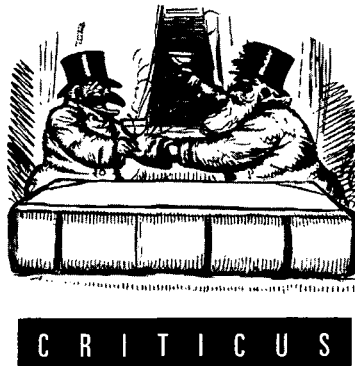


ARTS & CULTURE



Goodbye, Golly!

B Y G . B . T E N N Y S O N

AS DEATHS GO, the one that Criticus is about to lament doesn't stand in the league of the World Trade Center and Pentagon atrocities that have been occupying attention the past two months. No more can it quite be compared with great historical assassinations, such as Caesar's or Archduke Franz Ferdinand's. In fact, this death is not even that of a real person but rather of a symbol, a fictional character, and its murderers don't even call it a death but rather a "retirement." Nevertheless, Criticus knows exactly where he was and what he was doing at the time of the calamity. It was eight o'clock on the morning of 23 August 2001 in a room at the Galaxie Hotel in Oxford when Criticus switched on the television news and was confronted by a familiar and loved image and the newsreader's statement that that image, known as "Golly," had been dropped as the official advertising symbol of Robertson's marmalade.

Woe and lamentation. Criticus raced out to the nearby newsagent's and bought copies of all the national papers. Of course they carried the story prominently in the front section and always with illustra-

G.B. Tennyson is a dedicated golliwogologist (to use Walter Hooper's descriptive term) who has long contemplated writing a full-scale history of the golliwog and is now awaiting Golly's coming again to smite his detractors.

tions, the best of these being in the *Daily Mail*. Over one of those abundant English breakfasts (large pot of tea, two eggs, chunk of Canadian bacon, baked beans on fried bread, sausages, fried tomatoes, black pudding, rack of toast, butter, and of course, marmalade, whether Robertson's or not) a mournful Criticus lost his appetite reading those baleful news reports. All told essentially the same tale, though some were better than others at relating the history of the symbol.

American readers, even Constant ones, may find all the foregoing somewhat baffling. Who and what is this Golly, you may well ask, and why should his demise be national news with pictures? Above all, what has it to do with me? Well, here's the story.

Golly is the popular, and in recent years the official, name for a golliwog, a children's nursery book figure based on American dolls from the nineteenth century. Robertson's marmalade has always claimed that such a figure was brought back from America in the first decade of the twentieth century by the son of founder James Robertson of Paisley. He, John Robertson, saw children playing with rag dolls made from discarded bits of clothing often fashioned to look like a minstrel character. In 1910 James Robertson adapted the doll to use as a promotional device for advertising his Golden Shred (orange) and Silver Shred (lem-



on) marmalade. By 1928 Robertson's introduced its golliwog collectors' scheme whereby children could cut out paper golliwog "tokens" (coupons) from the wrapping on the marmalade jars to submit in exchange for golliwog brooches. The first of these showed Golly as a golfer. Over time (and long before there ever was a Barbie) Golly brooches depicted the character in every conceivable role — as doctor, skier, policeman, farmer, and countless other occupations and activities. More than twenty million Golly badges have been produced over the years, the highpoint being in the 1970s when 500,000 badges were sent out every year.

SO SUCCESSFUL was the collectors' scheme that it was expanded to include all manner of other golliwog objects, from soft toys to tea towels to dishware to aprons to sweat shirts. Moreover, many who became collectors as children continued collecting as adults, so that today there are 60,000 registered collectors, to say nothing of internet sites and international Golly organizations. There is bound to be stiff competition for the proposed final, year-end £20 Golly badge, which will be in gold and will render Golly carrying a suitcase with the year 2001 on it, his characteristic upraised left hand looking now very much like a final wave goodbye.

But why was such a popular figure discarded after ninety-one years service? Well, this being an epic story, we have begun *in medias res* (in the midst of things), as all epics are supposed to do, and we must go back to the beginning to make the whole comprehensible.

The Robertsons certainly did introduce and even

more certainly market the golliwog as he is best known today. John Robertson doubtless did bring back a golliwog-type rag doll that proved the inspiration for the advertising campaign. But the invention — both in the sense of the *finding* (remember the Invention of the Cross by St. Helena) and the *creating* — of the golliwog actually occurred over a decade and a half before Robertson's took him up. It too was an Anglo-American achievement.

A mother and daughter team share the glory. Florence Upton was born of English parentage in 1873 in the United States. As a child she was given one of the rag dolls in minstrel costume that were popular in America at the time. In

her teens she began work as a designer and illustrator. In 1893 the family moved back to England where Bertha Upton, Florence's mother, encouraged Florence to draw children's characters for a story for which Bertha supplied the text in verse. The result was *Two Dutch [i.e., German] Dolls and a Golliwogg* (note the spelling), published by Longmans in 1895. This was the first appearance of the character and word. No one knows for certain where the Uptons got the word, now generally rendered as *golliwog*. It has been speculated that it was inspired by *polliwog*, another name for a tadpole and one more commonly used in America than in England. Some also suggest that it was an American variation on the diminutive *dolly*, viz., *golly*, though no reason is known for its being thus altered. Possibly *dollies* were then the standard German wooden kind, as are the dolls in the Uptons' books, so that another word seemed appropriate for soft, rag dolls. But why, then, expand it to *golliwog*? It seems more likely that the full word itself was already in use in America and was taken back to England along with the doll. We might therefore say that the Uptons didn't so much create the word as introduce it to the general public.

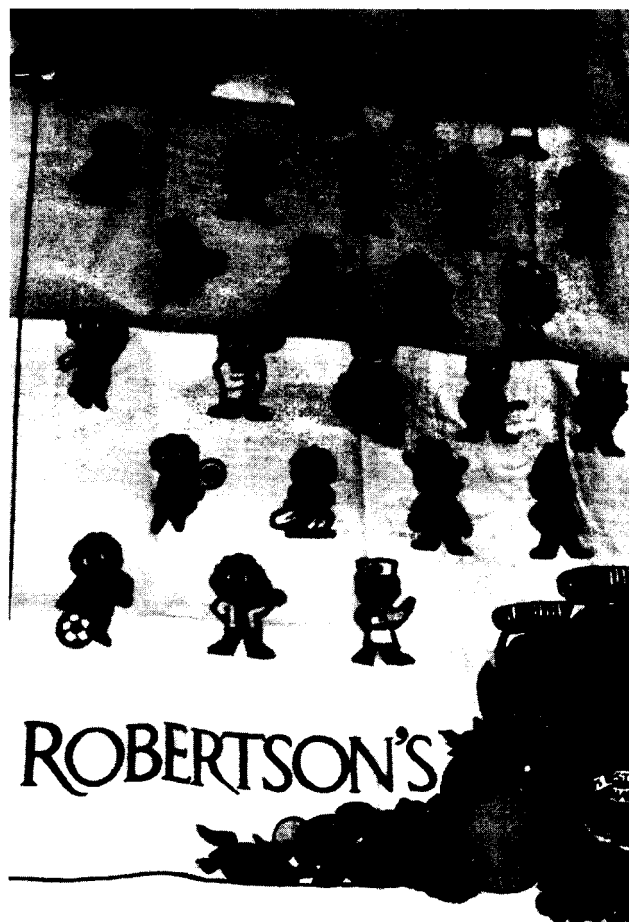
The Uptons' golliwog book was an immediate success. Children took to the golliwog character, who actually plays a relatively small role in the first book. But his popularity led to a series of twelve more books — the last in 1908 — in which he figures prominently and which all, like the first one, feature the name of this endearing character in the title. Thus we have *The Golliwogg's Bicycle Club*, *The Golliwogg's "Auto-Go-Cart,"* *The Golliwogg in Holland*, and so on. Alas for the Uptons, they never registered the Golliwogg as a

trademark, so he was appropriated by doll makers, by other writers, and by advertisers, most especially Robertson's.

IT OUGHT not surprise readers to learn that the child C.S. Lewis, avid reader as he was of the writings of E. Nesbit and Beatrix Potter, was clearly also a fan of the Uptons' stories because he included a golliwog as a character in the earliest known surviving work from his hand. It is a playlet that begins the "Animal Land" stories in the Boxen saga that Lewis and later his brother Warren wrote over a period of years. The surviving material from these writings was published by Walter Hooper as *Boxen: The Imaginary World of the Young C.S. Lewis* (1985). The play is titled "The King's Ring" and is believed by Hooper to have been written in early 1906 when Lewis would have been only seven years old. Among the characters is one Sir Big, described as a "frog fieldmarshal" (Lewis's boyish spelling) who has a servant named simply "Gollywog." This Golly has a very minor role, mainly to do Sir Big's bidding, so he experiences none of the adventures of the Uptons' Golly; but his very presence at this early date indicates how thoroughly the golliwog character had entered into the British nursery world.

The popularity of the Uptons' creation was demonstrated during the First World War when the original Golliwogg and the wooden dolls, the manuscripts, and the original watercolor illustrations were donated to the Red Cross and auctioned off to buy an ambulance for the war effort. Later they were given to the Prime Minister's country residence Chequers where they were on display until presented on long loan to the Museum of Childhood in Bethnal Green, London, where they presently reside, or at least did a few years ago when Criticus visited them. It is highly doubtful that Mr. Blair or any other Prime Minister will call the dolls back to Chequers.

Although C.S. Lewis never made much of his fictional golliwog and even denied that the "Animal Land" stories had any connection with his later children's fiction in the Narnian Chronicles, others were eager to capitalize on the popularity of the golliwog. I have already noted that toymakers brought forth numerous golliwog dolls, and virtually every British child until recently was sure to have one. Even the prestigious Steiff in Germany made Gollies, for the character was also popular on the continent, to the extent of inspiring a musical piece by Debussy. Still today the elegant British toymaker Merrythought is quietly producing Golly dolls for the quality market,



BY LINEN

often as not to a theme or style of the company's own devising. Criticus came upon one called "Golly Long-legs" in Harrods a few years ago at £28, which is probably £10 less than it would be today. (The pound is running at about \$1.50-\$1.60.) The Uptons must be smiling, or turning, in their graves in Hampstead Cemetery.

BUT LONG before Golly went upmarket, other writers than the Uptons were not behind-hand in incorporating golliwogs into their children's stories, though Criticus has no definitive list of all who did. He does remember a drawing in A.A. Milne's *When We Were Very Young* (first published 1924, though Criticus encountered a rather later edition, thank you) that shows a chair or bed with some of Christopher Robin's toys on it, one of which is clearly a golliwog. But the author other than the Uptons who made the most of the golliwog was Enid Blyton (1897-1968).

Blyton was an immensely popular and immensely prolific writer of children's books, so prolific that some believed she was actually a team of writers using a single name (which, incidentally, was true of the

Nancy Drew series). But Blyton wrote all her own stuff, explaining her literary fecundity by saying, as *Criticus* recalls it from memory, "I just open the sluice gates, and it all pours out." What poured out most successfully was, first, her series about the "Famous Five," a group of schoolchildren who solve mysteries and, second, her series of "Noddy" books. These latter which began appearing after World War II were about the adventures of "Little Noddy," a toy come to life in "Toyland," usually accompanied by his gnome-like friend called "Big-Ears." Blyton introduced golliwogs into the Noddy books, including a Mr. and a Mrs. Golly. Her golliwogs are often mischievous or testy with poor Noddy, rather unlike the Uptons' Golliwogg or for that

matter the genial, friendly Robertson's Golly. But they are not so wicked as latter-day critics have painted them. Nevertheless, the Blyton estate has recently sold the rights to her works for which a worldwide campaign is planned, with reissues and television cartoons and all the rest. Except that the golliwogs will be excised as will Big-Ears, so as not to be upsetting to children with big ears. Where is Prince Charles when we need him?

FLORENCE UPTON depicted the basic look of the golliwogg with her drawings, but later illustrators modified his appearance in various ways. The first golliwogg is a largish black-haired, very dark-gray-skinned figure with an oversized head, round white eyes with black dots, red mouth, and a huge shock of unruly, spiky hair. He is often dressed in a dark jacket with tails and red trousers and a red bow tie, but he appears in many other costumes in the Upton books to suit the story. Over time, however, the Robertson Golly has come to represent the defining image. His typical appearance is in a blue jacket, yellow waistcoat, red trousers and red bow tie. His hair is not wild but rounded off with low, even mounds on the top. When not in costume for one of his activities, he is typically rendered with his right hand behind his jacket and his left hand raised up as

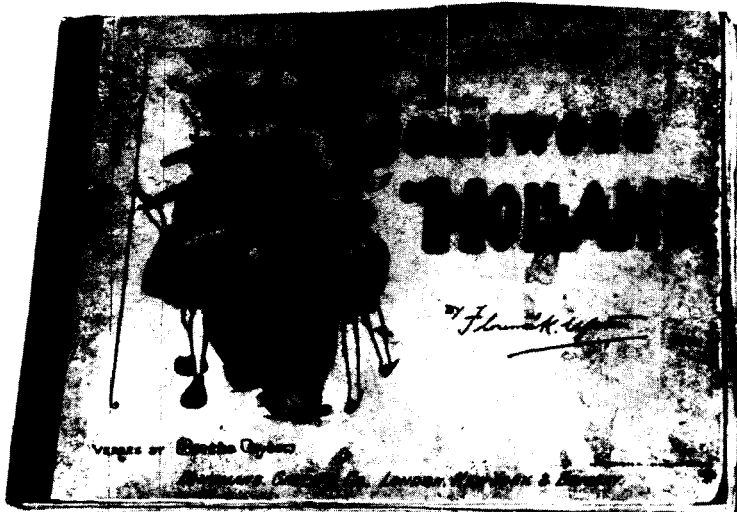
in a greeting. And he is almost always smiling.

So why should such a cheerful figure be dropped as a mascot? Well, alert readers will long since have come to the answer: *he is politically incorrect*. It all goes back to the Doleful Decade, the 1960s. It was then that the revolting classes began complaining that the golliwogg was a caricature of a black person, that he was derived from slave dolls, that his full name was

probably the source for, certainly a reminder of, the derogatory term *wog*. In the light of such criticism Robertson's quietly dropped the word *golliwogg* from their advertisements and called their mascot simply Golly. But that did not appease the politically correct. By the 1980s the Greater London Council had banned the purchase of Robertson's marmalade

in all facilities under its control. (Margaret Thatcher disbanded the Greater London Council in that same decade, but not, so far as I know, specifically because of its anti-Gollyism, but rather broadly because of its overall Loony Left policies under Ken Livingstone, who has since, Dracula-like, come back as the elected Mayor of London.) In the eighties also, Golly was removed from the front of the marmalade jar, but retained on the cap and on the token on the back. By now *Criticus* found himself humming the Noël Coward song "There Are Bad Times Just Around the Corner."

By the 1990s with the growth of the race relations industry, which is if anything more virulent in Britain than in the United States, there was continued criticism of Golly as racially offensive. The governmental Commission for Racial Equality reproved Robertson's several times, asking them to consult their customers as to the continued use of the symbol. Robertson's says it gets only ten letters a year complaining about the image. Another race-conscious group said the image "embodies the mythical qualities such as the love of music and rhythm, superstition, large appetites, primitive simplicity and savagery." All this from a doll designed to promote the sale of marmalade. The complainers may be saying more about their self-image than about dear little Golly.



By the turn of this century, Golly's fate was sealed. The Robertson family had long since sold the business to a conglomerate, and in the end corporate thought prevailed, which means: do anything to avoid bad publicity. At least unlike American firms, they did not have to pay off Jesse Jackson. In fact, they offered a face-saving solution. In announcing the retirement of Golly, a company spokeswoman said that Golly was not racist and still widely loved but their research has shown that children today "are no longer interested in — or familiar with — the Golly character." Theirs was a brand that was "constantly evolving" so they decided to replace Golly with seven characters from Roald Dahl's children's books illustrated by Quentin Blake. Illustrations of some of these characters appeared in the newspapers along with the Golly ones. Criticus finds that they range from fussy to ugly. In addition, Roald Dahl himself was widely known to be a monstrously unpleasant person, and many critics deplored the strong element of cruelty in his books. But in the modern world cruelty is preferable to racism. We piously hope that these new mascots will prove to be dismal failures.



vice." In any case, the primary definition of a wog is, in the words of the Oxford English Dictionary, "a vulgarly offensive name for a foreigner, especially one of Arab extraction." Also "the Arabic language." To be sure, the term has been applied variously to any non-white person, and even to any non-British foreigner, as in the famous phrase, "The wogs begin at Calais." Cultivated persons, of course, eschew the use of the term altogether, but perhaps it can be revived to apply to the Taliban.

Dictionary definitions of the golliwog define him as a doll, emphasizing his grotesqueness: "a kind of grotesque black doll" (Webster); "name invented for a black-faced grotesquely dressed (male) doll with a shock of fuzzy hair" (Oxford English Dictionary). If the anti-Golly faction had actually looked at Florence Upton's drawings in the original books they would have seen that she knew perfectly well the difference between her golliwog and human beings, black or otherwise. In *The Golliwogg's Bicycle Club* the Uptons take Golliwogg and four dolls around the world, ending up on a tropical island where they are beset by cannibals in the land of Panky-Wank. These brown-skinned, clearly human persons, possibly South Sea Islanders, possibly Africans, not only do not resemble Golliwogg, they actually intend to cook him as an edible alien. In the end, of course, the natives are placated, and they proceed to row the dolls and Golliwogg back to England.

MOREOVER, THE arguments against Golly, like so much that comes out of the University of Political Correctness range from dubious to wrong. The origin of the word wog, for example, is quite simply unknown. It may indeed be a contraction of golliwog, but this is not at all certain. It is first recorded in print in 1929 and may be a shortening of the term *wogger*, meaning a non-white, itself first recorded in 1922 in James Joyce's *Ulysses*. (Take that, modernists!) Some say it was the pronunciation of the initials W.O.G., for Western Oriental Gentleman, said to have been used by East Indians in British colonial service. Others say that it is from British naval parlance for "Wily Oriental Gentleman." Yet others claim it was British army slang for Egyptian "Workers On Government Ser-

That was certainly a different England from the current one. If there was any element of negritude in the various golliwogs that emerged from the time of the Uptons' writing, it was a benignly intended element. Even before children took Teddy bears to bed (the first Teddy dates from 1902), they were clutching their golliwogs with great affection. Now that Golly has gone to Golly Heaven, those dolls and those other symbols of his long life will become ever more valuable and ever more treasured. Meantime, be warned that the p.c. patrols, like rust, never sleep and are even now working to corrode and destroy everything, old, venerable, and loved.

CFF



A Utopia That Never Was

B Y P E T E R H A N N A F O R D

A FEW YEARS ago a political consultant friend defined the arch-environmentalists' view of the world as, "Man is but a passing disaster on this planet." At the time I thought it was an exaggeration, but time proved him right and me wrong.

Clean air and water and saving the national parks are causes too tame for the feverish who aspire to find meaning in their lives through tree-, animal- and earth-goddess worship. Their objective is to turn back industrial society to a utopia that never was. In his novel, Jack Stevens, a Californian and former assistant attorney general, tells us what can happen right here in California when the ultra-Greens make common cause with the vestiges of Sixties radicalism.

In the 2006 election, a "moderate" Republican, Richard Sloan, is elected. He is a disciple of public opinion polls and sets out to capitalize on broadly popular environmental issues by installing "greens" in high-level jobs. H. Bruce Scanlan, a one-time Berkeley radical, is state Secretary of Resources. His henchman is one Dr. Timothy Cooksey, a "deep ecologist" who is into every known New Age fad, a few to which the

author introduces us. They are aided by a dimwit United States senator, some quasi-fascist park rangers, and a band of eco-terrorists.

Scanlan and Cooksey conspire to thwart industrial development

Spark's Tract

by Jack Stevens

Xlibris Corporation,

2001, 351 pages,

\$19.54, paper.

through bureaucratic snarls. Their assertion is that mankind has been raping Mother Earth; that it all began when humans turned away from being hunter-gatherers to settling down to agrarian ways. They see mankind as just part of the food chain, nothing more. They rhapsodize about plants and animals.

Their immediate target is Will Spark, a 55-year-old petroleum geologist who wants to survey a sunken tract in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta for what he suspects is a huge supply of subterranean gas and perhaps oil. The story is built around the "greens" attempt to prevent his survey. His side of the story arouses the curiosity of an influential woman colum-

nist for a daily newspaper. His allies prove to be a rancher descended from Spanish colonialists (who also has an Irish ancestor), a Japanese-American couple, and a feisty Jewish couple from Brooklyn.

None of Stevens's characters are truly three-dimensional. All are symbols, metaphors, for ideas, philosophies, positions. In that sense they remind one of characters in Ayn Rand's novels. Like hers, his are vehicles for pursuing points of view. And, like Rand's, his characters can put forth their positions forcefully, eloquently, and persuasively. In the case of Stevens's characters, they often talk simple common sense in response to the New Age flights-of-fancy and misanthropic venom of the "greens."

WHILE THE characters are not deeply etched in a literary sense, the plot is filled with action and never slows down. This book is a page-turner. There are some surprising twists, including a mountain lion who performs a public service when it comes to the ring leader of the eco-terrorists.

If you thought the marriage of "deep ecology" and political radicalism could never happen here, Stevens reminds us through this cautionary tale that California is the land where anything can happen — including irrationality in government.

CFF.

Peter Hannaford's next book is Ronald Reagan and His Ranch: The Western White House, 1981-89, due to be published by Images From the Past, Inc., in February 2002.