

Book reviews

Objekttyp: **BookReview**

Zeitschrift: **Der Kreis : eine Monatsschrift = Le Cercle : revue mensuelle**

Band (Jahr): **32 (1964)**

Heft 9

PDF erstellt am: **01.07.2024**

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'Whatever time' was likely to be several hours later, when dawn was already breaking over the Alster: the hour when the morning before—having split earlier as young men will to go their separate ways to their separate pleasures after the shared drinking preliminaries—we had fortuitously and suddenly come together like ghosts at the top of the unashamedly, extrovertly, vigorously, garishly infamous Reeperbahn to catch through the misty dawn the streetcar named the German for Desire, which hourly through the hazardous night winds over its route, up and down, in and out, with early workmen and flotsam like us aboard, bearing them to the centre of the northern water-city, carrying us back to the Pension room to which our emptying pockets had reduced us. Where I now awaited Angus off the 0100 ? 0200 ? 0300 ? 0400 ? 0500 ? Strassenbahn . . .

And then, quite soon, the pad of his suede boots, the sound of a key turning: he also had returned earlier that night.

Silently I awaited his reading of my note.

'Chaps . . .' he said (it was always our burlesque form of greeting); and almost immediately he had disappeared with some of the last of our deutsch-marks to buy brandy at the nearby Hauptbahnhof (indeed the centre of our hamburger lives: where we had arrived, whence we were to depart—our neglected God willing—, and which seemed to dominate like a conniving magnet our in-between).

We sipped it from cups and Angus examined the marks which had begun to show around my throat. I was quite proud to tell him how nevertheless I had managed, with cunning and tenacity and responsibility, to save most of our remaining money (I the banker), which had so nearly cost me my life.

Next morning, on the day of our impoverished departure, I quickly passed the door of Heinrich's Hotel and stealthily threw with a jingle and a thud down into the well of its porch the key to one of its annexe rooms which I had found in the pocket of my crumpled linen suit.

It was not a souvenir which I wanted to keep (even salutarily to warn me); and my scrupulous return of it was, I tried to comfort myself, at least the start of a climb back towards other standards of behaviour . . .

ACHTUNG! indeed: all you young men loose in Europe, or in any of the beguiling, predatory cities of the world, five miles (and more) away from your homes.

Book Reviews

Jonathan to Gide

(The Homosexual in History) by Noel I. Garde. Vantage Press, New York 1964. \$ 10.00. 751 p. with Introduction, Bibliography, and 4 Indices: Subjects listed 1) Chronologically, and alphabetically by 2) Name, 3) Nationality, 4) Profession and Occupation.

«A more appropriate if unrealistic, title would be», to quote from Mr. Garde's Introduction, «Short Biographies of 300 Men, of Sufficient Importance in Politics and Culture in the Last 3000 Years to Merit Articles in the Best Encyclopedias, Who Have Been Referred to in Respons-

ible Printed Works as Being Homosexual, or of Homocrotic Temperament, or of Having Had Homosexual Relations on Occasion.» This is the first time a book of this sort has been published in English (Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld in 1920 published his 2 volume *Homosexualität des Mannes und des Weibes* which is still without an English translation). By arranging the biographies in historical order the author, «a keen historian in the broadest sense», has provided a unique short history of western civilization. The articles are, of necessity, short but surprisingly detailed and contain many «human interest» touches the readers of this magazine will find intensely interesting, emotionally moving and so completely understood that each must sooner or later say to himself, «There, but for the Grace of God, go I.» This is a book that should be in the library of every intelligent, self-respecting homophile and for him especially who must, of necessity, walk the secluded and unrevealing way.

— Jerry Mander

A VICTORIAN HOMOSEXUAL

John Addington Symonds

by Phyllis Grosskurth
(Longmans, London, 45 sh.)

John Addington Symonds was a Victorian man of letters and the friend of a great many famous contemporaries. His more solid works have been, it is said by those who know, unjustly neglected and the seven-volume «Renaissance in Italy» was not only a famous book in its day, but is still consulted by historians. But Symonds was also a practising, indeed a proselytising, homosexual, and it was probably inevitable that this fact should emerge from Miss Grosskurth's remarkable book with more vividness and cogency than does the substance of Symonds's literary and historical achievement.

Not that there is even the faintest undertone of prurience in the book. Miss Grosskurth approaches her still awkward subject with admirable directness and a total absence either of flamboyance or of priggishness. And the result is an extraordinarily interesting, scholarly and well-written revelation of Victorian *mœurs* among the upper-middle classes.

*

Without giving much thought to the topic I suppose I had vaguely assumed that homosexuality disappeared from England between Byron and Wilde—a ridiculous assumption. But it is certainly true that it did become, during those years, both clandestine in practice and unmentionable in theory. The homosexual world, which is so clearly and widely revealed to us in this book, was a desperately furtive one. All this we might have known already, but what is more surprising is that these particular facts of life were also so widely known and, by many people, so calmly accepted.

The most sensational revelation in the book must surely be that Dr Vaughan, the famous mid-century headmaster of Harrow, was forced to resign by Symonds's father, who had been told by his son about Vaughan's passionate love-affairs with Harrow boys. The headmaster's family already knew all about his habits, and Dr Symonds himself, though a very typical Victorian, seems not to have been unduly shocked by his

discovery. Certainly he never even considered the possibility of a prosecution.

They were, of course, masters at covering up: considering the total impracticability of their sexual code they had to be. It was only in that underground world where Symonds was such a prominent figure that the subject was, with agonising tentativeness, broached and retreated from. All the same, several of Symonds's friends who taught at public schools seem to have been open about their pederasty in a way which would be very rare today. The whole Victorian attitude was even more speckled with frankness and hypocrisy than is our own.

It is quite proper that Miss Grosskurth should have put this topic at the centre of her study. For Symonds's homosexuality was the daemonic driving-force of his whole life. As a small boy, living in the richest area of Clifton, he played erotic games with several boy-cousins. At Harrow, on the other hand, he seems to have been deeply shocked by the prevalence of heartless and ribald homosexuality among the boys, and it wasn't until he came to Jowett's Balliol in the late fifties that he fully recognised his own nature. A scandal drove him away from a fellowship at Magdalen. He began to have passionate but unfulfilled love-affairs with Bristol choir-boys. He married almost as a method of curing himself, but after a few years and the production of four daughters he persuaded his wife to connive at his homosexual infidelities. There had been a sixth-form boy at Clifton, a peasant at Davos, a gondolier in Venice, male brothels in London and, at times, a frenzy of dissipation all over Europe.

Finally, at the very end of his life, Symonds was collaborating with Havelock Ellis in the writing of «Sexual Inversion.» He died in 1893, before the book was published, and Ellis was later to make very little of his part in it. Certainly the collaboration between the cool, scientific Ellis and the wild, proselytising Symonds must have been an awkward one; but by this time Symonds believed that his most important function was to enlighten the ignorant about the nature and extent of homosexuality.

He had been making efforts at enlightenment all through his literary career—but these had been only enough to get him brutally reviewed and never enough to make him a real pioneer in the field. Though he hated Pater and all his works, Symonds was an aesthete, and he tinged his aestheticism with exactly the kind of romantic, veiled homosexuality which the philistines expected. He published several volumes of verse which showed the same tendency, but also circulated in private a good deal of much franker poetry. The main question must be, of course, how much Symonds was stunted or distorted by society's attitude to his sexual nature; and this is, as Miss Grosskurth tacitly recognises, a very difficult question to answer.

To begin with, Symonds was a typical Victorian consumptive, as well as an invert; he lived most of his adult life in Davos, and died of the disease at the age of 53. We can't tell how much of his violent manic-depression was due to the disease and how much to his sense of belonging to an oppressed minority. It is certainly true that this kind, naturally gentle, invariably charming man was made to suffer a great deal from the contemporary attitude towards his condition. It seems to me much

less certain that he would have been a better writer if he had lived in a more enlightened world. Symonds was certainly no poet, and I cannot believe that the unpublished verse was any better than those which Miss Grosskurth shows us. Much of his prose writing seems to have been both thin and hopelessly mannered. His masterpiece, «Renaissance in Italy,» is unlikely to have suffered even indirectly from that suppression of his full personality which Symonds felt that he was constantly enduring.

It is naïve to suppose that greater freedom of expression necessarily produces greater skill or depth of expression. Freedom of expression is a good in itself, for intellectual rather than for literary reasons. To many people nowadays it seems intolerable that homosexuality should be either a forbidden topic or a penalised practice. This is because there is no topic which should not be openly discussed and because it is wrong to make people suffer for doing what is natural to them if this does no harm to others.

But I doubt whether Symonds would have written better if he had lived in a more tolerant society. He might have written worse, lacking the daemonic impulse which drove him so hard, and often so successfully.

by Philip Toynbee

reprinted from THE OBSERVER, London

MAN AND SOCIETY

November 7, Summer 1964. Twice yearly, price each issue 3s Od. published by the Albany Trust, 32 Shaftesbury Avenue, London W. 1

We would like to bring to the attention of our English speaking readers the above mentioned Number 7 of MAN AND SOCIETY which is definitely a «must» for anyone interested in the question of homosexuality. To this writer the contribution by the well-known English novelist Iris Murdoch on «The Moral Decision About Homosexuality» seems to be of foremost importance—all the more so since this excellent article was written by a woman. We quote below a review of this number 7 of MAN AND SOCIETY which appeared on the pages of the DAILY TELEGRAPH in London. Since the reviewer of the DAILY TELEGRAPH deals more with another contrary contribution in the same issue and only briefly with the one by Iris Murdoch it is all the more important to bring this whole issue to the attention of our readers.

The DAILY TELEGRAPH reviewer writes:

No changes in the law relating to homosexuality will materially affect the incidence of blackmail, states Mr. William Shepherd, Conservative M.P. for Cheadle, Chesire. It has been grossly exaggerated by those who seek legal reform.

Mr. Shepherd, writing in the summer issue of *Man and Society* published by the Albany Trust, says legal changes will not make homosexual practices any more acceptable in society.

In his view every homosexual is a potential danger to young persons. Public interest lies in discouraging as many as possible from a way of life that must in the end bring misery.

He claims that cult plays a significant part in determining the extent of it, and that if it is fashionable it spreads, as a look at the British stage to-day and a decade ago shows.

«Now the emphasis is on virility. There is no longer the feeling that to be 'with it' on the stage one must engage in homosexual practices. The homosexual is becoming a liability to the producer and the 'cult' is, at least for the time being, at an end.»

A different view is taken by the novelist Iris Murdoch, former Oxford don, writing in the same issue.

She argues that it is a simple matter of human rights. One has a right to chose to be celibate, even if looked on with suspicion or contempt, or to be homosexual or to accept the fact that one is and be left alone.

«Human beings differ vastly and being heterosexually married is not the only 'proper' or 'rich' or 'rewarding' way of life.»

She agrees that the law must be changed, but states that it is unfortunate that many well meaning people are still treating homosexuality as a social ailment which scientific facts will help to cure. Homosexuals will always be a minority and doubtless always be with us.

An editorial in the issue states that the Homosexual Law Reform Society and the Albany Trust both recognise that the unreformed law prevents much constructive work for which the need is obvious and urgent.

It finds it «surprising» that Mr. Brooke, Home Secretary, should tell Parliament he has observed no material change in public opinion. It is claimed that acceptance of the Wolfenden proposals is spreading among the public at large and that informed opinion supports the findings.

From the House of Commons, London

Mr. Kenneth Robinson (St. Pancras, North. Lab.) asked the Attorney General why the Director of Public Prosecutions had advised chief constables to refer to him all cases involving homosexual offences between consenting adults in private for decision as to prosecution.

Sir John Hobson (Warwick and Leamington, C.).—The Director of Public prosecutions told chief constables on June 10 that he would be grateful if they would report to him for advice any cases in which they are contemplating proceedings in respect of homosexual offences between consenting adults committed either more than 12 months previously or in private.

The suggestion that the Director of Public Prosecutions should be consulted was made with a view to obtaining greater uniformity in the enforcement of the law. There is no question of any general change in prosecuting policy or law enforcement, or of any restriction on the exercise by chief constables of their discretion to prosecute when they think fit.

I realize there are some members who would like to see the law changed he added), but I cannot change it by practice. The duty of the Law Officers and the Director is to enforce the law.

Still a long way to go . . .

Sir,—The *Spectator* of July 10, in reviewing at length a biography and, more shortly, a novel, writes freely and with apparent equanimity of homosexuality. If charity and common sense forbid condemnation, need they go so far in familiarising perversion? One feels that normal healthy standards are thereby denigrated. (From Letter to the Editor.)

Greater Uniformity

It was unfortunate that the decision (if it be a decision) to change the existing practice in initiating prosecutions for private homosexual offences should have coincided with a Sunday newspaper scandal about alleged homosexuals in high places (though not, fortunately and apparently, present political high places) and their supposed connection with London protection rackets. The change in legal practice that is under discussion is that in future no prosecution should be initiated for private homosexual offences without the agreement of, or at any rate consultation with, the Director of Public Prosecutions. In itself this has nothing to do with protection rackets, which may well batten even more lucratively on homosexual clubs than on other sleazy ones. Blackmail threats to individuals have also been reported, based either on spying or on the use of decoys. By bringing in the DPP blackmail threats might be more effectively dealt with; the victim might be more likely to speak freely to the DPP than to his local police force.

The chief merit of the proposal about the DPP is that it would secure uniformity and therefore greater equity in law enforcement. At present the practice of different police forces differs wildly. It is not usual to search actively for opportunities of prosecuting private homosexuals; but when cases come almost accidentally to light, chief constables differ sharply on whether prosecutions or cautions or psychological counselling are more appropriate. — The proposal that the DPP should be consulted on these cases is said to come from Mr Skelhorn, the present director, who is more liberal minded than his predecessor, and to be backed by the Attorney General. Last year a Labour MP, Mr. Leo Abse, produced a private member's bill to establish a statutory obligation of consultation with the DPP, but the bill was defeated after an adverse decision in cabinet.

The present change does not, of course, require either legislative or cabinet sanction. Its precise status is to be the subject of questions to the Attorney General from Mr Abse in the Commons next Tuesday. The change should be welcomed. The best course now would be quietly to discontinue prosecutions for purely private homosexual offences; and to find out in the process of doing so whether there really are any difficulties in the way of an eventual straight repeal of the revelant sections of the sexual offences Act.

(From: *The Economist*, London)

Whate'er, my friend, or false or true,
The world may tell thee, give no ear,
For to separate us, dear,
The world will say that one is two.

Nesim Bey, Turco-Albanian poet

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Homoeroten, die das Bedürfnis haben an einem seelsorgerlichen Kontakt oder Gespräch, können sich vertrauensvoll an diese Stelle wenden, wo sie sich mit einem Seelsorger aussprechen können, der sich speziell mit der Homophilie und Homosexualität beschäftigt.

P.A. Rademakers