

## CANTERBURY ROTARY BOOK CLUB

### NOTES OF A VIRTUAL MEETING ZOOMED BY RICHARD AND VIV ON 23RD SEPTEMBER 2020

1. APPEARANCES: Richard, Viv, Deborah, Gill, Alan, Jennifer, Judith, Peter, Caroline, Georges, Brian
2. APOLOGIES: Neil (expert witness duty), Pauline, John Hill (PCC). Robert
3. BOOK: "Three Men in a Boat" - J K Jerome. Richard set us off to a very jolly start by appearing resplendent in a boater, with striped bow tie and blazer, apparently lounging in the stern of a rowing boat on the river at Henley on Thames on a lovely sunny afternoon - though with his crossed sculls behind him, his mode of propulsion was not entirely clear.

Richard has worn well, of course, but what of Jerome's comic masterpiece, published in 1889? The journey by rowing boat upstream from Kingston to Oxford (and back - but rain stopped play at Pangbourne on the way back) was claimed by Jerome to be based on a real trip he had made with his friends George and Harris, "coloured 'a little. Montmorency the terrier, however, was an entirely fictitious character. Apparently, the original intention was to write a serious travelogue, but humour took over.

The original popularity of the book was said to be due to the Thames having become a leisure area thanks to the railways - but why now? Judith thought it still had appeal, and Gill referred to a recent televised trip by Griff Rees-Jones. Peter had seen part of the original Jimmy Edwards' film of the book on You Tube but got fed up with the over acting and went no further than the scene at Hampton Court maze. He compared it to "The Last of the Summer wine". Richard pointed out that here the characters were young men. He found the book fascinating as part showing the way the river developed - barges giving way to pleasure craft, the use of the tow path and of the locks to keep it full of water - when he was rowing, you could sometimes almost walk across it at Richmond. Deborah spoke about the episode of the dead dog floating along with its legs in the air, putting them off their tea, and felt the book wore well. Georges loved the turns of phrase, and read a section from ChXV!! about the pool under Sandford lasher - "a wonderful place to drown yourself in" Viv liked the mixture of ordinary things with outrageous farce

We talked of relatives who loved this book. - Peter's son and Viv's daughter (who enjoyed repeated cds on car journeys); it was my grandfather's favourite book - he didn't read much else but Deborah said her father didn't read anyway

As a travelogue, Richard wondered if there was some echo of the grand European tour (but for ordinary folk) Viv just read it as a story. Alan liked the book - it was lively by comparison with some travelogues, but he thought some parts a bit light - such as the maze episode. Peter remarked how humour changed over the years. Jennifer liked the descriptions of the various pubs but found the funniest story was the problems they had in finding the right train at Waterloo, culminating in bribing the driver of the Exeter train to take them to Kingston. On the hyperbole, Richard reminded us that they way to get your tale believed if you are going to lie is the embellish it outrageously, and quoted the guide to Harbledown who told his audience there was a lake underneath it - with a boat on it

We considered the way Jerome carefully positioned his characters - rather like a painting (eg the assembly of errand boys who saw them off) and Georges found parts of the book like a Hogarth cartoon. Deborah thought Jerome's parents must have had a sense of humour to make his christian and surnames the same

We enjoyed the various references to food - the hopeless scrambled egg, the stew to which Montmorency contributed a rat, and the complaint when they abandoned the boat and sought a dinner in a restaurant that for 10 days they had been more or less existing on cold meat, cake and bread and jam. Georges said it was remarkable how stupid one can be in a boat, and told us how when he was about to take his A levels, he built himself a kayak, which he took to the sea with about 300pp of notes, which he was going to revise on the water. Unfortunately, he capsized, and although he recovered the pages, by the time he did so they were all blank. He got lousy A

levels , and attributed the whole thing to hormones!. Alan then told us of a sailing mishap on the Thames in his brother-in law's boat , when Alan had apparently pulled the wrong rope and , as a result, they became stranded on a sandbank.

All in all, this book gave or inspired a lot of laughs and we agreed how much we had enjoyed it - and on that basis, may I be forgiven if I haven't recorded what you said -, or got it wrong!

4. OTHER READS: Viv - "Stranded" - Val McDermid - short stories; "The Hunted" - Gabriel Bergmoser; "One day in the life of Ivan Denisovic" - Solzhenitsyn - brilliant, but you won't end it laughing. Judith - Bill Bryson - "Neither Here nor There"; Elizabeth Edmondson "Voyage of Innocence"; Stephen Hawking "A brief history of time"; Donna Leon "About Face". Pauline - "Unorthodox" - Deborah Feldman- she watched the film first and then read the book which was better - about Hasidic Jews and how a young woman frees herself from them . Also "Lady in Waiting" a biography by Ann Glenconner with information on Princess Margaret and is halfway through "The Improbability of Love" - Hannah Rothschild - about the art world. She has also been to visit NT gardens in E Sussex area - but hasn't read 3 Men in a Boat!. Brian "Where the Crawdads Sing" - Delia Owens - well written and a page turner - some insightful stuff on an abusive father; "Happy Valley" about British settlers in Kenya , Alan : Conrad "Heart of Darkness"

5. DONM: Wednesday 28th November 7.30pm. Book - "Heart of Darkness"

Many thanks to Richard and Viv for zooming