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# Books of General Interest

## AT THE SIGN OF THE SHIP

BRIGGS, ASA, ed. *Essays in the history of publishing, in celebration of the 250th anniversary of the House of Longman, 1724-1974.* London: Longman, 1974. viii, 468 p. £5.

Reviewed by Alan Bell, Department of Manuscripts, National Library of Scotland.

To commemorate their first quarter millennium in business, Longmans have commissioned a dozen essays in publishing history and have produced them handsomely in a large volume with plentiful illustrations, a first-rate binding and (for a group not unknown for its pressing financial management) at a benevolently low price. The story of Longmans has been written competently before and this collection is probably a more successful idea than another company history would have been. The general history of the firm is dealt with in Professor Briggs's introduction which proceeds from the pre-history, 'Sub Insigni Navis' in 1654, to Pearson Longman Ltd of 1968, still with its nautical colophon. The introduction is brief but suggestive: the relations of Andrew Lang or G. M. Trevelyan with the firm would have made equally good topics for essays. Professor Briggs's own main essay is on the Badminton Library, in which he skilfully relates the development of late Victorian British sport to the growth of high-class publishing series. Longmans' Badminton Library spawned the *Badminton Magazine*, the Fur, Feather and Fin series, and half a dozen imitative 'stately homes' sets from competitors. Like most of the other contributions, 'The View from Badminton' is closely related to Longmans history: this gives the volume a unity which most *Festschriften* never quite achieve.

Professor David Daiches writes straightforwardly on 'Presenting Shakespeare', linking movements in taste and scholarship to the history of Shakespearean publishing—the Longmans connection is particularly with Bowdler's *Family Shakespeare* which remained on their list for over a century. Another celebrated Longmans' book was (and is) Kennedy's *Revised Latin Primer*, which provides the occasion for R. M. Ogilvie's 'Latin for Yesterday', a survey of Latin teaching in schools up to the Cambridge Latin Course of 1971; one only wishes Mr Ogilvie had left more room for a fuller discussion of Kennedy and his work. John Clive, who has recently

published the first volume of an excellent life of Macaulay, returns to his former ground for an essay on the *Edinburgh Review*. Some of the earlier material re-used from his *Scotch Reviewers* seems rather stale, but he is excellent on Macaulay's contributions and writes well of the *Review's* later history. In the move from Whig to Liberal, Liberal to Unionist, Unionist to Reactionary, the long proprietorship of Longmans is one of the few unifying themes.

Annabel Jones, a member of Longmans' historical staff, contributes a first-rate essay on their publication of Disraeli's last novel, *Endymion*, which has just the right balance of biography, publishing history and literary appreciation, and draws from well-documented details conclusions which throw light on author-publisher relationships, trading economics, reviewing practice and much else in the complicated but fascinating history of Victorian publishing. The first edition binding of *Endymion* is shown in colour, but it is Brian Alderson's 'Tracts, Rewards and Fairies: the Victorian Contribution to Children's Literature' which gains most from its colour plates—a stunning series excellently related to an essay which discusses technological changes as well as its main theme of the change from books to edify and instruct to those intended to amuse and entertain. There is a book to be made of this, and I hope it will be as delightfully illustrated.

Hans Schmoller, Production Director of Penguin Books (also a part of the Longman-Cowdray combine) discusses 'The Paperback Revolution', going back as far as Victorian novel series and railway reading. His pages on the main modern developments are perhaps too confined to his own imprint, but he varies the familiar Penguin story with the reactions of the trade press at the time. Mr Schmoller writes well about new printing processes and provides—like so many of these essays—a glimpse of the future as well as a narration of the past. Even Ian Parsons's 'Copyright and Society'—a good short introduction to British law and practice—is largely concerned with current problems, as befits a contribution from the chairman of the Publishers Association Copyright Committee.

The volume concludes with three articles which

look very much to the future. Two are educational: 'Planning for Change' (Tony Becher and Brian Young) is more about educational theory than its practical consequences for the publishing industry, and seems superfluous when compared with the overlapping but practical 'Education and Publishing in Transition' in which Roy Yglesias gives a well-illustrated account of the development of text-book publishing in response to new approaches to learning. Longmans are one of the main firms in the field of English Language Teaching, and Mr Yglesias is particularly strong on ELT techniques and publications. Finally, though the essay is not last in the volume, Susan Holmes and Tim Rix look in 'Beyond the Book' at the impact which film, radio and television have had on the printed word. They are practical in their approach and fairly optimistic about the future: 'as the functions of the existing media become more precisely defined and specialised in the future, books are likely to continue to fulfil a necessary function'. The book will survive, and no doubt there will still be business for a House of Longman in another two hundred and fifty years.

## OF MORE THAN LOCAL INTEREST

SIMON, HERBERT. *Songs and words: a history of the Curwen Press.* London: Allen & Unwin, 1973. viii, 261 p. £7-50.

Reviewed by Dr R. H. Carnie, University of Calgary.

This handsomely printed book belongs to the genre of printing-house histories. Its author, Herbert Simon, joined the Curwen Press at Plaistow in 1933 and was made chairman of the firm in 1956, a position he held until he retired as Honorary President in 1970. One might have expected, therefore, that this house history would deal at some length with the achievement of the firm in the twentieth century, and particularly with the period 1933 to 1970. Instead, with a modesty which his close friend Sir Francis Meynell described as characteristic, the author has chosen to concentrate on the earlier history of the firm, and particularly on the lives and careers of its founder, John Curwen, and his two sons, John Spencer Curwen and Joseph Spedding Curwen, bringing his book to a close with the extraordinary achievement of the founder's grandson, Harold Curwen, who turned a specialized music printing and publishing house into a general printing firm, famed for the fineness and appropriateness of the printing which it offered both to book publishers and to commercial houses. The history of the last thirty years of Curwen Press activities remains still to be written.

The founder of the firm, John Curwen, Independent minister, propagandist for Sarah Clive

Tonic Sol-fa method of teaching singing, and author of a Victorian bestseller, *The History of Nelly Vanner* (1840), was a typically Victorian mixture of Nonconformist conscience and idealism on one hand, and practical energy on the other, and Simon's excellent account of the minister turned business man, making both a crusade and a good living out of the Tonic Sol-fa method of teaching vocal music, as opposed to the conventional staff notation method, was perhaps worthy of being a book on its own. John Curwen started the music printing and publishing firm at Plaistow in 1863; by 1866 he was a full-time music printer and publisher with printing works in Plaistow and publishing offices in London; by 1891 his son John Spencer Curwen could write in *The Story of Tonic Sol-fa* that at least six million people had learnt or were learning singing with the aid of the method, and, of course, most of them were using guides, song-sheets, and so on, printed by the ever-expanding printing establishment at Plaistow.

John Curwen died in 1880 after a fascinating life where Christian virtue, radical conscience and commercial energy and acumen marched successfully side by side. His eldest son, John Spencer Curwen, followed in his father's footsteps, firmly believing that the Tonic Sol-fa method was 'the indirect means of aiding worship, temperance and culture, of holding young men and women among good influences, of reforming character, of spreading Christianity'. If John Spencer Curwen was the publisher and publicist of the family, his younger brother, Joseph Spedding Curwen, was the practical printer who led the firm through necessary technical changes, using engraving processes and lithography, as well as conventional letterpress, to improve the firm's capacity to produce music printed in staff-notation and a wide range of stationery and account books. He also introduced the Monotype process into the firm. The study makes it quite clear also that Spedding Curwen, with his Christian radical paternalistic concern for the education and welfare of the printing-house employees, was largely responsible for the 'family' atmosphere at Plaistow which encouraged employees to stay with the firm for generations and allowed the firm to respond successfully to the extensive changes in 'style' and direction which were needed if it was to prosper after the first World War.

The music printing and publishing continued to prosper until 1929, but the period 1916 to 1933 saw the continual growth in importance of the firm's general printing activities under the leadership of Harold Curwen, Spedding Curwen's youngest son. It was Harold Curwen's enthusiasm for printing that was both attractive and functional and his friendship with many of the leading typographers and designers of the day.

pieces of book production as the early numbers of *The Fleuron*, many of the publications of the First Edition Club, and an extensive range of limited and illustrated editions of works of literature from Shakespeare to D. H. Lawrence. Sir Francis Meynell says in his autobiography *My Lives* that when he set up the Pelican Press in 1916 'in commercial printing only Bernard Newdigate at the Arden Press, Gerard Meynell at the Westminster Press and Harold Curwen at the Curwen Press were offering "style".' Meynell also puts on record that, despite the high position given to his Pelican Press in the history of English printing, 'the Curwen Press, its contemporary, did fine work more consistently'.

Harold Curwen shares the credit for this achievement with Oliver Simon, the famed book designer and elder brother of the author of this book, and Meynell brought many of the Nonesuch books to the Curwen Press for printing. The firm's work fitted very closely with Meynell's objectives for the Nonesuch Press: 'to choose and make books according to a triple idea: significance of subjects, beauty of format and moderation of price.' It would however be misleading to suggest that the

#### MAKING SENSE OF HARDY

GREGOR, IAN. *The great web: the form of Hardy's major fiction*. London: Faber, 1974. 236 p. £3-95.

ZIETLOW, PAUL. *Moments of vision: the poetry of Thomas Hardy*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974. 274 p. £4-75.

HARDY, THOMAS. *Poems of Thomas Hardy: a new selection*. Selected, with an introduction and notes, by T. R. M. Creighton. London: Macmillan, 1974. 384 p. £3-50 (paperback £1-75).

HARDY, THOMAS. *The New Wessex Edition*. General Editor: P. N. Furbank. London: Macmillan, 1974. 50p (paperback) each.

Ian Gregor was not the first critic to recognize the problematic nature of Hardy's art, but his article some years ago entitled 'What kind of fiction did Hardy write?' (*Essays in Criticism*, 16 (1966), p. 290-308), went further than most in spelling out the problems. His present book is a development of some of the thinking which went into the article. Hardy's novels are slippery commodities. It is difficult for the critic to see the object and see it whole. Opinion has been divided as to whether the cause of this is that Hardy's art is fundamentally flawed, or whether it is on the contrary so subtle that it coheres at some deeper, more mysterious

firm's reputation depended solely on its book printing. Harold Curwen was also engaged in bringing appropriate freshness and simplicity of design to a whole range of job printing, including such diverse items as the *Spirit of Joy* leaflets, illustrated by C. Lovat Fraser, advertising the Curwen Press's own products, the descriptive booklet for the Savoy Hotel, and advertisements for the Westminster Bank.

The history of a relatively small printing and publishing firm rarely has more than a local and parochial interest. This study indicates that the history of the Curwen Press deserves to be read nationally and internationally for at least two reasons: the first being the light it sheds on musical education for working and lower middle classes in the nineteenth century, and the second the importance of this firm in the English printing renaissance. The generous use of plates and illustrations supports the text in both aspects of the book, and the second appendix—*Catalogue raisonné of the books printed at the Curwen Press 1920-1932*—is a useful guide to collectors of fine printing, expanding and correcting as it does Oliver Simon's original listings of the firm's significant productions.

Eight volumes have been published: *Far from the madding crowd*; *Jude the Obscure*; *The Mayor of Casterbridge*; *The Return of the Native*; *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*; *The Trumpet-Major*; *Under the Greenwood Tree*; *The Woodlanders*.

A hardback edition is announced at £3-50 per volume.

PINION, F. B., ed. *Thomas Hardy and the modern world*. Dorchester: The Thomas Hardy Society, 1974. ix, 161 p. £2-50. (Available from The Secretary, The Vicarage, Haselbury Plucknett, Crewkerne, Somerset TA18 7PB.)

Reviewed by Michael Bath, Department of English Studies, University of Strathclyde.

and elusive level which only the critically elect can see. Hardy himself never tired of proclaiming that his writings do not present a consistent philosophy, but rather a series of seemings. Hardy appropriated the term 'impressionism' to describe this shifting perspective. No doubt this is why his work calls for a flexible approach. It needs a response which is not just subtle but supple.

Ian Gregor's book is Arnoldian in the best sense, combining detachment and objectivity with passionate dedication. Rather than propose an original but limited reinterpretation his method is to review accepted responses to Hardy's fiction and to ask not only, 'Is this true? but also, 'Is it adequate?

Frequently his answer is that it *is* true, but that it is not the whole truth. He insists on the many faceted aspect of Hardy's art:

One of the distinctive features of a Hardy novel is that it is 'open-meshed'; it contains many kinds of different elements, and we can only really get the sense of this if we see it, not as a pattern which defines itself, but as a gradually unfolding process. In this way we are able to do justice to the impression that the novel is different things at different times.

Gregor's approach is notable for its critical tact. He knows when to pursue an idea, and when to let it alone. He knows that the responses to a Hardy novel are multiple, but he recognizes that some are more important than others. Thus he opens a chapter: 'There are not many things which can be said with safety about *The Return of the Native*.' How refreshing it is to find a critic who does not regard Hardy as the easy option!

Previous critics have blamed the oddities and imperfections in Hardy's writing, attributing them to his rustic naiveté (as though he were one of his own peasants) or to his lack of a higher education, or to his idiosyncratic temperament. Gregor does not go to the opposite extreme, and he does not hesitate to condemn major flaws, but in many instances he finds ways of reacting to such features which reconcile us to them, or which place them in a new light. He shows how many of these spring from Hardy's evolving consciousness of the sources and implications of his own inspiration. The emergence of consciousness thus becomes for Gregor not just one of Hardy's focal interests in evolutionary philosophy, but the whole process of his art.

The process is gradual and in most of the novels incomplete. Thus the precarious tone of Hardy's authorial judgements is attributable to the partial emergence of his understanding of the sources of his own creativity. And where Gregor's reading most enhances Hardy's reputation is where he shows, however incomplete the final understanding, the profundity of the imaginative intuitions in which the novels have their source. Wessex itself is a symbol whose significance even Hardy comes only gradually to understand. The tribute of Gregor's criticism is therefore not simply to the finished artefact, but to the power and integrity of the creative process itself.

Professor Gregor's style is economical but elegant. The book is written not just with conviction but with passion, which declares itself in the fidelity of its responses to the novels. As with other recent writing on Hardy it is the modernity of Hardy's themes which chiefly excites response, defined here with D. H. Lawrence's penetrating insights into Hardy never far in the background. 'Where *Jude* ends,' says Gregor, '*The Rainbow* begins.' Hardy's Victorian aspects are less clearly defined, though the potent figure of Arnold lurks

in the wings. The references to J. S. Mill, to Victorian Hellenism, to Darwin are made *en passant*. Some of them would bear spelling out in greater detail. The very concept of the emergence of consciousness which Gregor applies to Hardy's aesthetic was itself one of those potent if super-annuated 'ideas' which have proved such an embarrassment to his critics. Indeed it is the role of 'ideas' in Hardy which is most problematic. Gregor rightly sees the ideas as secondary to the art. But the ideas are nevertheless there, and they have a history.

One or two minor cavils: the book has no bibliography and only the scantiest of indexes. Perhaps this reflects Gregor's sense of the purity of his critical task, and his wish to be unencumbered by scholarly impedimenta. There are signs of hasty revision; the title of Lerner and Holmstrom's book is wrongly cited on p. 46. It is a pity that the climax of his argument about *Tess* should be rendered incoherent by a piece of garbled printing.

The style of Paul Zietlow's book on Hardy's poetry conveys little of the excitement and challenge which characterize Ian Gregor's writing. It suffers from a type of transatlantic blandness. It is a book which nevertheless performs a useful, if more modest task. Mr Zietlow's aim is to survey and define the different kinds of poem which Hardy wrote, and the range of styles and attitudes which he adopts towards various subjects. At its blandest it is merely a poem-by-poem survey, but it does attempt to show the *haecceitas* or essential quality of particular poems and styles. Many poems are sensitively and intelligently discussed, and there is some good comment on Hardy's evasive strategies, on the art which covers its traces. Too often however he concentrates on situation, tone, idea and style as separate entities. The interpenetration of all these, or rather the peculiar way they coalesce in Hardy's poetry somehow eludes him. Too often Mr Zietlow is reluctant to look beyond the particular poem, which, because it is treated as a self-contained entity, loses all its philosophical and literary allusions. Any account of such a poem as 'Discouragement' which fails to hint at the cultural history of the concept of *natura naturans*, or which misses the Keatsian echo and irony in 'fosterer' is unlikely to get very far. Besides a lexical and syntactical register, the poem, like most of Hardy's, has also a cultural and historical frame of reference. Indeed one of the problems with Mr Zietlow's book is that it cannot hold the poetry in a wider frame, it simply proceeds from one poem to the next, and unfortunately it broaches the least promising poems first. Only after 150 pages does Mr Zietlow come to the poems of love and memory which must be regarded as the centre of Hardy's poetic art. One shares his phenomenological curiosity as to the kinds of poetry Hardy wrote, but