

# LITERARY SUPPLEMENT

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EVENINGS IN PRINTING HOUSE SQUARE, 1908, BY SIR MAX BEERBOHM.  
 "Lord Northcliffe: 'Help! Again I feel the demons of Sensationalism rising in me. Hold me fast! Curb me, if you love me!'"

## THE END OF THE "OLD GANG" AT PRINTING HOUSE SQUARE

By L. B. NAMIER, F.B.A.,

Professor of Modern History in the University of Manchester

WHEN in January, 1908, Lord Northcliffe entered into negotiations with the Manager of *The Times*, C. F. Moberly Bell, for the purchase of its control, his name was withheld from the other parties concerned, and even the chief proprietor, Arthur Walter, the fourth of his line, was only let into the secret two months later, to stop him from assuring people that Northcliffe was not the person in question. *The Times* was a partnership-at-will, and the agreement had to pass the Court of Chancery: even then the identity of the new proprietor remained undisclosed. "The most obstinately anonymous newspaper in the world" was secured by "X": Northcliffe's designation in *The Times* office for more than a year after the sale.

never to 'interfere with the paper': he would 'keep *The Times* as it had been," and merely reorganize it technically. Talking to a member of the Walter family, in January, 1909, "X" said that... he had been reading the files, had taken the trouble to make notes on the history of the paper and had gone deeply into the period when it first earned its prestige. He recalled the careers and achievements of John Walter II and Thomas Barnes—which that generation had utterly forgotten. The history of the paper as a whole, said "X," had been lost. The name of Delane was well enough known, but the earlier and formative enterprise... was submerged beneath a stream of loyalty to the Walter family as such. And on March 20, 1909, Northcliffe wrote to the Manager:—

I wish I could find a good history of *The Times*. I do not believe there is one. If that is so, one ought to be written by a very able man—a very good one, full of pictures, caricatures, &c., a work that would take two or three years. My idea is that the volume should be a very handsome one and not on the barest margin of paper. It would constitute a great advertisement of *The Times*.

By 1912 Northcliffe had lost interest in the history of *The Times* and had grown contemptuous of its tradition. He himself had to pass away before his idea was realized. The first volume of the History of *The Times* appeared in 1935, the second in 1939; and now the work is continued, "a very good one," handsome in its attire of pre-war design. The production of each volume takes normally several years, and a fourth is still to come. But the concern for advertisement is nowhere traceable, and even this volume, so near to the present day and covering the Northcliffe interlude, adheres to the undertaking to reveal the work and character of those directly concerned with the production of *The Times* "to the utmost extent that research has rendered possible."

More than one hundred years ago *The Times* outgrew the mould and functions of the conventional newspaper. John Walter I had run it as an appendix to his printing works

in Printing House Square, and his politics and practice were, like so much in eighteenth-century England, "private and pecuniary." The transition to Victorian austerity was anticipated by John Walter II, who, having renounced Treasury favours and private payments for "suppressions" and "corrections," secured the independence and integrity of *The Times*. Under his father's will only a partner in the copyright of the newspaper, but Chief Proprietor with practically autocratic hereditary powers, and sole owner of the premises and the printing works, he added to the complexities of the situation when, having turned country gentleman with Parliamentary ambitions, he handed over *The Times* to an editor, while the ultimate inalienable "prerogative" remained vested in his family.

The Walters changed into a dynasty—detached, revered, and not always effective; while the editor, anonymous, completely identified with the newspaper, without ambition other than "to place *The Times* at the head of the Press," was their employee rendering devoted service. In time a conception arose, realized before it was formulated: the proprietor and his executives became joint trustees in a great national institution with a particular function in English life. In Barnes's conscious thinking *The Times* was still "a privately owned political instrument and newspaper, conducted for private profit, and expressing his private judgment." But in practice he consulted, first, the public interest and, secondly, public opinion. This tradition was firmly established and developed under Delane, 1841-1877. It was his "passionate determination to be independent of every influence but that of instructed public opinion." *The Times* entailed a further responsibility: "to form aright the public opinion of this nation," to stimulate, to anticipate, and on occasion to

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## HANS ANDERSEN IN ROME

H. C. Andersen: *Romerke Dagbøger*. Edited by PAUL V. RUBOW and H. TORSBÆ-JENSEN. Copenhagen: Gyldendal. Kr.13.50.

The publication of the diaries kept by Hans Andersen during his four visits to Rome seems to be an act of piety rather than of necessity, since they were obviously not written for publication and only supplied the great writer with notes for his autobiography, *Mit Livs Eventyr*, as well as with episodes in his novel *Improvvisatøren* (*The Improvisatore*). Moreover, since they have for some time lain in the Royal Library in Copenhagen, they have been available for biographers who desired to use them. Nevertheless, the two editors of this volume have done their work well, both in deciphering what is apparently a somewhat illegible manuscript and in identifying in the notes all the people mentioned in the diary.

Andersen, an indefatigable traveller, stayed in Rome on four occasions; in 1833-34, from October to April with a break in February; in 1840-41 from late December to February; in April, 1846; and during May, 1861. He obviously enjoyed Rome immensely, and was never weary of going to see the churches and other monuments, and of attending the great public festivals and ceremonies of the Roman Church at St. Peter's and the Vatican. The bulk of the entries in his diaries record these daily occupations and the meetings with friends and acquaintances, mainly of the Scandinavian colony, whose members regularly foregathered at the Trattoria del Lepre. The state of the weather and the disorders, if any, of Andersen's own health were also regularly entered. These latter were sometimes painful, a bout of toothache on one occasion and a carbuncle on another being recorded in some detail. Andersen appears from his diaries to have been much more delicate than his activity might have seemed to suggest; he frequently noted fever in his blood and stomach ache, and the evenings when he went early to bed.

He was also highly sensitive in his feelings. The first stay in Rome, at a time when he had not yet fought his way out of obscurity, was for a time ruined by an adverse criticism of his *Agnete and the Merman* which had appeared in a Danish paper and had

been reported to him with insufficient tact by his faithful friends and patrons the Collin family of Copenhagen. He gave way to utter despair, with thoughts of suicide. As he wrote on January 7, 1834:

What a night I had! There was fever in my blood, and I tossed in bed. How near I was to ending this unhappy life! God gave my thoughts, God forgave them who have so deeply hurt me!

However, with the aid of good advice and encouragement from friends on the spot, he got over his woe, and proceeded to enjoy himself. His later visits were less troubled with sorrows of injured *amour propre*, but it is interesting to observe his natural sensitiveness breaking out again during the last stay in Rome, when he was a man of European reputation and ever in request to read his stories at the houses of friends. He had brought with him a young man of the Collin family with whose behaviour to himself he was displeased, feeling himself slighted and neglected on various occasions. These sorrows he tearfully entered in his diary with a singular want of dignity. In the end there was an affecting reconciliation and the sun shone again. And when it shone, Andersen certainly enjoyed himself in the great city in which by 1846 he said that he felt himself at home.

It was during his last visit that he met Robert and Elizabeth Browning at the house of William Wetmore Storey, where he found Robert Browning reciting *The Pied Piper of Hamelin* to a crowd of children, whom he routed in the room in procession, having dressed himself up as the Pied Piper. Then they played an English dance game. Young Jonas Collin, we regret to read, was bored on this occasion, and also felt cold because he had left off his waistcoat. He looked so pale that Andersen sent him home, but himself stayed at the children's party till six. Four days later he called on Mrs. Browning, who "was looking very ill"; it was not much more than a month before her death. To English readers the rest of Andersen's contacts will be of less interest, as they were mainly in the Scandinavian circle.

## LOST ALLUSIONS

ERIC PARTRIDGE: *Shakespeare's Bawdy*. A Literary and Psychological Essay and a Comprehensive Glossary. Routledge. 42s.

The history of literary criticism shows that while criticism is swayed by precedent, it is affected by the social and other conventions and the intellectual fashions of the critic's own day. It is, therefore, no surprise that in this many-minded era new and multifarious characteristics have been given prominence in Shakespearean exposition, each according to the personal predilections or particular thesis of the writer. Some comments on the various Shakespeares produced by this process were made by Mr. T. S. Eliot, in a paper read before the English Association in 1927, with the wise remark that the deliberate scepticism or cynicism or stoicism alleged, among other qualities, to characterize the poet's work, is actually a quality that he used for dramatic ends.

Since that date the psychologists and others have been active, and, as might have been expected, the question of references to sex in the plays and poems has received special attention in accordance with some of the modern views of it. Mr. Eric Partridge, in his *Shakespeare's Bawdy*, finds it necessary to quote Mr. Kenneth Walker's *Physiology of Sex* in support of greater modern tolerance of thought in such matters. Mr. Partridge describes himself as a Shakespeare-lover, interested in wit and words, and not a Shakespearean scholar. In his essay he divides discussion of his subject into five main categories: Shakespeare's system of imagery in his approach to, and treatment of, sex; references to non-sexual bawdy talk; homosexuality; sexual allusions, ranging from the figurative through the literal-allusive to the absolutely frank; and general.

Such references concern both physical attributes and their functions, and the imagery used in them is drawn from all the multitudinous affairs of life. It is expressed in an enormously rich vocabulary; all of it derived, not from books, but from first-hand experience. Mr. Partridge repudiates with emphasis allegations of what is now termed "a sexual deviation" on Shakespeare's own part. He emphasizes the abundant wit associated with the poet's sexual allusions—wit in which he is supreme among the dramatists, and which is sometimes so complex that much alertness of mind and knowledge of Elizabethan phraseology are needed to appreciate it.

In all of these allusions Shakespeare reflected certain of the manners of his times; and Mr. Partridge remarks that in drama and elsewhere there is ample evidence that men and women conversed with great freedom on sexual matters. The pages of

Cotgrave and Florio in fact show how many peculiar meanings associated with otherwise simple words were curiously understood in Elizabethan and Jacobean times. We may hence believe that Shakespeare in his allusions to sexual matters was mainly intent upon his dramatic purpose; and so appreciate Coleridge's opinion that if the dramatist "occasionally disgusts a keen sense of delicacy, he never injures the mind; . . . he does not use the faulty thing for a faulty purpose. . . . In Shakespeare vice never walks as in twilight; nothing is purposely out of its place."

Mr. Partridge himself, in dealing with the poet's general attitude to sex and love-making, declares that "It is . . . safer and wiser to speak rather of his treatment of sex than of his attitude towards it; better, and wiser still, to speak of his remarks on and references to sex than of the treatment he accords it." "The word or phrase," writes Mr. Partridge in another passage, "always suits either the speaker or the scene or the event." Mr. Partridge's reader might at this point understand that Shakespeare's treatment of these sexual matters was not devoid of a certain objectivity; but Mr. Partridge feels able to make some sweeping deductions. Shakespeare exhibited, he tells us in one connexion, "the healthy tendencies of a healthy, well-balanced male and mind," which is what we should infer; but he also declares that the poet "was an exceedingly knowledgeable amoralist"; and further that "it has not even yet been fully appreciated that Shakespeare is the world's greatest wit."

Our author concludes that at one period, covering the plays from *Hamlet* to the early half of *The Winter's Tale*, the poet suffered from sex-nausea, but that this disgust did not make for reticence; and he thinks that Shakespeare seems to have held that to write is to create, and to make love is potentially to create; but that composition is superior to love-making as a means of self-expression and almost equal to it as an antidote to the loneliness of artistically creative men, serving to satisfy the intellectual and spiritual need to create and assuage desire by sublimation.

Shakespeare's treatment of sex must, of course, be viewed in its place amidst the whole of his profound and many-sided portrayal of life, and particularly his treatment of human love in all its phases. Such matters are outside the scope of Mr. Partridge's present book, but he proposes to deal with love and friendship in Shakespeare at some future time.

## THE SPOKEN WORD

G. H. PHELPS (Editor): *Living Writers*. Sylvan Press. 8s. 6d.  
HENRY REED: *Moby Dick*. A Play for Radio from Herman Melville's Novel. Cape. 6s.  
EDWARD SACKVILLE-WEST: *And So To Bed*. An Album Compiled from his B.B.C. Feature. Phoenix House. 12s. 6d.

In his excellent introduction to the group of broadcast appreciations now published under the title *Living Writers* Mr. Gilbert Phelps strongly criticizes any attempt to impose upon Radio what he calls "a fourth estate" in language; and in the twelve Third Programme talks which follow it has clearly been the general intention of each contributor to approximate as closely as possible the spoken to the written word. At its best the result is as good as Mr. Dylan Thomas's talk on Mr. de la Mare or Mr. Grigson's on Mr. Wyndham Lewis. Speech rhythms give an air of fluency to an intellectual process and the process itself is worked out in language only very slightly coloured by the necessity of being heard and not read. This unpretentious little book should be obtained by anyone who wishes to attempt the hard art of informal criticism; it avoids, in particular, that stifling intimacy which sometimes drives the elevated listener to risk the draughty uproar of the plains below.

If broadcast criticism is hard, broadcast drama is infinitely harder; and it might be thought that *Moby Dick* presented a problem strictly insoluble. It is a novel which owes everything to the unifying force of the first person singular—a force which excuses the hollow boom of its weaker passages. Melville's style swells easily to an organ volume; but like the organ it has a tendency to cipher. Only the tone of voice which

he imposes immediately on the teller of the tale can make a fitting amalgam of the majestic and the absurd in what is to come. Mr. Reed, with outstanding patience and skill, has taken the central drama of the story and guided it, using as far as possible Melville's own words, past the obvious dangers of digression and over-insistence. In this guiding process passages of his own verse stand up like buoys, constant and illuminating; further, by putting them as commentaries into the mouths of Ishmael and Father Mapple he has at least been able to recall the single focus of Melville's story-telling. The recasting of the drama is not less tactful; where a sequence of speech or incident has been shifted it is regularly with the right enhancement of dramatic effect. Fidelity to the dialogue has its dangers, however. Splendour remains; but in the ordinary rub of talk the "Pequod" seems occasionally to be under command, not of Ahab but of Captain Hook. The fault is mainly Melville's own, but it springs in part from small instances in which Mr. Reed has taken the original phrasing and then too scrupulously washed the grit out of it. This most intelligent adaptation awakens the hope that he will write an original play for the same medium.

Mr. Sackville-West's anthology is taken from the short evening broadcasts of poetry and prose for which he was responsible in the middle years of the war. They mix the familiar easily with the unexpected; and they make a most comfortable little book, not too rare, not too prim; an anthology, in fact, which, besides reinforcing Mr. Phelps's contention that good writing is also good broadcast material, stands square on its own merits.

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