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978-1-108-02152-4 - Samuel Pepys and the World He Lived In

Henry Benjamin Wheatley

Excerpt

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SAMUEL PEPYS AND THE WORLD HE LIVED IN.

CHAPTER I.

PEPYS BEFORE THE DIARY.

“He was a *pollard* man, without the *top* (*i. e.* the reason as the source of ideas, or immediate yet not sensuous truths, having their evidence in themselves; or the imagination or idealizing power, by symbols mediating between the reason and the understanding), but on this account more broadly and luxuriantly branching out from the upper trunk.”—COLERIDGE’S MS. note in his copy of the “Diary” (*Notes and Queries*, 1st S. vol. vi. p. 215).

SAMUEL PEPYS was the first of a well-established stock to make a name in the outer world, but since his time the family can boast of having had amongst its members a Court physician, a bishop, and a lord chancellor.

The earliest recorded Pepys was named Thomas, and appears, on the authority of the Court Rolls of the manor of Pelhams, in Cotten-

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ham, to have been bailiff of the Abbot of Crowland's lands in Cambridgeshire, in the early part of the reign of Henry VI.¹ From that time the family flourished, and there seems to be some reason for believing that certain members enriched themselves with the spoils of the abbey lands in the time of Henry VIII.

Before the Diarist became known, one of the most distinguished members of the family was Richard Pepys, created Lord Chief Justice of Ireland by Charles I. When the King was executed, Richard resigned his office; but he enjoyed the favour of Cromwell, and resumed the place. As he did not die until 1678, it is strange that there should be no allusion to him in the "Diary."

The branch from which Samuel was descended had not much money; and his father, being a younger son, came to London and became a tailor. This descent in the social scale has caused much misapprehension, and his enemies did not forget to taunt him on his connection with tailoring; but it is a well-accredited axiom that trade does not injure gentry. Some remarks of Pepys himself upon his family have been greatly misunderstood. Referring to the non-appearance of any account of the Pepyses in Fuller's "Worthies," he writes:—"But I believe, indeed, our family were never considerable."² Dr. Doran paraphrased this into: "Let others say of his family what they might: he, for his own part, did not believe that it was of

¹ "Diary," ed. Mynors Bright, vol. iv. p. 366; vol. vi p. 306.

² "Diary," Feb. 10, 1661-62.

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anything like gentle descent.”¹ This is a pure blunder, for Pepys merely meant that none of the family had made much mark; and he would have been very indignant had any one told him that they were not gentle.

Samuel, the fifth child of John and Margaret Pepys, was born on February 23rd, 1632, either at Brampton, a village near Huntingdon, or in London. There is something to be said in favour of each supposition, but, as the registers of Brampton church do not commence until the year 1654,² the question cannot now be definitely settled. We have Pepys's own authority for the statement that his father and mother were married at Newington, in Surrey, on October 15th, 1626.³ The register of marriages of St. Mary, Newington, has been searched, but the name of Pepys occurs neither in the years 1625, 1626, nor in 1627,⁴ and Mrs. John Pepys's maiden name is still unknown. In early youth, Samuel went to a school at Huntingdon, as appears by a passage in the “Diary” (March 15th, 1659-60), where he writes: “I met Tom Alcock, one that went to school with me at Huntingdon, but I had not seen him this sixteen years.” He seems to have spent his youth pretty equally between town and country, for on one occasion, when he was walking over the fields to Kingsland, he re-

¹ “Habits and Men,” p. 300.

² I am indebted to the kindness of the Rev. Herbert Bree, Rector of Brampton, for this information.

³ “Diary,” Dec. 31, 1664.

⁴ “Notes and Queries,” 1st S. vol. xii. p. 102.

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membered the time when, as a boy, he lived there, and "used to shoot with my bow and arrow in these fields."¹ When he left Huntingdon he entered St. Paul's School, and remained there until he had reached the age of seventeen. In after life, on the occasion of an official visit to Mercers' Hall, he remembered the time when he was a petitioner for his exhibition.² He was a stout Roundhead in his boyish days, and this fact was remarked upon, to his great chagrin, in after years, by his friend and schoolfellow Mr. Christmas. He went to see the execution of Charles I. at Whitehall, and made himself conspicuous by saying on his return that, were he to preach upon the event of the day, he should select as his text the verse: "The memory of the wicked shall rot." He was in some fear that Mr. Christmas might remember this also, but he was happy to find that that gentleman had left school before the incident occurred.³ Pepys always took a lively interest in the welfare of his school, to which references are frequently made in the "Diary."

In 1650, his name occurs as a sizar on the boards of Trinity College, Cambridge; but before going to reside at the University, on March 5, 1650-51,⁴ he was entered at Magdalene College, having probably been led to make the change by the greater inducements held out to him by the latter college. Here he was elected

¹ "Diary," May 12, 1667.² Jan. 22, 1660-61.³ Nov. 1, 1660.⁴ "Did put on my gown first, March 5, 1650-51," Dec. 31, 1664 (note).

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into one of Mr. Spendluffe's scholarships in the following month; and two years later, on October 14; 1653, he was preferred to one on Dr. John Smith's foundation. His father was at this time described as a citizen of London.

Little is known of Samuel's academic career, during which he does not appear to have gained much distinction; and remarks in various parts of the "Diary" show that his conduct was not such as became a Puritan. The College books can be brought as a witness against him, for we learn from that source that, on October 21st, 1653, "Peapys and Hind were solemnly admonished . . . for having been scandalously over-served with drink the night before." Still, we must not jump to the conclusion that his time was entirely wasted, for he evidently carried into his busy life a good stock of classical learning. It was while he was at the University that he made the acquaintance of the learned Selden, from whom he borrowed the collection of ballads which formed the basis of the famous Pepysian collection. He relates that, while at Cambridge, he wrote a romance entitled, "Love a Cheate," which he tore up on the 30th of January, 1663-64. This work of destruction must have been performed with some feelings of regret, for he tells us that he rather liked the tale, and wondered that he had ever been able to write so well. His previous literary performances had consisted in the concocting of some anagrams upon Mrs. Elizabeth Whittle, afterwards the wife of Sir Stephen Fox.¹ It is not recorded at what

¹ "Diary," Nov. 11, 1660.

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time Pepys left college, but it must have been either in 1654 or 1655. He was made Master of Arts by proxy, in June, 1660, the grace being passed on the 26th of that month.

On the 1st of December, 1655,¹ when he was still without any settled means of support, Pepys married Elizabeth St. Michel, a beautiful and portionless girl of fifteen. Although there is extant a letter from Balthasar St. Michel to Pepys (dated from Deal, February 8th, 1673-74), in which the history of Mrs. Pepys's family is set forth, Lord Braybrooke was contented with the information on her monument, and merely added that she was educated in a convent, which in point of fact she was not. The letter alluded to was printed as far back as the year 1841,² and yet I cannot find that the history contained in it has ever been used by the biographers of Pepys. What is even more remarkable than Lord Braybrooke's silence respecting it, is the fact that the Rev. John Smith, who published the letter, overlooked it when he wrote his introduction. Mons. St. Michel was of a good family in Anjou, but having turned Huguenot at the age of twenty-one, when in the German service, his father disinherited him, and he was left penniless. He came over to England in the retinue of Henrietta Maria, on her marriage with Charles I., as one of her Majesty's gentleman carvers; but the Queen dismissed

¹ Lord Braybrooke says October, but the "Athenæum" (1848, p. 551) says December 1st.

² "Life, Journals, and Correspondence of S. Pepys," vol. i. p. 146.

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him on finding out that he was a Protestant, and did not go to mass. Being a handsome man with courtly manners, he gained the affections of the daughter of Sir Francis Kingsmall (lately left a widow by an Irish squire), who married him against the wishes of her family, and, with £1,500 which they raised, the newly-married couple started for France, in the hope of recovering, if possible, some part of the family estates. Unhappily, they were taken prisoners at sea, with all their goods, by the Dunkirkers, and when released they settled at Bideford, in Devonshire. Here, or near by, Elizabeth and Balthasar and the rest of the family were born.

In course of time they all went to France, and the father, in command of a company of foot, assisted at the taking of Dunkirk. He occupied his time with propositions of perpetual motion and other visionary schemes, and consequently brought himself and all dependent upon him to the brink of poverty. While he was away from Paris, some devout Roman Catholics persuaded Madame St. Michel to place her daughter in the nunnery of the Ursulines. The father was enraged at this action, but managed to get Elizabeth out of the nunnery after she had been there twelve days. Thinking that France was a dangerous place to live in, he hurried his family back to England, and shortly afterwards Elizabeth married Pepys. Her father was greatly pleased that she had become the wife of a true Protestant; and she herself said to him, kissing his eyes, "Dear father, though in my tender years I was by my low fortune in this

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world deluded to popery by the fond dictates thereof, I have now (joined with my riper years, which give me more understanding) a man to my husband too wise, and one too religious in the Protestant religion, to suffer my thoughts to bend that way any more."

There are several references in the "Diary" to Mrs. Pepys's father and mother, who seem never to have risen out of the state of poverty into which they had sunk. On May 2, 1662, Mons. St. Michel took out a patent, in concert with Sir John Collidon and Sir Edward Ford,¹ for the purpose of curing smoky chimneys; but this scheme could not have been very successful, as a few months afterwards he was preparing to go to Germany in order to fight against the Turks.² Pepys gave him some work to do in 1666, and Mrs. Pepys carried the account-books that he was to rule; but such jobs as these must have given him but a sorry living, and in the following year he again proposed to go abroad. Pepys sent him three jacobuses in gold to help him on his journey.³ We hear nothing more of either father or mother, with the exception of an allusion to their pleasure at seeing the prosperous state of their daughter⁴—a prosperity in which they certainly did not share.

This account of Mrs. Pepys's parentage has led us away from the early days of Pepys, when, with improvident passion, he married his young

¹ "Diary," Sept. 22, 1663. In the original patent (No. 138) St. Michel's name appears as Alexander Merchant of St. Michael. (See Appendix.)

² Jan. 4, 1663-64.

³ June 21, 1667.

⁴ Dec. 28, 1668.

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wife; and we will therefore return to the year 1655. Early marriages were then far from uncommon, and Mrs. Pepys's beauty was considered as forming a very valid excuse for the improvidence of the match. There seems to be some reason for believing that she was of a dark complexion, for her husband on one occasion was mad with her for dressing herself according to the fashion in fair hair.¹ Sir Edward Montagu, who was Pepys's first cousin one remove (Samuel's grandfather and Sir Edward's mother being brother and sister), gave a helping hand to the imprudent couple, and allowed them to live in his house. The Diarist alludes to this time, when, some years afterwards, he writes of how his wife "used to make coal fires, and wash" his "foul clothes with her own hand," in their little room at Lord Sandwich's.²

Samuel does not appear to have lived with his father after he had grown up, and as old John Pepys was not a very thriving tradesman, it seems likely that Montagu had previously assisted his young kinsman. Indeed, it was probably under his patronage that Samuel went to the University.

The Diarist seems to have held some official position in the year 1656, because on Thursday, August 7th, a pass was granted "to John Pepys and his man with necessaries for Holland, being on the desire of Mr. Sam^l. Pepys."³ John Pepys had probably long been in the habit of going

¹ "Diary," May 11, 1667.² Feb. 25, 1666-67.³ Entry-Book No. 105 of the Protector's Council of State, p. 327 (*quoted*, "Notes and Queries," 5th S. vol. v. p. 508).

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backwards and forwards to Holland, for Samuel writes (January 24th, 1665-66): "We went through Horslydowne, where I never was since a little boy, that I went to enquire after my father, whom we did give over for lost coming from Holland." Whether these journeys were undertaken in the way of business, or whether they had any connection with Montagu's affairs, we cannot now tell. That Samuel acted as a sort of agent for Montagu, we have evidence; and among the Rawlinson Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library is a memorandum of the payment to him on General Montagu's part for the ransom of the Marquis of Baydez (22nd January, 1656-57).

On March 26th, 1658, he underwent an operation for the stone, a disease that seems to have been inherited. The operation was successfully performed, and ever after he made a practice of celebrating the anniversary of this important event in his life with thanksgiving.

In 1659 he accompanied Sir Edward Montagu in the "Naseby," when that admiral made his expedition to the Sound; and he was very surprised to learn afterwards how negotiations had been carried on of which at the time he was quite ignorant. This is not the place for a history of the various stages that led to the Restoration, but a passing allusion to one of these may be allowed here, as the particulars are given in the "Diary." When Sir Edward Montagu left England for the Sound, he said to the Protector Richard, on parting with him, that "he should rejoice more to see him in his grave at his return home, than that he should give way to such