

ALEXANDRA

A BIRTHDAY ODE

suggested by ABBEY'S masterpiece in the Academy of 1904

BEING THE WATKIN TOWER OF ENGLISH LITERATURE
(vice Kubla Khan and Hyperion retired hurt)

THE
UNFINISHED OR MUTILATED (OR BOTH)

MANUSCRIPT

of Mr ALFRED AUSTIN, Mr OWEN SEAMAN, or Mr A. N. OTHER

rescued from the flames

AND

copied fair, transcribed, edited, annotated, arranged, printed, published

BY

OPHELIA COX (NÉE M^CHUNT)
AND DIAPER OF THE *Woman's Monthly*

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EDITORIAL NOTE

Pleesm! said my (Diaper's, not Mrs Cox's] sloppy slavey one brilliant November morning of last year, as the orangegold clouds of deliciously perfumed mist stole, in spite of the *Eighth* commandment, down my chimney in Fleet Street; [of course Diaper does not live in a chimney: she has a deevie flat there and the flat has a chimney, two chimneys, in fact, O.C.) myav thister litafir?

Woman! I replied sternly, whence came it? My practised eye had already detected the indescribable cachet of a treasure trove — *bene trovato, sin non veri similitudo!* as the immortal Mantuan bardic anarch hath it — ah! dear, *dear* old Dante! — Dunnom! — Oyussm! with a vivid blush through her smuts (Euphemia knows that she cannot hope to deceive me. What is my secret? A simple one: I always believe the worst: once in a thousand times I may be wrong, and it is only the next worst, but no matter.)

Without prolonging the agony, I may say that it shortly transpired that Euphemia Bugg — such is her name — has for years been the adored (Platonic if not Aristotelian) mistress of a distinguished littérateur, whom I have been able with difficulty (the maid is modest, as one would expect from the No. 1 belle dame of either of these cicisbeos), with one of the gentlemen whose name is on our title-page. The student of style will be able to make his or her choice.

All we care about is that he or she should pay his or her money.

It is at least certainly not a posthumous work of Walter Pater or John Addington Symonds: only a crapulous mountebank would credit W.B. Yeats or Robert Bridges with it. The only question is: did not perhaps the late Lord Tennyson foresee events, and leave it to be published when the right time came? But in this case, how account for Euphemia's possession of the dainty thing? Anyway, it's not Tennyson: don't worry: I was only teasing.

She had originally picked up the unfinished M.S. to use as curl-papers. It was indeed written, as will be obvious from the style, on sheets of thinnest, softest (and I believe sterilised) paper of a delicate and pleasing pale canary colour, mullioned at the shorter edges like a postage stamp

These she had placed on my mantelpiece for pipe-spills, and forgotten about them.

It is my pride and privilege through my old and esteemed consœur, as I suppose I may say for the lady of confrère, to give the providentially rescued masterpiece; alas! too incomplete! to the World of Society, though even the humblest may enjoy (A navy, when they were repairing the street, whom I asked up to taste my delicious T. — I think the abbreviation is so clever, don't you? — and to whom I had read it, said: "B...y good, miss, b...y good". A simple heartfelt tribute from the People).

Alas! too incomplete. But something at least is saved, — honour, which if you remember was all Sir George got out of King Francis' great lion at the battle of Pavium — you have read Mrs Browning's scrumptious poemlet, of course.

"Diaper" will at least avoid the Infernum proscribed for John Stuart Mill, Newton's dog, and Mr Warburton's housemaid. *Nunquam plaudite!*

ALEXANDRA

INTRODUCTORY PINDARIC ODE BY O.C.

Alexandra! Alexandra!
Lege! non ero Cassandra.
Ego scribam quæ me decet:
Xenophon non nimis fecit.
Alexandra! Alexandra!
Non ero mala Cassandra.
De te poetam, fac, ver, me!
Regne! Vive! Ama! Germe!
Alexandra! me inerme!

Regne! Ama! Germe! Vive!
Ex ad te it cupido cive.
Gratiam Deo demus mutuam
In cubili si te futuam.
Non ero mala Cassandra,
Alexandra! Alexandra!¹

Mrs Cox's Latinity is sometimes not quite up to Fleet Street mark: and these lines are decidedly not regular hexameters: Professor Jibb, to whom I submitted the point, was quite at one with me upon it, after a days' consideration. But the acrostic is beautifully carried out: and the sentiment is throughout loyal, enthusiastic, generous, delicate, forceful, noble, svelte, admirable, delicate, reverently amorous, respectfully familiar (Mrs Cox is in the very best set at Shanghai) and as I have elsewhere observed, above all, delicate.

In particular the male vigour of, 11. 11-13 is all her own: there is nothing like it in Sappho, at

least in those of her works that I have hitherto had the glorious privilege of perusing. It is, by the way, my favourite pastime when I have, as we say in Fleet Street, the “blunt” to go down to Marlow or Maidenhead in a punt, and there lie in some shady favourite backwater with my favourite girl friend in front. What a thing friendship is, world without end! — and my favourite old black briar between my lips, and her sweet face fixed on my old favourite thumb-worn — copy of Sappho, and pore over the deevie pages, hour after hour, bound by the Woman’s Guild. No! Sappho has nothing like this in all her scroll of gorgeous rhyme: Cox has, and I am proud to have been to her what I have.

Rosie Brooks
(*Diaper*)

ALEXANDRA

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I.

The sixty summers that have rolled away
Since first thy fame by bard and sage was sung
Leave thee to England and to us to-day
Still fair and young.

II.

I saw thee limned in all the robes and pearls,
Diamonds and ermine that proclaim thee queen:
Thou wast (or I know nothing about girls)
Barely eighteen.²

.

VII.

Thy royal Edward's undivided love
Hath been thy lifelong privilege, 'tis true!
Still, is he not, though us so far above,
Our Edward too?

.

XII.

Why did the heathen Hindoo's loyal roar
Acclaim that dream brighter than bard e'er dreamt?³
He worshipped thee⁴ . . .

XIII.

'Twas not thy George's viking frame that set
Australia cheering: but their souls surprise
The God within his magian deeply-set
Mysterious eyes.⁵

XIX.

Thou with thy smile⁶ encouraged⁷ all the sages⁸
 Who strove to alleviate⁹ man's bitter lot:¹⁰
 Thou saved¹¹ the pigeons in their trappy cages,
 From being shot.¹²

XXIV.

Marriage declines (our sobbing statesmen¹³ own)
 The birthrate shows mysterious decay:
 'Tis that each loyal bosom knows alone
 Thy single sway.

XXV.

Maidens and wives¹⁴ take tribute of our days:
 We love them (nous leur jurons nos grands dieux!)
 'Tis but (in von Krafft-Ebing's pregnant phrase)
 Faute de mieux.

XXVI.

With wives and sweethearts for awhile we dally:
 We haunt the Empire,¹⁵ pace the piteous Strand:¹⁶
 Or friendless, coinless, for a spurt we rally
 The faltering hand.¹⁷

XXVII

We prate of Pamela, we pipe of Polly,¹⁸
 We stock the loved disciple's shady wood¹⁹
 All this is merely visionary folly:
 It does no good.

XXVIII

We turn us from the tedious trivial traffic
 To vests that hold (your choicest spoil, be sure,
 O Illustrated London News or Graphic!)
 Thy miniature.²⁰

XXIX

To Ann, Bess, Clara, Dora, Ethel, Florrie,
 Grace, Helen, Ida, Jane, Kate, Lily, May

Nan, Olga, Prudence, Queenie, we say “Sorry!”
And turn away.

XXX

Even from Rose, Sal, Tabs, Ulrica, Violet,
Winnie, Xantippe, Yolande, Zaza, we
Turn like the magnet to the sailor’s eyelet²¹
To thee — to thee.²²

XXXIII

Hell . . .

Desunt cetera

NOTES:

1. *Translation by Mr A.B. Waulkphast.* Alexandra! Alexandra! Read! I will not be a Cassandra. (*i.e.* a prophetess of evil.) I will write those things which become me: Xenophon (an ancient writer . . . ah! did you once see Shelley plain? in his extant masterpiece) did no more. Alexandra! Alexandra! I will not be a bad Cassandra. (*i.e.* a seer of future misfortunes.) O spring! make me a poet (poetess) concerning thee! Reign! Live! Love! Be fruitful! Alexandra! I being unarmed. (Because Mrs Cox is a woman. Cf. Voltaire: “*O che sciagura essere sin cogl . . .*”) Reign! Love! Be fruitful! Live! Out of the citizen desire goes to thee. We will give grateful mutual thanks to God if I shall . . . (I do not know what *futuam* can mean. (Look up your Latin Dic., though I admit it is an unusual word in this connection, and may seem unjustifiable to those who have not seen my cl... O.C. (MS. illegible. Printer))) . . . thee in bed. I will not be a bad Cassandra. (*i.e.* a prognosticatress of calamity.) Alexandra! Alexandra!

2. Cancelled passage: verse III.

“Will not some hero, loyal, leal, and true,”

(Men fainting cried) “the accursed chromo take?”

The nation took the chromo, queen, and you,

You took the cake.

3. Clearly refers to the late Duke of Clarence and Avondale.

4. Suggested restoration by Dr Verrall and Brusch Bey:

. . . and made allowance for

A first attempt.

5. v. I. . . . his Hoffmann’s violet

Aniline eyes.

6. v. I. You with your smile . . . with that smile.
7. v. I. encouragedst.
8. v. I. all the savants . . . in their trappy caverns
. . . all the Magi . . . (Oh anthropophagi!)
9. v. I. to 'meliorate.'
10. It is an open secret that the late Herbert Spencer was solely inspired in his laborious labours by a desire to gratify his august though bewitching sovereign. It is related that in his early days as a student Her Majesty was visiting the school where he studied. "What are you doing, Herbert?" asked the beautiful but insouciant girl, as she then, as she now is, was. "Studying philosophy, miss!" was the brusque yet courtly reply. "Why study it? Rather synthesize it!" observed the thoughtful though dazzling monarch. "I will, miss!" cried the youth, the flash of genius leaping to his eyes. And as we all know, he kept his word.
11. v. I. You saved . . . savedst.
12. It is said that on the occasion of an important shooting match at Hurlingham, in which the Prince of Wales was to take part, Queen Alexandra in full regalia rushed between No. 3 trap and the 24-yard mark, and, in noble imitation of the Empress Agrippina, smote herself in the region of the uterus and cried "Strike here!" From that moment the doom of pigeon-shooting (save the mark!) at least in England, ever leader of humanitarian exacerbation, was sealed.
13. v. I. . . . our statisticians own . . . our J. Holt Schoolings.
14. v. I. Maids, matross, mots . . .
15. v. I. Oxford.
16. *i.e.* we occupy various official positions in India and the Colonies.
Strand: *i.e.*, the foreign strand. Cf. Heber (not the Kenite) "India's coral strand". The phrase denotes homesickness. But the whole stanza is certainly obscure.

17. Probably waving to the distant shores of beloved Albion. But “friendless, coinless” suggests rather the dead-beat than the Indian, or Colonial official.

18. vv. II. We ask for Anne, we argue over Ada,
All is foredoomed to fail; like the Armada:

We bleat of Barbara, we brawl of Bertha,
All this is like an edict of Jugurtha.

We cuddle Clara, we caress Corinna,
They are not worth the simple “Ta’ ala hinna!”

We chatter of Chilperic, we chirp of Cholly,
(As in text)

We drivel of Dorine, we drone of Dolly,
(As in text)

We eulogize Elaine, we egg on Emma,
They do not draw us from our drear dilemma:

We fiddle of Fifine, we fife of Fanny,
This is as gruesome as to grind one’s granny:

We . . . Fifine, we . . . with Fanny.
This is as gruesome as to grind one’s granny:

We gloat on Gabrielle, we goo-goo Gertie,
This is unsatisfactory and dirty:

We howl of Helen, we hurrah for Hertha,
(As for B)

We inspan Ivy, we invoke Irene,
Like sound advice to Mr. Mantalini,

We joke with Julia, we jolly Jessie,
This is a proposition really messy:

We kiss Kathleen, we knock up Katherina,
Like Bonaparte's success at Beresina,

We leer at Lilian, we long for Lottie,
This is admittedly extremely dotty :

We maunder of Marie, we miaul of Molly,
(As in text)

We nuzzle up to Norah, we nudge Nancy,
All this is but the play of idle fancy :

We ogle Olive, we oblate to Olga,
This dodge is vain as dreams upon the Volga :

We quiz Querida, quarrel over Queenie,
(As for I)

We rave of Rowena, we rant of Rachel,
All's a mirage like sailors see in Seychelles :

We sing of Sue, we serenade Selina,
(As for K)

We talk of Tabitha, we troll of Thais,
Like Shelley's effort to save Adonais,

We undress Undine, we up Ugolina,
(As for K)

We violate Vivien, we vault on Vera,
All's an unsatisfactory chimæra ;

We waste for Wilhelmine, we wail for Winnie,
The harmony is harsh, the tune is tinny ;

We xylo Xenia, we X-ray Xantippe,
We disagree with Fra Filippo Lippi :

We xylo Xavier, we X-ray Xerxes,
This is a vision like a drunken Turk sees :

We yammer of Yvonne, we yell Yolande,
This is weak tea to Alexandra's brandy :

We zeal for Zelma, zig-zag after Zaza,
No! happiness is never à la casa :

19. The loved disciple is perhaps St John. But Patmos is a rocky, not a wooded, island. Obscure.

20. Not a painted miniature, of course. More probably a black and white reproduction, or possibly a coloured one, of a sketch or photograph. Only the gentlemen and noblemen about the court would be in a position to order a painting on ivory by an artist such as Sargent or Herkomer from such sketch or photograph.

21. The nautical reference is, on the authority of Lloyd's journal, obscure.

22. Cancelled passage, vv. XXXI, XXXII.

XXXI

Who turn? Why, Arthur, Bertie, Charles, Dick, Edward,
Frank, George, Hal, Ike, John, Kenneth, Leonard, Mike,
Nat, Oliver, Pete, Quintus, wend them bedward
Alone, alike.

XXXII

So Roger, Sam, Tom, Unus, Victor, Willie,
Xenocrates, Yeo, Zeno, frown on fun,
Disdain, delight, cry: "Though you think us silly,
A.R. or none!"

The line "Alone, alike" resembled too nearly "Aloft, alone", in the famous Diamond Jubilee Ode. Hence the whole passage had to go.