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- 1 - Thomas Chatterton: Enigma - - - - Bert Smith
- 2 - A Lithograph and a
Woman - - - - - Robert D. Van Fossen

1 Thomas Chatterton: Enigma

One hundred and eighteen miles directly west of London lies the historic city of Bristol. Four or five centuries ago Bristol was of far greater importance perhaps than it is today. Maritime commerce made the City and it was from here that the Cabots set forth late in the 15th century on their voyage to the mainland of North America.

Bristol was still quite medieval in the 18th century. Only a few of its streets were paved and these with boulders or chunks of granite. Upper stories of houses jutted out over the streets, almost abutting those on the opposite side. There was, however, a striking contrast to this medieval scene as one came upon the cathedral and the many churches, for Bristol shared the architectural beauties of every English city in those bastions of Anglican worship.

Prominent among these churches was Saint Mary Redcliffe, built in the 13th century and long regarded as one of the finest examples of Perpendicular Gothic.

Like any institution that has survived the vicissitudes of feudal, fratricidal civil wars, and/or German bombings, St. Mary Redcliffe was rife with tradition. Brass plates on the interior walls served as markers to commemorate men and events. One of these plates related to the many benefactions of one John Canynge, five times Mayor of Bristol in the 15th century; Canynge, a merchant of wealth and culture, was interested in perpetuating the secular, ecclesiastical and literary inheritance of Bristol. Among those whom he had

endowed to gather and preserve this lore was a highly educated priest named Thomas Rowley. Rowley appears to have been a consecrated scholar who devoted many years of thoughtful toil to literary application. His writings, mostly poetic, included dramatic as well as historical subjects. At his death, his writings, inscribed on finest parchment, were stored in large chests over the north porch of the Church in what was known as the "muniment room". Here they had been allowed to gather the dust and dirt of the centuries.

For more than 125 years the Sextons of Saint Mary Redcliffe had been held uninterruptedly and in direct line, by the Chatterton family, the appointments having passed from father to son in almost feudal procession. This sinecure was broken in the mid-18th century when one Thomas Chatterton preferred to be a school teacher rather than a sexton. This rather improvident and intemperant school-master had married one sixteen-year old Sarah Young in 1748 and to them a few months later had been born a daughter. In the summer of 1752 this new father had died and the following November 20, a post-humous son was born whom his Mother named Thomas in honor of his deceased school-master Father.

When this young boy was but two or three years of age he had developed traits of shy moodiness. At about age five he was sent to the school where his father had been a teacher but within a few weeks the then-teacher brought him home with the assertion that it was a waste of time and money to send him to school as "the child had no competence to learn". This was distressing news for the young widowed mother who knew that there had been some instances of insanity in the family and feared that her last-born might prove to become an idiot; she probably realizing that the line between genius and insanity is immeasurably small.

A few weeks after this the widow Chatterton noticed that the child was greatly impressed with the illumined capital letters on an old french music manuscript and she immediately under took to

teach him his alphabet, a feat which he accomplished in just a few weeks. She then undertook to teach him to read, first from an old black-letter Bible and from one or two other large-type volumes left by his Father. Young Thomas soon acquired such a facility for reading as to astonish his Mother and all those about him. Such was his hunger for books that he read from the time he awakened, which was early, until time to go to bed at night, seldom stopping for food. Henceforth he seemed to live for the pleasure of reading.

As he gazed out the window of his garret room, at the steep, angular pinnacles of Redcliffe Church, directly across the street from his Mother's humble cottage, the church itself took on an aura of mystery. Tolerated by a kindly sexton he began to explore the nooks, crannies and recesses of the then four hundred year old church; here he discovered the brass plates, sunken into the walls, telling of John Canynge and his protege, Father Rowley, and subsequently he came across the muniment room which contained that which was to be the source of the romantic adventures that pointed the years ahead.

Years before, in 1727, a question had arisen in a meeting of the Church vestry as to certain documents having to do with certain deeds, (or perhaps mis-deeds), and it had been necessary to refer to the old archives in the muniment room. Not only were the old chests locked but also were bound with metal strapping. The many keys had vanished with the effects of sextons ages past, and it had been necessary to ruthlessly chop the chests apart. After finding what they had wanted to preserve, (or perhaps destroy) the remaining mouldy contents had been left scattered promiscuously across the dusty floor in a shambles of disorder, and thus young Thomas found stacks and heaps of parchments, covered with an illegible manuscript. Many were tattered and torn and some had undoubtedly fed the many rats with which the wharf cities of England were populated. Once he had removed the dirt and grime from the parchments this precocious youngster's intellect told him that some antiquarian value must be attached which, in

wild imagination, he associated with the romantic legends of Rowley. He was permitted to carry away armloads of these old parchments which he deposited in his own garret room, where he long meditated on that which he was now convinced were precious fragments.

A wealthy merchant named Colston had lately established a "Blue Coat" school for promising sons of indigent families. This school was patterned after Christ Hospital School in London, made famous in the following generation by such literary names as Coleridge and Lamb. The regimen of the school was strict, narrow but not unkind. The boys lived at the school, day and night, with the exception of Saturdays when they were free from noon until eight in the evening. Sarah Chatterton's son was not too enthusiastic about the routine that interfered with his studies of the Rowley parchments and his concomitant dreams of chivalry, knighthood and medieval lore. However, he had matured far beyond his years and was able to successfully fulfill the requirements of his six year course, picking up in addition a smattering of Latin, Astrology, and a study of those epochs and epics of the 15th century with their romantic fantasies.

In the little spare time he had he studied an old Saxon glossary, and deciphered and transcribed the old English in which the parchments were written.

By the combination of a rather devious mind, a fantastic imagination and undoubted ability he began to issue poems, long narratives, a history presumably transcribed from the Rowley parchments and other literary endeavors. True, they were forgeries, written by himself and draped with the trappings of the medieval poet-priest; they were probably originally undertaken as a hoax by which he hoped to attain status and recognition, but they marked the beginnings of an epoch that shaped his eventual destiny in the brief span of life remaining to him.

He then concocted an elaborate romance,

AELIA, based on annals of the old Saxons, and portraying the national customs of the valiant warriors in their contests with the Danes, and including the chivalry, loyalty and virtues which history has associated with them. This work he attempted to sell to Dodsley, the publisher, but to no avail.

During these middle years of the 18th century Horace Walpole epitomized English aristocracy in both its glory and its superficiality. On his private press at Strawberry Hill Walpole published the writings of many of his friends whom he wished to honor. Chatterton's quick imagination visualized the possibility of Walpole as a patron through whom the Chatterton forgeries could be brought before the world of letters.

Under the guise of offering contributions toward a future edition of Walpole's ANECDOTES OF PAINTING, Chatterton forwarded to him a bundle of manuscripts, all of which were identified by him as transcriptions of Rowley parchments.

Walpole's reaction was enthusiastic and prompt. Assuming that his correspondent was a "gentleman of elegant leisure" he replied effusively, offering to print the Rowley poems in their entirety if Chatterton would forward the originals to him. This, of course, the boy was unable to do, and when these were not forthcoming, and later correspondence proved the sender of the earlier manuscripts was but a sixteen year old boy, Walpole submitted those manuscripts for the expert criticism of Thomas Gray, the author of the ELEGY, and Mr. Gray immediately recognized the inconsistencies of style, vocabulary and customs and informed Walpole of his findings, admitting however, that they were cleverly imitative of old English style and subject matter.

Young Chatterton now realized that the profession of literature, as such, was a poor source of income to provide the necessities of the inner man. After all, he did live 200 years before the act of androgynation and the culbating exercise" was permitted to be delineated on the printed page

through lurid descriptions using the old Anglo-Saxon four letter words.

Failing to find either publisher or patron, Chatterton now began to write for the radical journals now filled with expressions of invective and abuse of the monarchy and the administration. Never before had the attacks been so virulent, nor had London before seen such a flood of journals ready and anxious to accept contributions of this type from the pens of those competent to add fuel to the inferno of popular criticism against the Crown.

Chatterton submitted a number of letters to various Radical journals and their acceptance was prompt and enthusiastic, with many nebulous offers of employment in London.

Chatterton, now 17, left Bristol, never to see it again. On his arrival in London he went from one printing office after another and then began to work with his usual diligence in turning out the biting satire to castigate the administration. He lived in a garret room, rented from a Mrs. Angell. His satiric writings came to the attention of John Wilkes and the Lord Mayor, and an appointment was made for him to call upon the Lord Mayor the following week. However, on the eve of his appointment with the Lord Mayor this gentleman suddenly died and soon thereafter the King decided that the impudence of the radical press and its writers should be curbed. Publishers were arrested and charged with everything from disturbing the peace to treason, and the market for Chatterton's diatribes suddenly ceased.

He had been paid but a few shillings and pence for his work for the Radicals and as this meager source of income vanished, he was practically reduced to starvation. His over-powering pride would not permit him to return home, a failure, nor would it allow him to accept any invitations to dine.

On the corner, across from his lodgings was an apothecary's shop, owned by a man named Cross.

Chatterton had made his acquaintance and the kindly man had noticed that Chatterton was undernourished and had, on several occasions asked him to eat with his family, but un-bending pride was proof against kindness.

On August 27, 1770, Chatterton's body, fully clothed, was found stretched out on his bed in his garret, a suicide by arsenic mixed with water.

It is ironic that at the very moment of Chatterton's suicide a Doctor Fry of Saint Johns College, Cambridge, was en route to Bristol to investigate the Rowley tradition. What it might have meant to Chatterton had the inquiry been made a few weeks earlier gives rise to interesting speculation.

Within a year of his death his fame was already in the ascendant. Goldsmith, speaking at a meeting of the Royal Academy informed the meeting that he personally thought that this store of Rowley poems was beautiful and that, Walpole notwithstanding, thought them to be genuine. There was an edition of some of Chatterton's writings as early as 1777, with more editions published frequently until early in the following century when Robert Southey collaborated in assembling all of the works, with notes and comments.

Even though it is now generally agreed that the poems were fabrications, they continued to attract great interest. Coleridge studied Chatterton as did Blake and Shelley. Keats dedicated ENDYMION to his memory. Wordsworth and Rossetti praised him the more for having written poetry of his own inspiration that excelled anything written by the medieval priest.

At an age when boys of our day are more concerned with the obtainment of a drivers' license, it is difficult to visualize a childhood and youth such as Chattertons.

When we read his poetry, with its brilliant imagery and the smooth cadences of his verses; when

we analyze the depths of romance in his dramas, then reflect on the circumstances under which they were written, we are astounded at the blaze of imagination, the talent for expression which would have been acclaimed with glowing admiration in one twice his years.

The Literary World has never known another quite like Thomas Chatterton. There were abilities and depths within him that transcended the virtuosity of an uncanny pen.

Many studies have been made of Chatterton and his writings, and still, after two hundred years, scholars and playwrights still find inspiration in this strange boy and his strange life. The better of our modern psychologists would have had a fascinating study in the intricacies and enigmas of this THOMAS CHATTERTON- "Wonderful Boy".

Bert Smith

2

A Lithograph and a Woman

Since 1934 at Literary Club meetings I have hung my hat, as have other members, in the cloakroom of the club.

In that room there is a lithograph of the 1884 flood hanging on the south wall. The water is as clear as the water in Silver Springs, Florida, which is not the way it is when the Ohio is in flood.

However, that lithograph reminds me of an event which took place at the foot of Broadway and later had a major impact upon not only our community, but upon people all over the world.

The relief Steamer Josh V. Throop tied up at the foot of Broadway and flew for the first time in history a Red Cross flag on an inland waterway in the United States. The first flag had been flown in Danville, New York on land and preceded the action at Cincinnati by only a short

time. This, also, was the first time the Red Cross flag was flown in Cincinnati.

The "Association of the American Red Cross" itself had only been chartered under the laws of the District of Columbia on May 21 in 1881 with the blessing of President Garfield. Clara Barton was elected President.

Miss Barton joined the Josh V. Throop at the landing and with Captain Josiah V. Throop in command, started work.

Captain Throop had an iron red cross made and painted it red and hung it between the stacks.

Metropolitan Cincinnati was an anthill of activity. Every organization was engaged in raising money and working with all available resources to assist flood victims.

Clara Barton had a crew, a boat load of supplies and a set of principles. Her one sentence creed was "The Red Cross means not national aid for the needs of people, but the peoples aid for the needs of the nation."

To meet such emergencies as Clara Barton had foreseen, the Red Cross had drawn up in 1883 five general regulations or principles that became guide posts for years to come.

1. Never to solicit relief as such.
2. Never to pay salaries to officers but only to those employed to perform manual labor and special services.
3. To have money in readiness to start a relief operation, day or night, weekday, Sunday, or holiday.
4. To evaluate problems by first hand observation, and to make immediate and reliable reports to the country through the associated press, so that people could then contribute to the Red Cross relief work, if they wished.
5. To acknowledge directly every contribution, and to carry out directions and employ

material in the wisest, swiftest way possible that was also consistent with sound management.

Such principles allowed maximum action with minimum red tape and delay. By putting her own money on immediate call - she kept several thousand dollars in cash on hand at all times - Clara Barton proved she meant to lead the way. So she did. At Cincinnati, she and her field agent, Dr. Julian Hubbell, found the city afloat with many inhabitants being fed from boats through third story windows.

Practically every local organization, private and public, was engaged in fund raising and relief work but there was 400 miles of such distress along the river.

To make matters worse there was a cyclone which struck and uprooted trees, destroyed houses, making more people homeless without fire, food and adequate shelter.

On the railroad tracks were freight cars with tons of relief supplies - but what good would they do the marooned victims?

So the Josh V. Throop moved out on the river in zig-zag fashion the first Red Cross boat ever seen on American waters.

Moving from bank to bank, - from side to side - and village to village, - it unloaded fuel and supplies wherever people huddled together.

Reaching Cairo - five days later, it reloaded, returned and resupplied victims on the way.

A brief trip of the same kind followed on the Mississippi in another ship - The Mattie Bell.

However, Clara Barton returned and reloaded the Josh V. Throop because she could not leave the flood victims on the Ohio without meeting further needs. She loaded the ship with pine lumber,

precut windows and doors, groceries, tools and utensils. Hiring a skillful team of carpenters she explained her idea and set forth.

Picture, if you will, what happened hour after hour, day after day.

A strange ship steams up the river with a big iron cross, painted a brilliant red, hung high between its smoke stacks. The ship halts, turns and draws up to the nearest landing. A half dozen men leave the ship with building materials and begin putting up a small house. While they work, following Clara's carefully established procedures, others bring furniture ashore. Then follow bed and bedding, clothing, table and chairs, dishes, candles, a small stove, cooking utensils, a plow, a rake, axe, hoe, shovel, spade, hammer and nails. Finally, a generous supply of meat, meal and groceries is brought for the table. Then the ship backs away from the landing and disappears down the river. To many families it must have been like a story book miracle.

"THE BEST PRINCIPLES OF SOCIAL SCIENCE"

Clara Barton, who had a keen sense of what is now called public relations, was most cooperative with journalists who covered her work. Many newspaper men and women journeyed on the two ships she chartered during her 1884 flood-relief activities, or reported from points ashore on the Red Cross work along the riverbanks in that period. All of them were vividly briefed by her on the new organization's aims.

The following editorial, which appeared on March 31, 1884, in the Chicago Inter-Ocean, was based on firsthand reporting and shows how knowledge of what she was accomplishing soon spread widely throughout the land:

"The day is not far distant—if it has not already come—when the American people will recognize the Red Cross as one of the wisest and best systems of philanthropic work in modern times. Its mission is not accomplished when it has carried

the generous offerings of the people to their brethren who have met with sudden calamity. It does not stop with the alleviation of bodily suffering and the clothing of the destitute—blessed as that work is, when wisely done so as not to break down the manly spirit of self-help.

The Red Cross has become a grand educator, embodying the best principles of social science, and that true spirit of charity which counts it a sacred privilege to serve one's fellowmen in time of trouble. The supplying of material wants—of food, raiment and shelter—is only a small part of its ministry in its work among suffering humanity.

When fire or flood or pestilence has caused widespread desolation, the Red Cross seeks to carry to people's hearts that message which speaks of a universal brotherhood. It is all the time and everywhere sowing the seed of brotherly kindness and goodwill, which is destined in time to yield the fruits of world-wide peace. Once let the love of doing good unto others become deeply rooted and practiced as an international custom, and arsenals and ironclad navies will give way to the spirit of equity."

WHAT KIND OF WOMAN WAS THIS WOMAN WHO LED THESE FLOOD RELIEF EXPEDITIONS?

Clarissa Hawlow Barton - who later shortened her first name to Clara, was a born fighter. It was in her blood, her era, her destiny. She was pert and petite, but that was not what distinguished her. A certain toughness of body and soul, and a dedication to others before herself, highlighted the life she lived and the legend she created.

Nineteenth century America was a man's world. Clara Barton lived from 1821 - Born Christmas Day near North Oxford, Massachusetts - until April 12, 1912.

She lived in a rural atmosphere of neighbor-help-neighbor. She became a school teacher in that

kind of community until she became a government clerk and there learned about nineteenth century red tape and spoils to later affect her activities in avoiding these matters in her later work.

It was during those years between 1861 and 1904 that she recognized and applied the concepts of Red Cross developed internationally as well as on the American scene.

From the Battle of Bull Run until Andersonville, she was there helping on the battlefields under fire with medical supplies and first aid.

She saw the carnage and loss of life and the dreadful waste of humanity because of the lack of medical and nursing care and the human need for humane attention.

In 1870 during the Franco-Prussian conflict she saw the international Red Cross system in effect.

In Switzerland the Red Cross leaders persuaded her to work for the accession of the U.S. to the Treaty of Geneva.

This was accomplished in the year 1882 on March 1st and confirmed by the Senate without a dissenting voice.

So, in 1884, Clara Barton finished her relief work in the Cincinnati area. Later that year she was sent to the International Red Cross Conference in Switzerland where she was the only woman among 400 delegates at the Conference which adopted her pioneering of peace time relief for worldwide use.

This development of the International and the American Red Cross was the product of demonstrated human need from the battlefields of Europe and the U. S. and those calamities of man from other causes which we call disaster. Thus the roots of the present reach into the past.

Her work was finished in 1904 and she

resigned from her job and the American Red Cross.

In 1905 the American Red Cross was chartered by Congress. These were new times demanding many changes.

The Red Cross became a quasi governmental organization and along with these changes came an important American development.

There was a need for sophisticated policies, programs and methods to meet the changing times.

The charter in effect today requires assistance to the Serviceman wherever he is and secondly, that the Red Cross respond to disasters and disaster relief.

The Charter, however, further requires that the Red Cross raise its own funds entirely from gifts and to remain volunteer oriented with volunteers managing the organization.

When the Charter was granted by Congress in 1905 the "Cincinnati Branch" was organized in May, 1905 at the request of the then Secretary of War, William Howard Taft, a native of Cincinnati. His friend, Mabel T. Boardman, Secretary of the National Society of the American Red Cross, made several visits to the "Cincinnati Branch" during this organization period. "Cincinnati Branch", American National Red Cross, received original Charter from President Theodore Roosevelt.

The "Cincinnati Branch" became a "Chapter" - a direct dependency of the Central Committee in January, 1910.

A headquarters for the Chapter, its first office, was "engaged at the rate of \$10 per month" at 227 W. 7th Street on October 10, 1912. As of this date, 1968, the Chapter occupies a 3-floor gift building dedicated on July 10, 1955.

On July 1, 1956, there was a major change in the organization of the Red Cross in the Cincinnati

area, brought about by the rapid growth of the metropolitan area and the need to provide uniform Red Cross services. To do this, the chapters in Boone, Campbell and Kenton counties in Kentucky, and Hamilton and Clermont counties in Ohio, merged into one organization - The Cincinnati Area Chapter, American National Red Cross. The merger was approved on October 29, 1956, by the Board of Governors of the American National Red Cross, and the Chapter's new charter was signed by President Dwight D. Eisenhower. Thus, this Chapter became the first in the United States to merge across state lines and provide services across state boundaries.

Between the years 1859 and 1967 the flood of 1884 was topped by only one. That was the flood of 1937.

Clara Barton's expedition spent about \$175,000 in 1884.

The Red Cross spent about sixteen million dollars in the Ohio River Valley in 1937.

A hurricane today may cost twice that much.

In this day and age of mass media news dissemination there is instantaneous knowledge on the part of the American people of a disaster and its details.

This is true in any community and the expectations of people everywhere are that there will be instantaneous response of not only Red Cross, but of fire departments, police departments and other agencies to render aid in disaster situations.

In our community, the Red Cross maintains a task force ready to respond around the clock in the five county area on both sides of the river. Today there are three hundred and eighty five men and women in Viet Nam serving from the ports and bases up to and including five out posts. Similarly wherever, in the world there are U. S. military installations there will be Red Cross personnel.

At every Red Cross Chapter in the U. S. there are people working in Service to Military families and the problems of the serviceman wherever he is. In our community there is Shop Early Christmas packages prepared for shipment to Viet Nam. There is also a program called Helpmate sending all kinds of recreational and personal supplies to Viet Nam. The Cincinnati Chapter has adopted the Fourth Infantry Division as its own and has sent a tremendous number of comfort and recreative items to that division.

In the Cincinnati Area the Red Cross chapter receives its funds from the United Appeal. The 1905 Congressional Charter gives the Red Cross a job and expects it to be done with funds given by the American people and performed by people leading the organization as volunteers.

It was the woman Clara Barton who moved on the world stages of battlefields, conference rooms, Presidential offices, Congressional offices, disaster scenes; developing and applying basic principles of utilizing contributed funds and people's efforts to relieve human suffering.

She was the victor over ill health and exhaustion from her efforts and achieved world fame and left us a body of principles and a program of action.

I would, therefore, suggest that you look at that lithograph in the cloak room. It does not matter really what the year is but it is a reminder to me of an extraordinary woman.

I do not think it would be inappropriate to suggest that some sort of marker or other memorial be placed at Front and Broadway to commemorate the action there in 1884 and its historic significance to Cincinnati and the U. S. as a whole.

Robert D. Van Fossen
