



*LITERARY
MAGAZINE*

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ABINGDON SCHOOL



LITERARY MAGAZINE

EDITORIAL

This little magazine is a first attempt and it is hoped that it will be received with tolerance. For a long time, the Editors of the *Abingdonian* have found it increasingly difficult to find any room in their magazine for original literary contributions. The idea of a Literary Magazine was therefore born, and these pages represent an effort to put the scheme into practice.

The format of the *Abingdonian* is being used for this magazine so that those sufficiently interested can if they wish bind the two books together. But this is the only connection between the two publications—they are otherwise completely separate undertakings. It is hoped to produce this Literary Magazine once a year on Founder's Day, and that each issue will show an improvement in size and quality.

For this year's contents, we hold no special brief. They are few in number because we have rejected much that was inferior to the reasonably high standard we expect. Each contribution was considered 'printworthy'; it was not necessarily considered to be excellent.

THE SCHOOL PRIZE COMPETITIONS, 1949-50

The most pleasing feature about this year's prize essays was the much improved quality of the work over that of previous years. This should prove some consolation to the disappointed competitors, all of whose work reached the qualifying standard of 1947-8, when most of our prizes originated or were revived after the war. What is not so pleasing, however, was the paucity of entries. To have on an average one or two essays for each prize is not nearly good enough: it is, moreover, a condemnation of the lack of interest and intellectual energy of the whole of Upper School. It is hoped that next year's competitions will see an improvement in this respect. Prize essays are not the monopoly of the Upper Sixth Form, and I should like to see more entries from both the Fifth and Lower Sixth Forms.

The Headmaster has reviewed the Layng Reading Prize elsewhere in this magazine, but a short review of the other competitions is made below.

THE VAN WAGENEN ESSAY

Two essays were submitted for this prize, and both were well done. The subject was one calling for clear, reasoned argument—"Western Union: its aims and difficulties." The prize winning essay was by Cullen and was a sound, well argued piece of work that went below the surface of the problem. Cullen showed that the fundamental difficulties of Western Union were economic and that the solution of these difficulties lay rather in a positive attitude to Western economic co-operation than in a negative fear of the Iron Curtain.

Bateman's essay, although adequately constructed, failed to do more than deal with the geographical implications of Western Union. It was, however, a commendable effort.

THE HISTORY ESSAY

Only one essay was submitted—by Willson—but it was well worth the prize. Willson's approach to a somewhat wide subject—"To what extent have human personalities influenced

History?"—was both sensible and confident. Choosing three great historical figures, Mohammed, Queen Elizabeth and Napoleon, he attempted to prove that history is not wholly 'the biography of great men' nor is it entirely controlled by social and economic causes. His conclusion was of necessity a compromise, and, although rather unconvincingly expressed in his final paragraph, was well supported by the argument of his essay. The chief merit of Willson's essay lay in his competent use of historical detail and in his sympathetic handling of the three personalities discussed.

THE ENGLISH ESSAY

No award was made in this competition, which became in fact no competition at all, there being only one entry. The subject was "The Supernatural in Literature" and was sufficiently interesting to have merited a greater response. Hamer's essay was thought to be too superficial to warrant the awarding of a prize. Competently written in a pleasing style it remained a sketchy review of macabre literature down the ages.

THE DIVINITY ESSAY

For this essay, competitors had to discuss with supporting biblical reference and quotation the fact that "Some elements in the teaching of Jesus would appear new, and at times revolutionary, to a Jew grounded in the Old Testament."

Three entries were received, the prize being awarded to Riggott with Wooldridge prox-acc. Although his essay was in some ways slovenly and of clumsy construction, Riggott had obviously given the subject much thought, kept to the point and supported his argument with apposite references to the Old and New Testaments. Wooldridge's essay was perhaps more fluent and stimulating, but was slighter and less adequate in reference. The third essay, submitted by Cullen, was somewhat woolly, and slow in getting down to the subject matter.

THE BALL SCIENCE ESSAY

One essay only was submitted for this prize so that once again there was no competition. Heavens' essay, however, was of sufficient merit to warrant the award of a prize. Whilst

not, perhaps, the best of compositions, it was a creditable and interesting effort to discuss a difficult subject—"Specialization is both a necessity and yet a handicap in Scientific Progress."

THE ENGLISH VERSE PRIZE

The subject for the verse prize was "The New Science Block" and there were three entries (two from one boy). The standard however was not as high as had been expected. It was not easy to decide, but Cullen was awarded the prize mainly because his poem (which is printed in this magazine) presented a more finished appearance, was more of an entity and had fewer lapses into the unpoetic.

It is hoped that next year there will be more and better entries for this particular competition. In expectation of this, future competitors are reminded of a few simple facts. A poem must have unity, as well as the purely mechanical devices of verse—rhyme, rhythm, imagery and so on (and even some of these were lacking!). Above all it must avoid the banal, the hackneyed and the prosaic. It should aim at giving expression in words having their own beauty to a thought worth expressing. But perhaps the greatest single attribute of a poet is self criticism. We cannot all be inspired and we should try to develop the ability to recognise a bad line or a bad phrase in our work and ruthlessly expunge it.

THE JUNIOR READING PRIZE

The method adopted by this year's judges was to get each competitor to read in turn a prose passage—Masefield's description of the Clipper from "Sard Harker"—and a short poem—Milton's "On His Blindness". Both pieces were read unseen and it was at once apparent that the standard of Junior reading was very good indeed. It proved impossible to decide between Hall, Howard and Woodley so that an additional prose passage—Lincoln's speech of dedication on Gettysburg field—was read by each of them. Hall proved an easy best on this third round, getting plenty of meaning out of the passage as well as being admirably clear. Woodley, however, was considered good enough for a second prize to be awarded.

D.O.W.

THE NEW SCIENCE BLOCK

From Monkish tutors long ago,
Dwelling by the great Thames' flow
In an Abbey now dismembered,
A School sprang up and fast engendered
Scholars versed in Latin; knowledge
Gleaned from many a Grecian sage.
But the smooth slipping years dropped by.
Eight centuries are born and die;
And Science is the new religion,
Man's chief delight and sole ambition.
Therefore this ancient seat of learning
Now towards Science its strength is turning.
A building rears in modern style,
With full wide windows to beguile
Fresh air and sunshine. There we'll learn
Things by Monks unheard, but we'll not spurn
The teachings of their Christian life,
Free from the sick fatigue and strife
—which in our modern world is rife.

J.T.C.

ABINGDON, WINTER

The sunlight on the leafless poplar trees
Beyond the old stone wall in Lacies' Court,
Ere winter evening early turns its short
And wistful glance away, and mankind flees
Its beauty,—for the nightly vapours freeze
In merely contemplating them, all thought
Of tenderness in Nature,—the sunlight caught
Upon a thousand slender branches, sees
A thousand arms and fingers, glowing pink
And naked, stretching up and out, that plead
For comfort from the deep, blue-violet sky:
And finding none, their living figures sink
To ghostly outlines, cold and dead indeed
Past all relenting in the night-wind's sigh.

F.W.B.

THE LAYNG READING PRIZE, 1950

This year the competition for the Layng Reading Prize was held in two stages. In the first, each candidate had to read a prepared passage of prose of his own choice: in the second, he was confronted with a poem of some twenty-four lines which he had to read after looking it through for one minute. The timing was nicely gauged to ensure that this stage of the competition provided a real test of comprehension.

The four candidates read respectively from Thomas Hardy, Kenneth Grahame, Aldous Huxley, and Charles Dickens, but with one exception they cannot be congratulated on their choice of piece. "The Wind in the Willows" is a delightful book, but it does not provide the right kind of material for someone who has been endowed by nature with the voice of a (not so very) minor prophet. If Cullen had read from Sir Thomas Browne, Burke, the Book of Ecclesiasticus, or any one of half a hundred other authors, he would have established a commanding lead in this stage of the competition. As it was, the butterfly was duly broken on the wheel, and so far there was little to choose between the four. Bateman has a pleasing voice but was too emotional over a passage of simple description, Hamer read intelligently, but swallowed his words, Heavens made a valiant but not entirely successful attempt to cope with some dialogue from David Copperfield. It is a sound principle, if you are looking for a passage to read on such an occasion, to turn quickly over the page as soon as you spot quotation marks. If you deliberately choose a passage which introduces two different speakers, and one of them is an elderly lady who speaks (or should speak) in character—well, it is asking for trouble.

Then came the test-piece of verse, which sorted the field out more distinctly. Robert Bridges' 'A Passer-By' is far more subtle—and far more difficult to read adequately—than appears at first glance. Bateman was admirably clear, but after the first verse he lost touch with the feeling of the poem and failed to convey any of its robust vigour to his

hearers. Cullen's approach too was far too sentimental: our withers remained unwrung. Heavens gave a straight-forward and honest-to-goodness reading but left a general impression of flatness. Hamer alone seemed really to get inside the poem and to be able to communicate its message with restraint and understanding. His reading was marred by one silly slip but he recovered himself with admirable sang-froid.

The adjudicators were unanimous in recommending Hamer for the award, and the projected third round of the competition thus became unnecessary. It should be added, however, that the standard of all four competitors was very high: any one of them, in the absence of Hamer, would have been prize-worthy. These comments are in fact being published only because they were sufficiently good as to deserve the compliment of serious criticism.

And lastly for one or two general points which may be a help to competitors in future years. Careful choice of a prose passage which not only is worth reading in itself but is also suitable for your own voice, is of the utmost importance. It is better, other things being equal, to choose a self-contained passage which needs little or no introduction. If introduction is necessary, it should be prepared beforehand: and it is possible to be dignified about this without being pompous. As for the verse, the vital thing is to interpret the emotion of the author without unnecessary artifice. It is surprising to find that the belief still survives (some naughtily aver, even in Portland Place) that a special kind of voice is needed for reading poetry. Nothing is more irritating than to hear someone reproducing a vigorous and full-blooded poem with a kind of maudlin pathos which is appropriate, if at all, only for the lesser gleams of the Celtic Twilight. It is in the hope not only of improving the standard of declamation but also of introducing readers to what is possibly a new word that I say that I personally look forward to more *panache* in the verse-reading next year. Or to put it in the vernacular, less of the sob-stuff and far more virility and swagger!

J.M.C.

STORM ON THE DOWNS

By this the rain clouds were drifting gloomily over the hills. The sun came out but vanished again immediately in a speeding veil of mist. Thunder muttered and the world was still. Small birds left their twittering amongst the higher greenery and disappeared in the canopied hedge-bottoms; there sat quiet. A great wind arose and drove against aspens and poplars with a strong though sudden force. Hills disappeared black into the gloom. Leaves and grasses trembled as the thunder boomed louder now; a lightning flash rent the gathering rain clouds for a moment and buildings stood out white and stark in an instant's piercing light.

Such it was when the rain began to fall: at first a whisper, a mere suggestion pattering on upper leaves; and then harder, more vehement; great white blots of rain rushing through the trees and spattering angrily against the earth. Another flash, a bolt from heaven struck the great oak I had noticed before the rain began. There was a terrible rending noise; the great limbs of the tree seemed torn from their sockets by the force of that savage blow. The top branches stood out black as they swayed slowly down towards me in the dark followed by the whole huge tree. It fell regretful, as if not willing to leave its time-honoured moorings, and tumbled down with a last agonised tearing of its roots, lying shuddering for a moment upon the sodden grass.

Part of it lay quite close to me and I could see a great moth which, in trying to shelter from the storm, had been caught by the thunderbolt and now lay trapped between two branches. It lay, feebly fluttering its wings, with a twig pinning its body to the bark. It looked so miserable and so pitiful there, beaten by the rain, that I stepped from my cover, where I had been hidden, and released it from its trap. It flew away gladly enough to a nearby holly and I felt strangely touched by what had happened. There lay the great oak—you would have thought it eternally immovable—lying prone upon the earth; it still looked fresh enough it was true, but its life was going from it, ebbing away. In a few days it would look quite brown and dry. Yet the moth,

its tiny denizen, now sat safe in the holly yonder. The strong, the massive had been slain and the wretched, weak little moth still lived.

But now the rain had stopped: only the trees and grasses held innumerable drops of rain; these pattered steadily from the leaves above me. The sombre rain clouds were passing away over the valley and the whited sun came out once more, casting sharp shadows over the sodden grass. And in the thickets birds shook themselves; a hedge-sparrow even started singing—discordantly—on the stricken oak tree. As I passed away I noticed the tree's great roots and torn, mighty limbs all charred and blackened by the fatal bolt. The sun was shining brighter now as it rode freely in the clearing sky.

A.E.W.

TU QUOQUE

Someone has thrown a sleeping sea
'Twixt ambition and its destiny!
Nothing can move it; silent, vast,
It washes away every prowess past.
Each breathless, greedy, hurried gain
Is worthless now, spite all the pain
There was in getting it ——
See how the waves roll on!
Moving and swift, they ever stay
To mock at me and at my parting day.
Like sleepers moving in their sleep
Turning they pass, yet ever keep
A drowsy, restless, plunging motion;
The long grey breakers of the ocean!
Moving vast in unbroken line
Yet tossing, turning, lashing brine
In deeper, spumier waves behind.
Beckoning on they seem to say
That life goes out with the parting day.

The sea of Fate cannot be passed
Thy weary self must sink at last!

A.E.W.

SPANISH ARMADA

Santanander the golden,
The richest and goodly,
With slanted, billowing sails;
Onward you plunged
Rising and falling,
Leading your sisters: pennants aflame
Figureheads golden carved,
Brass cannon shining on deck:
Exquisitely turned.

Santanander the broken,
Tragic and ruined;
Lying stormed and chilled
Where the Coolins tower;
Masts shattered, planks torn,
Cannon rolling in rain.
Splendid in Gádes;
Broken in Scotland,
Shattered and black in the grim Western Isles.

A.E.W.

THE SPANISH ARMADA

'The Spanish Armada is sailing!' The cry spread like wildfire through the little village of Drugadoon in Cornwall. Down in the little rocky cove the atmosphere was tense. Bedworthy, Gunnorth and Herringay were sitting on an upturned boat mending their fishing-nets, when a small boy ran towards them picking his way through the stones and rocks. They could hear him shouting and as he came nearer they heard the words 'armada' and 'Spaniards'. He stopped at last and incoherently blurted out the news. Herringay, only a young man, jumped up with a startled expression, and then sat down again when he saw the calm stern faces of his elder friends. 'What—What shall we do,' he mumbled.

Bedworthy took the pipe from his mouth, wiped his brow with a somewhat fishy handkerchief and remarked, 'Fight 'em.' This said, he replaced his pipe and looked thoughtfully

out to sea. Herringay looked on wonderingly for a moment and then exclaimed, 'But they'll come right past here. They won't land because of the rocks, but they might send out longboats for water or supplies or something—why, you never know.' Gunnorth, who had said nothing so far, looked at Bedworthy and then at young Herringay. 'Right m'son, we'll have our own li'l' war. We'll play a li'l' trick on 'em. Them Spanish ships which went past here to Plymouth some years ago used to make their way by the lights. They'll still be banking on them lights bein' there, because they think we didn't dare tak'em away for the danger to our own ships. We'll tak'em away—ah—an' put'em somewhere else:' This plan was agreed upon and the lights were moved.

Several days later the armada sailed by in broad daylight. All the villagers lined the shores of the small cove, and some took up vantage posts high up on the cliffs to see the colourful sight of the enormous fleet ploughing its course through the heavy swell. No galleons sent out their boats to Drugadon Cove—like as not the cove was not even noticed owing to its small size.

That night a large company of soldiers stopped at the 'King's Inn' and heard the stories of the armada—exaggerated stories of its splendour and size. In one corner the little group of three were drinking their beer silently—looking very grim. The captain of the company moved over to them and sat down. 'Why don't you make merry,' he said, 'like the others,—the danger is over—for you.' Young Herringay smiled—'We laid a trap for them but it didn't work. You see', he went on eagerly, 'if they had passed by at night they would have all come into this cove and run into the rocks, as we had specially arranged the lights.' He sank back into his chair dejectedly.

The captain of the company smiled and said, 'You're the sort of lad we could make a good soldier of.' This was generally Captain Jarrold's opening conversational gambit. 'But didn't you run the risk of endangering our own ships—you've put the lights back now, haven't you?'

Young Herringay looked up—‘Why, no, not yet. When I—’ As he spoke there was a tremendous crash and screams and shouts broke the night. There was a sound of falling timber and as they rushed out into the night they saw in the blackness a dark shape almost like a sail crumpling down to the water.

‘Hell’, shouted Captain Jarrold, ‘you’ve caught one of our own ships.’

They ran down to the water’s edge and they saw the dark shape of a long-boat looming up, with twenty oars pulling in unison. As it drew nearer the shapes became clear. Suddenly Captain Jarrold shouted out in a bull-like roar—‘By God! They’re Spaniards! Call the guard! Company! — —.’ His words became drowned in a confusion of cries. The boat came to the shore and a heavily uniformed officer jumped ashore and looked at the circle of grim-faced men armed with all sorts of weapons. Herringay was the only unarmed man and Cassilio El Refardo Tanagenite Tantara bowed before him. He handed to him his unbuckled sword and belt with the words ‘I sur-render.’

The next morning the Spanish sailors and soldiers were marched away by Captain Jarrold and his company. The remains of the galleon were left to the hands of the Drugadon villagers. An excise-man sent down the next day returned with a report saying that there was nothing left which could be salvaged. Had he stopped at the ‘King’s Inn’, however, he might have wondered at the gorgeous and expensive clothing of some of the occupants—to say nothing of the furniture which closely resembled that in the captain’s cabin on the galleon.