

## MARTIN COLES HARMAN

The passing of Martin Coles Harman leaves a big gap in the lives of us who knew him. His was such a vital personality that it was impossible to conceive of its light going out, and we are left with a feeling as of being in a room suddenly darkened. I well remember my first, critical, correspondence with him in January 1946. I wrote to an unknown to ask whether he would consider the idea of a group of naturalists going to his island in order to study its natural history. His reply was only mildly encouraging, as well it might be. But it was not actively discouraging, and upon my being able to reassure him that we had no designs on the ancient integrity of Lundy I received a letter so generous and warm as to assure me that our about to be born society had a certain future. Among four conditions laid down, the second was, 'The said Committee to be formed at my suggestion herein made ; I to be the first subscriber to its fund in the sum of £50 hereby promised'.

After that all was plain sailing ; a group of us interested in the idea met in Exeter and discussed ways and means, sent an exploratory expedition to Lundy in June, and by the end of the summer the Lundy Field Society was in existence, born, through Mr Harman's vigour and vision, out of the Devon Bird-Watching and Preservation Society. By the following spring we had been given free use of the Old Lighthouse, and were able to see our way towards maintaining a warden in permanent charge. All this was no light matter, particularly in those years immediately following the end of the war, and it was due very largely to Mr Harman's advice, encouragement and help that we succeeded. From that time onwards I, as Secretary, was to find him an everlasting source of delight and strength. Sometimes things happened which he didn't like, and he wrote immediately to say so, but in terms which caused no offence but only the wish to put things right. That we always arrived, swiftly, at an amicable conclusion was due in no small measure to his friendliness and his readiness to see a point of view. At other times he was pleased with something, particularly when we obtained a new record for Lundy, and again he wrote to me immediately to say so.

The debt which the Society owes to M. C. Harman is beyond telling. But it is for his personal qualities that I at least shall miss him most. He had an inexhaustible store of impish vitality which made every letter from him, every meeting with him, an event. He seemed to have retained his youthful capacity for excitement and adventure, and it manifested itself in his jealous guardianship of, and pride in, his small kingdom under the shadow of the larger Britain. Those who have been privileged to meet him on the soil of Lundy will remember vividly how happy he was there, walking through the bracken and heather to take stock of his Soay sheep, or deer, or golden orfe, calling at the Old Light to ask for news of

birds passing through, shooting the deer to control their numbers, or the geese for Christmas dinners, or talking with knowledge and animation on some point of Lundy's history to some chance visitor in the bar of the Marisco. Always was he brimming with zest and pride in his realm. It was this which made Lundy so charming a place; for his benevolent autocracy brooked few of the restrictions which hem round our mainland lives. And so I shall always think of him as a king in his kingdom, proud and pleased when a Hoopoe, a Roller, a Golden Oriole or, better still, an American Robin took brief sanctuary within his shores.

L. A. HARVEY.

Born at Caterham-on-the-Hill, Surrey, Martin Coles Harman was the second child, and second son of William and Florence Harman, and one of eleven children. Though a successful and much respected builder, Mr William Harman could not afford to give his numerous children much in the way of 'treats' and so the family found their pleasure in the family circle, and in simple country pursuits. They were a united and affectionate family, brought up in the strict principles of the late Victorian age. Martin and his elder brother were educated at Whitgift Middle School, where both were regarded as clever and painstaking boys.

Leaving school at 15 or 16 years of age, Martin found a place as office boy in the great Foreign Banking firm of Lazard Brothers in Threadneedle Street, London. He was no clock watcher; intelligent and outstandingly quick at figures, and soon rose to junior clerk, and at 24 years was head of the Stock Department. He showed astounding aptitude as a judge of the Stock Market, and went quickly from success to success.

My family and the Harman family lived side by side for six years, and for close on eighteen years in the same village. We were close friends. We played together, we went to school together, that is I went to school with most of the younger members, and we were in and out of each other's houses every day. When I was six and Martin eleven, he invited me to go bird's nesting with him. He and his brother Terry were inveterate birds' nesters, but they never took an egg if there were less than three in the nest. Martin remained an inveterate birds' nester to the day of his death. I remember, during the last war, a pair of Mistle Thrushes built a nest in the sycamore tree at the top of Millcombe Drive. Martin was thrilled to the marrow. He could not resist climbing the tree at least once a day, and handling the eggs. The result was the Mistle Thrushes deserted the nest, but, I am glad to say, built in a hawthorn bush behind Millcombe House, and reared a brood of four.

Martin Harman had those qualities which make for greatness. His brain worked clearly. He had courage, resolution and immense energy. He was also patient, tolerant, simple and unaffected. His

humility was quite astonishing in so successful a man. He was always prepared to believe that anybody and everybody knew more about a certain thing than he did, even though it was patent that Martin was a master in the subject under discussion.

As his success in business steadily grew, he made it his business to see that every member of his family had the opportunity to enjoy those things which circumstances had denied them in their childhood. Holidays at the seaside, holidays abroad, better schooling for the younger brothers and sisters, and a bigger house, with a large garden for his father and mother. He forgot no one: uncles, aunts, cousins, and close friends, all were put in the way of making their circumstances easier and more comfortable.

It is not given to many men to realize their ambitions, but Martin Harman, after visiting Lundy when he was eighteen, for an afternoon, by a Campbell steamer, said to his friend, George Rockett, 'One day I shall buy this island'. It was typical of the man that, having bought it, he did not want to keep it all to himself, he wanted as many people as possible to enjoy it with him. He never lost interest in Lundy. He never wanted to 'develop' it, but he wanted to preserve its ancient status, and resisted, very successfully, any encroachment on its independence, rights and privileges by 'officialdom'. He liked to think of it as a place where he, and all others, could find all kinds of wild life, and that was what led him to introduce deer, goats, ponies, Soay sheep, brown hares, swans, geese, wild ducks, squirrels, Barbary sheep, partridges and wallabies, and to reintroduce gannets. He also made attempts to breed red grouse and moorhens. For the benefit of those who have never visited Lundy, I must say that the introduction of brown hares, swans, wild ducks, squirrels, Barbary sheep, partridges, wallabies, red grouse and moorhens failed in a greater or lesser degree and that the placing of gannets' eggs under shags produced no gannets. Martin Harman also spent a lot of money in trying to exterminate the brown rat, and in planting trees and shrubs, as well as smaller plants, such as whortle-berry, which, incidentally, has not established itself.

Visitors to Lundy now might be excused for thinking that the Island had been 'let down' during Martin Harman's ownership, with the half ruined buildings, and general air of neglect, but, in fact he has preserved the Lundy which matters, for his successors and the large number of people in all parts of the United Kingdom who have visited Lundy and fallen under its charm. He could so easily have done otherwise.

F. W. GADE.

Although all my meetings with M. C. Harman were in London and mostly in or near the Law Courts, I always think of him in connection with Lundy. He was to my mind not only a typical

Englishman but a countryman and there is something about the Island, rugged but at the same time mild, which exactly matched his character. Simple and unostentatious in the way he lived yet lavishly generous to those he liked, self-confident but without any self-conceit, with a love of nature and a capacity for friendship with people of every type and with a sense of humour which did not spare himself, he was quite unlike the popular idea of an important financier.

When I first knew him he had, like almost everyone in the City, been struck by the terrible slump of twenty-five years ago and I was impressed by the courage, patience and cheerfulness with which he faced a long series of troubles and misfortunes and which enabled him to a large extent to overcome them. Such qualities being hereditary, I was not surprised to read that one of his sons had been posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross. M.C.H. himself grew up in an era of peace in which a young man wishing to make his way in the world naturally went into business, and I have sometimes wondered what his career might have been if he had adopted some profession which would have brought him more directly into contact with the conflicts of the modern world and given him an opportunity of leading men, which would have come more naturally to him than managing money.

CECIL BINNEY.

