

BOOK RECORD

Many People Say Those Were The Days—Or Were They?

Penetrating Light Shed On The Great Era Of The Victorians

COLLECTORS of Victoriana cannot afford to overlook a new contribution, "Home: A Victorian Vignette," by Robert Harling. This shrewd and impartial observer has waded through countless works of the nineteenth century, books of poetry, games, architecture, manners and morals, furnishing—everything that sheds a light on the Victorian scene as it really was.

Incredible Ancestors

The resulting "vignette," delightful word, makes fascinating reading. One gets a clearer vision of those almost incredible ancestors who laid the foundations of our lives today; their untiring moralising, their smugness, their shrewd eye for business, their industry, their vitality, their love of comfort, their social injustice, their pomposity, their hypocrisy, their wealth and their soul-destroying poverty; these qualities emerge before the fascinated reader's eye in curious juxtaposition.

The first section deals with The House; in what architectural manners did these Victorians live? These were the great days of "villas," from the large, ornate country and suburban dwellings disguised as Gothic castles, to the straight-up-and-down "semi-detached" villas that emerged upon a complacent world.

Royal example set a seal of approval on these activities with Albert and Victoria building Balmoral for their own home, and a thousand Englishmen following suit for pleasure or profit. Miniature castles and castellated villas expressed the Victorian's supreme taste in building.

Under a very different scheme came The Dwellings of the Poor. "Model" rural cottages were built in pairs, semi-detached being the great Victorian ambition, with unplastered walls, and a pump in the garden to supply water to the two houses. Less "model" cottages used the village pump.

Poor city-dwellers usually lived in single rooms costing from two to four shillings a week. In homes where the worker earned less than 20 shillings a week, as was usual, whole families lived in one room and several families occupied small tenement dwellings.

Accidents to children on unsafe stairways in crowded tenements were a commonplace, noted in many contemporary records of philanthropic societies—but never in the Courts of Law. The poor were there to be moralised over and sweated to swell the growing middle and upper-class prosperity.

It is interesting to note the detailed household accounts of the period, to see that a diet of meat and bread and pastry was usual, and that a man earning £250 a year could, and did, keep a wife and two servants.

A delightful chapter on furnishing the Victorian house follows, with directions from a dozen contemporary sources on everything from colour-schemes to curtainings. This part of the book is fully illustrated with engravings of pieces of furniture that would well baffle the modern eye, and lead one to wonder what sort of people could have invented them, let alone used them.

Much was expected of Victorian daughters, and bearded, whiskered gentlemen outdid each other in producing books for the guidance of "young females." Less effort was made for, or expected of, young males.

"The Young Lady's Book," for example, summed up these demands in a chapter on Moral Department. 'Piety, integrity, fortitude, charity, obedience, consideration, sincerity, prudence, activity, and cheerfulness, with the amiable qualities which arise from them, may, we presume, nearly define those moral properties called for in the daily conduct and habitual deportment of young ladies.'

Evenings at home receive the author's careful attention, and a typical collection of games and pastimes has been gathered from a variety of sources to enliven the more abandoned evenings when "rational conversation," needlework and making penwipers did not quite suffice.

Instructive games were, of course, favourite with the parents and authors of books of games for the young, with Anagrams, Charades, Cards, Conundrums, Enigmas, Puzzles, Rebuses, Transpositions and Riddles, etc. as light comic relief.

"But dominating all other recreations for evenings at home was the game of Charades which, as every schoolboy knows, 'is a poetical or other composition founded upon a word, each syllable of which constitutes a noun, and the whole of which word constitutes another noun of a somewhat different meaning from those supplied by its separate syllables.'" ("The Family Friend," 1850).

Wining And Dining

Wining and Dining makes interesting reading and we find exact instructions as to how to give a tea-party: (a) informal, (b) formal, (c) in the garden, (d) with gentlemen present, and so on.

The food did not greatly concern the Victorian hostess, but the precise ritual of serving made or married her as an entertainer. The lady whose parlour-maid asked: "Will you take tea or coffee, ma'am?" instead of simply "Tea or coffee, ma'am?" could only hang her head in shame; and as for the hostess who allowed a butler or footman to pour out tea, instead of the prescribed, "upper female-servants," this hapless wight should give up entertaining altogether.

The reader who digs into "Home: A Victorian Vignette" will find amusement and instruction in every other line—enough to make him rather more appreciative of the age of elastic freedom in which he lives.—M.M.

"Home: A Victorian Vignette." Robert Harling. Constable, London. Our copy from the publisher.

ten a book, "The Appreciation of Music," which is intended for secondary schools, junior orchestras, radio listeners, and music-lovers and teachers generally.

The book sets out in very plain and easily understood terms the various sections of the orchestra, and it discusses form in music, such as the sonata, the symphony, the concerto and allied forms.

It gives bright and readable biographies of Bach, Handel, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Chopin, Mendelssohn, Schumann and Brahms.

More than thirty important works are interestingly annotated, and the book is a credit to Mr. McLay's courage and faith in his methods.—K.A.

"The Appreciation of Music." R. E. McLay. Whitcombe and Tombs. Our copy from the publisher.



★ TYPICAL VICTORIAN IDYLL.—A small informal tea-party after a game of lawn tennis. Picture is taken from one of the amusing publications of that era called, "The Young Ladies' Treasure Book." ★

Two Penguins And A Pelican Make A Flight

One Social Satire And Two Essays

TWO Penguins and a Pelican? style is no more than good thinking.

The birds form a fascinating flight this week—a Penguin, a Penguin Special, and a Pelican Special—birds of widely different feather, flocking together only in respect of excellence.

First the ordinary Penguin—Miss Rose Macaulay's "Crewe Train," now 12 years from its first publication, but a perennial source of delight to the devotees of the author's dry, brilliant wit.

The Pelican special, Arnold Bennett's "Literary Taste," is something of an achievement. The original essay, than which one could hardly imagine a better introduction to English literature, has been edited by Mr. Frank Swinnerton—but only enough to bring it up to date.

Mr. Swinnerton has performed his rather invidious task faithfully and well, and has more than preserved the author's central idea of catholicity of taste, and his admirably-enunciated thesis that good

The Penguin special, Mr. W. M. Macmillan's "Warning from the West Indies," is now reissued after a lapse of two years. The warnings of unrest which were then dropped into the somewhat deaf ears of the British Government, have been more than justified in the interim by the unrests which have given concern to all interested in the welfare of the islands.

Incidentally, if all those who travelled under the auspices of the Carnegie Corporation of New York to perform special investigations were so ambitious and so able in their reports as Mr. Macmillan has been, English literature would be considerably the richer.—S.P.

"Crewe Train." Rose Macaulay. Penguin Book. "Literary Taste." Arnold Bennett, edited with additional lists by Frank Swinnerton. Pelican Special. "Warning from the West Indies." W. M. Macmillan. Penguin Special. Our copies from the publishers.

Herewith Bunk About "B.U.N.C."

I AM pleased to have a double-edged excuse to refer again to "B.U.N.C.," Frances Gray's shattering satire on the armaments racket, which was heartily recommended on this page recently.

First, Messrs. Constable and Company, the publishers, have written from London to say that the book has enjoyed remarkable success, especially for a first novel. Which is as it should be.

Second, I have just read a reference to "B.U.N.C." which convinces me that the criticism so often levelled at book reviewers as a class is, alas, merited.

A well-known author the other day satirically sympathised with those reviewers who frequently found themselves faced with the inconvenience of having to read

the books they were reviewing, and, better still, he saluted those who avoided this inconvenience by reviewing the books without reading them at all. . . .

A London contributor to the weekly book page of a leading New Zealand metropolitan daily, wrote last week of "B.U.N.C.":

"This firm (British United National Chemicals), is run by a woman who ACCIDENTALLY sells the secret of a poison gas to the Government of another country, and then has to sell its antidote to her own."

No reviewer could have read "B.U.N.C." and got, even vaguely, the impression that the poison gas was sold to the foreign Government "accidentally." It was sold very deliberately indeed.

If the opposite had been the case, "B.U.N.C." would have had as much sting in it as a filleted bee.—A.R.M.

Bringing Together The Child And The Masterpiece

An Experiment In School, And A Book

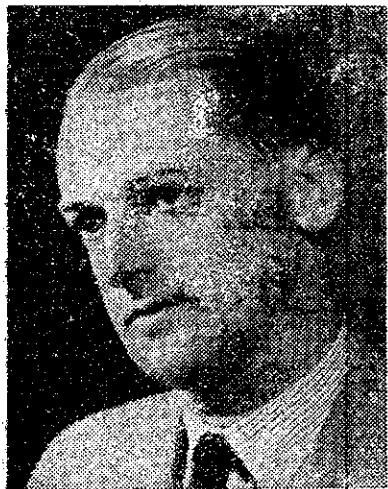
IF a school examiner of Victorian children on these lines, and noting the results.

Things are seldom what they seem; Skim milk masquerades as cream.

But that would be only a part of the story, because in many crowded city classrooms and in the not-so-crowded rural "halls of learning," the work of teaching music appreciation goes on and prepares the children for experiences that very few Victorian youngsters were privileged to enjoy.

For the purpose of educating a new generation to become intelligent listeners, many enthusiastic teachers are devoting time to this big subject of music appreciation, and thus widening the cultural horizon of their pupils.

One so engaged is Mr. R. E. McLay, assistant master at the Alexandra District High School, who has made a hobby of training



—S. P. Andrew Photo.

R. E. McLAY.—His hobby is training the young.

And now, after ten years' practical experience of teaching music appreciation, Mr. McLay has writ-