

# THE FIRST DOUBLE AND TRIPLE ACROSTICS?

A. ROSS ECKLER  
Morristown, New Jersey

Double and triple acrostics occupy an important niche in the history of word puzzles, for it is generally recognized that they were the predecessors to the crossword puzzle. For those unfamiliar with the genre, a double acrostic consists of clues for a sequence of words (the cross-lights) to be written in a list, plus two clues to the words spelled out by the first and last letters of the cross-lights (the uprights). In a triple acrostic a third upright is formed out of interior letters in the cross-lights. The cross-lights may consist of words of varying lengths, but the uprights are obviously constrained to have exactly as many letters as there are cross-lights.

In his 1925 book The World's Best Word Puzzles, Henry Ernest Dudeney states that the first double acrostic was constructed by "Cuthbert Bede" (a pseudonym for Rev. J. Bradley) and published in the Illustrated London News of August 30, 1856. It contained the six cross-lights Light, Ostrich, Neva (a river in Leningrad), Despotism, Owhyhe (an early spelling of Hawaii), and News; the uprights, of course, were LONDON and THAMES. Dudeney ventured to attribute the double acrostic to Queen Victoria, on the evidence of a book entitled Victorian Enigmas; or, Windsor Fireside Researches; Being a Series of Acrostics Enigmatically Propounded, by Charlotte Eliza Capel, printed in 1861:

Some five years ago, a copy of one in this collection was handed to me to solve, with these words- 'A friend at Windsor has this from the palace, said to be written by the Queen for the Royal children.' It was solved at the time, and laid by in my desk, until the winter before last, when three kindred spirits having met, I produced it for their amusement. The enigma disposed of, it was proposed we should emulate Her Majesty.

There seems little doubt that double acrostics were invented in the 1850s; Cuthbert Bede wrote in 1856 of double acrostics as agreeable novelties "lately introduced". In an 1860 puzzle book Charades, Enigmas and Riddles: Collected by Cantab, the introduction states "The Double Acrostic is a very recent invention". They quickly became the rage. For example, the publishing company of Thomas Bosworth in London had by 1867 issued at least six books of double acrostics, not only general works but special ones devoted to historical or Biblical topics.

But was Dudeney correct? Recently I acquired several volumes of The Family Friend, a semiannual (later a quarterly) compendium of issues of a monthly (later a weekly) magazine of stories,

poems, handicrafts and the like aimed at the British housewife. Each issue contained a puzzle column with a variety of chess problems, mathematical puzzles, mechanical puzzles and word puzzles, with answers given in the following issue. Most of the word puzzles are Charades and Numericals, but in an issue of Volume 1 of the New Series, published in 1852 (the preface is dated September 24, so the puzzles must have appeared sometime that summer), there are two word puzzles entitled Rebus which are clearly Double and Triple Acrostics:

Take the center of sight,  
A wanderer by night,  
What cheese-makers fancy,  
The short for fair Nancy,  
Something easily crack'd,  
And a sermon or tract;

The initials will show you a country of fame;  
The centres and finals two towns in the same.

A poisonous snake; hard water; a rugged rock; Latin bulls;  
a bulbous vegetable; a seaport in the Baltic; a little demon;  
and malt liquor. The initials will give the name of an  
illustrious lady, and the finals of all but the last two  
will give her title.

The cross-lights to the first puzzle are FoCuS, RAT, ALE, NAN, ChlnA, and EsSaY, and the uprights FRANCE, CALAIS and STENAY. The cross-lights to the second are VipeR, IcE, CraG, TaurI, OnioN, RigA, Imp and Ale, and the uprights VICTORIA REGINA.

Two issues later, a third Rebus appeared:

A girl's name; a negative; a double tooth; a portion of the  
staff of life; a town of Sweden; part of the finger; a noisy  
quack. The initials of these form the name of a country in  
Europe, and the finals the name of a division of the same  
country.

The cross-lights to this puzzle are ElleN, NO, GrindeR, LoaF, AbO, Nail and DucK, and the uprights ENGLAND and NORFOLK.

Apparently this wasn't a very popular puzzle, for I can find no further examples in my volumes of The Family Friend. Can anyone come up with examples of double or triple acrostical puzzles prior to the summer of 1852?