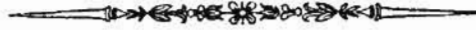


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## A ROSETTE FOR JOHN MOORE



“**W**ITHIN the hotel farmers were drinking beer at tuppence a pint,” but not I regret to say in 1961. This is John Moore reminiscing about Tewkesbury during his childhood, when “horses were commoner than cars”, and the few there were made everyone jump with the “poop-poop of the bulbous horn”. As his hobbies were all outdoor activities he became very bored during the great frost when animals were roasted on the Severn and the Wye. He started to read his way from Aard-Vark to Zymotic Diseases in the Encyclopaedia Britannica, but finished up by praying that the pipes would burst.

The young John was later taught to catch chub with a fly by his first hero, a Dr. Liston, who apparently belonged to the old kill or cure school. “Hurts you to breathe, does it? Then don’t.” Hero number two was a poacher who found John a quick pupil at the rabbit snaring classes. Then he reached one of his favourite periods, his early teens. “Arcady”, he says, “isn’t so much a place as a time of life.”

During this period he collected the eggs of every bird around Tewkesbury. He pressed and named the wild flowers, and amassed over 300 butterflies and moths. He could manage any boat, and swim the Severn, but when all this activity palled he would visit a shy Rate Collector who knew the works of Shakespeare by heart. Here he laid the foundation of his love of the English language. “And the words that have never been matched in the English tongue were a surge and thunder in my mind,” he recalls.

This fascination with words and language inevitably led him to write. In 1930 his first book appeared, but although he was sure that at least 10,000 copies should be printed, the public was so blind that only 1,500 sold! Several more books caused no ripple on the literary pool, and then after a comparatively happy war spent flying, he wrote “Portrait of Elmbury”, Elmbury being Tewkesbury. This caught the end of the war mood of let’s-get-away-from-it-all, and was an immediate

success. “Brensham Village” soon afterwards established John Moore as “The best writer about the English countryside, and its life, human or otherwise, that we have today,” as Compton Mackenzie described him.

By now, people, myself included, were asking in bookshops and libraries, “When is John Moore’s new book due?” Come they did and each one was a gem. “Blue Field”, completed the Brensham trilogy; “Come Rain, Come Shine”, and “The Season of the Year” with a chapter for each month.

“Man and Bird, and Beast” in 1959 was subtitled most happily “More Country Contentments.” This is a pot-pourri of the sights, sounds and smells of green hedges, golden hayfields and red earth. We hear through the descriptions the sound of cricket on the village green as well as the peaceful silence of the angler by the stream. This world of birds and badgers brings the English countryside into our living rooms on cold winter nights in Leeds, Liverpool and London.

Three novels, “The White Sparrow”, “Midsummer Meadow”, and “Dance and the Skylark”, followed a quiet, often whimsical pattern with the Tewkesbury countryside as a background. Then came a change of surroundings with “September Moon” set in the jungle green hopyards of Herefordshire.

“Jungle Girl” was a delicate and tender little story, again of young love, set this time in a circus, and never has the stamping and snorting of the animals and the smell of the canvas seemed more real. The latest book, just out, “You English Words”, is different from anything which has gone before. It brings John Moore full circle to his shy Rate Collector, for it is a book about the English language and the people who have used it well, from Chaucer to Churchill. Had I written it, I should have given John Moore a chapter to himself.

H.E.

My sincere thanks to John Moore for allowing me to have access to his papers.



*Midlander John Moore's books have conveyed the delights of the English countryside to countless readers*