

THE DIARY OF A DRAPER OF BATH

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SOME years ago an interesting-looking Diary came into my possession in the city of Eastbourne. It consisted of twenty-seven small note books, and covered the years 1856-1883. The Diary had been written by a gentleman who was at one time a Draper in the ancient city of Bath. I found the script hard to read—Victorian handschrift, innumerable ink blots, and the dulling hand of time with the ink—but I persisted and found it so fascinating as a study of the man himself and his environment that I decided to make a *précis* of it. The following pages are a *précis* of that *précis*. For obvious reasons I have suppressed the name of the worthy Draper, and other names which appear in the Diary. But everything here set down appears *in extenso* in the Draper's original memoranda.

On reading the Diaries for the first time, I came to the conclusion that the writer was little better than a bibulous egotist, and a smug hypocrite as well. But the year before I met in Dieppe another merchant of Bath, an elderly man, a man of substance. I asked him if he knew anything about my Draper; he said he did. The firm which he had founded was still in existence, but under a different name and management. It was one of the most important businesses of its kind in the city. He also informed me that he had known the Draper, as a boy, that he was a highly respected member of the community, a man of sincere religious convictions, and that there were many similar types in Bath at the same time. All, in fact, that the Draper had claimed for himself in the Preface to his Diaries was true. I broached the liquor question, and asked my Dieppe friend if he thought it possible for any man to have consumed the amount of spirits and beer which the Draper apparently had consumed, and still be, or remain, a consistent Christian. "Certainly," was the answer. "In those days a capacity for liquor was not incompatible with a capacity for religion. And in any case the amount of liquor which, according to the entries in the Diaries, the Draper apparently consumed, was not drunk by himself at all but by his business associates. It was the days of big dinner parties and every business man in Bath was buying similar quantities of liquor, purely for social and entertainment purposes. You don't imagine that any one man could have put away that amount of stuff, do you?"

I began to see the light and re-read the Diaries, with the result, that while my opinion of the Draper did not change completely, it altered considerably. I realized that what I had set down as hypocrisy was really sincerity, and that what I had taken for smugness was merely a natural Victorian pride in achievement. My Draper was really a good and not a bad man. I began to realize that if he ordered vast quantities of expensive liquors, he abhorred the sin of drunkenness. He dismissed a cook and a gardener because of it. He was a good family man and a dutiful son. He was for ever giving to or getting from his wife or his father or his mother or his mother-in-law while they lived, and from his children, presents of umbrellas and umbrella stands, snuff boxes and picture books, decanters and copies of Spurgeon's *Sermons*—the Baptists' Bible of the times—copies of Dr. Winslow's *The Lord's Prayer*, or *Jehovah's Jewels*, spittoons and carpet slippers, watch chains and silver broaches, lockets and Photo Albums. His wife was a difficult woman. She used to order her husband out of her room, balked sometimes at going to chapel, refused to give him his dinner, was constantly flying into tantrums, and could never keep a maid. One son was a bad tempered young whelp—although an excellent oarsman—and it is pretty clear where he got his from. It is true that our Draper quarrelled with his partner, who was a very cantankerous fellow, and could never get on with his brother, who was a very insolent fellow that drowned cats. It is true, too, that he was asked to hand in his books as treasurer of the chapel, but there again the trustees were an impossible set of men. But our Draper loved bowls and croquet and bagatelle and picnics and taking his children for donkey rides during the summer holidays. And a man who loved these simple things could certainly not have been a bad man.

People lived nearer the Almighty in those quiet Victorian days. Otherwise, no one could have begun a Diary like this:

“The greater part of my life has been passed in business; but my interests have not been wholly mundane. I know the vanity of riches and the danger of setting one's mind on heaping up treasures for oneself, on earth. For years my family and myself have been attached to a Baptist place of worship. The Sunday school was established in 1802 for the purpose of teaching poor children to read; to instruct them in the principles of the Christian religion; and, above all, to endeavour to improve their minds with the glorious truth. By strict attention to business and constant attendance at chapel whither my family, unless laid low by illness, have always accompanied me, I have tried to keep the

balance of my life even. That has been my constant endeavour, and I feel, on looking back, that I have not fallen short of my ideal. I hope I shall so continue to the end".

One can imagine the sort of people who went to the Draper's chapel. Anyone who is familiar with *Salem Chapel*, or *Saints and Sinners*, or with the Works of Mark Rutherford, can form a pretty shrewd idea. Rather ignorant, many of them, and self-righteous; convinced that they had knowledge of the complete revelation, laying unconscious claim to a sort of infallibility, merciless towards their pastor if he failed to please them. They would even ask for his resignation, and give him short shift. This happened in the case of one unfortunate individual, Mr. C—. Mr. C—had begun his pastorate on the friendliest footing with his masters. One can read the story behind the following entries, inserted with a sort of wry humour. Mr. C—. had recently been injudicious enough to marry a member of his congregation and this, as everyone knows, *may* be a cause of trouble. It certainly was in Mr. C—'s case. Apparently there was another lady in the case; she seemed to think that she had a certain claim on Mr. C—, and spread defamatory rumours about him—or about the lady of his choice. One can imagine this scene one Monday after a missionary sermon, when the pastor called to discuss the matter with the Draper:

"Miss B—. was in the shop at the time, but he did not speak or shake hands with her. He said, however, that if he saw a certain person hanging, he would not cut her down".

Unfortunately, there came a time when Mr. C—., under the new responsibilities of marriage, asked the treasurer for an increase in salary. It was refused by the Draper, whom he had regarded as his best friend. Furthermore, the pastor was told that he was no longer giving satisfaction and that his services would be dispensed with. The following Sunday Mr. C—., in the pulpit, "called down the curse of God on our Committee." There seems to have been incessant bickering and wrangling amongst these Christians. Too many claiming to be pillars; too many, to use a metaphor which the Draper would have understood, out of the same drawer. Is it greatly to be wondered at that the parson handed in his resignation almost immediately?

But there may have been another reason for Mr. C—.'s failure. He appears to have had a most unfortunate effect on at least two members of his congregation, if we may judge from the following entry:

On Sunday Mr. C—, commenced his stated ministry. Next day I staid in bed and had pills and a linseed poultice on. Mamma at home all day with a black eye.

If that was the sort of thing that happened every time Mr. C—, preached, no wonder he was asked to go!

In his earlier days, when he was "on the make" so to speak, our Draper had an insatiable appetite for attending lectures and concerts and Temperance Demonstrations and Uplift gatherings. He went to a concert in the Guildhall, *Midsummer Night's Dream*; heard Hugh Stowell Brown speak on the subject, "Never Despair." He attended lectures on *Antigone* (which he "greatly enjoyed"), Wycliffe, Pope and his Times, The Use and Progress of the Piano, India, Richard Cobden, and *Rob Roy*. He heard Thackeray deliver the first of his lectures, *The Four Georges*, Stanley speak on The Dark Continent, and Dr. Donald Fraser discourse on Richard Baxter. Unfortunately, our friend's quest for culture had little effect on his spelling, which was abominable. But he became a highly successful business man for all that. And in those days there were no private secretaries.

Naturally, a large part of the Diaries deals with local happenings, with the trials and worries of a man of business, with purely personal matters and trivial and uninteresting details. James Howells kills his wife and our Diarist sends a Bonnet to his siser as a present. He has "a terrible fall over a drawer in the shop" and narrowly escapes serious injury. (As a matter of fact, that fall was to cost him dear.) Two of Jefferis children are burried (*sic!*) and Cook's Circus—so well remembered by many of the writer's generation—has come to town. His wife had a little son "at 15 min. to 5 p.m." and he orders seven gallons of beer and attends a Temperance Demonstration. There is a nasty accident in Surrey Gardens during Mr. Spurgeon's sermon, and his business partner is thrown from a gig. He has twenty-five of the young people of the congregation in to tea and supper. The party breaks up at 4 in the morning. "It cost me £2 :6:6 and next day I had a terrible bad headache." He has eighteen people in to dinner and sells Mrs. B—, who has just become a widow, "a good black silk dress, 16 yards, at 5/5. *glacé* for mantles." His wife attends a ball at the Guildhall and he is asked to become Secretary of the Sunday School. He is troubled with Diarrhea (*sic*) and has "a little turn up" with two of the lady clerks in the shop. Mrs. Yerbury is taken

out of the water and the baby vaccinated (*sic*). He is measuring ribbons, looking at a new stock of parasols, marking the crinoline bonnets off, and afterwards he takes his wife home in a fly. The Midland Railway from Bath to Maggotsfield is opened (Aug. 4, 1869) and the Venetian blinds in front of the house are painted. Someone puts £5 in the Basket for the chapel and the doctor orders him to take a bath. He acquires a new hat, coat, and trowsers (*sic*) for the Bath Races; Miss H— gives notice that she wants to leave to get married. The Cook gets drunk, is dismissed and leaves in a Buss (*sic*). He “puts on (winter) drawers for the first time and dark curtains in the dining-room.” “He puts on his white shirts and leaves off his (winter) drawers.” There is no service in the chapel one Sunday “owing to the seats having been varnished.” While on holiday at Bournemouth, he hires a donkey for his boy and a Pony chair for his wife.

So the Panorama of our Draper's life shifts and changes and unfolds across the years. His son—the bad-tempered one—wins two cups at the Races of the Avon Club; the piano (*sic*) is tuned and a new mattress and bedstead are put up in the servant's room. There is polling for a Free Library; a new maid arrives at £10 p.a. and leaves almost immediately. Trade is terrible, he takes in only 4/- one day. Mr. Spurgeon arrives and mother loses her purse. A coloured gentleman, “a very tall, fine man” preaches at chapel and Mamma is not very pleased about her eldest son, the bad-tempered one, because he is staying out rather late in the evenings. The son in question was twenty-four years of age at the time. The gardener turns up so drunk that he can hardly speak and is promptly dismissed. He is very irritable (*sic*) and depressed owing to the state of trade (1879), and he has just received an illustrated paper all the way from Australia. There are great celebrations at the Centenary of Robert Raikes, the founder of Sunday Schools, and the Mayor “opens” a Memorial Fountain. He feels very relaxed (*sic*) but is roused from his lethargy when Mamma falls off the chair as she is putting paper in the window to keep out the draught. The bad-tempered son has rescued a lady who has jumped into the river. He is buying a new house and is getting new chandeliers, curtains for the bed, globes for the drawing-room and a new washstand for his bedroom.

But the interests of our Draper are not confined to the small local happenings that swim into his ken. There is the bigger world in which he takes a great if impartial

and uncritical interest. He is interested in the Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race, in municipal politics, in the dismissal of Mr. Crampton, the American Minister. He records "the birth of a Prince, heir to the throne of France," the declaration of war by the French Emperor against the King of Prussia, the news that a "great battle" has been won by the Prussians, the surrender of the Emperor, his arrival in Bath, with his son, the Prince Imperial, his death and burial at Chislehurst. When peace is signed after the Crimean War, the bells of Bath are rung all day. He is deeply concerned over the illness of the Prince of Wales and, like all good citizens, is vastly relieved at his recovery. He goes to the station to see the Queen and Prince Albert, notes the return of the Prince of Wales after his visit to India. He comments on, or rather mentions, the visits of General Grant and of Princess Mary of Teck to inspect the Orphan School. He sees the Prince of Wales in Bristol at the Royal Agricultural Show, and notes the melancholy tolling of the bells for the death of Princess Alice, the foundress of Women's Union for Nursing Sick and Wounded in War. He is obviously interested in the marriage of the Duke of Connaught (*sic*) at Winsor (*sic*), and in the arrival in the city of Lord Chelmsford from Plymouth where he had landed in the morning early. Lord Chelmsford, the Commander-in-Chief, had experienced defeat at Isandlana; but the disaster had been retrieved and Cetewayo defeated and taken prisoner. He notes that the Court has gone to Balmoral, the resignation of the Beaconsfield Ministry in 1880 and the triumph of Mr. Gladstone. From the comparative copiousness of his references to Mr. Gladstone, it is not difficult to see where our Draper's sympathies lay. He mentions too the departure of Sir Garnet Wolseley for Cairo, for his ultimate triumph at Tel-el-Kebir. During a holiday at Portsmouth he sees the *Himalaya* sail with about 1,000 men of the 77th Regiment, is kept awake by a Grand Ball that goes on until 7 in the morning, watches the Prince of Wales's yacht, the *Osborn* (*sic*) and the Queen's yacht, the *Alberta* pass. He also sees the Prince take his two sons, one of whom was the late King George V. to the *Baccante* (*sic*). Our Draper loves Royalty almost as much as his beloved Spurgeon; he never misses a chance to see a member of the Royal Family if he possibly can. Once, he actually goes the length of hiring a carriage to see the Duke and Dutchess (*sic*) of Connaught (*sic*), and he has the supreme satisfaction of meeting them "three times in one day." He records the marriage of the Duke

of Albany, the fourth and youngest son of Queen Victoria; the assassination of Lord Cavendish and Mr. Burke in Phoenix Park, the deaths of Mr. Roebuck, the politician, of President Garfield and Lord Beaconsfield. Also the trial and condemnation of Lefroy who hung (*sic*) at 9 o'clock on Tuesday, November 8, 1881.

Death, which seems to be far more lightly regarded these days than it was sixty or seventy years ago, occupies much space in the Diaries. A death in the Draper's family called forth expressions of unrestrained grief and of confidence in Almighty God. "Though He slay me, yet will I trust him," is his attitude. But his religious resignation is oddly blended with a careful interest in such mundanities as crepe and mourning cards. The Victorians made Death terrible, partly because they had a profounder faith in God than men generally profess to-day, and partly because they were, as families, so greatly preoccupied with the interests of church or chapel. Church or chapel took the place of bridge and the movies. The fear of the wrath of God and of the judgment to come was, for the Victorian, a far more realistic nightmare than the possibilities of atomic energy in our day. Whereas *we* believe that atomic energy will be ultimately used for the benefit of mankind, the Victorian of religious-conviction actually heard the voice of God in the thunder and believed that the physical end of the world would be the work of God's own hand. He believed in the literal fulfilment of the prophecies and walked in the fear of God. We find this attitude all through our Diaries, coupled with all mundane trappings of Death, memorial cards, zinc coffins, nodding hearse plums, "very appropriate and affectionate discourses (*sic*) and the hymns (*sic*) very nice indeed."

When his wife died, the Draper's description of the sad event was not only full of Victorian sentiment but typical of the man. This is not a parody of what he wrote, but exactly what he inserted in his Diary:—

"My dear wife died at 6.24 in the evening. Ordered steel and zinc and oak coffin. Dear Ellen put in the shell and soldered down. W— took away the Mattress and Bed and H— called about registering the death. Paid taxes and had my hair cut. Dear Ellen was buried in the Abbey cemetery with the Church of England Burial Service. In the evening I staid in my room and read several precious passages of Scripture. I thought of my dear Ellen now with me no longer, but with her Saviour, without fault. Louisa had a bad boil. On Sunday I staid in the Parlour alone, *yet not alone*. Put on a mustard leaf. Wednesday Clara

and Aunt Emma went up to the cemetery and put flowers upon Mamma's grave".

The mother's death had, however, apparently no effect on the temper of the family, if one is to judge by the following entry made a few weeks later:

"Ill most of the month as usual. John had tempers, James had boils, Clara went to Chapel and I kept taking the temperature of my bedroom and read at least two of Mr. Spurgeon's Sermons every Sunday".

On Good Friday, however, the bereaved widower was able to be out, when he spent "a very pleasant hour in the cemetery." He was further cheered up when W— sent home "the Best Mattress that dear Ellen died on."

An odd character this Draper of Bath, inconsequent, almost ridiculous in matters not concerning his business, yet definitely a "good" man in the religious sense of the word. No one who was not in the habit of walking much with God could have written a sentence like this:—

"I felt rather downcast, but on Sunday we read a Sermon in the morning and had a little prayer after for comfort, peace, and faith in Our Father's guidance".

Poor Draper, he had much physical suffering to endure and for years he was a semi-invalid. It all began with that fall over the drawer in the shop. Phlebitis, varicose veins, congestion of the lungs and clogged liver. What a life! But I still think that, if he had taken more exercise and drunk less port and sherry, he would have been a happier, certainly a healthier man. I can imagine no sane doctor to-day approving of the amount of liquor that he must have consumed, or the vast quantities of rich food that he must have devoured. To-day, his drink bills would have been prohibitive, assuming he could have bought the stuff, which he could not.

And as he was being everlastingly dosed with pills and gargles and medicines of one sort or another, measured for elastic stockings, having hot sponges and flannel and cotton wool applied to his legs, being plastered with mustard leaves, it is no wonder that his doctor's bill on one occasion amounted to £111: 3:10, and that this doctor's successor should have suggested 5/- a visit as a minimum, "to find the medicine or 3/6 and find my own."

The Draper retired from business after the death of his wife, but he carried on his Diary for some months longer. To the last he is full of small things. He gives his sister "two Bonnets and a Hat of dear Ellen's and some of her hair," is worried about a bursted (sic!) pipe and a second-hand piano (sic!) which, I am perfectly certain, was never touched by anyone, except the maid, in that maddening and depressing household. Ribbons and umbrellas, parasols and crinoline bonnets, beef tea, slops and gruel, poppy seeds for a swollen face, tincture of rhubarb—no wonder tempers were being constantly frayed in that Victorian household!

One sympathises with the wife of yours and with Henry John. And when one is just about at the end of one's patience with you and your niggling worldliness, one hears you sigh and exclaim from the bottom of your heart, "Oh, that it may be to glorify the grace of God in me, *a poor worm.*" Or is it John Bunyan who is speaking?