

# BITS AND PIECES

## POETRY CORNER

The following poem, written between 1719 and 1727, may be the first eulogy in verse to the magic lantern. Its author, Walter Titley (1700–68), wrote this ode while he was a student at Cambridge, where he obtained a BA in 1722 and an MA in 1726. During his time at King's College he lodged at the house of Bishop Atterbury, acting as tutor to the prelate's son. Maybe it was in this household that Titley saw his first lantern show, and was inspired to put pen to paper. He wrote in Latin; this translation is by Henry Travers (fl. 1731–54) from his 1731 book *Miscellaneous Poems and Translations*.

On graduating Titley was offered an elevated position as First Secretary to the British Embassy in Turin, and eventually became His Majesty's Envoy at the Court of Denmark. According to the *European Magazine* of November 1803, in which this translation also appeared, Titley's

'plan of life, as laid down by himself, was to prosecute his studies at Cambridge til he should be thirty, from thirty to sixty to be employed in public business, at sixty to retire and return to college, for which purpose he would keep his fellowship.'

He adhered to this plan until his retirement, when he thought better of the return to Cambridge and remained in Copenhagen, where 'he lived and died, greatly respected and lamented by all ranks of people'.

Mervyn Heard

### THE MAGIC LANTERN

I sing the forms which magic powers impart  
The thin creation of delusive art;  
And thro' the ambient gloom bright shapes display  
Hid from the sun nor conscious of the day  
Expand the sportive scene, the lantern show,  
No gleam of day must thro' the darkness glow;  
The fleeting forms abhor the envious light  
Love the brown shade and only live by night.  
Darkling and silent in her lonely cell  
The sorceress thus exerts her mystic spell  
Calls forth the spectres and unpeoples hell;  
But when the morn unfolds her purple ray  
Start the pale ghosts and fly approaching day.  
See thro' the gloom the fiery splendour fall  
Glare the red lens around the dusky wall;  
'Tis thus the sanguine ray of Cynthia streams  
When magic spells obstruct her lab'ring beams,  
And shivering ghosts from earth's reluctant womb,  
Formed by Thessalian charms, glide round the gaping tomb.  
Of various forms an incoherent train  
Fills the bright orb, and crowds the pictur'd plain;  
Here with rude pomp the satire shapes advance,  
Frisk with their tails and lead the sylvan dance;  
A dread grimace doth ev'ry look defile  
And each grins horribly a ghastly smile;  
No more my eyes the uncouth scene pursue,  
A lovelier prospect rises to my view;  
Here sceptred monarchs glare in bright array  
There blooming maids in beauteous lustre play.  
Next these the Knight who lends vindictive aid;  
What shape more worthy to succeed the maid?

In hostile mood the warrior wights appear,  
Fierce at the dragon flies the conquering spear;  
In vain his tongue emits envenomed fires;  
See where his flaming crest is doom'd to feel  
An arm victorious and resistless steel.  
Blest champion! but how soon the conquest flies!  
How soon the transient pomp eludes our eyes!  
To the thin air the fading warrior yield,  
And glide reluctant from the painted field.  
Far hence, ye forms of war — see Bacchus shine,  
His rosy cheeks proclaim the God of wine,  
And round his head the purple clusters twine.  
How soon the airy shade our hopes destroys!  
So fleets the golden dream of human joys.  
Next grins a form of pallid horror full,  
Emblem of dreary death a lifeless skull;  
The graceful cheeks no graceful beauties wear;  
The barren scalps despoiled of waving hair;  
A tottering tooth the fractured jaws between,  
Hangs dismally alone; no eyes are seen,  
But all's a dark vacuity within.  
Soon from our sight Death's frightful image flies,  
Whose place a shape more terrible supplies;  
Slow thro' the darkness stalks a baleful sprite,  
No drearier phantom of ill-fated Night  
Haunts the sad slumbers of some lonely dame,  
That nods delirious o'er th' expiring flame;  
When dimly blue the conscious lamps appear,  
And clank of chains proclaims the spectre near:  
Down from its head the mournful shroud depends,  
Beneath its feet the plaited garment ends;  
The ghastly face a dismal paleness wears;  
The trembling hand a livid taper bears.  
Far off, advised ye timorous virgins fly,  
Far from the terrible scene avert your eye;  
In soft repose, the horrid ghost will seem  
To haunt your slumbers, and revive in dream;  
Suffused with trickling sweat, you'll strive in vain,  
With circling arms, some friendly youth to gain;  
Bewail your lonely bed with wild affright,  
And dread the lengthened hours of the night.  
Such are the forms the crowded prospect shows:  
But if too far the long reflection glows,  
Round the bright orb a dim confusion plays,  
And a wild mass of undistinguished rays.  
So tintured canvas rude in ev'ry part,  
Show the first traces of the pencil's art;  
Scarce can our eyes discern the dubious plan,  
And gain some faint resemblance of a man.  
Now let the splendour of returning light  
Strike thro' the artificial shades of night;  
Lo! the strong flame the airy phantoms shun,  
Fade in the blaze and die before the sun.  
Thus when the limbs recline in soft repose  
With various forms the wakeful fancy glows;  
Men, beasts and birds, an unconnected train,  
Compose the motley vision of the brain;  
Here in long order fun'ral torches gleam,  
There royal triumphs gild the pompous dream.  
When lo! the purple blush of morning light,  
From the opening eye dispels the shades of night;  
The brightened scenes their usual aspect wear,  
And the false dream dissolves in shapeless air.

### THE MISSIONARY (AND IMPERIAL) LANTERN

Two extracts from *In Journeying Oft: Chapters by Various Missionaries on Travelling in Foreign Lands* (London: Church Missionary Society, 1900).

From chapter 2, 'Among the Coolies in Ceylon', by Reverend W. Welchman:

In districts where there are schools he spends a happy hour or so with the children, and after seeing as many of the English planters as possible, arrives about four or five o'clock at the estate at which he has decided to spend the night. He has many opportunities of speaking to the coolies in their homes in the evenings, and very often it is possible to show the missionary lantern either in the store or in the open air. This is always very popular with the coolies, who will stay for hours looking at the pictures and listening to the account of the life and death of Jesus. They always show great interest, and often ask for books, and say that they want to know more of Him of whom they have heard.

Reverend Welchman travelled round Ceylon (Sri Lanka) visiting the various tea plantations on horseback. We are not told if his lantern travelled with him, but it seems likely.

From chapter 7, 'A Mission Cruiser of the China Coast', by Reverend H.M. Eyton-Jones:

After supper, out again, and back on board. A white sheet is spread over the fore sail, and as the lantern flashes the pictures on the screen, the place is again agog to see the marvel. Surely this is a day of wonders to simple folk. For the first time in their lives they may listen to a lantern lecture on the life of Christ, as they stand on the shore.

Reverend Eyton-Jones's parish was based at Fuh-Ning, China, and extended 200 miles along the coast. His 'cruiser' was a Chinese Sampan, which he used to travel about his large parish.

Brian Widdowson

## ROBERTSON IN MADRID: AN ADDITIONAL NOTE

The anonymous Spanish article on Robertson's phantasmagoria which appeared in translation in the last edition of the *NMLJ*, an extract from a rare booklet, *Noticias Curiosas*, published in Madrid in 1821, gave rise to some speculation as to its authorship. There were indications that it could have been written in collaboration with Robertson himself, to advertise his public shows in Madrid; however, it seemed unlikely to be a translation from the French, and neither did it resemble the showman's *Memoirs*, published in 1833. Owing to the antiquity and unique nature of the booklet, any tentative identification of the author, 'An Enthusiast of White Magic', seemed destined to be unverifiable.

The only clue lay in his references to the Royal Physics Cabinet, until now completely lost and forgotten, for which no bibliographical sources now exist. It seemed safe to assume that because of the author's familiarity with the objects in the royal cabinet he must have been a member of the Spanish court, perhaps employed in the cabinet itself. A Royal Physics Cabinet, whose existence appears to have escaped the notice of Spanish scholars, was indeed worthy of investigation. After some research in the Archives of the Royal Palace in Madrid, I located documents referring to the cabinet and an inventory drawn up by its director, one Don Juan Mieg. It was interesting to discover that numerous recreational and optical objects formed part of what was otherwise a formal physics cabinet, intended for educational purposes, with an impressive up-to-date library.

Through the Spanish National Archives and the Natural History Museum in Madrid I located further documents relating to the

cabinet and to Don Juan Mieg, which revealed that he wrote at least four books, all dealing with scientific disciplines: physics, chemistry and natural history. Finally, in a list of rare volumes kept in the library of the Ateneo Society in Madrid, I found another by Mieg, *A Wizard in Society*, published in 1839. The title suggested a text quite different from Mieg's scientific works.

It was rather unexpected to discover that a court scientist should risk his reputation with a book on popular science, or more precisely on sleight of hand, for the general public. Yet it was not a total surprise to find on the title page the quotation from Pliny that appears at the head of the first article in *Noticias Curiosas*: '*Est natura hominum novitatis avida*' (It is in man's nature to be avid for novelty), and the quotations from Horace in *Noticias Curiosas* also appear in the prologue of *A Wizard in Society*. Both works are without doubt in Mieg's style of writing; some sentences in *A Wizard in Society* are repeated word for word from *Noticias Curiosas*, written nearly twenty years before.

Why Mieg should have published *Noticias Curiosas* anonymously, whilst *A Wizard in Society* bears his name, may be explained by the fact that in 1821, when *Noticias Curiosas* appeared, he had not been long established in his post. Perhaps he feared that his scientific credibility might be questioned by a rival, since it was not a strictly scientific text, whereas by 1839 he had been the highly respected director of the Royal Physics Cabinet for over twenty years. Whether or not *A Wizard in Society* sold well, to my knowledge there are no further copies extant. The Ateneo Society copy is inscribed, in the scientist's neat handwriting, '*ex libris Mieg*'.

Wendy Bird

## NEWTON & CO.

A couple of items of correspondence from the London lantern and slide suppliers Newton & Co., dated 1931 and 1932, have recently come to light. Although this company survived until after World War II, little detail is known of their activities as one of the last twentieth-century survivors of the slide manufacturing and supply trades. The correspondence was addressed to one W. Glanvill Mason, of Chatham, Kent, who appears to have been a lanternist or local supplier hiring slides from Newton. It consists of a typed letter on the company's stationery, reproduced here, and a postcard, pre-printed on the correspondence side with similar information about the company.

The letterhead contains a number of interesting details, including the dubious claim to have been 'Established over 200 years' (in the 1930s the correct figure was probably between 80 and 90). In 1931 the address of the company's 'Lantern Slide Gallery' was given as 43 Museum Street, London WC1. This was probably their last address, to which they moved in the late 1920s, and represents a slight retrenchment compared to their more elaborate previous premises at 37 King Street, Covent Garden. There is also a reference to a 'Lantern Slide Works and Photographic Studios' in South Kensington – more knowledge about the history of these premises might tell us something about Newton's changing fortunes.

The company rather grandly describes itself as 'Lantern Slide Publishers and Manufacturers, Diagram Makers, Scientific and Technical Photographers, and Scientific Instrument Makers, Publishers of Books and Art Reproductions'. The prominence given to lantern slide manufacture compared to their other activities might seem surprising so late in the commercial slide trade, but perhaps gives an indication of Newton's almost complete domination of the British slide market by this period. The letterhead makes much of the company's appointments to 'English Sovereigns continuously for over Sixty Years', as well as to Government departments and other institutions. There is also a list of 'Diplomas of Honour and Prize Medals', the earliest of which is from the Great Exhibition of 1851, at which Newton probably exhibited scientific instruments rather than magic lanterns.

The letter to Mason (signed by M. Fells, who is in the list of directors on the letterhead), closes with an interesting observation:

*We hope you will find that interest in lantern work will revive in your*

ESTABLISHED OVER 200 YEARS

DIPLOMAS OF HONOUR AND PRIZE MEDALS, 1851, 1862, 1869, 1878, 1884, 1885, 1893, 1894, 1904

CHAIRMAN & GOVERNING DIRECTOR  
H. C. NEWTON.

DIRECTORS  
A. J. BATHURST  
M. FELLS  
V. E. GRANGE  
F. H. MALL

Holders of Appointments to the English Sovereigns continuously for over Sixty Years.

NEWTON & CO., LTD.,  
LATE OF  
NEWTON & Co.,  
(FORMERLY OF 3 FLEET STREET, E.C. AND 37 KING STREET, W.C.1)

Lantern Slide Publishers and Manufacturers,  
Diagram Makers,  
Scientific and Technical Photographers,  
and Scientific Instrument Makers  
Publishers of Books and Art Reproductions

By Special Appointment to His Majesty King George V.  
HIS LATE MAJESTY KING EDWARD VII.  
HER LATE MAJESTY QUEEN VICTORIA.  
HIS LATE R.H. THE PRINCE CONSORT.

THE ADMIRALTY, WAR DEPARTMENT, THE INDIAN AND FOREIGN GOVERNMENTS,  
THE BOARD OF EDUCATION, SOUTH KENSINGTON, ETC.

By Special Appointment,  
TO THE ROYAL INSTITUTION OF GREAT BRITAIN

LANTERN SLIDE GALLERY,  
43, Museum Street,  
LONDON, W.C.1.

3rd November, 1931.

W. C. Mason, Esq.,  
"Barnvale",  
27 Maidstone Road,  
Shepton.

Dear Sir,

We thank you for your letter and have pleasure in sending sections 2 and 3 of the catalogue. We hope your customer will be able to make a suitable choice from various groups and will await your instructions.

The terms and conditions of hire are exactly the same as before and you will find full details on the enclosed leaflet.

We are also sending particulars of the Oberammergau Passion Play slides representing the 1930 Play. We have a number

*own district, as from our experience here it would seem that in spite of the publicity given to films the 'still' picture more than holds its own at the present time, and indeed occupies an important place in all educational activities. We are constantly adding to our stock in an endeavour to maintain an adequate supply.*

The key words here are probably 'educational activities', an area in which Newton had always specialised, but the idea that lantern slide exhibition was in some way holding off the challenge of the 1930s cinema has to be seen as something like wishful thinking!

RC, with thanks to Mark Butterworth