almost fatally" it seems to snarl. And similarly with the back of our country side. Here and there in this ten-mile ribbon of

*Blind Oak Gate*

fluffy Surrey, comes a rumble of occurrences below. One of these rumbles is at Holmbury Camp, where the brow of the heathland is furrowed by neolithic frowns. The other, better known to me, is at Blind Oak Gate.

Blind Oak Gate lies at the extreme north. The tracks leading up to it from the south climb up the clean chalk of the downs, and the sun shines into their ruts. Then begins a brash of bushes—hawthorn, sloe, bramble, heightening into holly and ash, and the sunlight gets frittered away. The ridge of the downs is crossed inadvertently, and after a hundred yards the traveller—for he has become a traveller—reaches this queer clearing. It slopes and slides, descending to the quarter of the north. It has no special shape. Eight or ten paths converge on it—some so unobtrusive that they fail to get counted. It is surrounded by trees, some of which are big, and many of which are undamaged. Tucked away at the top of it is a pond. The pond is small and shallow, and pretty ranunculus cover it in June. But what is it doing up hill? Like the paths, it is trying to hide itself. It is the centre of the whole affair, if affair there be. When the traveller has passed, the pond rises on its elbow and looks around it. When he returns, it lies back, and only a dribble through silver-weed reveals its dubious bed.

Many years ago, at Cairo, I encountered as a traveller the ruinous Mosque of Amr. The neighbourhood was deserted, the sunlight violent. I stood outside the enclosure and peeped. There was nothing particular to look at—only old stones—but peace and happiness seemed to flow out and fill me. Islam means peace. Whatever the creed may have done, the name means Peace, and its buildings can give a sense of arrival, which is unattainable in any Christian church. The tombs at Bidar give it, the Gol Gumbaz at Bijapur, the Shalimar Gardens at Lahore, the garden-houses at Aurangabad. But it came strongest from the Mosque of Amr, and I learnt afterwards, with superstitious joy, that others, besides myself, had noticed this; that the Mosque had been in early days the resort of the Companions of the Prophet; that the sanctity of their



*Blind Oak Gate*

lives had perfumed it; that the perfume had never faded away. Anyhow, I remember the feeling and am grateful for it, and mention it now because it is the exact opposite of the feeling I get at Blind Oak Gate. No peace here. Only a sense of something vaguely sinister, which would do harm if it could, but which cannot, this being Surrey; of something muffled up and recalcitrant; of something which rises upon its elbow when no one is present and looks down the converging paths. Anyone who knows the novels of Forrest Reid will realise what I am trying to say. He, better than any living author, can convey this atmosphere of baffled malevolence, this sense of trees which are not quite healthy and of water which is not quite clear. Yes—something is amiss. Our parish ingredients have been wrongly combined for once, and I can't honestly say I am sorry.

The Blind Oak and the Gate, which lent their names to the clearing, are both gone. The oak goodness knows when. The gate was pulled up for a lark by a boy who is now a middle aged tradesman. He and some other boys set to work and dragged it over the crest of the downs to the great chalk pit on the southern slope, where they crashed it. The place, deserted by its sponsors, has been left to its very own self, and who knows what it is up to during autumn nights? Not I. But I have sometimes stood there of a late afternoon, and flirted with the shadow of the shadow of evil. When I can go there no longer, I shall still remember it: it will remain as a faint blur opposite the calm cleansing sunlight of the Mosque of Amr. And when its trees are cut down and its pond emptied and its levels altered, it will not exist anywhere except in my memory. Cursing feebly, Blind Oak Gate will have been cleaned up for ever, and I can't honestly say I shall be glad.

E. M. FORSTER.

## THE HILL.

"Nothing almost sees miracles but misery."  
*King Lear.*

And long upon a troubled oar  
 He leant and hearkened to the shore,  
 Lest he could hear from thence one word  
 In those sweet tones his memory heard  
 Of guidance and of wisdom now.  
 Along the quay he pushed the prow  
 And landed, up the hills he clomb,  
 And saw the grey walls of his home,  
 Her window, and the fields she knew.  
 A word came from the speedwell blue,  
 A message from the good days gone.  
 The Hill her eyes last rested on,  
 The flowering trees all seemed to speak,  
 The Wash-Brook into utterance break.  
 They ceased; and answering came a tone  
 So deeply sprung it seemed his own:  
 "Ere I go hence to our dear grave  
 To prove myself this leave I crave,  
 God helping me, to keep the vow  
 Made once beneath the crab-tree bough,  
 Be good, do good, teach good, I swore,  
 Grant me of testing years but four;  
 Not now, light foam upon the wave,  
 The wave's light motion do I crave,  
 But a strong clear full wave my soul  
 Shall through God's mercy Godward roll,  
 Following where the brave crests lead,  
 Guiding perhaps some fluctuant weed,  
 Or flotsam. Far too idly long  
 I sang the enervating song  
 Of falling water; now a spring  
 Peak-purposed thy deeds to sing  
 O valiant land, thy valiant deeds.  
 Yet help herein my spirit needs  
 From thee, Great Spirit, lest I fall."  
 He reached the door in the old wall—  
 He raised his head, and spake the Name,  
 As from the rocks that other came  
 With steps of strength and hope and youth;  
 With words as true as prayers are truth



They intermingled minds and threw  
 Down certain years of shame and grew  
 In spirit and in thew, and set  
 Their paces eastward till they met  
 Beyond the vale the open hill,  
 Altar of all repentant still.  
 And as they grasped the stoney way,  
 And far below them England lay,  
 Spirit to spirit, each to each,  
 His deepest knowledge gave in speech.  
 Then turned the ageless to the old,  
 And who had helped his feet was bold  
 To help his mind, "Courage!" said he,  
 "Though flesh be blind, the soul can see."  
 But ere upon the mount he grew  
 Invisible as morning dew  
 When the World Star ascends the sky,  
 Spake thus—and melted, or did fly :

"I knew to whom I spake, a man  
 Who since his sixteenth year began  
 At Chaucer's table fed,  
 Who in sweet Spenser took delight,  
 In Marlowe's fire, in Milton's might,  
 By Shakespeare nurturéd.

And he hath seen the sun go down  
 From Skiddaw's awful peak, and drown  
 Far in the Western sky;  
 Hath fed his sheep on Monmouth hills,  
 Hath reared his beasts where Severn fills  
 The foaming cliffs of Wye.

But three-score years his limbs have borne  
 The worldly weight, and it hath worn  
 His body to the raw,  
 With many to defend and save,  
 Not now the old response it gave,  
 But sank through Time's stern law.

*The Hill*

Yet is this place, where bodies fade,  
 This deep, the forge where souls are made :  
 There is one fear alone—  
 That we, once hot, whom God would mould,  
 Losing that fire, grow hard and cold,  
 And to the scrap be thrown.

The iron suffers, and the soul  
 Has suffered ere it issues whole.  
 Once we have seen this clear,  
 We shall not fear for loss of breath,  
 But lest the *soul* should suffer death,  
 —There is no other fear.”

OLIVER W. F. LODGE.

### Why should we die, being young?

Why should we die, being young?  
 Surely we clasp the world in love  
 With no less passionate and gentle breath  
 Than older men. We live and move  
 And dream our dreams, thinking no thoughts of Death.  
 Why should we die, being young?

Now are we fit to die, being young.  
 For we have learned through passionate strife  
 To weave upon Death's gentle call  
 The threads that hold our love of Life.  
 So mourn us not; mourn not at all  
 That we should die, being young.

R. G. BOSANQUET.



From Plato's 'Τὴν ψύχην . . .'

We kissed; and with a sudden cry  
My soul leapt to my lips to share  
Their bliss, to free itself, to die  
In the embrace of God's sweet air.  
Poor wingless bird, how cruel was I  
To check it there.

R. G. BOSANQUET.

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

### 3. "UPTOWN" AND "DOWNTOWN."

I soon settled down with the Aunts in my new home. The two sisters were very unlike: Aunt Betsy, the elder (whom I was said to "favour") was spare and rather anxious looking, while Aunt Ann was buxom and smiling. They were always dressed precisely alike, and somehow this seemed to accentuate the great difference between them. Aunt Ann very willingly left the cares of the house to Aunt Betsy, and I trotted along with her on her daily marketing jaunts up-town and down-town.

I had now to correct my first impression that there were no shops. I remember two: one, into which we went most days, the Butcher's shop, so different from its modern counterpart that I recall it almost with pleasure—a step down through a little latched gate into a cool dark room with its red brick floor, and its large round chopping block (scrubbed so white) which took up most of the middle of the floor. We re-crossed the road, and a little further up-town we came to the only shop with any pretensions at all. This was the saddlery and harness shop, and I liked it very much: it looked so bright with all its shining appurtenances, and smelt so pleasantly of leather.

*“ Uptown ” and “ Downtown ”*

There were generally grooms and ostlers waiting about outside, their horses sometimes a little restive at being kept too long while their riders gossiped together. This was not one of Aunt Ann's usual haunts but only visited very occasionally for some trifling need: but the impression remains of the warm prevailing colour, and the picture of the shining stirrups, spurs, and harness-ornaments dangling from the ceiling.

One sunny autumn morning there was a crowd of excited people in the street, we could hardly make our way along. The centre of interest was the Crown Inn. The huntsmen were having a stirrup cup on their way to a Meet in the neighbourhood; now and again I heard the deep bay of a hound: this rather startled me, and I held Aunt's hand the tighter.

See with me the creaking sign-board gently swinging to and fro; the huntsmen (blobs of scarlet) with crooked elbows to uplifted heads; the shining horses; the swaying mass of hounds, and you have the lively scene which enchanted me.

As we moved away we were hailed by William the village postman; he was a rosy-faced thickset person with a pleasant smile. He was generally looked upon as “ not quite right ”; be he could read “ the written word as well as print ”, as he often assured us. William had a great idea of the importance of his office, and produced a letter for you as though he had been a special messenger from the sender. The story has been handed down about him that when digging in his garden one day a man looked over the hedge and said, “ Hullo, Billy, you're pretty nigh a fool, bain't ye?” “ Aye,” responded Billy, pausing for a moment in his digging, “ there be only a hedge between.”

This morning there was no letter for me, but there was one for the Aunts. As Aunt Ann had not got her spectacles with her she put it in her pocket to read when she got home and I learned its contents later.

We next called at one of a row of cottages in the meanest part of the town; the row abutted on to the Church and Churchyard and was called Church Lane. Aunt Ann



“ Uptown ” and “ Downtown ”

had been commissioned by Aunt Betsy to leave some little dainty for the poor woman living there who had lately been confined. When the door was opened, she was beckoned mysteriously inside. Unnoticed, I followed up the rickety stairs into the sordid bedroom, all agog with curiosity. There on the top of the low chest of drawers lay the bodies of two little babies. When I was discovered I was soon hustled down the stairs and was glad enough to find myself once more in the “ cheerful light of common day ”.

There was a pleasant house a little further up-town that it was always a delight to go into. If the door were open, as it usually was, one had a view through an opposite door of a lovely garden. We were welcomed in by a comfortable and comely person wreathed in smiles who was always ready for a good gossip.

We were just about to sit down for this when a tall meagre hungry-eyed man, the owner of the house, came in. George Mellish (that was his name) was a man with a grievance that “ must out ”, and upon this he started at once. He was frequently at loggerheads with the Vicar because of the latter’s high-handed ways with the non-conformists of the parish. At the moment he was boiling over with rage regarding his own tombstone, which he was determined to erect now to forestall any possible “ machinations of the Church ” as he put it, when he would not be there to protest. The Vicar excusably opposed this unorthodox proceeding tooth and nail. It has been said that there had been a time when the graves of dissenters had been dug in a North by South direction to differentiate them from those of Members of the Church of England, and, perhaps, as a guide to the Angel Gabriel when blowing the last trump. That *practice* had been discontinued, but its *spirit* survived. Of this George Mellish was well aware. Though rather a cantankerous person he was, nevertheless, one of those who by persistence and agitation eventually secured the passage of the Burials Act which removed many of the real grievances of dissenters in this matter.

*“ Uptown ” and “ Downtown ”*

George Mellish got his way. The site of his grave was outlined; the stone erected to his memory; and all particulars (save the date of his death) inscribed on it while he was still alive. To the Vicar's annoyance the unusual tombstone became one of the sights of the neighbourhood: people from near and far came to see it, myself among them.

I wasn't particularly interested in this conversation, so leaving Aunt Ann to bear the brunt of it I wandered into the garden wondering anew to see apples and pears growing on trees, not ranged on shelves for sale as I had been accustomed to see them. The dimpled plumpness followed me there, and we chattered together in the sunshine. I politely ate the stewed pears she brought me to the last morsel, though they were too cloyingly sweet for my taste; I did not wish to hurt her feelings by leaving any.

Aunt Ann having collected her daily ration of goods and gossip we returned home to our midday meal, and at this Aunt Betsy was regaled with all the talk of the town.

SARAH SHOREY GILL.

## PRAYER.

Alternatives and false directions make  
 A struggling wanderer like myself to stray  
 From off the narrow way to God, the way  
 I want with all my heart and soul to take.  
 Around me now 'tis dark enough to break  
 My heart: and yet—no, that I cannot say,—  
 My pride and not my heart must bow. I pray  
 To God that I may soon, ay, soon awake.



*Prayer*

But even that is wrong. It is not so  
 That prayer is made. But thus—I lift to Him  
 Who made and loves us all, as offering pure  
 This darkness; since all light is seen to flow  
 In Him, and lighten all things dull and dim—  
 All hardships, toils and trials we endure.

J. L. MORTIMER.

## THE STONE RUT.

I have been thinking of an old Roman road, a path in the woods with giant flagstones every now and then meeting my climbing feet with the impact of solid grey stone. A few of the big flagstones to my right and my left bear the age-old imprint of chariot wheels, yes—an ugly stone rut.

In the cool of this English summer evening I can climb this road by heart, so familiar is every turning and every new steepness. Under sweet-chestnut leaves and past a few wayside shrines, past the pools of Nemi and Albano, the road winds on, away from Rome up Monte Cavo to the ruins of a god's temple where victors used to lay their thankofferings for new conquests.

After doing this for many years, the chariots wore the stone ruts into the Roman road. Then Rome fell; and many generations of Christians climbed the relics of the road in order to turn round at the summit and gaze back on a beloved city in an incomparable setting, with Michelangelo's pale and perfect dome o'ertopping even the giant prophets on the Lateran.

I have been thinking of Urbino where the City is a palace and all the squares are great private courtyards; where a man wrote a book called *The Courtier*, a kind of commentary on the wit and gaiety of life at the Montefeltro's in the XVth. century, as he experienced it.

*The Stone Rut*

At San Gimignano where the tall watchtowers lean all ways, in the cool tiled cloisters of Santa Chiara in Naples, at Ravello steep over the blue Tyrrhenian bay, inside the dim dark mosaic churches of Ravenna and Palermo, in the straight sober streets of Turin and under the shadow of a single cypress in classic Tuscan landscape, there are men and women and places with a genius for art, the like of which no other country on earth has seen.

To love this is to love a memory, now that Italy is at war with England and all our allies, including a whole part of herself.

To love this is to make these times even harder. To love this is to see the stone rut coming into its own again, but not eternally, since nothing of this kind is eternal, so long as it is faced and countered.

S.S.





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