

Photographic Pleasures, Popularly Portrayed with Pen and Pencil 1855

The Rev. Edward Bradley (1827-1889), writing under the pseudonym of Cuthbert Bede, was one of the earliest and best caricaturists and humorous writers to lampoon the new art of photography.

Bill Jay

It is a common assumption that the Victorians were a dour lot, obsessed with discipline, hard work, and correct social etiquette when they were not tramping on natives in their mania for extending the Empire. Much of their literature is gloomy, masochistically wallowing in the dreary problems of the poor or the swoonings of hypersensitive young ladies, who were probably suffering from too-tight corsets rather than from any offense to their rigid moral code. They were, it is believed, frugal, sexually frigid, and obsessed with death.

To a large extent the Victorian age was marked by these characteristics. Paradoxically, it was also an age of rampant optimism. And their literature reflects this other side of the Victorian temperament. There was a tremendous outpouring of satire, parody, wordplay, and light verse during the 19th century, epitomized by the nonsense verse of Edward Lear, the springy operettas of Gilbert and Sullivan, the surrealist whimsy of Lewis Carroll, the poems of Thomas Hood, the incisive cartoons of Cruikshank and Leech, and many others. Punch, the greatest humor periodical of any age, began publishing in 1841, and both reflected the Victorian's passion for laughing at itself and fueled the desire for comic relief.

One of the finest humorists of the 19th century was known as Cuthbert Bede, whose real name was Edward Bradley. He occupies a special place in the history of photography because his importance and fame rest on only one book: Photographic Pleasures, Popularly Portrayed with Pen and Pencil which was published in 1855. Before reviewing this fascinating book it is important to note a few biographical facts.

Edward Bradley was born on 25 March 1827 at Kidderminster, in Worcestershire, the son of a surgeon. He studied at University College, Durham, and graduated with a B.A. degree in 1848. Bradley had decided on a career in the church, and he took his licentiate of theology in the following year. He was only 21 years old, and too young to be accepted as a minister in the Church of England. While waiting for a year, he further prepared himself for the ministry by pursuing studies at Oxford University. Although he never became a member of this university, and never matriculated, the experiences gained at this seat of learning were to provide much of the material for a comic book, The Adventures of Mr. Verdant Green, published in three parts in 1853, 1854, and 1856. A one-volume edition appeared in 1857 which included a woodcut of the author as frontispiece, from a photograph by Oscar Rejlander.

Perhaps feeling that being an author of comic prose and caricatures was not consistent with his career as a minister of the church, Edward Bradley adopted the pen name of Cuthbert Bede, a combination of the names of the two patron saints of Durham, the city in which he received his degree. Saint Cuthbert of Lindisfarne died in the year 687. His biography was written by the Venerable Bede, who was 15 years old in that year but already an eminent classical scholar. He was ordained a deacon by the age of 19 and was destined to become one of the most revered theologians and historians in British history. He was also a storytelling "man of the people." The young Bradley was a young theologian and an aspiring writer, and adopting the pseudonym of Bede must have seemed eminently appropriate.

The Adventures of Mr. Verdant Green was his first book and was his most popular success. Over

100,000 copies had been sold by 1870, and further reprints boosted the total sales to well over 200,000, which is a vivid testament to the book's popularity. The total amount that Bradley received from the book was 350 pounds, a considerable sum for the age. The original three-part edition is now a collector's item. It is a humorous account of student life at Oxford University, and many of the incidents are no doubt autobiographical, or at least heard from fellow students. The story was illustrated with many wood engravings, which were originally intended for weekly publication in Punch magazine, but never used. One illustration in the book depicts a woman photographer in the act of making a portrait of Mr. Verdant Green. The accompanying text describes the scene:

Miss Fanny Bouncer was good-humoured and clever, and besides being mistress of the usual young lady accomplishments, was a clever proficient in the fascinating art of photography, and had brought her camera and chemicals, and had not only calotyped Mr. Verdant Green, but had made no end of duplicates of him in a manner that was suggestive of the deepest admiration and affection.

This is not the earliest caricature of a photographer drawn by Cuthbert Bede. Four of his cartoons had appeared in Punch during 1853. The first was published in the 7 May issue and depicts a photographer preparing to picture a scene as three peasant children look on with curiosity. It was captioned: "A Photographer Astonishing the Natives."

The second appeared two weeks later and shows a photographer beneath his focusing cloth about to be rammed in the rear by a charging bull. The caption runs: "Portrait of a Distinguished Photographer Who Has Just Succeeded in Focussing (Sic) a View to His Complete Satisfaction."

The third, published on 30 July, depicts a mother and a daughter with smudged face, standing at the counter of a photographic dealer. The mother says: "I shall feel obliged to you, Mr. Squills, if you would remove these stains from my daughter's face. I cannot persuade her to be sufficiently careful with her Photographic Chemicals, and she has had a misfortune with her Nitrate of Silver. Unless you can do something for her, she will not be fit to be seen at Lady Mayfair's tonight." (Mr. Squills administers relief to the fair sufferer, in the shape of Cyanide of Potassium.)

The fourth, published on 13 August, also shows a photographer beneath the focusing cloth as an old lady stumbles into the line of fire from around a corner. The caption runs: "A Photographic Picture. Old lady (who is not used to these newfangled notions), 'Oh, Sir! Please, Sir! Don't, Sir! Don't for goodness' sake fire, Sir!'" She is holding up her hands, and has dropped her umbrella in fright.

These cartoons, with some slight modifications, were all later published in Photographic Pleasures.

At this time Cuthbert Bede was 26 years old and was not a practicing photographer; he was pursuing his vocation as a country parson. The Rev. Edward Bradley was ordained in 1850 and served successively as curate of Glatton-with-Holme, in Huntingdonshire, vicar of Bobbington, in Staffordshire (1857), rector of Denton-with-Caldecote, in Huntingdonshire (1859), rector of Stretton, in Rutlandshire (1871), and finally vicar of Lenton-with-Hanby, in Lincolnshire (1883), where he died at the age of 62.

In appearance, at least as a young man, Cuthbert Bede was closely shaven with very pale skin. After the success of his book, Bede was introduced to a prominent man as "M. Verdant Green." "Mr. Verdant Green?" said the man, "I should have thought it was Mr. Blanco White."

In December 1858 he married Harriet Amelia Hancocks, and had two sons, Cuthbert and Henry. As a vicar, the Reverend Edward Bradley was renowned not only for his kindly personality but also for his indefatigable efforts as a parochial organizer. In order to raise funds for his parishioners he gave lectures on "Modern Humourists," "Wit and Wisdom," and "Light Literature," subjects in

which he was an acknowledged expert.

Throughout his career, beginning in 1850, Bradley contributed scores of articles and pieces of light verse, usually illustrated by himself, and all signed as Cuthbert Bede, to the popular press of the day, including All the Year Round, Sharpe's London Magazine, Cruikshank's Magazine, The Month, The Man in the Moon, The Town and Country Miscellany, Notes and Queries, The Field, The Gentleman's Magazine, The Graphic, and others, as well as Punch.

In addition Cuthbert Bede was the author of numerous books, including: Shilling Book of Beauty (1856), which he edited; Tales of College Life (1856); Nearer and Dearer (1857); Fairy Fables and Happy Hours (1858); Glencreggan (1860); Curate of Cranston (1862); Tour in Tartan Land (1863); The White Wife (1864); The Rook's Garden (1865); Matins and Muttons (1866); Fotheringay and Mary Queen of Scots (1866); and Little Mr. Bouncer, a sequel to Mr. Verdant Green (1878).

The Victorian writers (notably Lewis Carroll) were very fond of word games and puzzles, such as palindromes and acrostics. Cuthbert Bede was no exception. He devised many acrostics for the amusement of his readers, and is credited with the introduction of the double acrostic, the first of which was published in the Illustrated London News, 30 August 1856, and soon became a regular column. A typical double acrostic by Cuthbert Bede is as follows:

The Letters (5)

I brighten even the brightest scene (LamP)
I very nearly an ostrich had been (EmU)
I with a hood once pass'd all my days(MariaN)
I am a fop in a play of all plays (OsriC)
To its greatness the city of Bath I did raise (NasH)

The Words

I'm a Mark of judgement, of taste, and wit,
O'er a crowd of pages I rule the roast;
I mix with choice spirits, while choicer ones sit
Around, while I give them full many a toast.
Of my two words, my first is squeez'd into my second,
Although at its head it is commonly reckoned.

Cuthbert Bede's word-games and puns extend to Photographic Pleasures. The text delights in verbal play, blending amusement with instruction in the new art of photography. It was well received by the Victorian public and was reprinted in 1859 and again in 1863, as a cheaper "popular edition." Strangely, it then seems to have been totally forgotten. In 1885 the editor of The Amateur Photographer encountered the book with some surprise, saying that its existence was unknown. Three weeks after Bede's death, the photographer W. Lang delivered a paper on Photographic Pleasures to the Glasgow Photographic Society, and his text was published in both The Photographic News and The British Journal of Photography. In his opening remarks, Lang said that "we may safely take it for granted that all of us have read The Adventures of Mr. Verdant Green... It still enjoys a worldwide popularity." He then remarked, "It is not, however, generally known" that the same author produced Photographic Pleasures.

The book was all but forgotten again until 80 years later when Helmut Gernsheim published an extract of the text and several illustrations in his History of Photography (1969), and a short biography of Cuthbert Bede in One Hundred Years of Photographic History (1975), a festschrift for Beaumont Newhall, published by the University of New Mexico.

Photographic Pleasures is not only a very funny book about the personalities of the period and their

idiosyncrasies but also a vivid portrayal of the joys and difficulties inherent in the early processes of photography.

Even though Cuthbert Bede was not a practicing photographer at the time of publication, it is clearly evident that he had a deep affection for and a detailed knowledge of the major figures in the medium and their contribution to its introduction and development. But his lack of personal involvement does occasionally lead to some glaring errors of fact. For example, he states: "Daguerre's pictures were fixed on paper impregnated with nitrate of silver" and that "those of Mr. Niepce were upon glass, silver plated copper, and polished tin." Neither assertions are true. The reader will forgive these errors of fact because the overall impression produced by Photographic Pleasures is one of exuberant delight in the "inevitable love for infants."

It is true that the text will be fully appreciated only by those with a familiarity with 19th century photographers and photography. For the historian, Photographic Pleasures provides an incomparable insight into the idiosyncrasies of the photographers and the inconveniences of the processes in the first 16 years of the medium.

Cuthbert Bede eventually became a practicing photographer. In a letter to Henry Peach Robinson he mentions taking lessons in photography in 1863. He became sufficiently adept at operating the camera and the processing chemicals to illustrate one of his own books with photographs (original prints) within a year or two. The book was Visitor's Handbook to Rosslyn and Hawthornden, published in Edinburgh in 1864 or 1865 (the book is not dated); it contains 16 small prints taken by Cuthbert Bede. A copy of this book is in the collection of The Humanities Research Center, University of Texas.

Photographic Pleasures remains Cuthbert Bede's major contribution to the history of photography. His combination of wit and wisdom distinguishes it as a unique document, a comic masterpiece, providing both reading pleasure and historical information.

Cuthbert Bede died on 12 December 1889.

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