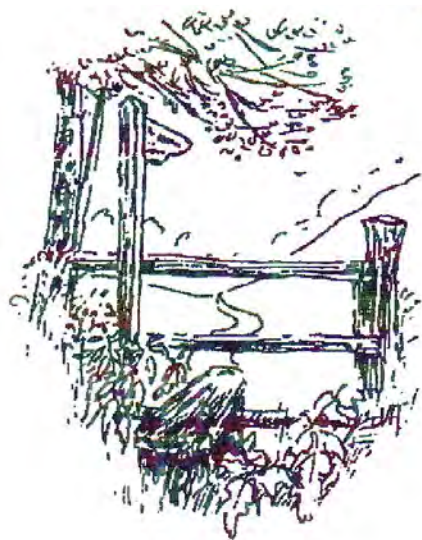


# THE EDWARD THOMAS FELLOWSHIP



NEWSLETTER 76

September 2016

a poetry that has nothing to do with invention, but falls naturally out of the life of the speakers, as apples fall in a still night

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**Please send material for the next Newsletter as a Word document in an email attachment. Thank you.**

## The Edward Thomas Summer Walk – Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2016

Six Fellowship members met for the fifth annual extra summer walk at the Queen Elizabeth Country Park near Buriton, Hampshire on Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> July. A ten mile walk was led by Pam and Stephen Turner. The weather was fine and our day began with Pam reading “Over the Hills” to prepare us for the climb up to Holt Down. We then followed the main path around War Down to meet The South Downs Way. Here we enjoyed the view to the north and east while Larry Skillman read “Under The Wood”. Our route then took us gently down towards Buriton, passing above the village and the old chalk pits. Where the lane ended, we turned South through an attractive nature reserve full of early summer wild flowers. Eventually we joined the quiet lane along the ridge where we paused whilst Cynthia Lloyd read “Bird’s Nest”.

We continued on along the lane enjoying uninterrupted views of the downs to the south and west, gradually descending into a valley to meet a road and railway line. Once we had crossed the railway bridge we were confronted by a steep climb up to Chalton village. At this point Stephen went ahead of the party as our booked lunch time at The Red Lion was fast approaching, and he was anxious not to lose our table or so he said! He need not have worried as the service at the pub was painfully slow considering the pub was not too busy.

Larry read “The Dark Forest” before we set off after lunch. It was not long before it began to rain and we made a number of stops under the trees to put more and more protective layers on. Fortunately we followed a tree lined lane for a couple of miles which gave some protection from the increasingly heavy rain. Once we turned off the lane we had a steady climb up onto Holt Down. By this time the rain became heavier and we pressed on at some speed and postponed further readings.

By the time we arrived back at the start point most of us found that our waterproof jackets and footwear were not actually waterproof. This failed to dampen our spirits and we arrived in time to enjoy tea and cakes inside the Country Park Centre café. Before long the rain became torrential and we were very grateful not to

have still been walking in it. In the comfort of the tearoom Terry read an extract from "The Heart of England" to round the day off before we all made our way home.

Anyone who would be interested in a similar walk in 2017 should contact Stephen 01252 810852 or [stephenjturner1@aol.com](mailto:stephenjturner1@aol.com)) to register an interest and to be kept informed of future similar walks.

Stephen Turner

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### **Elizabeth Parkhurst: An Appreciation**

Honor Elizabeth Caenwen Parkhurst (formerly Maxted, née Thomas) died on July 10<sup>th</sup> 2016 after a short illness, aged 89 years. She was the last and youngest representative of the generation of Thomases after Edward and his brothers. Elizabeth was born on April 2<sup>nd</sup> 1927, the youngest child of Julian, youngest brother of the poet in Ryde on the Isle of Wight. Following an education that involved frequent moves due to her father's occupation she joined her brothers in the Royal Navy and entered the Women's Royal Naval Service. Highly gifted in languages she was recruited to work at Bletchley Park. After the war she spent time in Chapel Hill with Raymond Adams, a Thoreau scholar at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill and his wife Charlotte, an active member of the Religious Society of Friends. It was following a lecture there in 1948 that she met Robert Frost (see Newsletter 32, February 1995).

Elizabeth was a multi-faceted woman; mother to seven children, she was an enthusiastic and highly valued member of the church choir, the Parish Council and a School Governor in the village of Cranford, Northamptonshire to which they moved after a period of time living in Ontario, Canada. She played a pivotal role in village life, running a kindergarten, and organising countless May Day celebrations including dresses, garlands and teas.

Her singing voice was pure, strong and beautiful; my brother Ben recalls hearing someone in the congregation saying he just came to the church to hear her sing! Thus I had the joy of being sung to sleep by her with songs that ranged through the Beatles, African-American spirituals, Greensleeves and The Wraggle Taggle Gypsies. She formed a living bridge between successive cultural and political generations, and to this legacy brought her own vibrant fusion of intelligence and wit, combined with a deep commitment to human and animal welfare and the importance of connection between individuals.

Her energy was remarkable and her interests in politics, literature and music were wide-ranging and cosmopolitan. She had gentle eyes and a lovely generous, sensitive mouth. Her use of English was marvellous; personal letters to family and friends, campaigning letters and articles revealed a gift for making every word matter. This was a quality she admired in Edward Thomas's writing and like him she appreciated the beauty of names given to places, flora and fauna. She was robust and vigorous, raising a large family in many challenging circumstances, and welcoming family, her friends and legions of ours into a succession of beautifully decorated homes. Elizabeth was also a keen and talented gardener. She created gardens more often than not from bare plots wherever she lived, and these continue to flourish and bring pleasures anew. A walnut sapling given to her by Edward Eastaway Thomas has grown into a magnificent tree in the garden at Cranford, pots of lilies, snapdragons and roses from her last home in Wales, Esgaironnen Fach, flourish at the home of her dear friend, Dennis Collins, and cuttings from her blackcurrant and raspberry bushes bear ripening fruit in my garden in Oxford as I write this. She often said that it was the gardens she made that were hardest to leave when faced with a move.

When relocation to Sussex followed from my father's redundancy as a farm worker she became Secretary of the Newhaven Society which campaigned to successfully preserve the Napoleonic Fort and to stop the transport of uranium hexafluoride through Newhaven Port. She continued to sing in the church choir and local Choral Society, as she did when she married John Parkhurst and moved to Wales. There she began to learn Welsh, and connected with the Pontarddulais branch of the Thomas family during a visit to the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth

in 1997 as part of a weekend of music, readings and walking she helped organize for the Edward Thomas Fellowship based at Gregynog Hall.

Her admiration and feeling for Edward Thomas's work was profound. Both her parents were devoted to Edward and his writing and worked hard to set the foundations for his emergence as a major voice in the twentieth century. Elizabeth was present, aged 10, at the unveiling of the Memorial Stone on the Shoulder of Mutton in 1937. She supported Nick Carter's organization of an exhibition in 1968 at the Bodleian Library, Oxford, and took us as children to this as well as reading events at Bedales School and the unveiling of the windows in Eastbury Church. Through these we came to meet her cousins, Bronwen and Myfanwy and their families, and later, Edward Cawston Thomas and his family. A pre-Fellowship walker since the 1970s she was an enthusiastic member of the Fellowship until her death.

I would like to finish with some lines of her uncle's from 'The Stile' in *Light and Twilight*, which characterize her commitment to life, and bring hope and inspiration to those who remain.

*Things will happen which will trample and pierce, but I shall go on, something that is here and there like the wind, something unconquerable, something not to be separated from the dark earth and the light sky, a strong citizen of infinity and eternity. The confidence and ease had become a deep joy; I knew that I could not do without the Infinite, nor the Infinite without me.*

Julia Maxted

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## Book Reviews by Edward Thomas

### The Holiday Country

*The Wye.* Painted by Sutton Palmer. Described by A. G. Bradley. London, A & C Black, 7s. 6d. net.

*Lift Luck on Southern Roads,* by Tickner Edwardes, with 16 illustrations. London: Methuen, 6s.

*An Outdoor Breviary,* by M. Jourdain. London, The Academy Press, 2s. 6d. net.

*Back to the Land, A Medley,* by C2. Longmans, 4s. 6d. net.

Mr. A. G. Bradley is perhaps the most admirable of our picturesque topographers, and he is at his best when writing of Wales or the borderland of Wales. In describing the course of the Wye from Plinlimmon to Beachley, he has to traverse some of the best of Wales and of England also. He is almost original, and certainly just and eloquent in his enthusiasm for the mountain moorland of the upper Wye, that "glorious solitude" which "no Englishman to speak of, and very few Welshmen, know." Mr. Bradley has not only enthusiasm but taste in scenery, and speaks with proportion. He can really describe, and bears in mind when he is doing so the two necessary conditions of prose and description, to keep an eye on the subject and an eye on the reader. Thus his pictures are intelligible. He can, for example, bring the Wyndcliff before the eye. This he does not by any inspired felicity, but by a careful consideration of the scene in its detail and its entirety. We mention this just because it is a success very frequently sought by modern writers and very seldom achieved.

### Not Over-Descriptive.

There is not, however, too much description. It is mingled as usual with history, legend, and gossip, all in that lively though somewhat massive style which is now so familiar to many. There is a great deal of history and legend about Llangurig, Builth, Ross, Tintern, and Chepstow, and few readers will ever have seen it in so

picturesque a form before. Mr. Bradley is a cyclist and a walker, and he stops at nothing. Other walkers and cyclists will admire him discreetly. The rest of the world – those of the motoring class, or the humbler sybarite who affects the more gregarious char-a-banc, who come to gaze, perhaps to eat, and then to ride away – ought to thank him exceedingly, for he describes what they will never see and in a manner which, they at any rate will think, relieves them of the necessity. His illustrator is not and could hardly be so versatile in taste, nor perhaps is it within the power of the three-colour process to do justice to any genuine picture of the high lands of Cardigan and Radnor. These he gives us only in contrast with the softer riverside umbrage. At the ordinary picturesque subject, Symond's Gate or Tintern or the Wyndcliff, he is charming without being perfectly obvious.

### **Style and the Man.**

It is a pity that Mr. Tickner Edwardes is not such a master of his medium and his material as Mr. Bradley. For he has excellent material and just feeling. Only his style is shaky. He tries to do too much. He cannot do anything good in the picturesque or personal style, but where he relates what has taken place without any comment he is good, and sometimes in dialogue he is very good. If only he were not bent on being a picturesque traveller of the egoistic type! [...] We always feel his enjoyment, even when his writing is not the real thing. We feel that Mr. Edwardes is even better than his books – he is the author of the well-known "Lore of the Honey Bee" – and this feeling, after a time, comes to make us think better of his books, for if the style is not the man it is because the man is a good deal more. He went through some of the best of Somerset, Wiltshire, and Hampshire; he saw many weathers and many men; nor was he without adventures. And everywhere he went, men and women offered him a lift. This in itself is a greater compliment than we could devise; it certainly is one which would not be paid to many authors.

### **Writers, Not Readers.**

"An Outdoor Breviary" will probably be more interesting to writers than readers, because it is evidently a serious attempt to write well. On the other hand, a simple

reader may fail to see this, and, consequently, be able to enjoy what the writer is only able to watch and analyse. It is the attempt of one who has the gift of writing, though he may very likely write much better when he gives up trying to write well. [...] There are many beautiful objects and much careful writing; at present they have not combined. M. Jourdain has a love of visible beauty, and an admirable and individual taste in books, which will probably end by helping him to create beautiful things of his own.

We do not like "Back to the Land." The authors are very clever, very snifty, and very well bred. The book describes some of their adventures during the search for an historical man or house in some healthy part of Somerset, Dorset, or East Devon, not too far from the sea, with hunting, fishing, and shooting in the neighbourhood, and an ancient village church. The house was to be a three per cent investment. Naturally, they succeeded. Their adventures were of the usual kind, due chiefly to the habitual mendacity of house agents.

There is a thin, joyless humour diffused over every page, of which this reference to Wootton Bassett is characteristic:

A dreary dead-alive place, consisting of one long unlovely street. The church was ugly, the lunch was bad and very dear: the only object of interest appeared to be the new cemetery, which we visited accordingly.

A very well-bred and tasteless book, so merely clever as to be almost dull, which is a singular achievement.



## England and the English

Price Collier, *England and the English*

27.v.09

The author of "England and the English," Mr. Price Collier, is an American who has known England during thirty years, has made friends here, has seen town and country and many kinds of men, and has lived in a small Shropshire town. He has no single point to make, no one prejudice for or against us. He has some gift for generalisation, but is so anxious apparently to find a place for everything he has seen and heard that he sacrifices a very clear impression, with its attendant inaccuracies. He writes well, with a moderation that is sometimes near to mellowness. It is very noticeable, too, that he writes like one who is on his guard, and is for the time being the representative of a country which has been lightly or maliciously spoken of by the people he is describing. There are always claws under his velvet, and they are sometimes given a fair amount of play, as in the exposure of our "Pecksniffian ethics," our slang, which is equal to American slang, and our bad cooking. But no matter; it is a serious, an honest, an observant, and on the whole a well-informed book. His inaccuracies are never important, as when he speaks of "a graduate of Eton." His limitations are due largely to the fact that he knows only the wealthier class and what they know, and to his apparently superficial acquaintance with English history.

He divides his opinions under nine headings: "First Impressions," "Who are the English?" "The Land of Compromise," "English Home Life," "Are the English dull?" "Sport," "Ireland," "An English Country Town," and "Society." [...] Coming to what he has seen, he gives a long and lively study of instances, such as could be found in any country, to show that we are inconsistent, that we are hypocritical, that we compromise, to show, in fact, that there are thousands of opinions, and that action does not perfectly represent any of them. He also says that "A chaste thief is no better than a rake. There are probably more of the former and fewer of the latter in American than in English social and political life." He has his own kind of Puritanism, and in order to convict us of swearing and immorality goes back to Elizabeth and George II. He puts down our indifferent "morals" (using the word in

the most vulgar sense) to the fact that this is a man's country. The women, for the same reason, dress badly and are awkward, yet he contrasts them favourably with American women, who are given too much pocket-money and worship. He does not like Englishwomen's complexions. Of the men he says that they are cocksure and yet without spontaneity, but at the same time that, what with their sports and love of a country life, they are younger for their years than Americans; that the mingling of young and old is a good and remarkable thing; and that "Englishmen laugh and smile" and "lark" more than other men of "mature age." But the Englishman is "a far more democratic sportsman" than the American, and his games are "on sounder lines of fair play, sanity, and uprightness than anywhere else in the world."

For the country and the Englishman at home there he has little but praise. Two things, he says, surpass any preliminary praise of them, and one is an English landscape in May. As is only natural in an American, he lays stress on the fact that we are of one race and notes the absence of foreigners in the country town. "There people," he says, "all of one race, from highest to lowest, master and man, have an advantage of mutual understanding and a kind of taciturn sympathy with one another that are priceless in solving many of their problems." In the country, as elsewhere, he is struck by the amount of good work that is unpaid, especially what is done by women. He admires our literature, and says amusingly: "We in America have had no time, no energy to spare for literature." Among his larger conclusions we observe that he considers that the million best Englishmen would be, all-round, superior to a million from any other nation, even the American; that we are slow, vigorous, law-loving, contented, democratic, and not fond of sensational newspapers which "still find it difficult to make headway in England"; that we are on the way to Socialism, and that we are wrong. Finally, he says: "Though we Americans may not like the English, we are of the same race, and at bottom I and most of my countrymen would not like to see the old man downed." He suggests three ways out: an immediate war with Germany, a "political and commercial federation of the Empire," and chance. He gives us a chance, which is enough in a land of compromise.

*The Return to the Land*

by Senator Jules Meline, with preface by Justin McCarthy.

London: Chapman and Hall, 5s. net.

2.ix.1907.

M. Meline's book is partly a history of the rise of industrial and commercial prosperity in Europe, and especially in France; partly an attempt to forecast and even to influence the trend of events when, as he thinks is already discernible, the decline of this prosperity begins. In style it is masterly. It sweeps along, "without o'erflowing full," clear, brilliant, handling even statistics as if they were but images, and we reach the end with as little trouble as if we had been listening to a half-hour's speech by an ingenious politician with a good voice. And what is the result?

There has been, he says, a violent tendency to over-production in industry; it must subside, and men will be thrown out of work; what is more, the improvements in machinery will augment the same result. He asks how work is to be found for these. He waves the Socialist aside with a passionate debater's gesture. There is but one opening, one resource - "an opening wide enough for all, a resource that will be inexhaustible for centuries yet to come: the land."

**The Charm of Town.**

France, he claims, like the United States, really has a land to which to return. But then the young men and women like the towns. Taxation in the country is enormously high, and the equipment of civilisation is poor. The middleman takes large profits. The life is dull. Well, "co-operative societies will prove themselves in time the great means of emancipating agriculture." Let the State give help as, by helping the banks, it has already done. The countryman must be educated in order "to bring out the beauties of nature and the advantages of life in the fields," and this

does not seem to strike him as a hard thing. And may we not count upon the peasant's "unconquerable attachment to the soil"? he exclaims!

[...]

They in France have something to hope from the migration of factories to the country, as in our own Bournville; and they may look to a class, which divides its time between factory and land, and improves its physique.

Then, M. Meline hopes, popular literature can help by holding up healthy ideals, and he himself quotes "Emile":-

Men were never meant to be heaped together in ant-hills; they were to be scattered sparsely over the soil which they should be cultivating.

Growing lyrical himself, he cries:-

Go off with your children to the fields, and try to leave them there as long as possible - altogether, if you can. Thanks to the revivifying bath of country air, you will see them bloom afresh.

### **A Pied Piper.**

Later he has nothing but praise for that "great reformer," Mr. Chamberlain, that Pied Piper who is calling out of the towns all the rats who infest them. Why should not France be the market-garden of the world? Why, he asks again, will not the youth of the country turn its eyes to the "promised land" of the Colonies? They should read noble books of travels and voyages instead of corrupt novels. He concludes:-

The well-being of a people is like a tree: agriculture is its root, manufacture and commerce are its branches and its leaves; if the root is injured, the leaves fall, the branches break away, and the tree dies.

It is a clever book. It collects a number of facts and ideas which will, we suspect, be very variously interpreted by its readers. But it is lacking in largeness of view. It does not deal at all with a hundred questions of art, for example, of craftsmanship, of the condition of the worker, mental, social and physical, of education, of tendencies. It sees no purposes in modern development; it has, after all, no strong principles, no clear desires and aims. Though optimistic, it is exceedingly cautious, and, as it seems to us, it owes a fatal weakness to a stubborn dislike of Socialistic proposals (when they come from Socialists), which is strangely out of harmony with his approval of measures of a Socialistic nature already in force in his own country and elsewhere.

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### A Cotswold Village

J. Arthur Gibbs, *A Cotswold Village; or, Country Life and Pursuits in Gloucestershire.*

22.vii.09

Mr. J. Arthur Gibbs's "A Cotswold Village; or, Country Life and Pursuits in Gloucestershire," is a book of the same type as Richard Jefferies's "Wild Life in a Southern County," and if it had preceded that book instead of following it after twenty years it would have been a very remarkable book. The author knew Jefferies's work, and it evidently suggested to him what to look out for or what to note down, and their methods are similar, and even practically the same. Mr. Gibbs's book is quite as valuable as a document, for though it is later it is also larger. Nor is there any great difference in style. Both books are pieced together rather carelessly. The later one is slightly more diffuse in style. But Mr. Gibbs was a very different man. He belonged to the country gentleman class, and was at Eton and Oxford, and he was a Conservative in politics. He frankly advises men of his class to remember that "a kind word, a shake of the hand, the occasional distribution of game throughout the village, and a hundred other small kindnesses do more to win the heart of the labouring man than much talk at election times of Small Holdings, Parish Councils, or Free Education"; and he wishes us to believe that a tea from the squire "two or three times a year" does much to cheer the lives of the labourers. He tells us that the condition of the rural poor "must ever offer scope for deep reflection

and comparison." In these matters we feel that his conduct was probably more admirable than his reflection, and yet however trivial his remarks they are interesting as representative of a certain type of his class, and it is well to have such a record of them. It is not these that give their value to the book, and we must remember that at his age Jefferies himself had not gone much further or by a very different path in his views of life. For pure observation of people, places and sports, occupations and wild life, the book is admirable. Everything is put down freshly from the note-book, and has not gone through any deadening process of being written up. There are stories, jokes, snatches of conversation, quotations from old diaries, odds and ends of a hundred kinds about squires, gamekeepers, labourers and their wives. Mr. Gibbs had a real gift for writing which was in keeping with his own frank, open-air nature. We cannot refuse to be grateful to an author who describes the extravagant costume of a lay preacher after the Reformation and comments merely: "What an ass he must have looked." We hesitate now and then at some of his derivations, as when he appears to connect "bury" in "Buryclose" with burial. But as a rule he confines himself to simple statements of fact. Among the countless good things we must note fragments of dialect, including "Roger Plowman's Journey to London," a version of "Turmut-hoeing," and the song "George Ridler's Oven," which Jefferies only mentions, with a quotation, we fancy, of the couplet:

While vools gwoes scramblin' vur and nigh,  
We bides at whom, my dog and I.

Some of his chapters are on hunting in the Wall country, a Cotswold trout stream, Burford, Cotswold Pastures, the Cotswolds three hundred years ago, and Cirencester. Towards the end of the book there are some chapters a little too full of description of scenery and reflections on it. These bring out the author's diffuseness and intellectual limitations to an unfavourable degree, yet are genuine and not without indications of character which will be welcomed by those who have learnt to care for him, and few will not. The book is illustrated and has a short note on Mr. Gibbs and a portrait.

*The Charm of the English Village,*

by P. H. Ditchfield, illustrated by Sydney R. Jones.

London, Batsford, 7s. 6d. net.

*The Peacock's Pleasaunce,*

by "E. V. B.," with eight full-page illustrations.

London, Lane, 5s. net.

*The Cotswolds,*

painted by G. F. Nicholls, described by Francis Duckworth, with twenty-four full-page illustrations in colour.

London, Black, 6s. net.

*From a Hertfordshire Cottage,*

by W. Beach Thomas.

London, Alston Rivers, 3s. 6d.

Mr P. H. Ditchfield professes to deal with many interesting things in his book, with the village church, manors, farms, rectories, cottages, gardens, inns, shops, mills, almshouses, schools, crosses, farms, barns, dovecots, old roads, bridges, sundials, and weathercocks, and some human life. [...] But his intention is too picturesque to allow him to be precise, while, being an antiquarian, he knows the names of so many things that he can easily fill a book with little else. His book is therefore a mixture of information which does not inform and of picturesqueness which is not picturesque. In both he fails because he fails to give life to things by means of words. But the illustrations are sufficiently numerous and accurate to atone for the shortcomings of the text.

### **Ease and Quiet.**

Mr. Ditchfield does not really convince us that he likes what he writes about. There is no doubt that "E.V.B." does. She really likes trees and birds, and really hates advertisement boards in green fields and new houses in quiet lanes. There is, however, very little reason in her hate, except that she is a sensitive person who likes ease and nice things. Modernity annoys her. [...] She writes stories and descriptions and gossips - of "an almost ideal city" (an ant city); of a white earwig; of a little old house in Banffshire; of the bridge at Lucerne; of birds and gardens. She is always right; never vulgar. Yet the utmost that we have got out of her book is a quotation or two; not a thought or image or emotion of her own that words have made real to us. Best of all, perhaps, is the series of photographs of a white peacock.

### **Rural Beauty.**

Mr. Francis Duckworth's book on the Cotswolds is quite a different thing. He knows a piece of beautiful English country, with a human and natural character of its own. He knows it by walking over it and by reading. He uses words like a practical man. And so he is able to give a large, clear impression of this land as a whole, and then more detailed pictures of parts of it, with their history and associations. As a specimen of his writing we could easily give something more attractive than this, which we choose because it shows that he really has had his eye on the subject. He is speaking of this stone Cotswold house and its roof of grey "slats":

The roof will be of a single span, unless you can afford lead, and know how to use it. The supporting walls therefore will need to be strong and thick.

Finally, what is to become of all the space under this wide, high roof; how is it to be lighted? For if it is not lighted it will all be wasted, and the craftsman will be called clumsy and extravagant. To refute such criticisms he brought into use the dormer window. That is to say, he carried up the outside wall above the level of the eave at various points and formed gables.



The artist gives some charming pictures of old houses. In fact, his houses and streets are always interesting; his landscapes, on the other hand, have been severely handled by the three-colour process. At the end of the book is a sketch map of the central and northern Cotswolds, a triangular piece, with Chipping Campden, Stroud, and Burford at the angles, showing the main heights and masses, with the rivers and their valleys.

### **Knows his Subject.**

Mr. Beach Thomas's book is better still, and what with his knowledge of many various kinds of wild life, of books and of himself, he is one of the few country essayists in whom we have confidence. We know that he is writing of what he has seen and cared about. His only real fault is that he has got into a habit of writing short essays. There are nearly fifty in a book of less than three hundred pages, and the frequent breaks make it troublesome to read. He could probably do much more justice to his observation and discourse if he devised some other form. Of course, if each essay were thoroughly well-knit and complete in itself, there would be nothing to complain of. But this writing is not of a kind that tells in a short space. It is careful and precise, but has no great charm or character. Having said this we must say that Mr. Beach Thomas has few equals, and that he is distinct from all of them in the freshness of his talk about clouds, flowers, grasses, birds, insects, and trees, and sport.

*Woodlanders and Field Folk: Sketches of Wild Life in Great Britain,*

by John Watson and Blanche Winder, with forty illustrations.

London: Fisher Unwin, 5s. net.

2.viii.1907

Mr. Watson appears to be a man who has had unusual opportunities of studying many kinds of British birds and animals. Yet, if he had confined himself to what he had seen with his own eyes this book need not have been half the size, while if he only put down what was in some sense new it would have contained one or two chapters instead of fifty.

[...]

It is as familiar as the riches of Mr. Carnegie, the modesty of Miss Marie Corelli, or the qualities of Cadbury's cocoa. There is an article on "Night Sounds" which need never have been written. It mentions a few of the birds and animals that may be heard at night, and ends with two or three pages on the nightingale [...] As to the writing, it has none of the vividness that might have been expected from one who is not a literary man. Yet Mr. Watson has read only too much. He will write a whole article without once drawing seriously on his own experience. Then when he comes to discuss, e.g., the reasoning of birds and get no help from other men, he has no point of view, no intuition, no real observation. He gives instances of various kind of intelligence, but can draw no conclusion, and has not even a strong prejudice. He has simply heard of the debate between those who uphold reasoning and those who uphold instinct as the cause of certain actions of birds; and it has seemed to him that birds are often clever, which is quite true; and, with this fact before him, he should have struck out boldly, as we feel sure he was prompted to do, instead of showing that he does not understand the case. But where he is plainly recording his own observation he is an interesting companion. We wonder how much his characterless and fairly correct style is due to his collaborator.

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### **The Imaginative Race.**

*The Literature of the Celts* by Magnus Maclean.

London: Blackie and Son. 7s. 6d. net.

21.x.03

This book is, as it claims to be, the first general survey of Celtic literature. Mr. Maclean is an enthusiastic Celt, and if his preferences are those of a Scot, they are so frank as to be very easily corrected. He has a wide acquaintance with his subject, and a still wider acquaintance with the critical and other literature which that has called forth. A marvellously corrupt style is his only considerable fault.

Mr. Maclean writes of S. Patrick and S. Columba as the morning stars of Celtic literature, by virtue of achievement and influence. Though Christians, they were druided by the past of their race. S. Patrick, it has been written, was suspicious of his own fearful joy at hearing the stories of the Feinn; but his guardian angels reassured him and even suggested that he should write the stories down, since they would be a joyous influence "to the end of time."

[...]

Even so early was the characteristic note of Celtic literature struck; to some it may seem that all its finest pieces might have come from one brain alone. Gaelic and Welsh poets were rhyming in subtle metres "while the Germanic races could only alliterate." From that time forth Celtic literature falls under half a dozen heads.

First, in point of antiquity of theme, though not always in antiquity of execution, there are the mythological poems. To this class belong such portions of the Mabinogion as the Tale of Pwyll, and the greater part of the "Three Sorrows of Story Telling." The writers apparently took the old mythology (which was more a mystery to them perhaps than to us) as actual fact. We need hardly mention the "Tragedy of the Children of Lir" as one of the loveliest of this class. They were changed by a sorceress into four white swans, and – how significantly! – when she wished to lighten their sorrow she gave the swans "the use of their Gaelic speech, of their human reason, and the power of singing sweet; plaintive, fairy music,

surpassing all known in the world in its harmony and soothing influence.”

[...]

Secondly, there is the heroic cycle, to which belong the stories of Cuchullin and such tales in the Mabinogion as “The Lady of the Fountain.” Mr. Maclean calls them Homeric. It is true that we can find Hector in Cuchullin and a Ulysses in Kai, but there is a grand, purely human interest in the Greek or Trojan, but he seems to us to have suffered the supreme misfortune of missing his Maeonides. In literature, at least, he remains an impressive torso, but still a torso. And, it must be remembered, not only were the heroes seen through a thick mist of ages, but the poets were writing at a time so long after the downfall of their race that their activity and success have scarcely a parallel in the history of literature. They write of Death, of Battle, of Woman, of the voices of Birds, as if these portents had never become stale to them, as if they had been approached in an ecstasy of surprise and never forgotten.

The third class is made memorable by heroes who are all but historical, such as Fionn, Gaul MacMorna, Ossian, Diarmad and Caoilte MacRonan. “As the name David is traditionally associated with the Hebrew Psalter, says Mr. Maclean, “so is that of Ossian, the warrior poet, with the classic poems of the Gael. His name will always be identified with the bardic literature that celebrates the deeds of the Feinn, even though scholars cannot affirm with historical certainty that he actually lived or was the real author of one of the ballads attributed to him.”

[...]

The fourth class includes the lives, e.g., of S. Columba, and the histories, e.g. of Gildas, Nennius, and Keating. They are in Latin and Gaelic, and with the exception of the work of Adamnan and Keating they are still more or less raw material, and must wait yet a little longer before they compete with Greek and Latin story as treasures of poetic theme.

The fifth class of personal lyrics, powerfully represented in mediaeval Welsh, is the most perfect of all in form. \*

## Edward Thomas and J. M Synge

The epigraph on the first page of the newsletter is Thomas's response to the poetry of J. M. Synge in September 1907. His poems were 'raw poetry & something more - wonderfully lean & bare & yet compelling us to clothe them in the warm & radiant life which they disdain' (September 1909). It was 'poetry of the most unquestionable kind, but poetry shrunk almost to its bones' (July 1909).

Synge was a writer he admired greatly. *Riders to the Sea* was 'wonderful & equal to the Greeks' (June 1909). *The Playboy of the Western World* was 'un-English' but 'To all who care about life it will be a joy' (August 1907). He also praised it in a letter:

But *The Playboy*. Have you read and seen it? I daresay it is the greatest play of modern times. Of course I don't know. But I felt it to be utterly new and altogether fine.

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## Other News

**Philip Lancaster's** *War Passion* was given its premiere at Cirencester Parish Church on 24 July 2016 as part of the Three Choirs Festival. One of the war poems set to music was Edward Thomas's 'Rain'.

**Professor Francis O'Gorman's** volume *Swinburne and Pater*, for the Oxford University Press selected edition of Edward Thomas's prose, will be published on 1 April 2017 (512 pages). Francis was recently appointed to Chair at Edinburgh University.

**Peter Parker's** *Housman Country: Into the Heart of England* looks at AE Housman's influence on a number of writers, including Edward Thomas.

**Stephen Stuart-Smith** has recently moved house and in reorganising his library finds he has duplicates of some Edward Thomas first (or early) editions, which he is offering for sale to members of the Fellowship. These include *Cloud Castle*, *Horae Solitariae*, *Light and Twilight*, *Oxford*, *Richard Jefferies*, *The Tenth Muse* and *Windsor Castle*. For a full list of books, please contact [stephen@enitharmon.co.uk](mailto:stephen@enitharmon.co.uk), 020 7430 0844.

**Guy Cuthbertson** was a Moore Institute Visiting Research Fellow at the National University of Ireland, Galway, during 2015-16, working on Edward Thomas and Ireland. During his time there, he gave a talk entitled "'It's a Long, Long Way": Edward Thomas, Ireland and the First World War'.

**Melissa Harrison's** *Summer: An Anthology for the Changing Seasons* was published on 19 May 2016. *Autumn: An Anthology for the Changing Seasons* was published on 25 August 2016. Her *Rain: Four Walks in English Weather* was published on 3 March 2016.

**John Lewis-Stempel's** *Green Islands: An Anthology of British Nature Writing* will be published on 15 November 2016.

**David Orr's** *The Road Not Taken: Finding America in the Poem Everyone Loves and Almost Everyone Gets Wrong*, a cultural biography of Robert Frost's poem, was published by Penguin on 18 August 2015 and is now available in paperback.

**It is Easy to be Dead**, a play about Charles Hamilton Sorley, was given its premiere at Finborough Theatre in June.

**Simon Armitage**, Professor of Poetry at Oxford, has recently published *Still*, a sequence of poems created in response to 26 panoramic photographs of battlefields associated with the Battle of the Somme, chosen from archives at the Imperial War Museums. The thirty poems are versions of *The Georgics* by Virgil. As Armitage writes in his introduction, '*There are many thousands of aerial and reconnaissance photographs of the First World War that offer an unfamiliar and rarely-seen visual perspective of the conflict. Map-like images of cratered fields and hieroglyphic trench patterns; dreamlike "obliques" showing landscapes of sepia-toned towns and ghostly villages; panoramas of apparently tranquil meadows and country lanes that disguise more macabre details. These photographs will form a physical and atmospheric backdrop to poems that explore events and locations significant to the Somme Offensive. The result is a dialogue between military documents of the day and the poetic responses they provoke one hundred years later.*' *Still*, published at £30 by Enitharmon Press ([www.enitharmon.co.uk](http://www.enitharmon.co.uk), 020 7430 0844), is in a large-scale landscape format with introductory texts, contemporary maps, fold-outs and decorated endpapers. It has been described in the *Financial Times* as 'a brilliant work of art'.

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