

An Appreciation of Henry Robinson King (1855-1935) by Littleton Charles Powys (1874-1955), taken from the *Old Shirburnian Society Annual Report*, October 1935:

On the 28<sup>th</sup> of September [1935] the Revd. Henry Robinson King, familiarly known to all Shirburnians as 'Crusoe,' died; and on Oct. 1<sup>st</sup>. after a service in the School Chapel he was buried at Sherborne. He had reached the eighty-first year of his life, forty-two of which he had spent in devoted service to the School. The son of the Revd. Henry King, he was born at the Vicarage at Kirkby Stephen in Westmoreland in 1855, and was educated at Clifton in T.E. Brown's House. He was head of the School and a member of the XV. He went up to Exeter College, Oxford, as a scholar, and, after taking his degree, for a brief time tried law as a profession; but he soon found it uncongenial to him, and chose the career which had more scope for his many gifts. When at the beginning of 1863 the Revd. E.M. Young appointed him as assistant master it was a fortunate day for Sherborne School for it was not long ere he came under her spell, and from that time onwards he lived his life for her. The outstanding feature of his character was his unshakeable loyalty. If once a person, an author, a district or a place won his heart, he never failed them. His friends, (and during his long life he had many of them), knew the truth of this; Sherborne and countless generations of Shirburnians will bear witness to it; the mountains, the rivers, the lakes of Westmoreland ne'er had a more faithful lover; the nineteenth century poets, and writers of prose, whose works he read and re-read and insisted on sharing with others, must have recognised in him one of their most staunch and forceful champions.

The writer can remember him in his early years at Sherborne, when as a young man he was gradually establishing his position in the school of his choice. He can see him active, broad, and muscular, taking part in the games on the Upper, always clad in a Clifton Jersey, an enthusiastic supporter of every athletic exercise, a devotee of the swimming bath through well nigh the whole year. He thinks of him as a bachelor, living above the furniture shop of Mr Collins in Cheap Street, where he was given to hospitality, entertaining not only his colleagues, but also the senior boys whose ways and thoughts interested and appealed to him. He thinks of him as the form master of IVA, a most careful and accurate teacher of the classics, full of humour, with methods of persuasion peculiarly his own, and in his true element inspiring his pupils with his own great love of letters, reading to them, when time allowed, his favourite passages of English literature. Nor were his efforts unrewarded; for there is many a past member of his form who recalls with gratitude those pleasant hours and the influence they had upon him.

In the late eighties bad days fell upon Sherborne; many of his colleagues in despair went elsewhere; but he refused to leave the School he loved. He believed in her and her future; and, now equipped with the full powers of manhood, he played an enormous part in her recovery. For her he spent himself and his money. It was he who at his own cost improved and redecorated the Big Schoolroom, thereby setting a precedent, so generously followed in later years by other devoted assistant masters.

In 1897 with Canon Westcott and G.M. Carey, those great lovers of Sherborne, he founded the Old Shirburnian Society; and he was appointed its Honorary Secretary, which post he filled for twenty-eight years. Throughout those years he managed its affairs entirely by himself, and under his kindly and wise guidance the Society quietly and steadily grew until on his retirement the membership was over 2,000. There could be no one who knew so many of Sherborne's Old boys, no one who was better known to them. Not an O.S. dinner was held, but he was there; and those short speeches of his, full of anecdote and wit, won universal applause. And yet the heavy work connected with the O.S. Society was not heavy enough to prevent him from forming another Society over which he was the supreme and jealous ruler. He chose its members, and its Honorary Members; he invited those, whom he fancied, to write and read papers; he allotted the parts at the terminal readings of one of Shakespeare's plays, and at this evening function he and Mrs King most hospitably entertained the full assembly. These meetings did much to encourage an appreciation of literature, and past members of the Duffers will ever hold his memory dear.

1898 the year of the birth of the Duffers was also the year of his marriage, an event of great importance to Sherborne; for not only past members of Abbeylands but also of the School know how well his wife played her part. In 1900 he succeeded C.H. Hodgson as the House Master of Abbeylands; and into this house he

instilled his spirit of loyalty, and the School owes much to the many leaders that house provided. Later in life in the year 1910 he was ordained, and for over twenty years the chapel services were enriched by the charm of his personal appearance, by the beauty of his voice, and by his quiet and dignified bearing. And when finally Nature had her way, and old age and illness came, as long as ever he was able, he daily made his way in cap and gown to the School Chapel; there to be present in what he held to be the very heart of his beloved Sherborne School. But it is impossible to write of Mr King without reference to his individualism. He liked to be alone; if possible, alone with Nature. He was little interested in flowers, birds, and butterflies, but he loved the big things in Nature, the woods, the fields, the mountains, lakes and rivers, the sunshine, rain and storm; into their midst he would daily go on foot or on his bicycle; and in their presence he was happy, and in his happiness he would declaim the poems he loved best.

Everything he did, he liked to do in his own way, and on his own initiative; he did not lightly brook interference; but what he did he did most meticulously and well. No doubt this characteristic independence, and indeed the loyalty of his affection too were inherited from his North Country ancestors; and in these days of mass movements such independence is good to see; did not Goethe say, 'If each one does his duty as an individual, and if each works rightly in his own vocation, it will be well with the whole'? Such is a brief outline of the life of this great man to whom all connected with Sherborne will wish to render honour due. We bid him farewell, full of gratitude for the example he set and the life he lived; a life, which for all those little peculiarities, which indeed only helped to win the affection of those who knew him, was based on a love of righteousness, a communion with Nature, a devotion to literature and music, and a zeal to serve humanity.