

The following paper about Henry Robinson King and the Duffers was given by Cecil Day-Lewis at a meeting of the Duffers held at Abbey House on the 6 June 1948, and was reprinted in a booklet produced in 1948 to celebrate the 50th Year of the Duffers.

H.R.K., SHERBORNE AND THE DUFFERS

Thirty-one years ago, less three months, a new boy walked into the form room of Lower 5 Classical. It was his first day at Sherborne. What thoughts were in his head, what apprehensions, what fantasies, he cannot now remember. If any processes of thought went on, they were no doubt strongly coloured by the boy's sedulous and awed reading of stories of public school life. He had not, as it happened, read a quite recently published novel, which was reputed to be about Sherborne and a terribly wicked book, *The Loom of Youth* (another published picture of H.R.K., a warmly sympathetic one, may be found in the Sherborne chapter of John Cowper Powys' *Autobiography*). Had he done so, he would perhaps have recognised the master who stood on the dais awaiting him. But, most probably, there were no thoughts in this new boy's head at all. He was in that limbo which public school neophytes must all pass through, as the first part of their ordeal, subject to the 'blank misgivings of a creature moving about in worlds not realised.' As he took his seat and covertly, timidly, eyed the unknown – the unknown standing up there on the dais, dressed in cap and gown, and for some mysterious reason called, not Mr King, but Mr Crusoe – one thought, I am pretty sure, did not enter the boy's head, the thought that he was destined to become this Mr Crusoe's son-in-law.

H.R.K. was nicknamed Crusoe, of course, because – but no. Even as I write those fatal words, I hear his voice saying plaintively, as he corrects an essay of mine, "Never say 'of course,' Day Lewis. If something is a matter of course, there's no need to point it out – you only insult your reader's intelligence: and if it isn't a matter of course, then to say 'of course' is inaccurate." It was my first lesson – the first I can recall at any rate – in English style.

I'll start that sentence again, then: H.R.K. was nicknamed Crusoe because his second name was Robinson. I only mention that as an instance of the sublime misconceptions of boys about their teachers. It was several weeks before I myself discovered that the R in H.R.K.'s initials stood for Robinson. Yet the nickname had seemed to me, from the first, singularly apt: in my own illustrated copy of *Robinson Crusoe*, the hero was adorned with a large, drooping moustache; and an identical growth, something between the handlebar and the Robert Louis Stevenson varieties, I now beheld upon the face of my form master. It was the first feature, I am sure, which struck my attention. Add to it a sanguine complexion, silver hair, blue eyes which could twinkle with rich amusement – add these, and you get a totally false impression, though each detail is correct. It is true that H.R.K. in some moods, and given a beard, could have stood in for Father Christmas. But he had moods far removed from the jovial and the bonhomous. The blue eyes often became abstracted, their look turned inward. He was easily bored. He could be petulant. And it is perhaps the best tribute one can pay to him as a schoolmaster that, in spite of this, he was most remarkably patient. Not so by nature: he had trained himself to it, I think. When his pupils were being more than usually stupid, he never bullied, seldom nagged. The voice became just a little more plaintive as he pointed at one after another of us with the gold-rimmed pince-nez he wore on a broad black ribbon, saying "Next... Next... Next. Doesn't *anyone* know the answer?"

For many Shirburnians H.R.K. was that voice – a querulous, upward-slurring whine – a gross travesty of his actual voice, which was singularly beautiful, if plaintive in timbre. Like all closely-knit and immature communities, the Day Room, is an insatiable myth-maker. The same motive which impels a primitive tribe to create myth drives us, when young, to crude caricature: it is the wish both to keep the gods at a safe distance and to drag them down to our own level. Boys are so blankly incurious about the private lives or the characters of their masters: they demand a fantastically high standard of justice, wisdom and consistency from these gods of theirs, but at the same time feel entitled to fasten upon a single mannerism, wildly exaggerate it, and allow it to represent the god's whole personality. And it is seldom even a significant mannerism that is picked out.

To many of us, I say, as it might be the Frank Sinatra of his time, H.R.K. was The Voice. It is partly to rescue a complex and charming personality from the crude simplifications of my boyhood, from being a 'vox et praeterea nihil,' that I am writing now.

Partly that: partly as an act of piety. Piety to a father-in-law, and to a truly civilised man. Above all, piety to a schoolmaster who infected me with his generous enthusiasm for English poetry, who was the first man to praise a poem of my own (I was aged 13, and H.R.K. had set us to write a poem on the execution of Charles I. My own effort he singled out for commendation. I loved him from that moment). Piety, yes. But I have never believed that true piety is manifested in unctuous and perfunctory platitudes after the *de mortuis* model. How dismally well we know that obituary note: "he had a genius for friendship" – which is the obituarist's way of saying that he rubbed along very well with people on the whole: or "he retained his essential boyishness to the end" – which means he failed to become emotionally or intellectually adult: or "he was deeply religious at heart" – which means he never went to church. I have far too great a respect for H.R.K.'s memory to wish to embalm him in the insipid amber of conventional phrases. How can we value the light of a personality if we do not set it against the shade?

Like all the rest of us, H.R.K. was a bewildering mixture of characteristics. He began life as a solicitor, came to Sherborne School to take temporary work for one term, and remained on the staff for 40 years. It does not seem that he had any vocation for teaching, yet his conscientiousness was unquestioned, his influence on generations of Shirburnians a considerable one. In many ways a traditionalist – when in 1908 it was proposed that boys should no longer wear top-hats, he was the only master to oppose the abolition of this most depressing form of headgear – yet on occasion he would sympathise with the new, even the revolutionary. He was fundamentally a shy man; yet he possessed great social charm and ease of manner. He was a conformist on the whole, and a shrinker from controversy – he hated argument or criticism within the family circle – yet, after the Sherborne Schism, when the then Head Master, Edward Young, left the School under a cloud of failure and unpopularity, H.R.K. was the one master here, I believe, who went to see him off at the station. He was an egocentric man; certainly one, you would say, with no deeply-rooted personal relationships outside his own family; yet there is no doubt that the death of so many Abbeylands boys in the 1914 war caused him profound sorrow, and contributed to the tragic break-up of his mental powers later. He was a devoted lover of literature – a dedicated lover: yet, in spite of this, or perhaps because of it, he did not seem to me to exercise a keen critical sense upon which he read. He got a great deal of enjoyment out of life: but, as his diaries show, he was convinced from quite an early age that the world, and England in particular, was going to the dogs.

But I could spend hours cataloguing his contradictions, and still give no clear picture of the man. My own picture of him as a schoolmaster is indissociable from the Sherborne of 30 years ago, as it lingers in the mind's eye. I see him always against a lustrous, episodic, *chiaroscuro* background. He is, perhaps, mounting his bicycle outside Abbeylands. Now, H.R.K. mounting a bicycle was a legendary sight. His mortar board set straight and rather forward on his head, the tassel hanging over his nose; his gown wrapped round his neck like a muffler, with the ends tucked into his jacket, for he was a hardy man, a scorner of overcoats even in the raw Sherborne winter: thus apparelled, he would set one foot on the back step of his bicycle, and with the other foot on the ground propel it forwards, very much in the manner of a person trying to start an old-fashioned motor cycle on a cold morning. When, by these methods, the machine had been worked up to a suitable speed, and indeed seemed likely to outdistance its prospective rider, he would as it were fall upwards into the saddle from behind, there would be an unnerving wobble till H.R.K. gained full control of his mount, then he was off, riding furiously.

Off, perhaps, to watch his House play a House match. He was not, on the touch-line, the vocal type of Housemaster: rather, he gazed at the performance with a somewhat lacklustre and incredulous eye, only the chewed ends of his moustache testifying, after the game, to a certain emotional strain passed through. Or perhaps he was off to take his Greek set. He started boys on Greek then, and was particularly fond of this part of his work – "I like my little chaps," he used to say: a phrase that, coming from so emotionally reticent a man, meant a good deal in warmth and tenderness. Or again, he might have been bicycling out into the country with a copy of Milton or Wordsworth in his pocket. His educative mission was not

confined to the boys of Sherborne School. It extended also to the lower creation: and one might with justice say that nowhere in Great Britain was the cow population so cultured at this time as in North Dorset. For it was H.R.K.'s practice, on coming to a convenient gate, to dismount, lean his book on the top bar, and start reading aloud. And the cows in that field would gather round, munching steadily through a hundred lines of *Paradise Lost* or *The Prelude*, gazing from time to time at the reader with an expression not so immeasurably more bovine than that of some of his own Stolidi, his Duffers.

I do not wish to represent him as an eccentric. He was nothing of the sort. He was a civilised gentleman, but of a kind rare enough at any time to excite attention: one who believed his country's great poets were its greatest glory, and not mere providers of material for examination papers or tags for Commemoration speeches. H.R.K., no enthusiast in other respects – he took Holy Orders in 1910 because the School needed another chaplain; his Chapel sermons, beautifully phrased and delivered, were not those of a religious zealot nor even of an intelligence deeply versed in Christian doctrine – though, as I say, no enthusiast in other respects, he was a near-idolater of Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth. And his North-country blood gave him an independence of mind, so that, although a conventional man on the whole, he could disregard conventions which stood in the light of his ruling passion – could brush aside, for instance the convention that the English gentleman does not read poetry aloud in the open air to himself and to any of the beasts of the field that may chance to listen in.

It is, then, as a civilised man and a lover of literature that he should chiefly be commemorated. The influence of a civilised man in an only half-civilised community, such as the School was 30 years ago, is bound to be indirect and slow-maturing. Sherborne was still, when I came, a pretty rugged and murky place: my House [Harper House] was, at least. And H.R.K. was an old man by then, and a tired one: the vicissitudes of the School, many years of teaching and housemastership, the hard war years and the bitter uncertainty of the future, as his private diaries reveal, were a cumulative burden he felt he could not bear much longer. But he had his niche here – the niche of Tennyson's 'flower in the crannied wall.' He was not a red-hot gospeller for culture, nor a slick spellbinding populariser of literature. He was rather, if I may mix my allusions, the book that walked by itself and a book that anyone who cared to run might read. He did not expound to us why Wordsworth and Shelley were good poets: he did not waste time 'explaining' what their poems mean: he just read them to us – read them with golden tones and a quiet, inner conviction of the supreme importance of poetry to the human spirit. And we listened, or half listened, or dozed off. But, for some of us at any rate, imperceptibly it sank in, just as the beauty of Sherborne itself was sinking in, not through our eyes so much as through the pores of our being; and the course of our life was changed thereby, because its meaning was insensibly enlarged.

It is Time that makes for poetry, and makes poetry; steeping, crystallising, constellating the poet's images, and for every man softening the outlines of his past, giving it patina and perspective, clarifying its rhythms. My own memories of H.R.K., as I have said, are chiefly against at Sherborne background, though I often stayed with his family afterwards in the Lakes or the Scottish Highlands, where, an old man now, he would lead the way nimbly up one of his beloved mountains and regale us at the summit with some full-blooded recitation – 'Blow, bugles, blow' was one of the set-pieces for mountain tops, and I can hear now the rich, full, lingering echoes he gave to the open vowels of that resonant poem. But, in association with him, it is still the memories of Sherborne that most vividly recur, memories, and pictures which, although his own figure may not appear in them, he conjures up, Prospero-like, when I write about him; scenes, sensations, images, their nature but dimly apprehended at the time, their value unrecognised in the welter, the intermittent anxiety, the surface monotony of a schoolboy's life, but their features standing out ever more clearly as the formless flood recedes. Thomas Hardy said all this with exquisite delicacy in a poem about his father and mother in his childhood home, *The Self-Unseeing*:

*This is the ancient floor,
Footworn and hollow and thin,
Here was the former door
Where the dead feet walked in.*

*She sat here in her chair,
Smiling into the fire;
He who played stood there,
Bowing it higher and higher.*

*Childlike, I danced in a dream;
Blessings emblazoned that day:
Everything glowed with a gleam;
Yet we were looking away!*

We were looking away, it is true; looking towards a featureless yet vaguely promising future. But something was being precipitated. What links me closest with Sherborne is not the friendships I made, nor the education I received, but certain golden, irrelevant gleanings: the mild, wet south-west wind as one walked back through autumn darkness to make toast over a study fire: the *leitmotif* of the Abbey bells marking out, like a chain of buoys, the channel down a drowsy Sunday afternoon in summer: primrose-picking on Good Friday: an expedition into the country, equipped with jam jars, under orders from an exigent fag-master to bring him back, alive or dead, for dissection in the laboratory, a frog: the Chrysanthemum Show which, many years later, was to form a poem of my own: bicycling out along a dusty-white Dorset road to a manor house where lived a certain Mrs Baskett, and being refreshed on arrival with, of all things, a glass of champagne. It is surely moments such as these which civilised us, which most helped us to grow up, because they touched our hearts unexpectedly or, sinking into them by benign, gentle repetition, left an impression there deeper than that of the most orthodox process or the larger event.

Such things, then, are symbols to me of the happiness which I believe to be a favourable condition for spiritual growth, whatever the dour champions of the strength-through-suffering school may preach to the contrary. 'The cistern contains, the fountain overflows,' said William Blake. I am especially grateful to Sherborne because while it imposed a Spartan and no doubt salutary discipline in general, it also allowed a certain play to that fountain – to the spontaneous, overflowing spirits, the natural movement or the unorthodox bent in each of us. The tradition is still very much alive: at least, assuming that a young relative of mine now at the School [Nicholas Charles Day-Lewis (b.1934), Harper House 1947-1952] reported correctly to me a recent saying of his Housemaster [R.M.M. Barlow, Housemaster of Harper House 1934-1948] – "If you must break school rules, Day-Lewis, you might at least ask my permission first." That admonition sums up for me the enlightened liberalism of Sherborne – a tradition of good humour and good sense for which, in my own time, we were chiefly indebted, I think, to Nowell Smith and to H.R.K. himself.

H.R.K.'s humour was perhaps the prime source of his charm. He had a public humour, and a private one which was much dryer and could be quite scarifying: the latter was kept reticently within his diaries, for the most part; as, of a dinner guest, "he is a *flabby* conversationalist," or, of a visiting cleric, "a Mr Handley preached in rambling fashion this evening; the boys thought it was the best, etc., etc." He was a great raconteur, a raconteur in the grand manner. He had a remarkable fund of good stories, stored up both in his memory and in a notebook which he used for the recording of droll incidents or phrases. One could always see a story coming. At some turn of the conversation, the blue eyes would light up with reminiscent relish, and a look would come over his face which can best be defined by that Victorian word, 'waggish.' Then he was off, entrancing his listeners quite as much by the gusto with which he told the story and the enjoyment he so evidently took in it, as by the story itself. His anecdotes were generally concerned with the oddities, the special flavour of ordinary people: he seemed much more interested in people's oddities than in the people themselves; and you might infer from this that he was no judge of character. Had I not read his diaries, I should have thought so myself, forgetting to allow for the Victorian sense of decorum which forbade the discussion of personalities in public. But his diaries reveal a very shrewd judgment, and a remarkably detached one too, in concise summings-up of the characters of boys in his House, of his own children even. It would be unseemly to quote any of these. But let me give you a more general extract – one which shows that H.R.K. was far from being the gentle, ineffectual dreamer some thought him. In 1900, when the School was at a low ebb, he writes, "Don't in the least see why boys should be attracted to

Sherborne, unless the parents are enamoured of the picturesque. Our boys are not very learned, nor v. gentlemanlike, nor v. well-behaved, nor v. moral, nor particularly manly and self-reliant. Not good at any game." We may also, I suspect, learn something of H.R.K.'s own values from the order in which he places the virtues so sparsely displayed by the Sherborne boys of 1900.

H.R.K. had an excellent ear, both for music and for speech, so that his repertoire contained a great number of stories in dialect, Westmorland and Dorset particularly. His letters were full of humorous descriptions: he could give to the commonplace scene or event that touch of exaggeration, that slant of the grotesque, which made one realise how, to the humourist as to the poet, nothing in fact *is* commonplace.

He was a humourist, then, in the rich, unsubtle Victorian tradition of humour. A humourist, rather than a wit; for, although his mind did not lack the power of rapid association which makes for wit, it lacked the necessary iconoclasm, the impulse to shock, the need to give the scheme of things a good shaking up, which are behind all forms of wit. In another field his mind showed great alacrity. His flair for the apt but not trite quotation was remarkable. One day, when the 1914-18 war memorial was under discussion, Nowell Smith met him in the Courts and asked him to think about a suitable inscription for it. H.R.K., after the briefest pause, came out on the spot with those lines of Milton beginning 'Nor love thy life, nor hate'... lines which are nobly right in the context for which he offered them, but also tell us something important about H.R.K. himself, about that classical habit of mind which, entertaining neither the folly of the hedonist nor the masochism of the puritan, finds its fulfilment in the values, today so depreciated, of humanism.

As I add touch to touch upon this picture of H.R.K., I seem to see emerging ever more clearly the portrait of a typical Victorian – if one can dare to say that the complex, seething, more self-contradictory of periods produced a type. In good spirits, beaming and gleaming with hospitable intent, giving somehow, although he was a slightly-built man, an illusion of rotundity, he might have stepped straight from the pages of his favourite novelist; not a Mr Pickwick nor a Mr Cheeryble; but as one of Dickens' gay, sensitive, diffident, good-natured, rather selfish young heroes might have become after reaching a ripe age. His vocabulary was somewhat Victorian, too: the name of this Society attests it: and 'Bravo! Capital, capital!' he would exclaim, with a quiet clap of the hands, at the end of a Duffers' paper which had commended itself to him: and he had the habit of inventing fantastic slang – words like 'stungers' (the g was soft) – a habit common among the pre-Raphaelites and other late Victorian writers. In private life he was very much the head of the family: incidentally, I never knew a happier or more self-sufficient family group than that which one found at Greenhill. Again, like so many middle-class Victorians, he was emphatically *not* an all-round man: for instance, never having had to use his hands, he was quite hopeless with them: this Crusoe could not have lived one week on the desert island of his resourceful forebear; he couldn't make a bed or boil an egg, let alone hammer in a nail straight. He was Victorian, too, in the combination of high seriousness and dry humour which, privately, he brought to the things he valued most – to his religion, his work at Sherborne, his literary gods: he reminds me a little, in this way, of Matthew Arnold, that most earnest and most disconcertingly flippant man of his age. Yet again, if the intellectual curiosity which now seems perhaps the most admirable of the many admirable Victorian virtues, was somewhat lacking in H.R.K., we must remember that for most Victorians this virtue was confined within narrow limits. For every Huxley, there were a hundred Bishop Wilberforces: and in many fields – that of sex-relationship, for instance – intellectual honesty was not at all encouraged, as the reception given to Meredith's great poem, *Modern Love*, abundantly showed. If H.R.K. held his mind aloof, at least in later days, from the scientific and religious controversies of the time, it was chiefly, I imagine, though motives of enlightened self-interest, through a right instinct for the things his nature needed and the things which might upset its equilibrium.

The Duffers, when I was elected to the society in 1920, was set in the mould of this personality I have been trying to depict. Tolerance, style, a genial *ambience*, a disregard of the controversial – these were the personal qualities H.R.K. had given to the society he founded. I remember our meetings chiefly as a break from the routine of school life, a pleasant hour beguiled by the scent of sweet peas and pinks wafting in through the French windows, by the hypnotic click of the ladies' knitting needles, by a voice reading a paper about something or other, by the prospect of a large tea to follow. The intellectual aspect was not, in my case, paramount. I had no great passion to improve my mind. When I had to write a paper myself, I chose

some obscure subject upon which, I calculated, H.R.K. and my fellow-members would be as ignorant as myself, and then copied out large chunks of some books on this subject. I have no vivid recollection of H.R.K.'s own contributions. I fear that I may sometimes have helped to extort those wry cries of anguish one finds dotted about in his diaries: viz., "Read my paper on Milton to the Duffers. They listened politely, but no impression made. O stolidi stolidissimi!" We must have been a lump to daunt the most powerful leaven. The only paper I heard which left a lasting impression on my mind was one given by Mr O'Hanlon: his subject was the Western Front in the 1914 war, and the evocative images he used went to my heart, and stayed there, being poetry. Criticism and discussion of the papers were neither debarred nor encouraged, which meant there seldom was discussion. This may seem reprehensible to you. And indeed I agree, there is much to be said for sharpening our minds by the practice of criticism in public: but, without keen intellectual curiosity, discussion of this kind is bound to be perfunctory, just as, without a certain knowledge, it will be shallow; and intellectual curiosity was not a virtue, I have suggested, in which our founder would give us a lead. Apart from this, and speaking generally, I am inclined to think we spend too much time nowadays in reading books about books about books, in criticising criticisms of creative work. A poem is meant, after all, to be heard, as a string quartet is meant to be heard: neither is composed to provide material for analytic talk or for pseudo-historical gossip. This attitude of mine I only mention because it happens to be in the H.R.K. tradition. In the early days of the Duffers, a paper on an author was regularly followed by a reading from the author: it seems to me a good practice. H.R.K. himself read for pleasure, as his son told you not long ago, and what did not please him he did not read, though he would listen tolerantly to anyone who commended an author in whom he himself felt little interest. His mind was not closed to contemporary writing. He even read my own early poems, though – for some reason I have never fathomed – always with a dictionary at his side. If he rejected most modern writing, after trial, it was because it had nothing for him, nothing he was looking for.

In the last phrase we may see the justification for societies such as the Duffers, and for the tradition H.R.K. bequeathed. A literary society at school should offer us, not criticism in depth, but a wide range of choice. If we hear a number of papers on the most diverse subjects, and particularly if each paper quotes freely from the original source and thus gives us the 'feel' of its author – poet, novelist, essayist, whoever it may be – then each of us has a chance to find out what he is looking for, at the moment, in literature. It is true that a poet does not know what the poem is he is writing, until he has written it, and no less true that the individual reader does not know what he is looking for in literature till he has found it. And when he has found it, he may well wish to carry it off and be alone with it, or bury it in his imagination, not to have it worried at and fought over like a bone by a pack of dogs. What each of us is looking for depends upon his personality and the complex of his experience at any given time: but it is always something which will, as the psychologists put it, redress the balance of his interests, will supply some lack in himself, some need for beauty or illumination or reassurance. Great art, whose creators are so often warped, incomplete, tragic human beings, nevertheless tends always towards integration and enlarging of personality, towards wholeness, in those whom it deeply affects.

To return to the Duffers of my own day. If I have given the impression that it was a satisfying rather than a stimulating activity, I could not deny it. But we had our moments; as when a young lady, almost as young as myself – she was to become a loved and revered figure in Sherborne – turned to me during a lull in the reading of a Shakespeare play, and asked me, with that frankness of address and clarity of enunciation for which she is still notable, "Mr Day-Lewis, what *is* a strumpet?" The refining influence of the female, though it was not perfectly exemplified on that occasion, was one that I at least stood sorely in need of. I don't think the presence of ladies at our meetings made me any more tongue-tied than I was by nature then. It certainly added to the civilised atmosphere, the sense of privilege we all felt. And then, of course, there was the deadly, and by us much appreciated, rivalry between the masters' wives who entertained us, as to which could provide the most sumptuous tea. I fancy there are worse ways of coming to literature than via iced cakes and strawberries.

However, this jubilee year of the Duffers, our aim should be, not to utter laments for lost traditions or elegiacs for the eclairs of yesteryear, but to ask ourselves how best may our society develop, how much of the H.R.K. tradition it may profitably carry on. Tolerance, style, a genial *ambience*, a disregard of

controversy: if those were the personal qualities which gave the Duffers its special flavour in my time, I would gladly see all but the last of them retained. I'm all for controversy myself, for heated argument, for taking the lid off our enthusiasms and prejudices: but then I am half Irish, and the Irish take literature, like politics, hard; not long ago a poet knocked a man down in Dublin for speaking disrespectfully of another poet's metre. I don't insist on the Duffers carrying controversy to that pitch. But I am sure you should not be afraid to write controversial papers and to criticise them ferociously. What used in my day to be called the 'Bolshie' mentality, disobliging and prickly though it is, should be cherished in a community for it is the spirit which keeps us awake, on our toes intellectually: it is far more acceptable to the Muses than any chorus of politely indifferent yes-men. The sin against the holy spirit of the arts is to be patronising towards them.

Tolerance, in the sense of keeping our minds open to any new experience which literature can give us, however bizarre or at first disagreeable, is surely no less important. The great Sigmund Freud said, "One must be very humble, one must put both one's sympathies and one's antipathies clean behind one, if one would learn by experience what is real in the world." That is true tolerance, and it holds equally true for our approach to literature. It is unwise to be glibly supercilious about experiments, in any art, which do not immediately appeal to us. We had better remember that there is scarcely a single one of the major English poets, for instance, who was not, when first he wrote, assailed with charges of obscurity, or of flouting the poetic tradition, or of corrupting people's minds – or all three. If we cannot warm to the audacity, the novelty, the unexpectedness of our own contemporary writers, when we are young, we had better take up croquet or have our glands seen to. And at least, whatever age we may be, we can refuse to subscribe to the quaint old English belief that the only good poet is a dead poet.

As a counterpoise to this, there is the tradition of geniality and style. The genial *ambience*, the sense of being a member of the School's intellectual elite – let us not be falsely modest about it. H.R.K. himself, as his diaries show, was, partly by nature, partly by virtue of his classical training, a man of aristocratic temper. To the extent that such a temper implies a special responsibility of the best minds towards the best things in our culture, we shall do well to model ourselves on our founder. A certain largeness of outlook, a certain magnanimity, a natural feeling for the best, an innate conviction that, if I may so express it, the arts are the concern of the good man and to be cherished by him – these are all part of the aristocratic tradition. That famous, if deceptively simple, recipe for poetry-making, 'the best words in the best order,' has the aristocratic ring. It is true for all style, whether in verse or prose. Style, which is another word for compromise, or if you like for marriage – the marriage of the ideal with the possible, and of self with not-self; a compromise between the writer's meaning and his medium, between the individual flavour and the general climate of opinion, between tradition and experiment – style seems to me the first concern of any society which professes an interest in literature.

I do not mean what is called 'fine writing'; or, necessarily, the business of writing at all. You have to leave this to the specialists, the irritable and unbiddable tribe of word-spinners. What I mean is that we should cultivate in ourselves, while young, the response to style and thus a responsibility *for* style. To put it bluntly, if people like the Duffers are incapable of learning to recognise the difference between good broadcloth and shoddy in literature, then who will recognise it? And if every generation does not produce an intellectual elite – to be drawn in the future, let us hope, from every class and kind – capable of such recognition, then the arts will deteriorate, because their practitioners will lack the stimulus which only an informed, critical audience, demanding the highest standards and willing to love the highest when they see it, can give them. There are people, I know, who say, "What is the use of the arts? Does it really matter so very much if they do deteriorate?" And there are a good many more people who really think this, but haven't the courage to say it. To such persons one can but reply that, where there is no vision, the people perishes: or, in other words, that, taking the long view of it, healthy art is not merely a symptom of a healthy society but essential to it. Every age, no doubt, gets the art it deserves. But even 'decadent' art may, paradoxically, be healthy art – healthy in so far as it is truly modern, a faithful interpretation of eternal verities in the terms of its own age.

Do I seem to have wandered far away from style and the Stolidi? Not very far. Style, you see, is not just a surface quality; or rather, bad style is, but good style, true style, never is – never a layer of icing-and-crystallised-cherries superimposed upon a solid cake of meaning. Style is the quintessence of the individual writer, painter, composer, worked into the very flesh and bone of his product. The final test, by which good art may be distinguished from merely specious art, is that when the former style is not a veneer you can scrape off; it goes right down to the very core, so that style and meaning, technique and material, cannot be taken apart. Style, in literature as in life, is a sign of vitality. Every work of style, however tragic or even disillusioned it may be, is life-enhancing: just as every work of bad style, though it may be highly moral or robustly optimistic in its sentiments, is life-diminishing. Style is to art what, for the religious, grace is to the human being.

So I suggest that the Duffers go forward out of this, their fiftieth year, with the intention of upholding in a drab age the colour, the felicity, the *panache* of style. Let us hope to be neither supercilious about experiment nor contemptuous of tradition. Let us have open minds, but not yawning ones. The questioning mind, the one which will let nothing pass without a close scrutiny of its credentials, is as necessary to literature's health as are the mellowed judgment and the tolerant approach. A society such as yours needs both its rebels and its academicians. Blake said, "Drive your cart and your plough over the bones of the dead." It is a deep, dark saying: it holds, I believe, all we need to know about the interdependence of tradition and experiment. But above all you must believe, each one of you, that literature does matter, intensely and perennially matter: otherwise, the Duffers might as well pack up.

We should be serious about literature. But let us not be too solemn. There are people – our founder was most signally not of their type – who approach literature as if it were a medicine cupboard. "Will this book do me good?" "Will that book chase away the blues?" "Will the other book brace up my moral tone?" "James Joyce's mixture tastes very queer, they say, but all the best people are taking it so I'd better try a dose." Oh dear me, that won't do at all. And equally to be avoided is the priggish kind of critical attitude which goes something like this: "Here, ladies and gentlemen, I have a sample of T.S. Eliot (or a A. Tennyson, or T. Hardy, or M. Proust, or whoever it may be). It is pretty revolting stuff. But I'm going to sacrifice myself and swallow it, for the public good, just to show you what its effects are, and what a disinterested chap I am." There are an awful lot of these martyrs in the cause of literature about just now. I fancy we'd do better to read the books we enjoy, and let our moral tone look after itself. And if we detest a writer, we should either pass him up, which was H.R.K.'s method, or make a personal matter of it, and not pretend to an Olympian detachment or assume a *pro bone public* expression as we smack him in the eye.

A personal matter, for that is in the last resort the value of literature – a personal relationship between reader and writer, between the best of the writer, which is his book, and the best of the reader, which is his imagination. The book if there is any art in it, is as living a thing as the reader. You can't have mass-enjoyment of literature; it is not a mass activity any more, whatever it may have been in the times of Homer or the ballad-singers. One day Yeats met George Moore in a London street, and the following dialogue ensued:

Yeats: Moore, I have just had a terrible experience.

Moore: What was that, Yeats?

Yeats: Moore, I have just come from hearing my poem, 'The Lake Island of Innisfree,' sung in unison – in unison, Moore – by a choir of 10,000 Boy Scouts.

I will not labour the moral of that story, certainly not to the extent of recommending that all mass-media for literature, including literary societies, should be abolished. But I think we should look upon a society such as the Duffers, not as an end in itself, nor as a substitute for private reading, but as a means whereby each member may come to discover what he is looking for in literature – one which offers him a range of potential interest wider than his school English studies or his private enterprise in reading can compass, and stimulates him by the exchange of enthusiasm and antipathy among its members. To this end, may I make a few practical suggestions? First, you should take a leaf from your founder's book and keep literature a personal thing: if you are writing a critical paper, start by making up your mind what *you* think

about the writer you are discussing, not by discovering what the literary pundits have said about him: let your criticism spring direct from the relationship between him and yourself, and not come out through a filter, however refined, of other men's minds. Second, the best way to get the feel for style is to write yourself: it cannot be done solely by writing critical or documentary essays; I believe the Duffers should encourage imaginative writing by making an occasional feature of creative work – poems, short stories, autobiographical fragments, or whatever it may be – done by its members. Third, I have known better readers than H.R.K. (though very few), but I have never known one who so infectiously communicated his own pleasure in the work he was reading. This part of the tradition you must surely maintain. One cannot be too often dipped in the original sources of our literature; and reading aloud is an art in itself. May I commend this art to your attention?

It may well be that the Duffers do encourage such methods of approach to literature. If you do, and if you preserve that blend of charm and seriousness which distinguished our founder, then the Duffers may confidently look forward to the next 50 years. And H.R.K. himself, pausing for a moment as he reads Wordsworth to the fauna of the Elysian fields, may look back upon the society he created, and be pleased.

CECIL DAY-LEWIS CBE (1904-1972)

Cecil Day-Lewis attended Sherborne School (Harper House) 1917-1923 and was a member of the Duffers. He was Poet Laureate 1968-1972.

The Duffers.

**50th Year
Jubilee**

151st Term.

May, 1948.

President:—THE HEADMASTER.
Chairman:—MR. R. S. THOMPSON.
Hon. Members:
 MASTERS AND EX-MASTERS OF THE STAFF OF SHERBORNE SCHOOL,
 MR. L. C. POWYS, REV. A. FIELD.

Members:

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Jan. 1947 J. P. WIMBUSH	Jan. 1948 M. W. B. BRADBURY	Jan. 1948 J. N. INSALL
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Jan. 1948 R. HOPE SIMPSON	Jan. 1948 J. M. MAYBURY	May 1948 R. KIMBALL
Jan. 1948 W. S. BLACKSHAW	Jan. 1948 I. P. WARDLAW	May 1948 G. H. HALLSMITH

MEETINGS :

May 16 F. W. King, Esq. ...	"H.R.K." 4.15 p.m. ...	{ At Abbeylands Host: Mr. Randolph
June 6 C. Day Lewis, Esq. ...	"THE DUFFERS." 4.15 p.m. ...	{ At Abbey House Host: Mr. Westlake
July 4 G.O'Hanlon, Esq.	"RETROSPECT AND PROSPECT." 8.0 p.m.	{ At Lyon House Host: Mr. Holmes
July 17 "TWELFTH NIGHT"	Read by Old Duffers to Present Duffers. 6.45 p.m.	{ At Cumnor House Host: Mr. Baker

June 19

Musbury
Axminster

Dear S.T.,

many thanks for letting me see this very interesting paper. I'll have a shot at Malvolio, certainly, though with hideous qualms about how much better Bobbie Harris would be doing it - though this ^{would apply} applies equally to Orsino !

What a delightful
audience I had - so
quick off the mark.

Yours
(and)

TWELFTH NIGHT

Read at Cumnor House, Greenhill, on 17 July 1948
beginning at 6.45 p.m. as the final curtain
on the Jubilee Celebrations of the

DUFFERS

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

ORSINO, Duke of Illyria	C.DAY LEWIS ESQ.
SEBASTIAN, brother to Viola	G.E.HUMPHRIES
ANTONIO, a sea captain, friend to Sebastian ...	HENRY DE VILLIERS ESQ. SIR NICOLAS DE VILLIERS
A Sea Captain, friend to Viola	C.L.BERRISFORD
VALENTINE,) gentlemen attending on the Duke ...	J.WHITTINGFALE ESQ.
CURIO,)	J.P.WIMBUSH
SIR TOBY BELCH, uncle to Olivia.	J.H.RANDOLPH ESQ.
SIR ANDREW AGUECHEEK	THE CHAIRMAN
MALVOLIO, steward to Olivia	V.V.R.G.C.CLINTON- BADDELEY ESQ.
FABIAN,) servants to Olivia	A.H.TRELAWNY-ROSS ESQ.
FESTE, a clown,)	GO'HANLON ESQ.
OLIVIA	MRS. G.M.CAREY
VIOLA	MRS. C.DAY LEWIS (Miss Mary King)
MARIA, Olivia's woman	O.D.HOLT ESQ.
Priest	J.F.CRAWFORD
1 Officer	B.S.DUNN
2 Officer	M.S.CLARKE-JERVOISE
Servant	B.M.HAWKES

Scene: A city in Illyria, and the sea coast near it.