Books of General Interest

AT THE SIGN OF THE SHIP


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 more successful than another company history would have been. The general history of the firm is dealt with in Professor Briggs' 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' own main essay is on the Badminton Library, in which he skilfully relates the development of late Victorian British publishers to the concept of publishing as a business. Longmans' Badminton Library spawned the Badminton Magazine, the Fur, Feather and Fin series, and half a dozen initiative 'stately homes' sets from competitors. Much like most of the essays in this book, 'The View from Badminton' is closely related to Longmans' history: this gives the volume a unity which most Festschriften never quite achieve.

Professor David Davies' wide-ranging essay on 'Presenting Shakespeare', linking performances in taste and scholarship to the history of Shakespearian publishing—the Longmans connection is particularly with Bowles' 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 methods 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 Gibe, 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 Republican, the long proprietorship of Longmans is one of the few unifying themes.

Amabel 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 (as a part of the London-Cowdray combine) discusses 'The Paperback Revolution', going back as far as Victorian novel series and railway reading. His pages on the 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 narrative of the past. Even Ian Parson's 'Copyright and Society'—a good short introduction to British law and practice—is largely concerned with current problems, befits a contribution from the chairman of the Publishers 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 practical consequences for the publishing industry, and seems sometimes superfluous when compared with the overlapping but practical 'Education and Publishing in Transition' in which Roy Gyles gives a well-illustrated account of the development of text-books in response to new approaches to learning. Longmans are one of the main firms in the field of English Language Teaching, and Mr Gyles is particularly strong on ETL techniques and publications. Finally, though the essay is not last in the volume, Susan Holmes and Tim Rix look in 'Beyond the Impact of 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'.

Of MORE THAN LOCAL INTEREST


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

This handsomely printed book belongs to the genre of printing-house histories. Its author, Herbert Smith, joined the Curwen Press at Plaistow in 1923 and was made chairman of the firm in 1956, a position he held until he retired as Honorary President in 1970. One might be excused, therefore, that this house history would deal at some length with the achievement of the firm in the twentieth century, particularly with the period 1933 to 1970. Instead, the author, who has 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 Spencer 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 engraving house into a general music publishing firm, famed for the fineness and appropriateness of the printing which it offered both to music publishers and to commercial houses. The history of the last thirty years of Curwen Printing activities remains still to be written.

The founder of the firm, John Curwen, Independent minister, propagandist for 'the Singing Church', was a Victorian bestseller, The History of Nelly Banner (1840), was a typically Victorian mixture of Nonconformist conscience and idealism on one hand, and practical energy on the other, and the present account of the minister turned business man, makes an extraordinary and 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 stationery and publishing offices in London; by 1891 his son John Spencer Curwen could write in The Story of Tonic Sol-fa that 'through the last million people have learnt or were learning singing music under the twofold 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, teaching and culture, of holding young men and women among the reforming character, of spreading Christianity'. If John Spencer Curwen was the publisher and publicist of the family, his younger brother, Joseph Spedding Curwen, the practical printer who led the firm through the necessary changes, using engraving processes and lithography as well as conventional letterpress, to improve the firm's ability to produce music printed in staff notation and a wide range of stationery and account books. He also introduced the Music Press process in the United States.

The study makes it quite clear that Spedding Curwen, with his Christian radical paternalistic concern for 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 changes in 'style' and 'character' after the first World War.

The music printing and publishing continued to prosper until 1929, but the period 1919 to 1932 saw general printing activity under the leadership of Harold Curwen, Curwen's youngest son, who was both attractive and fashionable and his designs and promotion 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 stationery and publishing offices in London; by 1891 his son John Spencer Curwen could write in The Story of Tonic Sol-fa that 'through the last million people have learnt or were learning singing music under the twofold method, and, of course, most of them were using guides, song-sheets, and so on, printed by the ever-expanding printing establishment at Plaistow.'
MakinSKEEKING OF HARDY


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 to say what they are about in the 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 level which only the whole novel exists 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 signs, and we can never really get to the sense of this if we see it, not as a pattern which defines itself, but as a gradually unfolding process. In this essay Marchbank takes this to mean that the novel is different at times and for reasons.

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, and 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!

Frequent critics have blamed the odollies and imperfections in Hardy's writing, attributing them to his rustic naivety (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 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 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 nature of Hardy's authorial judgements is attributable to the partial unfolding of his sources in consciousness and in the novels have their source. Wessex itself is a symbol whose significance even Hardy comes only gradually to understand. The tribute of Gregory's criticism is therefore not simply to the finished product, but to the power and integrity of the creative process itself.

Professor Gregory's style is economical but elegant. The book is written not just with conviction but passion, which is necessary to 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 excite response, defined here with D. H. Lawrence's in 'The Germ' as the 'background of the background'. 'Where Jude ends,' says Gregory, 'The Rainbow begins.' Hardy's Victorian aspects are less clearly defined, though the potent figure of Arnoldhurks in the wings. The references to J. S. Mill, to Victoria, to Helen and 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 Gregory applies to Hardy's aesthetic was itself one of those potent if superficially uninteresting 'ideau' which had long been a bane to his critics. Indeed it is the role of 'ideas' in Hardy which is most problematic. Gregory rightly sees the ideas as secondary to the art. But the ideas are nevertheless there, and they have a history.

One or more cavils: the book has no bibliography and only the scantiest of indexes. Perhaps this reflects Gregory's sense of the purity of his scholarship and his view of this as a problem against the scholarly impediments. 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 inelegant by a piece of garbled printing.* * *

The style of Paul Zielot's book on Hardy's poetry conveys little of the excitement and challenge which this writer's work has always had from a type of transatlantic blandness. It is a book which nevertheless performs a useful, if more modest task. Mr Zielot's aim is to survey and define the different kinds of poetry 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 is an attempt to show how reverential or essential qualities of Hardy's poems and poetry, or their sensitivity and intelligently, and there is some good comment on Hardy's evasive strategies, on the art which covers its traces. Too often however, the concentration on the sources of his poetry 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 Zielot is reluctant to look beyond the particular poem in order to the inner entity, loses all its philosophical and literary allusions. Any account of such a poem as 'Disencouragement' which fails to hint at the cultural history of the concept of nature, 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 an architectural and historical coherence. Indeed one of the problems with Mr Zielot's book is that it cannot hold the poetry in a wider frame, it simply proceeds from one poem to the next, as unfortunately all too many of the differing poems first. Only after 150 pages does Mr Zielot 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...