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978-1-108-07411-7 - Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century: Comprizing
Biographical Memoirs of William Boywer, Printer, F.S.A., and Many of his Learned
Friends: Volume 5

John Nichols

Excerpt

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(1)

ESSAYS AND ILLUSTRATIONS

REFERRED TO IN THE

LITERARY ANECDOTES

OF THE

EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.

No. I.

EDWARD CAVE.

(See vol. II. p. 44 ; vol. IV. p. 95.)

“THE curiosity of the publick seems to demand the history of every man who has by whatever means risen to eminence ; and few lives would have more readers than that of the Compiler of *The Gentleman's Magazine*, if all those who received improvement or entertainment from him should retain so much kindness for their Benefactor as to enquire after his conduct and character.

EDWARD CAVE was born at Newton in Warwickshire, Feb. 29, 1691. His father was the youngest son of Mr. Edward Cave, of Cave's in the Hole, a lone house, on the Street-road in the same county, which took its name from the occupier ; but, having concurred with his elder brother in cutting off the intail of a small hereditary estate, by which act it

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was lost from the family, he was reduced to follow in Rugby the trade of a shoe-maker. He was a man of good reputation in his narrow circle, and remarkable for strength and rustic intrepidity. He lived to a great age, and was in his latter years supported by his son.

It was fortunate for Edward Cave, that, having a disposition to literary attainments, he was not cut off by the poverty of his parents from opportunities of cultivating his faculties. The school of Rugby, in which he had, by the rules of its foundation, a right to be instructed, was then in high reputation, under the Rev. Mr. Holyock, to whose care most of the neighbouring families, even of the highest rank, entrusted their sons. He had judgment to discover, and, for some time, generosity to encourage the genius of young Cave; and was so well pleased with his quick progress in the school, that he declared his resolution to breed him for the University, and recommend him as a servitor to some of his scholars of high rank. But prosperity which depends upon the caprice of others is of short duration. Cave's superiority in literature exalted him to an invidious familiarity with boys who were far above him in rank and expectations; and, as in unequal associations it always happens, whatever unlucky prank was played, was imputed to Cave. When any mischief, great or small, was done, though perhaps others boasted of the stratagem when it was successful, yet upon detection or miscarriage the fault was sure to fall upon poor Cave.

At last his mistress, by some invisible means, lost a favourite cock. Cave was with little examination stigmatized as the thief or murderer; not because he was more apparently criminal than others, but because he was more easily reached by vindictive justice. From that time Mr. Holyock withdrew his kindness visibly from him, and treated him with harshness, which the crime in its utmost aggravation could scarcely deserve, and which surely he would have forborne,

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forborne, had he considered how hardly the habitual influence of birth and fortune is resisted; and how frequently men, not wholly without sense of virtue, are betrayed to acts more atrocious than the robbery of a hen-roost, by a desire of pleasing their superiors.

Those reflections his master never made, or made without effect; for, under pretence that Cave obstructed the discipline of the school, by selling clandestine assistance, and supplying exercises to idlers, he was oppressed with unreasonable tasks, that there might be an opportunity of quarreling with his failure; and when his diligence had surmounted them, no regard was paid to the performance. Cave bore this persecution for a while; and then left the school, and the hope of a literary education, to seek some other means of gaining a livelihood.

He was first placed with a Collector of the Excise. He used to recount with some pleasure a journey or two which he rode with him as his clerk, and relate the victories that he gained over the Excisemen in grammatical disputations. But the insolence of his mistress, who employed him in servile drudgery, quickly disgusted him; and he went up to London in quest of more suitable employment.

He was recommended to a timber-merchant at the Bank side, and, while he was there on liking, is said to have given hopes of great mercantile abilities. But this place he soon left, I know not for what reason, and was bound apprentice to Mr. Collins, a printer of some reputation, and deputy alderman.

This was a trade for which men were formerly qualified by a literary education, and which was pleasing to Cave, because it furnished some employment for his scholastic attainments. Here therefore he resolved to settle, though his master and mistress lived in perpetual discord, and their house could be no comfortable habitation. From the inconveniences of these domestic tumults he was soon released, having in only two years attained

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tained so much skill in his art, and gained so much the confidence of his master, that he was sent without any superintendant to conduct a printing-house at Norwich, and publish a weekly paper. In this undertaking he met with some opposition, which produced a public controversy, and procured young Cave reputation as a writer.

His master died before his apprenticeship was expired; and, as he was not able to bear the perverseness of his mistress, he quitted her house upon a stipulated allowance, and married a young widow, with whom he lived at Bow. When his apprenticeship was over, he worked as a journeyman at the printing-house of Mr. Barber *, a man much distinguished and employed by the Tories, whose principles had at that time so much prevalence with Cave, that he was for some years a writer in 'Mist's Journal,' which (though he afterwards obtained, by his wife's interest, a small place in the Post-office) he for some time continued. But, as interest is powerful, and conversation, however mean, in time persuasive, he by degrees inclined to another party †; in which, however, he was always moderate, though steady and determined.

When he was admitted into the Post-office, he still continued, at his intervals of attendance, to exercise his trade, or to employ himself with some typographical business. He corrected the "Gradus ad Parnassum," and was liberally rewarded by the Company of Stationers. He wrote an account of

* Of whom, see before, vol. I. p. 73.

† This is by no means confined to persons that move in such humble spheres. The appreciating author of the "Decline, &c." has not only told us, p. 81. c. III. n. 15, that "officers of the police or revenue easily adapt themselves to any form of government;" but, for fear lest a doctrine that adds so little to the Dignity of Human Nature (on which modern Philosophers lay so much stress) should not be readily admitted, has even condescended to furnish an instance of a person deep in the schemes of Opposition one week, and the next taking his seat at the Board of Trade and Plantations as a Lord thereof." T. F.

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the Criminals, which had for some time a considerable sale; and published many little pamphlets that accident brought into his hands, of which it would be very difficult to recover the memory. By the correspondence which his place in the Post-office facilitated, he procured country news-papers, and sold their intelligence to a journalist of London for a guinea a week.

He was afterwards raised to the office of Clerk of the Franks, in which he acted with great spirit and firmness; and often stopped franks which were given by Members of Parliament to their friends, because he thought such extension of a peculiar right illegal. This raised many complaints; and having stopped, among others, a frank given to the old Duchess of Marlborough by Mr. Walter Plummer, he was cited before the House, as for breach of privilege, and accused, I suppose very unjustly, of opening letters to detect them. He was treated with great harshness and severity; but, declining their questions by pleading his oath of secrecy, was at last dismissed. And it must be recorded to his honour, that when he was ejected from his office, he did not think himself discharged from his trust, but continued to refuse to his nearest friends any information about the management of the office.

By this constancy of diligence, and diversification of employment, he in time collected a sum sufficient for the purchase of a small printing-office, and began *The Gentleman's Magazine*, a periodical pamphlet, of which the scheme is known wherever the English language is spoken. To this undertaking he owed the affluence in which he passed the last twenty years of his life, and the fortune which he left behind him, which, though large, had been yet larger, had he not rashly and wantonly impaired it by innumerable projects, of which I know not that ever one succeeded.

The Gentleman's Magazine, which has already subsisted three and twenty years, and still continues equally

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equally to enjoy the favour of the world *, is one of the most successful and lucrative pamphlets which literary history has upon record, and therefore deserves, in this narrative, particular notice.

Mr. Cave, when he formed the project, was far from expecting the success which he found ; and others had so little prospect of its consequence, that, though he had for several years talked of his plan among printers and booksellers, none of them thought it worth the trial †. That they were not restrained by their virtue from the execution of another man's design, was sufficiently apparent as soon as that design began to be gainful ; for in a few years a multitude of magazines arose, and perished : only *The London Magazine*, supported by a powerful association of booksellers, and circulated with all the art, and all the cunning of trade, exempted itself from the general fate of Cave's invaders,

* This was written at the beginning of 1754 ; and it may still with justice be said, that *The Gentleman's Magazine*, after a period of almost eighty years, stands foremost for literary reputation, as the respectable *Correspondence* it uniformly continues to enjoy abundantly evinces.

† "The invention of this new species of publication may be considered as something of an epocha in the Literary History of this Country. The periodical publications before that time were almost wholly confined to political transactions, and to foreign and domestic occurrences. But the Magazines have opened a way for every kind of enquiry and information. The intelligence and discussion contained in them are very extensive and various ; and they have been the means of diffusing a general habit of reading through the Nation ; which, in a certain degree, hath enlarged the public understanding. Many young Authors, who have afterwards risen to considerable eminence in the literary world, have here made their first attempts in composition. Here, too, are preserved a multitude of curious and useful hints, observations, and facts, which otherwise might have never appeared ; or, if they had appeared in a more evanescent form, would have incurred the danger of being lost. If it were not an invidious task, the history of them would be no incurious or unentertaining subject. The Magazines that unite utility with entertainment are undoubtedly preferable to those (*if there have been any such*) which have only a view to idle and frivolous amusement."

Dr. Kippis.

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and obtained, though not an equal, yet a considerable sale*.

Cave now began to aspire to popularity; and, being a greater lover of poetry than any other art, he sometimes offered subjects for poems, and proposed prizes for the best performances. The first prize was fifty pounds, for which, being but newly acquainted with wealth, and thinking the influence of fifty pounds extremely great, he expected the first Authors of the kingdom to appear as competitors; and offered the allotment of the prize to the Universities. But, when the time came, no name was seen among the writers that had been ever seen before; the Universities and several private men rejected the province of assigning the prize †. At all this Mr. Cave wondered for a while; but his natural judgment, and a wider acquaintance with the world, soon cured him of his astonishment, as of many other prejudices and errors. Nor have many men been seen raised by accident or industry to sudden riches, that retained less of the meanness of their former state.

He continued to improve his Magazine, and had the satisfaction of seeing its success proportionate to his diligence, till in the year 1751 his wife died of an asthma; with which though he seemed not at first much affected, yet in a few days he lost his sleep and his appetite; and, lingering two years, fell, by drinking acid liquors, into a diarrhœa, and afterwards into a kind of lethargic insensibility, in which one of the last acts of reason he exerted, was fondly to press the hand that is now writing this little narrative. He died on January 10, 1754, æt. 63, having just concluded the twenty-third annual collection.

* This was actually the case in 1754; but The London Magazine ceased to exist in 1785. See vol. IV. p. 95.

† The determination was left to Dr. Cromwell Mortimer, and Dr. Birch; and by the latter the award was made, which may be seen in the Magazine for the year 1736, vol. VI. p. 59.

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He was a man of large stature, not only tall but bulky, and was, when young, of remarkable strength and activity. He was generally healthful, and capable of much labour and long application; but in the latter years of his life was afflicted with the gout, which he endeavoured to cure or alleviate by a total abstinence both from strong liquors and animal food. From animal food he abstained about four years, and from strong liquors much longer; but the gout continued unconquered, perhaps unabated.

His resolution and perseverance were very uncommon; whatever he undertook, neither expence nor fatigue were able to repress him; but his constancy was calm, and, to those who did not know him, appeared faint and languid; but he always went forward, though he moved slowly.

The same chilness of mind was observable in his conversation; he was watching the minutest accent of those whom he disgusted by seeming inattention; and his visitant was surprized when he came a second time, by preparations to execute the scheme which he supposed never to have been heard.

He was, consistently with this general tranquillity of mind, a tenacious maintainer, though not a clamorous demander of his right. In his youth, having summoned his fellow-journeymen to concert measures against the oppression of their masters, he mounted a kind of rostrum. and harangued them so efficaciously, that they determined to resist all future invasions. And when the Stamp Officers demanded to stamp the last half sheet of the Magazines, Mr. Cave alone defeated their claim, to which the proprietors of the Rival Magazines would meanly have submitted

He was a friend rather easy and constant, than zealous and active; yet many instances might be given, where both his money and his diligence were employed liberally for others. His enmity was in like manner cool and deliberate; but, though cool, it

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it was not insidious, and though deliberate, not pertinacious.

His mental faculties were slow ; he saw little at a time, but that little he saw with great exactness. He was long in finding the right, but seldom failed to find it at last. His affections were not easily gained, and his opinion not quickly discovered. His reserve, as it might hide his faults, concealed his virtues ; but such he was, as they who best knew him have most lamented*.”

To the foregoing incomparable article I shall take the liberty of making some additions.

From the time of Mr. Cave's first connexion with the Newspaper at Norwich, he had conceived a strong idea of the utility of publishing the Parliamentary Debates ; and had an opportunity, whilst engaged in a situation at the Post-office, not only, as stated by Dr. Johnson, of supplying his London friends with the Provincial Papers ; but he also contrived to furnish the Country Printers with those written Minutes of the Proceedings in the Two Houses of Parliament, which within my own remembrance were regularly circulated in the Coffee-houses, before the Daily Papers were *tacitly permitted* to report the Debates.

The Orders of the House were indeed regularly repeated, and occasionally enforced ; and under these, in April 1728, Mr. Cave experienced some inconvenience and expence ; having been ordered into the custody of the Serjeant at Arms, for supplying his friend Mr. Robert Raikes with the Minutes of the House, for the use of the Gloucester Journal. After a confinement of several days, on stating his sorrow for the offence, and pleading that he had a wife and family who suffered much by his imprison-

* Thus far this article is given in the words of Dr. Johnson, from *Gent. Mag.* vol. XXV. p. 55—57 ; revised by its excellent Author, at my particular request, in 1781.

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ment, he was discharged, with a reprimand, on paying the accustomed fees *."

In the following year Mr. Raikes again incurred the censure of the House † by repeating his offence ; but Mr. Cave was at that time out of the scrape ‡.

The plan of inserting a regular series of the Parliamentary Debates in the Gentleman's Magazine, was a project which Mr. Cave had long in contemplation before he adventured to put it into practice. At length, in July 1736, he boldly dared ; and his method of proceeding is thus related by Sir John Hawkins :

"Taking with him a friend or two, he found means to procure for them and himself admission into the gallery of the House of Commons, or to some concealed station in the other House : and then they privately took down notes of the several speeches, and the general tendency and substance of the arguments. Thus furnished, Cave and his associates would adjourn to a neighbouring tavern, and compare and adjust their notes ; by means whereof, and the help of their memories, they became enabled to fix at least the substance of what they had so lately heard and remarked. The reducing this crude matter into form was the work of a future day and of an abler hand ; Guthrie, the Historian, a writer for the booksellers, whom Cave retained for the purpose."

* Journals of the House of Commons, vol. XXI. pp. 85, 118, 119, 127.

† Ibid. pp. 227, 238.

‡ Mr. Raikes, in a Petition to the House, stated, "that, before the beginning of that Session of Parliament, he gave orders to his servant, not to insert in his Journal any of the Votes or Resolutions of the House ; that the paragraph complained of was inserted without his knowledge, and was taken (as he was informed) from a News-letter, sent by Mr. Gythens, clerk of the Bristol road, or his assistant, to the King's-head Inn in Gloucester ; that the Petitioner is very ill of a fever, keeps his bed, and is not able to travel ; and praying that he may be excused from attending the House." His attendance was accordingly dispensed with ; and Gythens directed to attend.

But