



Cotgrave and District U3A

Keeping in Touch 19

We began last week's Letter with a limerick about a young lady from Kew so it was something of a coincidence that, looking idly through 'Verse and Worse', I should stumble upon yet another resident of that same locality. I wonder if they might ever meet?

There was a young curate of Kew
Who kept a Tom cat in a pew.
He taught it to speak
Alphabetical Greek
But it never got further than μ (mew).

Langar

However, I know that you are all eager to get down to the serious bit of this week's Letter, so here goes:



As I warned you last week, the village of Langar is famous, among many other things, for the fact that Samuel Butler was born in the old rectory on Church Lane on 4th December 1835.

He was the eldest son of the Rector, Thomas Butler and his wife Fanny. They also had a younger son Thomas and two daughters. Our photograph shows the family posing for a very Victorian family gathering which includes Tom's wife Etta. It was taken in 1865, when Samuel was thirty years of age.

To say that they look miserable would probably be an understatement and this is consistent with Samuel's later account of family life in the shape of his semi-autobiographical book 'The Way of All Flesh'. He is also quoted as saying that the only member of his family with whom he did *not* quarrel was another son William who died at the age of six months!

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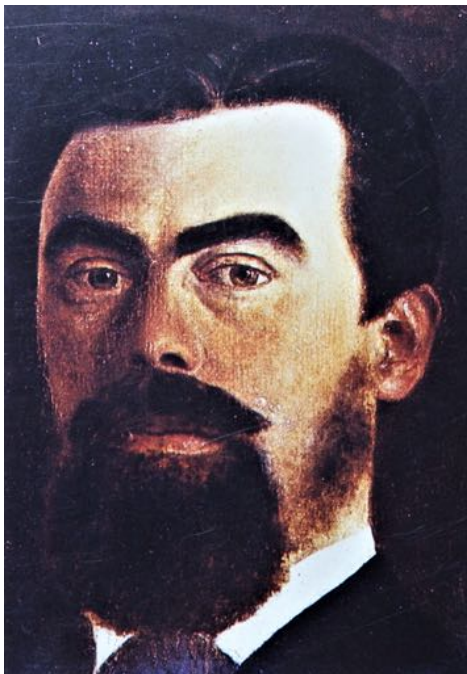
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Rev Thomas Butler.

Samuel's grandfather Dr Samuel Butler had been headmaster of a great Victorian public school at Shrewsbury, where he ran an extremely tough disciplinary regime, based on the belief that sparing the rod spoiled the child. Thomas was 'toughened' by a period as a student there and apparently followed a very similar line with his own children. Samuel and he took a mutual dislike to one another and, though his father succeeded in giving him a rapid educational start in life, he also contrived to alienate him almost totally. It was assumed that Samuel would follow his father into the priesthood but Samuel was having nothing of it – he wished to be an artist, while his father reckoned painting to be a complete waste of time! After a certain amount of acrimonious exchange, it was decided that Samuel would depart from English shores and become a sheep farmer in New

Zealand – a somewhat surprising compromise. In providing the funds for this enterprise, Thomas probably believed that the experience would 'bring him to his senses' and persuade him to return to Langar and take up Holy Orders. In the event, Samuel proved to be a rather successful sheep farmer and was able to record a considerable financial profit before returning to England in 1864.



However, he did not return to Langar but took up residence in London, where he remained for the rest of his life. He then proceeded with his artistic career, contriving to have a number of his paintings accepted for Royal Academy Exhibitions. We show one of his several self-portraits and a retrospective of 'Family Prayers' in the living room in the Langar rectory.



At the same time he also took up writing and musical composition, having developed an intense love for Handel's music. However, it was his writing which made his name. Firstly, came 'The Way of All Flesh', though he held it back from publication until after his death, knowing, one assumes, that it would create a major stir within the Butler family. Secondly came his best remembered book, 'Erewhon' ('Nowhere' almost backwards!) in which he criticised the Christian religion, thus finalising the break with his father! He also became seriously involved with the controversy surrounding Charles Darwin's book 'Origin of Species' – in spite of having declared himself to be an atheist, he nevertheless denied the legitimacy of Darwin's theory of Evolution. It seemed that he was determined to disagree with whatever happened to be the accepted view on any particular topic!

Returning to Langar and Thomas Butler, we should note that Thomas made a major contribution to village life, in particular the total refurbishment of St Andrew's Church. As was often the case with village churches in the early nineteenth century, St Andrew's was in a poor state of repair when Thomas became Rector. As was also typical of village rectors at that time, Thomas was an extremely rich man – just take a look at his luxurious rectory! (In the 1861 Census, for example, the Cotgrave Rector Evelyn Hardolph Harcourt Vernon lived in the 'New Rectory' together with his wife, six children, a Governess and seven servants!). To Thomas' credit, however, he spent a great deal of his own money on rebuilding the church as he imagined it to have been in mediaeval times. Apparently, the only bit of St Andrews that he *didn't* rebuild was the north transept. He also devoted his efforts to many other good deeds around the village, including the establishment of the 'National School' in 1840, a building architecturally similar to our Church School in Cotgrave, built some twenty-three years later. The Langar school was a particularly early example of such Victorian school buildings.



(As an aside, we may note that the 'National Society' was set up in 1811 with the aim of establishing a 'National School' in every Parish to provide an education for poor children, based on the teachings of the Church of England.)

Finally (and what a relief?) we may briefly return to our main subject Samuel Butler, who, when he died in 1902, left behind a number of quotable quotes. One such is particularly apt for our present Covid-19 situation:

"Life is the art of drawing sufficient conclusions from insufficient premises."

A couple more will suffice:

"Life is like playing a violin solo in public and learning the instrument as one goes on."

"Though God cannot alter the past, historians can." (But would we even dream of such a thing?)

That seems to be a suitable point at which to leave our historical wanderings.

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Art



We've already seen a couple of examples of Samuel Butler's painting but I much prefer the following examples from our Art Group. As with last week's, they were sent in by Don Whitaker – thanks once again Don.



By way of contrast, I was struck by this photograph of a piece of unusual sculpture which is on display in the Tate Gallery at St Ives in Cornwall. It is by a Russian artist called Naum Gabo (no, I hadn't heard of him either!) and is made (can you believe?) from sheets of rusting steel. As the Times critic says, the spaces between the sheets are as important as the sheets themselves. Apparently, Gabo was fascinated by the idea of 'negative space' but, whether you go along with such a concept, or not, there is certainly much interest in the way the solid bits and the spaces work together.



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Puzzle Corner

We begin with the answers to Sue Hillyard's song extract questions of last week.

We have included the original questions which was "20 extracts from well known songs....can you name all of them", *in blue*

1. I'll be your sweetheart *Bluebells I've gathered*
2. Mairi's Wedding *Bright her eye as any star*
3. Mountains of Mourne *Took a hand at this digging for gold*
4. The Rose *Love, it is a flower*
5. 76 Trombones *There were more than a thousand reeds*
6. Sound of Silence *Narrow streets of cobblestone*
7. Jeepers Creepers *Got to put my cheaters on*
8. Tulips from Amsterdam *These empty arms of mine*
9. On the Sunny Side of the Street *I used to walk in the shade*
10. Feed the birds *All around the cathedral*
11. If I ruled the world *Every heart would have a new song to sing*
12. The Wild Rover *And it's no, nay, never*
13. Raindrops keep falling on my head *Sleeping on the job*
14. Hey Jude *Na na na nah, na na na nah*
15. Byebye love *I sure am blue*
16. Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious *The biggest word you ever heard*
17. I wanna be like you *And stroll right into town*
18. Messing about on the river *There are tillers and rudders and anchors and cleats*
19. Money makes the world go round *You can pay for a gay escapade*
20. All that jazz! *Where the gin is cold*

Then, we are fortunate in having another song title quiz from Paul Childs – thanks Paul. Answers, as usual, next week.

Musical pop quiz - Girls names

- 1) Ritchie Valens sang a sorrowful song about whom?
- 2) Who were the Four Pennies singing about whom ?
- 3) Neil Diamond sang a sweet song about whom ?
- 4) Frankie Laine belted out the devil of a song about?
- 5) Nat King Cole sang about a famous painting?
- 6) Paul Anka wrote and recorded this famous early pop hit?
- 7) Frank Ifield singing about a girl 'down under'?
- 8) West Side Story featured a girl called ?
- 9) Little Richard sang about whom?
- 10) The Beatles sang about her 'in the sky'?
- 11) Buddy Holly had hits singing about this girl?
- 12) The Batchelors had a hit with this girl's name?

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Cats

The limerick about a cat with which we began this week's Letter reminded me first of that lovely photograph from Lesley Sinclair in last week's Letter then that I had once written an article about cats for the Cross Magazine. That was in 2010 but it still has relevance today, so here it is:

Cats have been in the news quite a lot lately and I can't help thinking about the many ways in which these severely independent animals affect and influence our lives. First of all, there was that lovely story about the English cricketer, Graeme Swann who, having spun the Pakistani team to yet another Test Match defeat, was apprehended by Nottinghamshire police for speeding in West Bridgford. He was, he claimed, en route to some suitable purveyor of hardware in search of a screwdriver with which to rescue his cat from incarceration beneath the floor of his West Bridgford house and every cat lover will understand the urgency of such an errand. How often does one's feline companion climb a particularly inaccessible tree or contrive to reach some impossible corner of the house roof, then mew piteously for assistance with the nigh-on impossible descent? Poor Swann's cat apparently managed to engineer a somewhat different version of this familiar tragedy but the plight of the ever-vulnerable owner was none the less lamentable. Yet another illustration of the manner in which our cats control our lives – but spare a brief thought, at least, for the sad fact that here was a household not only bereft of the comfort of its incumbent moggy but, what is more, bereft of such a basic, everyday implement as a screwdriver with which to release it. Being an inveterate collector of tools, myself, I find it almost impossible to imagine such a situation. One can only wonder whether Nottinghamshire police may find it similarly impossible! But I say “good luck” to another cat lover – I very much hope he gets off.

The second of these recent cat references is of an altogether different flavour. Who, indeed, has failed to learn with horror of the dreadful crime of poor Mary Bale who dropped a cat into a wheely-bin and closed the lid on it. In an instant she qualified for the soubriquet of ‘most hated woman in England’. The whole army of cat lovers united to condemn her for such an immoral act towards one of Nature's vulnerable creatures. Poor harmless moggy – what had it done to deserve such treatment? I know that cats can find ways of annoying us humans when they feel aggrieved with our lack of feline understanding but this was surely going too far, no matter how much of a nuisance it made of itself. I find it hard to feel sympathy for Mary Bale – I'm not at all sure I want her to get off.

Returning to happier themes, I read only yesterday (30th August) of the Coventry cat which took the local bus into town, not only without its owner's permission but also without buying a ticket. What was to be done about that, one wonders? What was actually done was quite remarkable. Some inspired member of transport staff was able to employ modern technology to plot (in reverse) the trail of cat paw-marks and trace them back to the cat's home. A very relieved owner was thereby enabled to reclaim a much missed moggy and, so I believe, the cat in question was then issued with a bus pass (for a bus puss?) in case it felt like repeating the journey on another day. As I say, cats have us well and truly under their control. Would we react like that if it had been a child, I wonder?

T S Eliot, in his wonderful little book ‘Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats’ has a poem about the naming of cats and I am immediately reminded of the pair of cats belonging to an old cricketing friend of mine. He happens to be a lover of both cats and classical music so his cats rejoice in the names of Clara and Fanny – both names that one can shout effectively

when there is need to call them home but chosen, I understand, in honour of Clara Schumann (wife to Robert Schumann) and Fanny Mendelssohn (sister to Felix Mendelssohn). They are unique in my experience of cat quirkiness, in following him every morning on his walk to the local shops to buy the family newspaper. Going for walks, I always thought, was a practice pertaining only to dogs – I know of no other cats given to such ambulatory tendencies but it takes all sorts to make a world, of course.

My own favourite cat has been dead for many years so I have to take comfort from ‘Old Possum’s’ moggies*. My cat, I have to admit, was a little bit like ‘The Old Gumbie Cat’:

‘Her coat is of the tabby kind, with tiger stripes and leopard spots,
All day she sits upon the stair or on the steps or on the mat:
She sits and sits and sits and sits – and that’s what makes a Gumbie Cat’

But she had a lovely nature. She could even put up with me.

I suppose my favourite cat of all cats must be Macavity: The Mystery Cat, of whom there is room for no more than a brief extract:

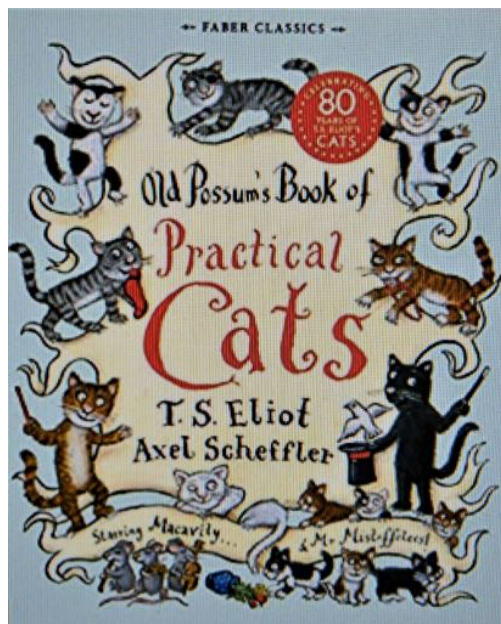
‘Macavity, Macavity, there’s no one like Macavity,
For he’s a fiend in feline shape, a monster of depravity.
You may meet him in a by-street, you may meet him in the square -
But when a crime’s discovered, then *Macavity’s not there!*’

I can really recommend the rest. If you can’t find it in Waterstone’s, it’s certainly available from Amazon. Happy reading.

John Orton

*PS. If you would like a copy of T S Elliot’s masterpiece it could cost you as much as £800 for a First Edition but about £8 for a paperback.

Does anyone remember, by the way, what did happen over Graeme Swann’s ‘Speeding’ charge? I have no recollection at all – nor for what became of Mary Bale.



There’s a new edition of T S Elliot’s ‘Old Possum’s Book of Practical Cats’ in which (as the Amazon advertising adjunct has it, “You may meet magical Mr Mistoffelees, sleepy old Deuteronomy and curious Rum Tum Tugger but you’ll be lucky to meet Macavity because *Macavity isn’t there!*”

Creative Writing

This week's contribution from the Creative Writing group is by Elsie Warby and makes use of the self-same set of words that motivated Chris Tomblin's article, last week

Using words: Leaving, van, nature, corset, brand new £20 note, sundial.

I hadn't been to an auction before but regularly watched 'Bargain Hunt'. I always thought I could do better than the contestants at estimating the value of the wide range of items. Of course, I could have put my money where my mouth is and apply to go on the show, but that wasn't in my nature, I was too nervous and apprehensive about making a fool of myself.

Then one day I saw on Facebook that Bargain Hunt was coming soon to our local auction house. This would be an opportunity to watch the show being filmed and maybe even get to see myself on television. My best friend Emma was eager to come with me, like me she enjoyed the show but didn't want to take part.

We arrived early to give us time to browse before the auction got underway. Neither of us intended buying anything but just in case something caught our eye we both registered and picked up a bidding ticket and auction catalogue. We also withdrew £100 each, in brand new £20 notes, from the cash machine, in order to ensure we didn't spend any more than that.

We wandered around trying to guess which were the 'Bargain Hunt' items. Emma spotted a toy 'Dinky' van with its box, interesting but not something we wanted. Then I spotted a surprising item, an Edwardian whalebone corset. This looked to be a contender but again something we would definitely not want to purchase! Then I did see an item that I just had to have. It was a rusty metal sundial which I could use in my garden. The guide price was £20 to £30, well within my budget.

Emma and I settled ourselves in a position where we had a good view of the show's contestants and their experts. The auction began and bidding was brisk. Then the 'red team' took up position so we would now see what their items were. The first object was the toy van which sold for a healthy £50, the delighted reactions clearly showed they had made a profit on that. Next came the corset, would anyone bid? The price dropped down to £10, no one was bidding. When the auctioneer asked for a fiver to my surprise Emma's hand shot up. "Sold to the lady in the flowered top." The disappointed groans of the red team showed they'd clearly paid a lot more for it.

I didn't have time to ask Emma why on earth she'd bought the corset as the next item was my longed-for sundial. The auctioneer asked for £50 then went down to £30, £20 then £10. I nervously put my hand up, would anyone else bid? To my surprise the gavel went down, it was mine! Again the red team looked devastated, they must have made another loss.

We hung around to see the highs and lows of the rest of the [auction](#) although we knew we wouldn't know the results until the show was broadcast in a few weeks. By now everyone was leaving so Emma and I went to pay for and collect our surprising auction purchases. We loaded up my car and headed home.

I was dying to know why Emma had bid for the Edwardian corset.

"I couldn't resist the chance to appear on tv and at the last minute I thought I'd bid as it had gone down to £5" she told me. "It might come in useful for fancy dress parties."

Several weeks passed and then the day came when the show was broadcast. I searched the audience and was able to see both me and Emma winning the bidding. We were correct in thinking the contestants had paid over the odds for our items. They'd paid £50 for my sundial and £30 for the corset so we were the ones who'd acquired a bargain.

Emma did wear the corset for a fancy-dress party but, not surprisingly, found it very uncomfortable so she has donated it to the local amateur theatre group who agreed it was a useful addition to their period costumes. I cleaned up the sundial and gave it a fresh coat of paint. It sits perfectly in the sunny corner of my garden and tells the time when the sun shines. Everyone admires it and they are impressed with my bargain.

More Verse and Worse

I can't resist finishing with yet another snippet from 'Verse and Worse', the illustration being even better than the verse.

THE CRIME

On the first of September, one Sunday morn,
I shot a hen pheasant in standing corn
Without a licence. Contrive who can
Such a cluster of crimes against God and man!



Keep well and keep safe. See you next week,

John