

Friendship in England

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Friendship in England

A Victorian Poet in Love.

Digby Mackworth Dolben, a promising poet who was drowned while bathing at the age of nineteen, idealized his school-friend Archie Manning who, according to the poet and critic Bridges, was a person whom «it was difficult not to idealize if one had any tendency that way». All spoke of him «in terms of love and admiration . . . for combined grace, amiability and beauty of person and character he had no equal». In Greek vein Dolben wrote:

«O come my king and fill the palaces
where screeptred loss too long hath held her place
I wait, unquestioning, no servant but thy slave
Content me with the lowest place, so be it that
I see thy royal face».

He did not meet Manning again:

«A little flower of love is ours, without a root
without the end of fruit.
Yet — take the scent thereof».

Patmore «In Love» with Tennyson.

In 1846, at 36 years of age the poet Alfred Tennyson, who, said Carlyle to Emerson, was «one of the finest looking men in the world» met the poet Coventry Patmore then 24 years of age, «young, admiring, enthusiastic . . . not extravagantly handsome but attractive, slim, boyish, with long auburn hair and a finely shaped head.» To Emily Amoleside he wrote in 1850: «In Tennyson I perceive a nature higher and wider than my own, at the feet of whom I can sit happily and *with love*». Patmore's son, born in that year, was named Tennyson.

Lord Byron in Love.

Lord Byron, notorious for his «affairs» with the opposite sex, would appear to have kept the best of his affection for his own. In his «Diary» (1821) he says: «My school-friendships were, with me, *passions* — for I was always violent — that with Lord Clare began one of the earliest and lasted the longest . . . I never hear the word «Clare» without a beating of the heart even now.» Meeting him in later years he said: «I could feel his heart beat to his fingers-ends — unless indeed it was the pulse of my own that made me think so.» They spent «five minutes in the public road but I hardly recollect an hour in my existence which can be weighed against them 'for' I loved him better than any *male* thing in the world.»

At Cambridge he met the chorister Eddelston and wrote to a lady friend: «I certainly love him more than any human being . . . we shall put Pylades and Orestes out of countenance.»

In Greece (1810) he took «the most lively interest» in a Greek youth named Nicolo Giraud. To Hobhouse, his confidant, he said: «You know I *hate* women» yet, says Hobhouse, «perhaps because his own nature

included a decided feminine strain, he could not do without them 'though' it was only in his relationship with *men* that the more romantic and idealistic side . . . was allowed to emerge. Among men alone did he recognize his equals.»

In 1824, the year of his lonely death, he remembered his first love and wrote: «My dearest Clare . . . I hope that you do not forget that I always regard you as my dearest friend, and *love* you as when we were Harrow boys together.»

Beuno

« . . . all this, and Heaven too»

by R. Young

Sometimes I hate the very sight of him. When Clive comes into my room and I see his tall, lanky figure and the irresistible grin which spreads slowly over his features, I'd like nothing better than to throttle him for shattering merely by his presence the peace of my mind so utterly. Poor boy, it isn't his fault that my heart misses a beat when he bends his long body over my easy chair, gripping its arms with his hands and saying in his slightly blurred voice, «Hallo, Uncle Pat, how are you this evening?» How can he perceive what a disturbance he creates in my mind when his body is so close to my own? It's not his fault that I'm a fool. Twenty-five years his senior I ought to know better and yet — —.

There was a time when I thought I had got over it all. But fate stepped in when he heard that a room in the flat was to be let. I couldn't say I don't want you here because I love you and having you next-door would be unbearable. It's something you can only think but never say. All I did say was, 'Of course, I'll be delighted to have you in the flat, my dear boy.' Which was even true, as at that time I felt myself no longer in danger of being hurt by his mere presence. So he came, and the boy I had known for a long time became part of my life to such an extent that it shocked me often to think of the part he played in my thoughts. Being completely normal as he was, sentence of utter silence was passed on me. Never for a moment did I entertain the thought of trying to make the boy respond to any of my own feelings for him. I'd have felt a cad if I had ever done so.

Subsequently he became engaged and I can still remember the relief felt when he told me the news and the even greater relief when he introduced his fiancée. This relief, however, was short-lived and I was back where I had started. But now it was worse, as all my love for him, consciously suppressed for months, came with re-doubled power to the surface again. Nothing availed me, even although youths of his age never had held any attraction for me. Was it the realization of my loneliness or fear of old age that had driven me so deeply into this maze?

Life became well regulated after his engagement, and I saw more of him, but usually with Celia. The girl came frequently in the evenings. When I was still furiously banging away at my typewriter, Clive often invited me to share their night-cap. There we would sit, the fire would burn brightly in the open fire-place; Celia would sit on the floor and