

# THE BELLAMY CHARADES

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*Editor's Note: Doris Nash Wortman (1890-1967), Double-Crostic editor for the Saturday Review from 1952 to 1967, and a member of the National Puzzlers' League (under the nom "Dorse"), wrote the following piece about 1945.*

Fifty years ago in Boston, there was a best-selling author who had been enjoying a most successful limelight for six or seven years when, to the surprise of everybody, a shy retiring brother of his—an excellent public accountant not supposed to be a writer at all—leaped with a book into a successful limelight of his own.

The best-selling author was Edward Bellamy, with his prophetic novel *Looking Backward—2000 A.D. – 1887 A.D.* (Can't wait to dig up a copy of it, halfway between those points as we are—that is, halfway plus the length of World War II.) The shy retiring bachelor brother was William Bellamy, who published *A Century of Charades* in 1894.

Charades in verse had been written for hundreds of years. In fact, in the time of Queen Elizabeth it was the obligation of every gentleman with any social pretensions to be able to turn a neat enigma of the sort on demand, quite as much as to be able to sing at sight "correctly and pleasingly" a part in those intricate contrapuntal ditties known as madrigals. Later, Jane Austen's flirtatious young persons wrote to each other stilted, strained verses in whose patchouli-scented and lace-trimmed language lay concealed some such timid charade as "court-ship."

*Concealed* is right. It was for William Bellamy, three generations later, to cut away all inert "poetry," introduce charm, multiply titillating clues, pragmatically codify a set of laws for writing charades in verse which is in force today.

With what seems to many of us sound psychology, William Bellamy never published the answers to any of his charades. If people wrote to him beseeching help in arriving at a solution, he would reply with another charade on the same keyword. (Sometimes this helped, sometimes it didn't.) He included an ingenious key, at the back of each of his five volumes (the last was published in 1911), by which one might *verify* a solution, but from which only a chess-player with the patience of Job could ever have worked backward to achieve the answers without solving for them.

It became the fashion for bewildered Bellamy devotees in search of keywords to ask for hints from more successful solvers in the correspondence columns of the public prints. Tucked between the pages of an old copy of Bellamy's *Third Century*, found twenty-five years ago in a bookstall, were two clippings from some New York Times Book Review sections of even longer ago. Constant readers were endeavoring to help each other to elusive solutions by giving out their own settings of certain keywords and asking for similar help in solving others.

For William Bellamy's success was immediate, his idea fascinating and novel, his techniques contagious. Less than two years after the *Century*, a young girl named Carolyn Wells published her first book, a book of charades in verse, which she called *At the Sign of the Sphinx* and dedicated to no less a person than the great Shakespearean scholar William James Rolfe. Doctor

Rolfe, she tells us in her autobiographical *The Rest of My Life*, had encouraged her by saying that her charades were “as good as Bellamy’s”.

Many people in these fifty years have written charades in verse. All were modeled on Bellamy’s. Once in a blue moon, a few equal the master’s in charm, imaginative humor and closeness of cluing, in economy of words, in finish.

It seems timely now, when the whole civilized world is thirsty for mental recreations powerful enough to catch and hold a distraught attention, and when for twenty-five years the public interest in words has been not only stimulated but exacerbated (ever since the first Crossword humbly reared its checkered head), to revive the Bellamy charades in verse. This department takes joy and pride in promising at least two a month.

While the Bellamy books have long been out of print, nevertheless they are not so ancient that it is impossible to find them, and it may be that many of our readers know them well. Since the chief interest of any enigma lies in its answer being unknown, this department will include one or two charades of modern manufacture in the style of Bellamy, and will also accept in publication worthy contributions which are of sufficient general interest.

### **Bellamy Charade No. 222**

Cleopatra in a crisis  
Thus relieved her mind to Isis:

“Though in chains I’d look attractive,  
Never will I be a captive;  
Nor with Caesar will I palter,  
Though he lead me to the altar”—

[Here she used a Latin word,  
‘Tis MY SECOND and MY THIRD.]

“Better that MY FIRST forestall him,  
Than to live MY FOURTH to call him.  
Marcus is my love forever.  
Though I never thought him clever,  
And his ‘Dying, Egypt, dying,’  
Was enough to drive me flying,  
Still will I be true to Marcus;  
Let me die upon his carcass.”

Atropos then slit the meshes,  
Now MY WHOLE is what all flesh is.”

### **Bellamy Charade No. 289**

MY FIRST claims England as his proud domain;  
MY FIRST and NEXT its myriads has slain;  
In Spain some look to see MY ONE, TWO, THREE;  
And when a great man lies in mortal pain,  
The doctors meet, and on MY WHOLE agree.

**Modern Charade No. 1**

“A rose is a rose is a rose is a rose”—  
 For Gertrude perhaps, not for me.  
 ‘Twas a FIRST before, and everyone knows  
 That a hip it will LAST to be.

I can skate, I can ski, I can walk the tight-rope,  
 I can juggle—I’ve various talents  
 Requiring poise; and some day I hope  
 My own simple TOTAL to balance.

**Modern Charade No. 2**

When Duty whispers low, a lad  
 Replies he FIRST, we’re told—  
 And he a courteous “LAST” might add  
 For fear his manner’s bold.  
 He wouldn’t, if he’d think to turn  
 And see who counsels him,  
 For ‘tis God’s voice’s daughter stern—  
 A lady plenty grim.

The ugly WHOLE, with warlike claws,  
 A frightful death defines;  
 And with a goat capricious draws  
 Imaginary lines.  
 His numbered days to bridal trysts  
 Rare, rosy fragrance lend,  
 ‘And come at length, like journalists’,  
 With thirty to their end.

*It should be pointed out that Bellamy charades are phonetic (such as bison: bye, sun) with my first, my second, etc., referring to the individual syllables. It is unclear what department she expected to publish her charades—perhaps in The Enigma, but they never appeared there as a regular feature. The five Bellamy books are A Century of Charades (1894), A Second Century of Charades (1896), A Third Century of Charades (1904), More Charades (1909), and Broken Words: A Fifth Century of Charades (1911). The editor has available for sale two copies of each of the first two books and one of the third, for six dollars apiece. In Open Sesame (1895), Harland Ballard provided rhymed answers to the first Bellamy book, and in Re-Open Sesame (1897), he did the same for the second.*