

COLLEGE STREET, HURSLEY AND OTTERBOURNE: CHARLOTTE MARY YONGE AND HER CIRCLE

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ABSTRACT

Charlotte Mary Yonge (1823–1901) was a highly successful novelist and a prolific writer of religious, educational and historical works. Although proud of her family's Devonshire origins she was deeply attached to her home village of Otterbourne, where she lived throughout her seventy-seven years. A devoted High Anglican Churchwoman, Charlotte Yonge deliberately cut herself off from the social and intellectual influences of the London literary scene. Yet during her most productive years she was part of a lively local cultural circle which included the nationally revered religious leader John Keble as well as Dr George Moberly, reforming Headmaster of Winchester College, and the Hampshire grandee Sir William Heathcote. After this circle broke up in the mid-1860s Charlotte Yonge continued to write and to take an increasing part in the Winchester scene, but she always looked back to the 1840s and 50s as 'Golden Days'.

The best selling Victorian novelist Charlotte Mary Yonge died just over ninety years ago, in March 1901. In her home village of Otterbourne, she was something of a living legend: delivering her Funeral Sermon, the theologian Robert Campbell Moberly paid tribute to 'Miss Yonge – without whom there is no one, I suppose, now living who can at all remember the village of Otterbourne'. He added,

How many generations of Otterbourne children have learned in their time to associate Scripture lessons, or other forms of religious teaching, with her own peculiar manner and tone of voice? (R. C. Moberly 1901, 2–3).

Charlotte Yonge had lived in Otterbourne all her life. It was, she said, 'a place . . . which can boast of nothing extraordinary' but where one could find 'no country walk devoid of the homely delights that sustain and lift up the spirit' (Yonge 1892, 1). She had been born there, in Otterbourne House (which is still standing,

though now converted into flats) in August 1823 and throughout her long life she rarely left the village for any length of time. She consciously rejected what she saw as the 'whirl' of London, and went abroad only once. Apart from a solitary trip to France her furthest ventures were a journey to Ireland for a family wedding in 1857, and numerous visits to Chester, Devon and the Isle of Wight.

Yet by the time she was thirty Charlotte Yonge was a nationally known figure, author of a best selling novel eagerly read by an enthusiastic public which included the highest in the land: Queen Victoria was later to discuss Yonge novels in her letters to the Princess Royal. Charlotte Yonge's first really successful novel *The Heir of Redclyffe*, published in 1853, went into seventeen editions. Its romantic depiction of the chivalric virtues of honour, bravery and heroic sacrifice at work in the everyday lives of an upper-middle class Victorian family inspired generations of Oxford Undergraduates, including the young William Morris and his friend Edward Coley Burne Jones. And Charlotte Yonge's brother Julian, serving in the Crimean War in 1854, was congratulated by his fellow officers on being related to the author of the novel most frequently requested by wounded officers during their convalescence.

For the rest of her long career (and she was writing to the last) Charlotte Yonge remained one of the most widely read British novelists, with steady sales for her eventual publishers Macmillan and an international reputation. She was a prolific – perhaps too prolific – writer not only of novels (both historical and contemporary), but also of religious and educational works. In addition, she edited *The Monthly Packet*, a Magazine 'For Younger Members of the English Church' from 1851 to 1892, almost the entire life

of the publication. Admittedly, by the 1880s she was beginning to be considered old-fashioned: traditionally, it is said that her most enthusiastic readers were then 'ladies with silver in their hair' rather than the young women and girls whom Charlotte Yonge mainly addressed in her fiction. But in 1893, for instance, she was still so famous that the *Strand Magazine's* series *A Chapter on Ears*, a collection of articles symptomatic of the nineteenth-century passion for phrenology, featured hers alongside those of John Stuart Mill and the then Prince of Wales.

As well as achieving popular success, Charlotte Yonge was widely respected as a moral and high-minded author. Her talent had been consciously dedicated to the dissemination of 'Church Principles', in other words the tenets and ethos of the Oxford Movement.

If Keble, Pusey, Newman and Hurrell Froude presented the theology of the Movement to a not always enthusiastic clerical audience, Charlotte Yonge popularised their ideas and ideals among the intelligent and imaginative laity, addressing herself particularly to girls and young ladies between the ages of fifteen and twenty five 'completing their education at home', as she put it in her first editorial for *The Monthly Packet*. Charles Kingsley's character Claude Mellot in *Two Years Ago*, pictures a nineteenth-century Lady of Shalott, who,

instead of weaving and dreaming, is reading Miss Yonge's novels, and becoming all the wiser thereby, and teaching poor children in the National School. (Kingsley (1857) 1893, 13).

During Charlotte Yonge's lifetime none other than Henry James declared that she brought 'a first class mind' to bear on her subjects, a comment noted by the critic Kathleen Tillotson in her *Novels of the 1840s* (1983). More recently, Owen Chadwick, author of the definitive study of the Victorian Church, has described Charlotte Yonge as 'one of the true creative novelists of the 19th century, with two or three of her books ranking among the best Christian novels of any age.' (Chadwick 1966, Part II, 214).

The most successful of Charlotte Yonge's novels, those written during the early and middle

years of her career as a novelist, were produced while she formed part of a local circle composed of able and intelligent people who were in the forefront of the Oxford Movement. This circle included John Keble (nationally revered as perhaps the most saintly of the founding fathers of the Oxford Movement) and Dr George Moberly, a long serving Headmaster of Winchester College. George Moberly's daughter Annie, writing in 1911, in *Dulce Domum*, her account of her own Winchester childhood, said that

For thirty years Mr. Keble, Miss Yonge, and my father, each being, in differing degrees, centres of Church teaching and influence, lived in the closest intimacy and friendship; and it is difficult to overestimate the richness, fullness and variety of living interests which they brought into the lives of one another. (C A E Moberly 1911, 4).

In fact, at the beginning of the thirty years the 'closest intimacy and friendship' was hardly to be established on equal terms, for when John Keble came to Hursley and George Moberly came to Winchester, Charlotte Yonge was still only twelve. She had been very strictly brought up by 'young parents of much ability and strong sense of duty', as she later described them. They

were sure to read and think much of the education of an only child, as I was for so long. The Edgeworth system chiefly influenced them, though modified by religion and good sense. It was not spoiling. There was nothing to make me feel myself important; I was repressed when I was troublesome, made to be obedient or suffer for it, and was allowed few mere indulgences in eating and drinking, and no holidays. (C Coleridge 1903, 56).

Despite this somewhat daunting regime, Charlotte was devoted to her parents, especially her father, William Crawley Yonge. In fact, despite the great importance of Keble in her development, her relationship with her father was undoubtedly the emotional centre of Charlotte Yonge's life: when he died suddenly in 1854 she suffered the type of bereavement to which she referred in *Womankind* (a collection of essays on the nature, education and experiences of women) as 'a widowhood of the soul' (Yonge 1881, 307).

All her life she carried filial obedience to extreme lengths: forbidden by her parents to enter the cottage homes of her village neighbours for fear of moral or physical contamination, she observed this prohibition for the rest of her life. She did regret the loss of easy communication with the inhabitants of Otterbourne; but with the children at least she had close contact through the Sunday School, in which she began to teach at the age of seven – too young by her own admission.

An important member of the Yonge household was Mrs Yonge's mother, Granny Bargas. Tiny, bustling, and an extremely forceful character, Mrs Bargas obviously ruled the entire family. She had insisted that William Yonge should give up a promising Army career and settle for the life of a country squire as the price of her daughter's hand in marriage, and Charlotte's somewhat equivocal relationship with her grandmother was probably responsible for the rather gritty grannies in some of the novels. When Charlotte was six, her only sibling, Julian Bargas Yonge, was born. The brother and sister were too far apart in age, and in ability, to become one of the close brother/sister pairs so often seen in Victorian life and literature (including Charlotte Yonge's own novels), and in the study of her career the luckless Julian often suggests the word 'embarrassment', whether social or financial.

The young Charlotte's rather dull life was enlivened by annual summer visits to her father's family home in Devon, at Puslinch. Here she could run wild with her nine riotous young cousins:

I was happy at home, but it was with calm, solitary happiness; there none but myself was a native of the land of childhood. The dear home people gave me all they could, but they could not be children themselves and oh! the bliss of that cousinland to me! (C Coleridge 1903, 62–3).

Back at home, pacing round the garden of Otterbourne House, Charlotte wove long, involved stories about huge families of imaginary children:

I imagined ten boys and eleven girls living in an arbour in the garden, but I can remember nothing about them except the names Caroline and Lucy. (C Coleridge 1903, 21).

Enormous families, often running into double figures, were to remain a characteristic of her work; and it was probably at this stage that she acquired what she later described in the Preface to the 1886 edition of *Scenes and Characters* as 'the curious semi-belief in the creatures of one's own imagination.' So Charlotte grew up under the influence of her beloved if dominating parents, with the daily round of lessons (often conducted with much shouting and ranting from the perfectionist Mr Yonge) enlivened only by the annual visits to Puslinch and very occasional trips to Oxford or London. Then in 1835 a series of events changed her life and brought her into contact with figures of national importance.

John Keble, born in 1792, was in his early forties when he came to the village of Hursley as its new Vicar. He was a famous man: doubly celebrated, firstly as a poet and secondly as a religious leader. *The Christian Year*, a series of poems based on the liturgical seasons (Advent, Lent and so on) had brought him nationwide acclaim in 1827. Largely on the strength of the sub-Wordsworthian *The Christian Year* Keble was to become Oxford Professor of Poetry (lecturing of course in Latin). Although the collection contained several poems still sung as hymns in the Anglican Church it is difficult now to recapture the tremendous enthusiasm *The Christian Year* inspired throughout the century. Charlotte Yonge wrote of Keble that 'it was with awe and reverence for the first poet I had ever seen that I looked at him from the first' (Yonge 1871, ii), and Frances Wilbraham, a friend of Charlotte Yonge and sister of Major Wilbraham of the Army Hospital at Netley, said of her first meeting with Keble,

It gave one a thrill to be thus brought into contact with the author of *The Christian Year*, the man who, more than any other living person, had moulded one's thoughts, defined one's Church principles, sobered yet deepened one's feelings on the most momentous of subjects. (Yonge 1872, lix).

This meeting took place in 1852, a full 25 years after the publication of *The Christian Year*.

Frances Wilbraham's comments also suggest Keble's position as a religious leader. As a Tutor

at Oriel College Oxford, Keble had been introduced by the religious enthusiast Hurrell Froude to John Henry Newman, who considered him 'the true and primary author' of the Oxford Movement (Newman *Apologia* (1864) 1965, 107). Keble contributed to the *Tracts for the Times* (from which adherents of the Movement gained the nickname Tractarians) and it was Keble who preached the famous Sermon on National Apostasy in July 1833, of which Newman said, 'I have ever considered and kept the day, as the start of the religious movement of 1833' (Newman (1864) 1965, 122). Discussion arose, both then and subsequently, as to whether this really was the start of the Movement, and on the exact relationship between the theological views of Keble, of the doomed, consumptive Hurrell Froude, of the charismatic Newman and of their new associate the Hebrew scholar Edward Bouverie Pusey. Certainly it seems likely that all made their distinctively personal contributions to the Movement, and also that Keble's vision of the Church of England as a major branch of the Catholic, Apostolic Church possessed of all the authority deriving from direct descent from the Apostles, was of paramount importance. Further, at this time and for the rest of his life, Keble struck all who encountered him as an unaffectedly humble, holy and saintly individual. His very presence was seen as a powerful argument for the validity of these apparently new (but according to the Tractarians very ancient) attitudes to Anglican doctrine and liturgy.

In these circumstances his departure from Oxford in 1835 to bury himself in a country parish might have seemed surprising. But in fact Keble's decision was a direct result of his early religious training. Like Charlotte Yonge, Keble placed the highest value on filial obedience; his father had been a conscientious and devoted parish priest and Keble looked no higher than his father's example. Another aspect of Keble's life in Hursley that owed much to his own early experiences was his attitude to women. Keble was the only Tractarian founding father to achieve anything approaching an ordinary home life. Hurrell Froude and Newman were both avowed celibates; Pusey's married life was tragically short. When Keble came to Hursley in 1835 he was a newly married man (another

reason of course for his decision to leave Oxford) about to settle into a happy domestic life 'coze-ing', as he called it, with his 'two wives' – by which he meant his actual wife Charlotte Keble and his sister Elizabeth Keble (Yonge 1872, ciii). In some ways this household reflected the family relationships of his youth, when he had called another sister, Mary Anne, his 'sweetheart' and Elizabeth his 'wife' (Battiscombe 1963, 93). Elizabeth was an invalid, although her health improved after one of her legs was amputated, a situation paralleled in Charlotte Yonge's novel *The Pillars of the House* of 1873. Charlotte Keble was several years younger than her husband, who took pleasure in her good looks and liked her to dress becomingly, preferably in bright colours. He had numerous female friends (including of course Charlotte Yonge and her mother) and he was clearly a man who, in the most innocent sense, enjoyed female company. His first biographer Sir John Taylor Coleridge described youthful holidays in Sidmouth when he was clearly something of a 'ladies' man', and one of Keble's students wrote of him as a young Oriel tutor:

perhaps I may be pardonned for mentioning, we undergraduates used to think him, for a little man, which he was, a very well made man. It was the fashion then for men to wear tight pantaloons, which showed the figure. (Yonge 1872, clxv).

Brought up in Regency times, before the extreme nineteenth-century polarization of the sexes, and used to the company of intelligent sisters, for he did not attend a public school but went to Oxford at the age of 14 straight from home tutoring by his father, Keble recognised women as the spiritual equals of men. And if he expected the ladies to work out their salvation in secluded lives of quiet usefulness, one should not forget that this was his own ideal existence.

In choosing to leave Oxford and devote himself to his parish, Keble was drawing closer not just to women but to the laity in general, making an important departure from the Oxford Movement's purely clerical origins. Regretting that Keble was absent from Oxford during the critical years following Newman's secession, Dean Church commented that

Mr Keble was now less than ever an academic, and became more and more closely connected with men out of Oxford, his friends in London and his neighbours at Hursley and Winchester. (Church 1900, 407).

Keble came to Hursley as Vicar at the invitation of the local magnate, Sir William Heathcote. Sir William, owner of a fine house at Hursley Park, was an even more important man in the area than William Yonge. He was a landowner, a high Tory and a High Churchman. Charlotte Yonge had known Sir William all her life: she later wrote that

the first political event I remember at all was the Reform Bill (of 1832), and the mournful predictions my uncles used to make about it, till I expected to see a repetition of the Reign of Terror. "Heathcote and Chute" for Hampshire was the first election I remember, Sir William Heathcote then being a slender, youthful looking man, with a face like the description of Claverhouse's and an appearance more like an Eton boy than a man of thirty one or thirty two. (C Coleridge 1903, 80).

Charlotte Yonge was acute, and acerbic, enough to notice and comment on the 'touch of Sir Charles Grandison', Samuel Richardson's courtly eighteenth-century hero, about Sir William; but she always revered him as an embodiment of benevolent, paternalistic Toryism. In a favourable situation, which she was clear sighted enough to realise was not always the case, she felt that Church and State, Vicar and Squire, should work together for the spiritual, moral and material good of the parishioners and tenants entrusted to their care by God. The eighteenth-century partnership of Squire and Parson should continue, but transfigured and en-nobled by the selflessly high ideals of the Oxford Movement. Sir William took a significant step towards becoming the ideal squire when he appointed Keble to the Hursley living, after which began 'the golden days of Hursley' when the village saw 'the Church and the secular power working together in an almost ideal way' (Yonge 1898, 125).

The duties of Sir William's 'station' as a conscientious local leader included activity as a 'just' Magistrate, encouragement of Keble's

parish work and Church building, help with the foundation of parish schools and the provision of various treats for local children and old people (Yonge 1898, 126). Notably, 'he would not let farms to any but Church people' (Awdry 1906, 96). In the county his interests encompassed public health, with 'the rebuilding and improvement of the County Hospital', the erection of 'a new and well managed lunatic asylum at Farnham', and law and order, with emphasis on legal work as Chairman of Quarter Sessions and interest in 'a renewed jail on the then approved principles and the inauguration of a county police' (Yonge 1898, 126).

As well as the busy Sir William, Keble encountered another kindred spirit in his new Parish: William Yonge. Otterbourne was joined with Hursley at this time, so that later, when William Yonge's daughter Charlotte approached Confirmation, Keble was able to take her on for instruction 'as a sort of out-lying sheep' (Yonge 1872, iv). Keble and William Yonge soon discovered a mutual enthusiasm for Church building – a very characteristic Tractarian activity over the following decades. Charlotte Yonge wrote,

my father's strong, practical and uncompromising nature, tempered with great tenderness and susceptibility, his chivalry, loyalty and thoroughness were exceedingly congenial to Mr. Keble, and they worked together in a manner that always reminded me of the friendship of Laud and Strafford (Yonge 1872, viii)

an allusion which reveals as much about Charlotte Yonge's attitude to seventeenth century history as about the relationship between Keble and William Yonge. The project on which these two were engaged was the building of a new church for Otterbourne (C R Coleridge 1903, 117ff; Yonge 1898, 99ff). The old building was thought to be too far from the current village centre and too near to the new railway line – the noise of passing trains would surely prove a distraction to the worshippers. Armed only with an admiration for York Minster and the technical drawing skills he had acquired at the age of sixteen, William Yonge undertook the design of the church. In fact it was the only building he

ever designed, although he was later asked to advise on the building of Ampfield Church (Yonge 1898, 140ff). He also undertook the considerable expense of the building, and this, together with Granny Bargus' failing health, meant the end of the family's long holidays in Devon.

However, although the twelve year old Charlotte missed these reunions with her Puslinch cousins, she soon had other interests to absorb her. The building of the new church, was of course, a fascinating project, and her novels, especially the early *Abbey Church* (1844) and the well-loved *The Daisy Chain* (1856) often feature the excitements of church building and decoration.

But there was also a new experience in store for her, when in 1835, the same year as Keble's arrival in Hursley, a new Headmaster was appointed to Winchester College. George Moberly was thirty two; born in St Petersburg where his father had business interests, he had been educated at Winchester and Balliol College Oxford, and was ordained in 1826. In 1834 he had married Mary Anne Crokat, who like him had spent much of her childhood abroad – in Italy in her case. Dr Moberly was never one of the radical leaders of the Oxford Movement, but he was enough of a Tractarian, by reputation as well as practice, to alarm the mainly Evangelical clergy of Winchester and he had a difficult time during his early years in the city. George and Mary Anne Moberly were already young adults when the Oxford Movement made its official appearance in 1833. Both, with an upbringing deficient (by later Tractarian standards) in religious training, were conscientious Christians eager for mutual spiritual improvement, and receptive to the ideas of the Anglican revival. Before their marriage Mary Anne Crokat, as she still was, confided to her Journal for 1833:

Oct. 11. Mr. Moberly is acquainted with Keble, the author of *The Christian Year* . . . He particularly recommends Taylor's *Holy Living* to me. . Mr Moberly is full of information, anecdote and good sense; his conversation is both amusing and instructive. We sat up talking nearly an hour after prayers. (C A E Moberly 1911, 50).

By the time the Moberlys arrived in Winchester

they had produced their first child, Alice, and Mary Anne Moberly invited calls from local ladies to introduce herself and display her baby. Amongst the early callers were the Yonge family. Later Mrs Moberly recalled,

I well remember the first call that the William Yongs made on us when we were still in lodgings in College Street. They lived at Otterbourne, a village four miles out. Charlotte Yonge, then a girl of twelve with a very shrill voice, came with them. (C A E Moberly 1911, 59–60).

Normally Charlotte, notoriously clumsy, over-excitable and by her own admission 'an eager talker' hated such sedate occasions. She found them bearable only by imagining herself back into history, perhaps the sixteenth century with the polite circle of ladies anxiously discussing the possible appearance of the Spanish Armada. But on this visit she stayed firmly in the nineteenth century, since she fell instantly in love with the beautiful, Madonna-like Mrs Moberly. Annie Moberly's *Dulce Domum* later described her mother's appearance and habits:

My mother's face was finely formed with straight brows and dark hair and eyelashes over blue-grey eyes; these, with the long, delicately shaped aquiline nose, were lovely. Her long white throat and graceful bearing made her look taller than she really was . . . She looked upon it as a duty to make herself and everything around her as perfect as possible. . She disliked yellow flowers. . Bottled scents were far too coarse for her. . Her wrath at being subjected to such smells as gas, coal-smoke or lamp-oil was strong and despairing; and no member of her large household ventured to strike a match, or blow out a candle, in any room into which she was likely to come within half an hour of the rash act. If possible, she would never *touch* a penny, and if it could not be avoided, hurried to wash her hands; she always washed the silver or gold coins with soap and water before giving them in the offertory. Amused as we often were at these and other dainty fancies, yet we recognised that they imparted an air of exceeding refinement, such as we never perceived in the same degree elsewhere . . . My mother was extremely shy and reserved. During the first year of her married life she managed not to call her husband anything, and as soon as Alice could speak adopted the child's name for him, addressing him as "Papa" from that

time forward. I remember perfectly, when they had been married more than twenty years, hearing him coax her to call him by his name; he refused to give up a charming cloak he had bought for her until it was said. After a long time, and with the greatest difficulty, she whispered, "Thank you, George", but it was never said again. (C A E Moberly 1911, 155–7).

Mary Anne Moberly may have had difficulty in calling her husband by his Christian name, but between 1835 and 1854 she bore him fifteen children, all of whom lived through infancy and childhood, although three were to die young. Despite references to her headaches and time spent 'on the sofa' Mrs Moberly was probably a basically robust woman, since she lived to the good age of 78. Possibly her famous 'refinement' may have been a refuge against the onslaughts of the 'troops of children' with whom she was constantly surrounded (C A E Moberly 1911, 8).

'Refinement' was also an outstanding characteristic of the newly married Mrs Keble. Mary Anne Moberly recorded,

It was at the end of our first winter in Winchester that the Kebles came to Hursley, five miles away. We called first, and found them at home, with wedding cake and wine set out on the table. Without being really pretty, Mrs. Keble was most sweet-looking. She had beautiful brown eyes and hair, a delicate complexion like porcelain, and an air of extreme refinement. (C A E Moberly 1911, 59).

For the young Charlotte Yonge, Hursley Vicarage was, as she put it, 'charmed ground'. Like Mary Anne Moberly, she admired Mrs Keble's 'bright tender kindness', adding 'In her transparency of complexion and clear, dark hazel eyes, she was like a delicate flower' (Yonge 1872, vii). At fifteen, Charlotte Yonge was prepared for Confirmation by Keble. This Sacrament held great significance for her, and she never forgot the training she received from her spiritual father. Later she said of his teaching,

It must have visibly excited and impressed me very much, for his two warnings when he gave me my ticket were: the one against too much talk and discussion of church matters, especially doctrines; the other against the dangers of these things merely

for the sake of their poetry and beauty – aesthetically he would have said, only that he would have thought the word affected. (C Coleridge 1902, 132).

She took these warnings to heart and throughout her life observed extreme reticence about religious doctrine, and an aversion to the more flamboyant forms of Ritualism. At this time she came to know Keble more intimately, and noted that despite his sometimes stern moral uprightness, he retained a quality which she often described as 'playfulness':

There was something in his ways and bearing as if he had preserved to the last a certain boyishness, something that made you feel that he had never altered very much. (Yonge 1872, clviii).

Keble had, of course, been a precociously brilliant youth, entering Oxford University 'wanting then more than four months of completing his fifteenth year' (J T Coleridge 1870, 10), collecting an impressive series of University prizes and taking a Double First in the summer of 1810. At Hursley Keble's humility led him to play down his intellectual abilities, but the perceptive Charlotte Yonge noted:

Indeed it was curious how every now and then some matter would arise where his exceeding rapidity of comprehension on some newly presented subject, or ready application of illustration, would make one say to oneself, as if it were a discovery, "what a wonderfully clever man this is", a thing that his gentle, diffident, humble manner was always making one forget. (Yonge 1872, xxxv/vi).

Charlotte Yonge herself was also an outstandingly talented person, and as the 1840s went on she was serving an apprenticeship as a writer, publishing short stories and serials in Mozley's *Magazine for the Young* and, in 1844, her first full length novel *Abbey Church*. As she said herself, 'I must have written' (C Coleridge 1903, 153); but for Granny Bergus earning money by writing (or any other means) was not a ladylike thing to do, and Charlotte's early career was justified only by the donation of the profits to charitable purposes. The Keble household took a great interest in her work and she recalled that

for at least twelve or fifteen years after 1845 I never did any literary work without talking it over with Mr. and Mrs. Keble, referring difficulties to them, and generally showing the MS, which used to come back with little touches of pencil, and a list of references to words or phrases. (Yonge 1872, xxiv).

In later years she noted the extreme 'refinement' and rather old fashioned tone of some of the comments, but at the time Charlotte's manuscripts were eagerly read and discussed at the Vicarage not only by John and Charlotte Keble, but also by Keble's lame sister Elizabeth, a quiet gentle personality who had been known to sit so motionlessly on the Vicarage lawn that birds hopped up to her and tried to pick the printed cherries off her dress! (Yonge 1872, lxxviii). Though unassuming she was, however, like all the Keble family, evidently quick in apprehension: Frances Wilbraham recalled,

his gentle sister grew quite eager on the subject [of Keble's early entry to Corpus], and reminded him of trifling circumstances which he had forgotten, and added pretty touches of her own to the narrative. I could not help mentally wondering whether if she had tried for the scholarship at Corpus, she might not have won it too? (Yonge 1872, civ).

Charlotte and the three Kebles shared a common love of Scott, Dante and Manzoni; of guessing and paper games (Charlotte's biographer Christabel Coleridge allegedly burnt hundreds of these after the author's death); and of King Charles I, whose anniversary as 'our own, our royal Saint' was regularly kept at Hursley. Both Charlotte Yonge and Frances Wilbraham felt that Keble's happiest times at Hursley were spent before 1845; in that year they thought his cheerfulness received 'a permanent check' from the news of Newman's decision to leave the Church of England (Yonge 1872, xxii). At this time Charlotte Yonge and Keble paced the Water Meadows near St Cross deep in anguished discussion, finally reaching the conclusion, if indeed they had ever really doubted it, that the 'safety' which Keble always sought in matters of faith, was to be found within the Anglican church (Yonge 1872, xix ff).

This crisis was also discussed with the

Moberlys, who had just had their ninth child, Robert Campbell Moberly. He was the first baby to be christened in the large stone font which George Moberly presented to Winchester College Chapel. Annie Moberly recalled,

The christenings of the eight youngest children in the College Chapel became occasions of annual meetings of the special circle of friends. All the former godparents within reach . . . were invited . . . and a long procession formed in which each of the unconfirmed children was escorted across the ancient quadrangle to the baptistery by his or her godparents. (C A E Moberly 1911, 76).

Clearly the procession grew longer year by year as the Moberly family grew larger, reaching a total of fifteen with Alice, George, Mary, Edith, Arthur, Dora, Kitty, Emily Frances, Robert, Annie, John, Edward, Walter, Maggie and Selwyn. Several of this brood had interesting adult lives, notably Robert and Annie. The distinguished theologian Robert was a contributor to Charles Gore's important volume *Lux Mundi* (1889). Annie became famous as the first Principal of St Hugh's College Oxford and infamous as one of the pair of academic ladies (the other being her friend Eleanor Jourdain) who publicised their apparently supernatural visions of the court of Marie Antoinette on a visit to the Trianon.

At this period, the late 1840s through to the mid '60s, the Yongs, Kebles and Moberlys were in constant communication. As Annie Moberly explained in *Dulce Domum*,

it was an actual daily intercourse . . . which made the tie so binding. For twenty seven years my father rented a farm in the woodlands close to Hursley, and we were in the habit (in the summer months) of seeing the vicar and his wife at least three times a week . . . During the other months of the year, whenever the Kebles and Yongs came into Winchester for Cathedral or for shopping, they, as a matter of course, made their headquarters in College Street . . . A cart from our farm, carrying milk, butter, and bread to the school, every day throughout the year, passed through Otterbourne and St. Cross and back. By this means letters, books, and parcels of all sizes from Otterbourne were answered from College Street, without the medium

of the post, before noon on the same day. The Yonges were within a walk of the Kebles, and had their own possibilities of immediate communication. (C A E Moberly 1911, 5).

Annie added a fascinating description of early and mid-Victorian Winchester and its surroundings:

Winchester was a smaller place then than it is now [in 1911]. There were no houses on St. Giles' Hill, and no station at its foot. On the Romsey road the gaol (which was itself new) was the last building. The Training College for Schoolmasters and the Hospital were built outside the town while we were living at Winchester. Houses stopped at Culver's Close in Southgate Street, and with the Queen Inn in Kingsgate Street. The boys' boarding-houses in Culver's Close were not yet built. St. Cross was entirely divided from Winchester by fields, and beyond the church at St. Cross there was nothing but the little village of Compton between it and Otterbourne. Shawford Down had no house upon it, unless it was one lately built close to the railway, where there was then no station. Otterbourne hill, now altered in character by telegraph poles, water works, and the endless passing traffic of bicycles and motor cars, was a quiet country road, with the furzy common above, on which were a very few, deeply thatched, scattered cottages. Chandlers Ford was country wayside station with no surrounding houses; the roads from it to Otterbourne and Hursley being delicious, silent, wooded lanes, where nightingales sang in abundance and little commons and deep fir woods alternated, and where a wayfarer was scarcely ever met. Our own lane (joining the two main roads from Winchester to Southampton) was cut out of pine and oak woods, within which foxgloves grew in forests. The lanes and woods were entirely uninhabited save by birds, squirrels, rabbits and glorious butterflies; heather banks and bracken had it all their own way, and the wild strawberries and blackberries were untouched unless we took them. These woods – now, alas! being cleared for small houses and villas in connection with Chandlers Ford – were the scenes of our picnics with the Kebles, Heathcotes and Yongs, and are to us full of sacred memories. (C A E Moberly 1911, 6–7).

Among the letters and parcels brought by the carrier were frequent communications to the Moberly children from Charlotte Yonge, who wrote stories and, especially, plays for them. One of

these, *The Pigeon Pie*, was a family drama set in the Civil War, and in that staunchly Royalist household it caused trouble since no one wanted to play the Roundhead characters. Mr Dunderhead, a layfigure, was used for the Cromwellian troops, and finally Mrs Yonge consented to take the role of the misguided Colonel Enderby.

The group of friends shared Charlotte Yonge's literary triumph when in 1853, her novel *The Heir of Redclyffe* became an overnight success. They were closely involved in her subsequent novels, so much so that the Moberlys were often known as the Daisy Chain family because of the resemblance they bore to the Mays in that novel. In fact, as Annie Moberly pointed out, the Mays are more closely modelled on Charlotte Yonge's own family of cousins at Puslinch.

During these years Charlotte Yonge's best known and best loved novels appeared: *Henrietta's Wish* and *Langley School* in 1850; *The Heir of Redclyffe* in 1853; *The Little Duke*, *The Castle Builders* and *Heartsease* in 1854; *The Daisy Chain* in 1856; *Dynevor Terrace* in 1857; *Hopes and Fears* in 1860; *The Young Stepmother* in 1861 and so on.

Sadness as well as triumph was to come to the circle. In 1854 William Yonge died suddenly from a stroke after seeing Julian off at Portsmouth for service in the Crimean War; later Julian was invalided home with an unromantic case of sunstroke. For Charlotte Yonge the loss of her father was the major bereavement of her life and years later she recalled his

keen dark eyes . . . even now when for twenty three years they have been closed, to think of their beaming smile seems to me to recall my greatest happiness, of their warning glance my chief dread and shame (C Coleridge 1903, 50).

Four years after Mr Yonge's death, in July 1858, the Moberlys' second daughter and third child, Mary Louisa, married George Ridding. He was a Wykhamist, an Oxford graduate and an ordained clergyman. Mary's sister Annie described the wedding,

in the little old church of St. Swithun, which had been placed over the King's Gate for the workmen when they were building the Cathedral. Decorations in church were almost unknown then, but friends

had decked the church as a surprise to us, and the font was filled with water lillies and passion flowers. The bride was surrounded by her seven white robed sisters wearing forget me nots. (C A E Moberly 1911, 138).

1858 was, as those familiar with William Dyce's picture *Pegwell Bay* will recall, the year of Donati's Comet. According to Annie Moberly, the autumn of 1858 'was singularly unhealthy, warm and damp' (C A E Moberly 1911, 139); illness was rife in Winchester and just before Christmas 1858, Arthur Moberly died at the age of 18, a promising schoolboy at the College. (The school was in fact notoriously unhealthy and some parents avoided it for its damp, low lying position.) His parents had scarcely recovered from this sorrow when a second tragedy struck the Moberly family. In 1859 Mary Ridding died in childbirth at the age of twenty one. Her mother Mary Anne Moberly wrote

often during that terrible night I asked that it might be my life for the young life . . . it seemed such a mysterious dispensation. . . For in the first days the anguish was overpowering – we seemed bowed to the earth, and as if no relief could lift us up; but it has come. We have had the strength and comfort which so many kind friends have asked for us. (C A E Moberly 1911, 148).

Further changes took place in Charlotte Yonge's life when her brother Julian married, also in 1858; Charlotte and her mother moved a few hundred yards down the main street of Otterbourne to Elderfield. The house is still there, owned by the prison service. Here Mrs Yonge was to die in 1868 and here Charlotte lived for the rest of her life. Mrs Keble had always suffered from delicate health and as the 1860s progressed this gave increasing cause for alarm. Elizabeth Keble died in 1860 and John Keble was at last beginning to fail. In June 1865, Keble, Pusey and Newman were briefly reunited at Hursley Vicarage. They had not met for twenty years, and Newman wrote, 'three old men who had worked together vigorously in their prime, this is what they have come to – poor human nature!' (Ker 1988, 578).

Charlotte Yonge was a constant attender at the Vicarage, but no longer could she share her thoughts and feelings with the ageing Kebles; she knew that they could no longer tolerate her flow of

'eager talk'. The Kebles died within weeks of one another in 1866, and just as Kebles and Moberlys had arrived together so they departed. George Moberly had been Headmaster of Winchester College for over thirty years. He had improved both the buildings and the moral and religious atmosphere of the school, and had steered it through the Clarendon Commission's examination of the public schools. But now it was the turn of a younger man to implement some of the reforms recommended by the Commission, and this task fell to his bereaved son in law George Ridding who had been Second Master since 1863. Ridding, who later married again, changed Winchester College in many ways; George Moberly, after brief periods as Vicar of Brighstone on the Isle of Wight, and as a Canon of Chester, was appointed Bishop of Salisbury – his memorial is still to be seen in the Cathedral there and he rests with several other Moberlys in the cathedral cloister.

For Charlotte Yonge, then, an era had come to an end. She was still to write many books, including her masterpiece *The Pillars of the House* (1873); but without the stimulation of the intelligent and lively circle of friends who had at once inspired and criticised her work, her resolute rejection of the literary and intellectual world of London began to tell and she found it increasingly difficult to keep up with the times.

It is true that when the Kebles died and the Moberlys left Winchester, Charlotte Yonge still had more than three decades of useful and satisfying life ahead of her. She was extremely influential in the life of Winchester, especially during the foundation of the Winchester Girls' High School, now St Swithun's School. Here she was closely associated with Anna Bramston, daughter of a former Dean of Winchester, and Anna Bramston's great friend Amelie Leroy, better known as the writer Esme Stuart. Charlotte Yonge remained in close touch with the Moberly family (it was after all Robert Campbell Moberly whose Funeral Sermon for Charlotte Yonge was quoted at the beginning of this account); but in reminiscing with that family she always looked back to George Moberly's period as Headmaster as 'the dear golden age of our lives . . . full of "fun, games and habitual merriment"' (C A E Moberly 1911, 293).

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