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The Abinger Chronicle

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The Abinger Chronicle

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The Abinger Chronicle

Vol. 1. No. 12. *December, 1940*

FROM AN ABINGER DIARY*

The Greek citizen—enough for him to live *"finely and fairly,"* serving the City well, and after death to *"partake of a worthy tomb."* (Plato). He was to be a noble animal, strong, courageous, eager, with this mark of distinction : that he lived for the City, and held his own satisfactions to be just in the measure that they perfected his citizenship. By that standard he ruled his passions. Now Christianity holds this quite a secondary mark of distinction : the primary mark of distinction being that one participate in transforming human nature for the elimination of conflict between humans and in the wide universe.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

For centuries our fathers propounded and defended a doctrine gradually expanded and enriched, a Christian civilisation viewed as a Unity. They thought its details worth fighting about. Now we are left wondering whether we have inherited anything at all. The details seem futile and irrelevant beside this basic uncertainty.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Suppose there are no general ends, no event towards which creation moves, no all-embracing all-resolving finality towards which the good tends and which the bad resists : only a diversity of purposes, a concert or clash of these in the world—There might still be intelligence capable of perceiving coherence, of marking down that this conflicts with that but not with that other; that within certain limits this complex of purposes is harmonious, but this other self-defeating.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Our vision of historical purposes is fragmentary, for ever being conveyed to us and for ever being lost and

* The sequence of these thoughts would be logical, and is not chronological.

obscured. From time to time we achieve relative certainty of a purpose and devote ourselves to it: It is achieved, and therewith something is lost that it is now our need to regain. And so we pass on, gaining and losing, yet peradventure through all this effort and dissolution in experience something forms which pervades existence.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

We have broken up the shapely world vision of our race by analysis, forcing our abstract proportions upon it (abstractions learned, no doubt, from observation of itself, but perfected in progressive distance from such observation) until things as they are seem less real than the patterns of neat units we have made out of bits of them. Nature thus seems on the point of decomposing into the scientific abstractions of which we aver it to be composed, and of which in some sense it is, though not in its integrity, composed. We must learn now to see nature in its integrity, recognising scientific patterns to have about them always something of our own invention. Nature is not the less established in unique shapes because we can force these uniques into classes, and see the suggestions of regroupings in the very stuff of the given world. Science proceeds by the perpetual discovery of exceptions to laws, then made the subject of new laws. Though every fact and feature of the universe be a crisis of conflicting forces, maturing towards resolution—forces which we can to some extent classify and predict—yet not the less for that the existent is there as it is, and rears its unique shapes, everlastingly mysterious, first for our contemplation, and only secondly for our examination and interference.

(P.S. On re-reading, inclined to be critical of these "things as they are," these "unique shapes" and to stand up for classification as being implicit in the perceived world: to try and get behind all classifications is as much a distortion as is the omniclassificationism of scientists).

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

By what duty or right do I dig at the fundamentals in approaching a task of historical appraisal? How is it I don't find judgments ready made for application? I would justify my probings by our national tradition of private examination, of gaining clear and distinct ideas, etc. Of course Locke and Co. were comfortably sure that examination would *confirm* the individual in the essential views of tradition about morals and the soul: we have seen free examination shaking these views to the uttermost, and know the danger of over-shaking as that of rootedness. To work and live at all we know we must allow tradition to work more or less.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

In an article [on Austria] the *Tablet* has some acute remarks on the degeneracy of Europe since the Seventeenth Century, when man first laid claim to human *self-determination* and viewed Christianity as something civilizing for primitive men, but to be *grown out of*. But if one allows the doctrine of development, with Newman, one may think that Christianity itself grows, and instead of growing out of it grow up with it. And instead of viewing self-determination as inimical to God-determinedness, one may conceive as the greatest hope a harmony of the active and passive determination. This would be to conceive of a medium of Providence in which existence is, with a fitness of contact that may be seen in an assertion now of Providence against existence, now of existence against Providence, and Philosophy would be the striking of that balance, the attainment of that clear focussing.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Why not strength in prayer? Well, our gaining of strength is, by the method of prayer, confluent with the method of human courage. Maybe supplication, perpetual search for guidance from the ideal centre had become oppressive: the natural courage it had to correct was being stifled. But we must now reassert the controlling Spirit, which we may think of as the Godward pole of attraction

over against the Natureward, we being the children of God and of nature, with peace to make and battles to fight on either side.

C.J.S.S.

(Oct., 1937—July, 1938).

STRENGTH

One like the Son of Man, when hope took flight,
Walked with him in the spirit's central night.
And now, revived, he relishes new dawn;
One walks with him a green and cloistered lawn.

G. Rostrevor Hamilton

THE DESTRUCTIVE DUCK

There was a lake set between high mounains, in a very lonely place. The water would ripple, the sun would shine, the night would follow after day, but nothing very remarkable ever seemed to happen.

"We are tired of looking at one another," whispered the rushes that grew round the banks.

"We are still more tired of your complaints," sighed the white lilies that rocked on the surface of the water.

The Wind, who had just come down from the mountain tops, whistled and sang a song as he flew over the lake.

"Oh why can't you take us with you?" cried the discontented rushes and lilies. "What wonderful things you must see on your travels."

"Well, look what I have brought you," laughed the Wind, and borne gently through the air came a large and shining rainbow coloured bubble. It twinkled so with pink, green, violet and blue lights that the flowers shivered with pleasure when it came near.

The Wind breathed very quickly as the bubble drifted down and came to rest amidst the white petals of a water lily.

"You will see wonderful things when you look into that bright ball," sighed the Wind—and flew swiftly away.

The rushes and lilies bent forward to admire the beautiful visitor; and what the Wind had said became quite true. They looked into the bubble, and within the glittering shape were mirrored in lovely little pictures all the things of which they had grown so tired: the water, the flowers, the high mountains, the blue sky overhead, and the fleecy clouds which sailed through it. But gathered within this circle all these familiar things looked different.

The rushes and the lilies felt they saw them for the first time, and with a new and indescribable pleasure.

"What makes everything look so delightful in that bubble?" asked the tall reed.

"I don't know," said the Iris.

"I always thought the Lake was dull, but when I see it framed in that circle there is something wonderful about it."

"Yes, it has made it all new and exciting; we were blind before that bubble came. As long as it stays we need not envy the Wind and its travels, we can be content."

At that moment there was a stir in the Lake, and a brown duck swam noisily along. It soon spied the bubble, shining in all its brightness, and held above the deep waters by the white arms of the lily.

"Oh what a ridiculous thing," quacked the duck, "I never saw anything so absurd as those silly little pictures, they aren't real at all," and with a savage snap the rude creature paddled near, and opening wide its beak took a great bite.

"Phluff——" the duck's beak was still empty, and the bubble and all that was mirrored in it had vanished.

A quick shudder went round the Lake when the flowers saw what had happened, and diamond tears of grief sprang from the golden hearts of the lilies.

But a small silver fish happened to swim by, and the duck lost no time in turning upside down, with its tail stuck into the air, and with one gobble it swallowed the minnow.

"Ah, ha, the fish was much better than that tiresome empty ball!" cried the duck. "There was nothing whatever in it," and it sat up and blinked the water out of its eyes. And then it turned round with a disagreeable commotion and bustled off home again—never even seeing that the flowers had all faded with grief.

HELEN PAGE

SOLOMON MADE WISDOM

Solomon made wisdom—but was he imbued
With the wisdom of that language, the speech of fortitude.

Solomon made wisdom—but could he spell and set
The lovely word Endurance of his Jewish alphabet.

Solomon made wisdom—but could he find the zeal
To write in golden letters that dim black word ordeal.

D. EARDLEY WILMOT

IVORY TOWER

Sometimes I wish for an Ivory Tower:
the real thing, unassailable;
where friends would bring me fruit and flower,
and converse be available.

The world would fight on in the plains below,
truth be bandied about and soiled,
while I to my Ivory Tower would go,
never so much as embroiled.

But those who live in Ivory Towers
commenting but uninvolved,
they have incomes, you know, as well as flowers,
so they're born with one problem solved.

Ivory Tower

Ivory Towers however can crack
and tumble down overnight
but that only happens when shares are slack
and the owner gets a fright.

On the whole, if my income were constant,
unearned and sufficiently large,
I should purchase a Tower this instant
and live there, in sole charge.

S.S.

SONG FOR CHRISTMAS

O gently in the crib tonight,
Baby lies, baby lies,
Puts gentle fingers in his eyes
And is quiet.

Softly the wind sings,
Softly the world sings,
Softly the mother sings,
Softly tonight.

O now against the cross to come,
Lord protect, Lord protect
Your silent and unhappy one.
O, hear the guns!

Gaily the wind whispers,
Gaily the world will sing,
The mother is peaceful at birth,
O Jesus is king,
For him there is everything.

Gently, gently in the crib tonight,
Baby lies, baby lies,
Puts gentle fingers to his eyes
And is quiet.

NICHOLAS MOORE

A LETTER

Dear "S.S."

I have just been reading your story, "The Refugee and the Home Office"—a most ingenious and delightful little work of art (with excellent pleading in it). I am so glad that when at last the Invasion came, vast numbers of anglophil aliens "stood side by side with the English and Canadian and Australian and New Zealand and Indian soldiers and sailors and airmen," and that the Invasion was a complete fiasco. But you must forgive me for saying that I didn't like your account of what happened afterwards. You tell us that amidst the general rejoicings a young German "said to his English friends, 'We'll make Europeans of you yet. But it's been a tough job. I remember the days when you didn't know the first thing about Europe, and I wondered why on earth you were fighting this war.' 'So did we wonder that,' said Fritz's English friends, 'until we met you. The Ministry of Information never told us, nor did Churchill except in an odd sentence or two.' "

I had not supposed that "we" would talk that kind of nonsense. I should have thought that "we"—or at least the vast majority of us—had all along been very well aware of the reason for which the war was being fought, and of what the result would be to us and to Europe and to the rest of the world if Germany were victorious. I should also have thought that long before the war began we had known quite well what it would be about if it did begin. I had actually thought we long ago grew rather sick of the innumerable articles, speeches and broadcasts that explained to us, day after day, month after month, the obvious stark issues that were at stake; and I had marvelled at this flux until I realised that there must be in the British Isles an unblest minority that couldn't observe for itself what stared it in the face.

Were "Fritz's English friends" of this kind? You do not say so. You speak not a word of scorn for them, or for the words that you put into their mouths. At the same

time, you dismiss with explicit contempt an English soldier and "ex-Home Office official" who replies to Fritz, "What nonsense you talk. Europe you say. We're not Europeans. We're a cut above Huns and Wops and Dagoes," and continues in that strange vein. I am thus driven to infer that you feel no disrespect for the mentality of those other speakers, and regard them as quite typical and normal representatives of the rough island race, and would not greatly object to being regarded as one of them.

Well, I'm not one of them. And as I am, like you, one of the "local" contributors to this magazine, and as people at large might be rather inclined to suppose that in a little rustic circle there would perhaps be a community of opinion, I beg to say that if in any future number your fairy pen shall (in the sense indicated) impinge on political matters, I shall be loth to remain among the contributors.

What a threat, dear friend! Pardon my pomposity, even as I pity your simplicity.

Yours ever,

MAX BEERBOHM

December, 1940.

ANOTHER LETTER

DEAR MAX,

Your praise makes my pen dance and tingle with delight, but then suddenly the nib jerks at the horrid threat in your last sentence but one, and refuses to dance any more.

As I take it up again, it is a different pen, a sobered one. Slightly nervous about the task, it murmurs "a nice fix this is—the *Ab. Chron.* isn't political—but go ahead."

Well, when I knew of the offence caused in my little story I decided to ask a few strangers whether they too had received a shock. I asked Jones and Smith and Lady White and Mrs. Black, members of that excellent great public you refer to as "our rough island race." Do you know what they one and all replied? They all replied

that they had never known any foreign refugees, that they could not easily follow the story, and that they could see allusions in it, without however understanding them.

This was sad, but frank. The other folk, Brown, Williams and Davies,, who, like myself, knew the refugees from Germany, Austria, Italy and elsewhere who have come over to England these last years, had followed the story and took the complaint of Fritz's friends as a true part of the pattern and it gave them no offence.

To appreciate the complaint it is necessary to remember what happened to the refugees in England in June, July and August, 1940, and, at the awful risk of being tedious, I will recall it. In those months, thousands of anglophil refugees were interned and several thousand shipped to Canada and Australia to prisoners' camps prepared there for *enemy* aliens. Was this really a war of European liberation or had these "victims of Nazi oppression" in England fallen into the hands of robots, unacquainted with their character and achievements? Had these refugees not appeared before especially appointed tribunals throughout England during the previous winter to be classified? If this classification now seemed inadequate in view of giant "fifth column" activities in Holland, Norway and France, could not a less high-handed method have been devised of dealing with the distinguished professors from Göttingen and Bonn and Berlin now teaching at Oxford and Cambridge and Manchester, not to mention the scores of doctors, lawyers, clerks and craftsmen, many of them elderly, in English homes up and down the country? They were taken away, usually at five minutes' notice, almost invariably before breakfast, in the local prison van.

Fritz's friends in my story are real. When that mass internment was carried out in the early hours of those summer mornings all over the country, many an English host and hostess of a refugee thus taken, was ashamed of what was happening and puzzled.

Here was, and I agree with them, here is, a question that is linked indissolubly with this war's goal. What was happening did not tally.

I too was ashamed, not so puzzled perhaps. I went to the Home Office and spent the strangest forty minutes there you can imagine, but that is another story.

Of course my English-friends-of-the-foreign-refugee are a minority. It has always been so, even in the London days of Foscolo and Mazzini. It is minorities like these that made the Risorgimento a familiar, fine thing to English hearts. It is due to such a minority now, that the whole internment policy is being closely revised.

"But," I hear you saying, "what are 50,000 foreign refugees among the millions involved in the war and the mighty odds we fight, surely not a cause for questioning what the war is about?" And I would reply that these refugees are what is left of a quiet, sane Europe within our shores and that many of them are gallant Europeans such as gladden the heart of one who, like myself, feels my roots strike out through the soil of this dear and far-flung island to the next best thing I know, which is the civilisation of Europe, a civilisation to which through Greece and Rome and Paris and a hundred other nice places and people belong, and which shall yet liberate itself from its present tyranny.

Dear Max, you could never be as pompous as this; you could never be pompous at all. Meanwhile, I must hope for understanding in my effort to explain who in my story was in doubt about the war, and on what occasion,

and so remain,

yours affectionately,

S.S.

FRAGMENTS TO BE FOUND IN RUINS

(for Priscilla)

The guns bitter, the winds bitter, the cold
Frost biting through the blankets of our world
To gnaw upon the quickness of sweet love,
And I at this time fortunate to have
A wife in a green jersey, a house, and a poem. . . .

NICHOLAS MOORE

If your Subscription is now due for Renewal . . .

Since the *Abinger Chronicle* is not, by its nature, likely to enjoy a sufficiently large circulation to attract advertisers, it remains one of the few, perhaps the only, magazine which lives entirely upon its subscriptions.

All the intricacies of modern publishing are unknown to its small grey pages. No, the *Chronicle* neither advertises nor takes in advertisements. It would be fun to do both, but costly, and precarious. It is so sober that it just pays its way each month and makes no debts.

It cannot be upon the bookstalls (few can, these days), but there it is, nevertheless, in a goodly number of homes up and down the country, and even in the United States.

It will soon be a year old—and what a year! It has had some thirty contributors in these wild and grim months, sixteen of whom are local to this happy corner of England, the others from as far afield as California and Cornwall. About a third had never published before, including men and women now serving with the Forces. That is as it should be and it is, I fancy, what the famous skippers of this little ship wanted. They wanted a sturdy crew who could turn about in the small space available, with all the added hard work that means in the writing of brief prose and poetry from the living heart and head of man, despite "the riving storm that is all around and over us."

Meanwhile postage went up in the summer (an awful blow), envelopes thinned and jumped a penny and blocks have become a very luxury. We can, however, survive, if every subscriber not only renews his or her subscription, but brings in two or more new subscribers.

Renew your subscription for a year now and tell friends about the *Abinger Chronicle*, and give a year's subscription as a Christmas present to someone who would enjoy it. Post it to

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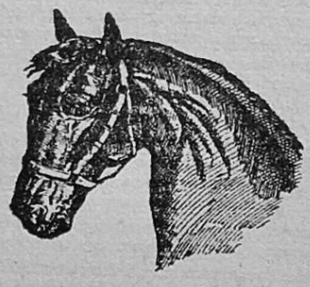

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