

April-May, 1941.

Vol. 2. No. 3.

The Abinger Chronicle

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Price Sixpence.

The Abinger Chronicle

appears frequently, as funds allow, monthly, if possible. While many of the contributors are local to the Abinger district, or frequent visitors to it, like Max Beerbohm, E. M. Forster, Desmond MacCarthy, R. C. Trevelyan and Ralph Vaughan Williams, many come from far afield.

MSS. (which are voluntary) are welcomed by

THE EDITOR

CHERRY COTTAGE

ABINGER COMMON,

DORKING, SURREY

The annual subscription is 6/- post free; 3/- for six months, post free. These should be sent to the Editor.

(Cheques, if used, should be made out to

Sylvia Sprigge. No stamps, please).

NOTE—Vol. I., Nos. 1—12, and Vol. II., No. 1, are now out of print.

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VIRGINIA WOOLF

It is too soon to judge how great a loss literature will have suffered in Virginia Woolf's death. At present what will chiefly be in the minds of her many readers and friends must be grief at the disappearance of as fine and rare a spirit as we have known in our time. Her fineness showed itself not only in the wit and imaginative charm of her conversation, but in every page that she wrote, even in what might be considered her less successful books. For she was always a fearless and passionate experimenter, and that not for the sake of novelty or notoriety, but sincerely, for the sake of the art she loved beyond all other things. In order to be true to herself she took risks, deliberately abandoning many of the resources of the classical art of novel-writing, such as dramatic and even narrative design, elaborate descriptive construction of character, and realism of environment, where it did not directly serve her purpose. In general that purpose was, I think, more poetic than novelistic. Her interest in her characters was not so much in their relations to other characters, or in their own intellectual development, but in their imaginative moods and their response to beauty, in their vitality and sense of life. To give expression to this interest, she was endowed with a marvellous power of visual description, which grew out of a vigilant and sensitive feeling for beauty of every kind.

As she came to rely less and less on dramatic and narrative methods of design, she consciously developed a method of composing her books which was very much her own. A quotation from a letter to one of her friends will give some idea of what that was: "You have found out exactly what I was trying to do when you compare it to a piece of music. It's odd, for I am not regularly musical, but I always think of my books as music before I write them. And especially

with the life of Roger—there was such a mass of detail that the only way I could hold it together was by abstracting it into themes. I did try to state them in the first chapter, and then to make them all heard together, and end by bringing back the first theme in the last chapter.” This “musical” method appears clearly in all her maturer books, and gives them a very definite form and coherence, in spite of the complexity and episodic quality of much of the material. It is most evident in *To the Lighthouse*, which is perhaps her greatest and most perfect novel.

The remarkable gift for biography which is shown in her *Life of Roger Fry* may also be seen in many of the Essays in her *Common Reader*. Here she proves herself to be a just and discerning appreciator, not only of the books, but of the lives and personalities of writers as different to herself as George Eliot, Conrad and Montaigne. The same honesty of intellect and character, the same genius, is revealed both in her less ambitious writings, and in the larger, creative works by which she is most sure to be remembered.

R. C. TREVELYAN

BRIEFLY MY MORNING

Wise men have set for fairest end of learning,
Feverish youth gone by,
To know, beyond the coloured play of sense,
The single whiteness of intransience,
The pearl of Truth all other pearls outpricing.

Yet how shall I not grieve that past renewal
My morning-time is fled?

What universal vision could atone—
Ecstatic mind “alone with the Alone”—
For small particular raptures, day-sufficing?

Briefly my morning

Briefly my morning—in its upland valley
 A stream that loitered long,
 With time at standstill under heathered slopes,
 Then wider, quickening with seaward hopes,
 Flowed through warm-scented banks and flowers enticing—

Briefly my morning passed. The silver moment
 Shining to Lethe slipped :

 And yet what foolish flashings I recall !
 The day that I was Caesar, conquered Gaul,
 Escaping from the schoolroom undetected :

The day I saw about a lofty oak-tree
 Buoyant with pinion spread,
 No longer gazed at in a coloured plate,
 The mighty *Purple Emperor* hold his state,
 And then, my net on clumsy pole erected,

Dashed him to common earth : the day, reluctant,
 I took my father's great
 Blue-calf-bound Milton, and at random read
 Of Satan—"horror Plumed" upon his head—
 And stayed, surprised and shamed by so much splendour.

And later days : sudden a gold horizon
 Of liberating thought :
 An hour of friendship tested : and the shared
 Excitement of a crowd : ventures we dared
 And found no longer frightening : the tender,

Stealthy approach and passionate usurpation
 Of love; the close turmoil;

 The hour of wild certainty, the doubt
 With premature bravado put to rout,
 The desperate joy outvaluing safe pleasure.

And quiet days; the very scent and savour
 Of daily things new-felt,
 Wherewith the incidents of work or play,
 Dear home affections, a mere summer day,
 This hour or that, are heightened beyond measure.

Briefly my morning

Briefly my morning. Yet those days I summon
Back from the countless dead;

Nor do they come as pitiable shades,
The tearful ghosts of lamentable glades,
A scorn, a mockery of life departed—

Nor do they come as spirit without body,
Bare ecstasy of mind,
But in the warm desire-moving dress
Of bright imaginary loveliness,
Clear-seeing, quiet-thinking, and true-hearted.

G. ROSTREVOR HAMILTON

INTERVIEW

SCENE: *The Office of the Muse Sisters.*

CHARACTERS: *Three of the Muse Sisters: Calliope, Erato
and Euterpe.*

An inspiring Modern Author.

* * *

How old are you, young man?

Twenty-one.

Are you married?

Once and a half. Once divorced.

Have you any influential friends?

Well . . .

What my sister means, is friends who will help
you in your work?

Well, I . . .

No need to be nervous, young man.

I know a schoolmaster, a bank manager, a . . .

No good.

Too ordinary.

Dull.

Well . . . I know a cartoonist, a house-painter . . .

Not house-painters. They are not in favour just
at the moment.

. . . a miner, a hop-picker . . .

Better !

. . . a tram-driver, a fish-porter, a gigolo . . .

Better still !

. . . a crook, an ex-gaoler, a hangman, a reformatory boy . . .

Splendid !

Excellent !

That will do !

That will pass you !

And now for general knowledge.

You start, sister.

Young man, have you a knowledge of pubs, night-clubs, continental cafés and road-houses ?

Intimate. My mother was a barmaid. You might say I was born in the bar-parlour. Beer was like mother's milk to me.

Remarkable !

Noteworthy !

Fascinating !

Have you experience of any wars ?

China, Abyssinia, Spain, Dunkirk.

We congratulate you.

Are you thoroughly conversant with streets running with blood and houses plastered with human parts ?

I have wallowed in such scenes.

Magnificent !

Delightful !

Highly commendable !

Have you a sensitive olfactory nerve ?

As delicate as a seismograph. I can bring your handkerchief to your nose in twenty taps of the typewriter. I can distinguish the odour of a tenement flat from a doss house, new drains from old drains, sweating navvies from sweating farm-labourers, the smell of mud in Cornwall from the smell of mud in Devonshire.

Have you studied neurotics, perverts, drunks, prostitutes, tarts, harlots and pimps ?

From the life.

Have you a detailed knowledge of disease ?

I know all the symptoms. My father was a doctor. Diagnosis was his favourite subject. He made a recital of symptoms as thrilling as a gangster's coup.

Grand !

Superb !

Most desirable !

And now for languages, young man.

Your subject, sister.

Where have you studied languages, young and handsome ?

The Luxury. The Regal. The Royal. The Pavilion.

The Super. The Astoria. The Odeon. The Palladium.

The Palace. The Empire. The Dominion. The Court.

The Grand. The Elite. The Forum. The Mammoth.

The Cosy. The . . .

A smattering of English as well, we presume ?

Sure. Just enough to give a flavour. As you might say—the cherry in the cocktail.

Brilliant !

Stupendous !

Charming !

Of course you can swear fluently ?

In the language of each country in which I have fought.

I suppose you have inside information on European affairs ?

You might say the scum of Europe was the cream on my infant porridge.

Witty, sister !

Biographical !

And apt !

Now for Nationalities, sisters.

Your mother, sir ?

Norwegian.

Your father ?

Polish.

Grand-parents ?

Dutch.

Great-grand-parents ?

Danish.

Piquant !

Interview

Glamorous !

Couldn't be better !

All the oppressed peoples in one pedigree !

I don't think we need retrogress any further, sisters.

You see, young man, the public likes a good mixture.

You have all the best ingredients.

Are there any more questions, sister ?

He knows all the answers anyway.

I consider him well equipped to get down to the veriest granulated dregs of life and to fling them with consummate skill in the gaping face of the public.

I feel convinced that not the humblest louse will escape his searching pen.

Young man, it gives us the utmost ecstasy to inform you that you have passed our examination with honours.

We will present you with the very best certificate of our establishment, signed jointly by the Muse Sisters.

You may now consider yourself thoroughly A-mused and B-mused.

We can assure you that everything is still before you.

An infinity of future, brother.

If we may call you, brother, brother ?

We see no harrowingly earthly reason why you should not sound great depths of success . . .

Except . . .

What, sister ?

Perhaps . . .

Well, sister ?

Speak up !

On second thoughts . . .

Tell him the worst for he grows pale as a bloodless corpse, sister.

Except . . . for the paper shortage.

Look out, sister !

He's going to faint !

He has fainted !

You shouldn't have mentioned the paper shortage.

It was too brutal, sister.

IDA PROCTER

NURSERY RHYMES

The alarums and excursions of history have left many footprints on the shores of literature. War is a great exporter, and among the ragged motley that we now call "nursery" rhymes (they were collected under that name only a century and a half ago), there are many that show the scar of battle. Some mirror home struggles; "Hark, Hark the dogs do bark" dates from the Black Death, when hungry men roamed the countryside, a terror to their neighbours. The Peasants' Rebellion has left two of its heroes named in rhyme, "My father he died I cannot tell how," with its refrain "Jack Straw Blazey boys," and there is a long song where each verse winds up with "John Ball shot them all," an odd monument to a brave priest, martyr to the far-off vision of democracy, who roused England with his preaching of "When Adam delve and Eve span."

"Baa Baa Black Sheep" and "Little Bo Peep" date from the 15th century, when the wool trade with Flanders was making England green and pleasant enough for some with its rich sheep pastures, but the seesaw of economic trouble is reflected in the song of Lear's Fool,

"That such a king should play Bo Peep,
And go the fools among,"

and in the Ballad of the Bad Black Sheep,

"Halfe England ys nowght now but shepe,
In every corner they play bo-pepe,
Lorde, them confownde by twentye and ten,
And fyll their places with Cristen men."

The Reformation storms left several rhymes behind. "Little Jack Horner" is claimed by west country tradition to be John Horner, steward to the last Abbot of Glastonbury, who afterwards became owner of Mells, and, with his brother Thomas, had evidently feathered his nest warmly. "Mary Mary quite contrary," whether addressed to the Virgin, or only to the queen, is an ugly gibe at the old religion's sanctus bell, the cockle shell of the pilgrim, and the nuns expelled from their cloisters.

But all nursery rhymes do not, thank Heaven, show the human race as eternally quarrelling, even when they follow the roads opened up by invasions. "Humpty

Nursery Rhymes

Dumpty" is one of these, being found all over Northern Europe wherever the Teutonic tribes pushed their way. There are many amusing variations, every country relating the riddle of the egg in a different way. "Lady Bird, Lady Bird" has the same geography, and there are some fascinating possibilities about this rhyme, which perhaps reaches back to the very early myths of the sun and of flight. But later it became christianised, and the little scarlet insect gets many names, such as Our Lady's Hen, or the Mary or May chafer. In Norfolk it became the "Burnie Bee" or even "Bishop Barnabye," and here is a version given to me in Sogndal a year or two ago:

" Little gold one,
Fly away to God,
And He will give you a little food,
On a little pearl plate."

One would guess that of all our rhymes "Jack and Jill" would have been British born, but in fact they came from Iceland, where they are found in the Younger Edda, as a myth of the tides. The two children, Hjuki and Bil, are kidnapped by the man in the moon while they are fetching their father a pail of water from the spring.

A rhyme that comes straight from Rome of the 2nd century is a sort of leapfrog game, still played in England, with the cry "Buck, Buck, how many fingers do I hold up?", and we find it exactly described in the Satyricon of Petronius; "Trimalchio, not to seem grieved by the loss, kissed the boy, and bade him get up on his back, and the boy climbed on horseback on him and slapped him on the shoulder, calling out, "Bucca, Bucca, quod sunt hic?"

Remains of Anglo-Saxon is found in a rhyme that seems quaintly appropriate to black-out nights. When sent through a dark passage, the Devon children used to chant:

" Buckee Buckee, Biddy bene,
Is the way now fair and clean?
Has the goose ygone to nest?
Has the fox ygone to rest?
Shall I come away?"

Nursery Rhymes

The first line is debased from "Puca" a sprite, from which we get Puck; "biddan" I ask, and "Ben" a prayer, or boon.

Rhymes are still growing. The Sinn Fein troubles produced such hot angry ones, in very much of the same tradition as the old ones, that they are best forgotten. But here is one that should be preserved, it was heard in London streets a short time before the war,

"London County Council, L.C.C.

Board of Education, you're not He!"

a very modern relative of the ancient counting-out rhymes "Hickory Dickory Dock" and "Eena Meena Mina Mo," which contain in their gibberish the tag ends of the very first numerals ever counted in this island, a fine ancestry indeed!

The survival of Nursery Rhymes, unaided by any ceremonial use such has helped to preserve our hymns and psalms is something short of miraculous. They have swung down the gossamer thread of aural tradition alone. Spin on, little spiders of Time! Your Jacob's ladder catches the shining dew.

M. E. BOSANQUET

THE PAUSE

Sometimes in early summer do the leaves
In muffled rustle—as of bated breath—
Suggest their hardness, as when in Autumn dying,
And whisper thoughts of death.

Then the whole rhythmic landscape seems to pause
That labourer's bent back catches a theme
Significant. There's no effect or cause
Outside of Man: and Time alone is still.

JOHN GRIFFIN

SERIOUSNESS

Some years ago, at Rome, when I was passing under St. Peter's, one of its great bells began tolling its gigantic knell every two seconds or so. I have never heard any sound more overwhelmingly passionate. It was as though some warning of tremendous import were being delivered, stroke by stroke, to miserable mankind. The most solemn organ music could never come near the simple grandeur and earnestness of this bell, whose wordless monotony seemed more charged with meaning than any human eloquence could be.

Yet the beauty of seriousness is human enough; and beauty, when it is most moving, is most serious. But with us seriousness is an unstable and seldom unalloyed mood. It is to natural things that we must go to find its pure essence, to the "earnest stars" (*noctis signa severa*), to Walt Whitman's "serious and firm monotonies as of winds," to the "eternal whisperings" of the sea, to the sight and sound of water falling, the cry of the curlew and the song of the storm-thrush. Under the spell of these, how easily and utterly do not our trivial worthless thoughts fall away, and leave us alone with the rapture and loneliness of things?

Yet now in the tolling of this bell, if there was warning, there was also reassurance. It was no menacing power, but a friend speaking to me; and in his seriousness there was confidence. All our lives we are waiting and searching, often without being aware of it, for the friend in whom we may find absolute trust and security, who will be wiser, stronger, more courageous than we, who will give us counsel and comfort and faith in ourselves. Though we may be fated never to discover him, yet the desire does not die. It is towards this perfect friend that all our imperfect friendships aspire, and, not discovering him, fade away into disillusionment. And now, while I was surrendering myself to the voice of this bell, it seemed for a time as though I had found him. Was that too illusion? The bell stopped suddenly, and the familiar world returned. But for a long while the mood of that waking dream remained.

R. C. TREVELYAN

SEGESTA, SICILY

Built upon the rugged mountain height
against the last and high great granite wall,
the Temple stands gigantic, wide and all
of roseate stone, transparent in the light.
Silence was wed to space upon this site,
till strange lamenting song, a bagpipe's call
from Shepherd far below came musical,
a classic tune that did to Greece invite.
Eye followed ear to where the bleating sheep
grazed on the sloping downhill rocky lea.
Hill after hill into a vale, fell steep,
and crowning all the distance, lay the Sea
that Highroad home to Greece, the builders knew
and kept it, like another god, in view.

Autumn, 1938.

S.S.



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80 SOUTH ST., DORKING

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