A LATER PEPYS.

Bundles of Old Letters from the Georgian Period.

London, June 15.

Scandalous tattle was the salt that preserved the memory of Samuel Pepys from oblivion. While he was an efficient Secretary of the Admiralty, closed his career by a short term of service as president of the Royal Society and left to Magdalen College a valuable collection of books, manuscripts and prints, he would have been one among a thousand faithful but forgotten servants of the Crown if he had not kept an amusing diary in cipher. Before that unique record of the manners and gossip of the reign of Charles II was deciphered and published, another Pepys of the same line was rounding out an eminently respectable career. This was Sir William Weller Pepys, Baronet, Master in Chancery, and an ornament of polite society during the latter half of the eighteenth century. If he did not keep a diary in either long or short hand, he wrote diffuse letters to his son and to various literary and social acquaintances, and filed the replies with Mr. Gladstone's painstaking care. These bundles of yellow manuscript with faded ink have been jealously guarded by descendants, and have finally found their way into print. The son of the Master of the Chancery was Lord Chancellor Cottenham; Sir Richard Pepys was Lord Chief Justice of Ireland; there was a bishop in the family, and Sir Lucas Pepys was a physician in attendance upon George III. The memories of all these worthies are revived in two handsome volumes, edited by Miss Gaussen, a member of the Pepys family, and published by Mr. John Lane. The editor's purpose is to prove that the reputation of the family does not depend upon the scandalmonger's precious diary in cipher; but she does not hesitate to make use of the old legend in the title, "A Later Pepys."

The original Pepys salt has lost much of its savor. There are fresh glimpses of the manners and social life of the eighteenth and earlier decades of the nineteenth century, but the world had become more sedate and priggish when the Master in Chancery wrote his stilted letters to Hannah More and other friends. Fanny Burney gave him credit for having shrewdness and drollery, as well as a fashionable air and address; but there is no touch of either wit or frivolity in these letters. He was a most serious person, with a diffuse and involved style and an inborn love of platitude. If the famous diarist's ciphers had been translated before the death of the Master in Chancery, the letters might have gained vivacity and lightness of touch. As matters stand the reader finds himself nodding over the stately periods, and when he closes his eyes finds himself wondering what Hannah More would have said in reply if Sir William had discussed his ancestor's revelations of the licentiousness of the Merry Monarch's reign in place of the simple piety of Watts's hymns. His conversation could not have been as dull as his letters, for he was one of the most conspicuous figures in Mrs. Montagu's bluestocking circle, and did not allow Dr. Johnson to silence him when they had an argumentative bout over the "Lives of the Poets." He took pains after their quarrel to have a last word with the dictator without revealing his identity. "When I heard of poor Johnson's despondency toward the conclusion of his life," are the words of the amiable lawyer, "I wrote him an anonymous letter (for he would not have regarded it, had he known it came from me) to place in a strong light the good produced by his writings, and I trust that it administered some consolation." This was a pretty display of magnanimity worthy of the good bluestocking's heart; but the reader of this decorous sentence cannot help wishing that the letter had been signed and Dr. Johnson's reply been preserved. The answer might have been as impressive a document as the famous letter sent from Gough Square to Lord Chesterfield.

Sir William Pepys's letters to his children are pious and affectionate, but less racy and entertaining than Lord Chesterfield's paternal homilies. His friends tried to frighten him by telling him when he first undertook to educate his sons that they would hate him as their schoolmaster, but he continued to receive proofs of their attachment. He gave them much advice about their reading, their companions and their devotions; he recommended Lord Clarendon's "History of the Rebellion" as a source of holiday relaxation, and offered his own services as coach in elocution; he discussed in detail the merits of Gray's and Dryden's odes, and disclaimed any intention of making a boy a philosopher at seventeen; and he invariably invited the confidence of his children and made them feel that they were loved and honored for their good qualities and affectionate conduct. He wrote to his sons with as much stateliness and dignity as he discussed morality, religion and literature with Hannah More, and he was ceremonious with them even in so small a detail as the expediency of dropping minor incidents in telling a story. In one of his letters he objected to an account which one of his sons had given of getting into a front box instead of an upper box "as too long and circumstantial for the importance of the catastrophe." He added: "This I happen to remember, because I very often catch myself at relating a story with many circumstances, when perhaps at last the final event is not at all interesting, which is certainly a fault in conversation, tires the company very much, and entitles the narrator to the modern application of a Boar." Sir William married late, although several of his friends, notably Mrs. Chapone, had interested themselves in finding a wife for him; and he nerved himself for the venture by reflections on the age, experience and past conduct of the lady, added to her marked devotion to himself. "Her person," he wrote circumspectly to his aunt, "is tall and beautifully shaped, and her countenance, without beauty, is expressive of goodness. She is of a cheerful, though sober, turn of mind, but what I rely most upon for my future happiness is the uncommon attachment which she has, a long time since, discovered for me, and which equals anything that modern times can boast of, and which will make us, if not the richest, yet the happiest couple on earth." With less discretion, whimsical Samuel Pepys could speak of his wife, of whose beauty he was proud, in these terms: "My wife hath bought herself a new yellow gown, called a sack; lor! what a fool she do look in it! 'Tis fit the poor wretch should have somewhat to amuse her."

Sir William Pepys had many interesting correspondents, who wrote constantly to him on state affairs and diplomatic and international questions. Among these were Sir Nathaniel Wraxall, who made the rounds of the Continental courts and knew what was going on among princes, favorites and Ministers; Major Rennell, the famous geographer and Eastern traveller, and from Mrs. Hartley, sister of Benjamin Franklin's intimate friend, David Hartley, the opponent of the war in America, and negotiator of the peace. Wraxall was as stanch a Tory as Dr. Johnson in his views of the American Revolution, but he knew that Sir William was not in sympathy with the King's measures of coercion. When Burgoyne's disastrous affair was discussed in Vienna he could express the hope that there was yet spirit and resolution enough left to maintain a war on which the very existence of England as a power of Europe depended; and it was not until 1824 that the old Tory squire could reconcile himself to the situation in the New World and write in this spirit: "I dread no enemy except America. I see, too, with the greatest pleasure that the capitulations of Saratoga and Yorktown, with all the other humiliations and disasters of the American war, are nearly obliterated. . . . If Monroe and his countrymen act in union with us, you and I may hope to finish our career without seeing this country engaged in any long or arduous contest." Mrs. Hartley probably shared her brother's extreme Whiggish views respecting the American Revolution, for she lived with him at Belvedere on the crest of the hills north of Bath, and was devotedly attached to him. He was one of the earliest English Abolitionists and opponents of the slave trade, and as member of Parliament for Hull took the American side in the debates on Colonial taxation, and published a series of letters in opposition to the tea and stamp duties. He was an ardent admirer of Franklin, and after Yorktown signed, in Paris, the treaty of peace. Mrs. Hartley was a poor politician and refrained from argument on either American or French questions, with which her brother was preoccupied. In Hannah More's letters there are references to General Oglethorpe, who returned from Georgia with a conviction that the Colonists never could be subdued in war, and was one of the earliest callers at the American Embassy when John Adams arrived in London after the Peace of Paris.

This new budget of Pepys papers includes a bundle of letters from Sir William to his cousin, William Franks, a banker, in which the opinion is forcibly expressed that the happiest life is that of the successful man of business who has some literary pursuits. There is another series, written mainly by Sir James Macdonald, a Highland chieftain, with a remarkable mind and attractive personality, who died in Rome at twenty-four, after leaving a powerful impress upon Adam Smith, Boswell, Hume and many other distinguished men. Sir William Pepys was his intimate companion at Eton and Oxford, and the letters in one of these new volumes are the only literary memorial of a man of exceptional talent and sweetness of nature, who was known as the Marcellus of Scotland. There are many letters, also, from Sir Lucas Pepys, the court physician, to his brother, with a big bundle of correspondence between Sir William and Hannah More, who were close friends, with similar literary tastes and habits of mind. The ceremonious baronet and the prim old maid compared their impressions of English politics, French republicanism, Napoleonic warfare, diplomatic coalitions, Scotch literature, Byron's fiery poetry and fierce controversies, Miss Edgeworth's fiction and the decline of conversation in polite society; and so deliberate were their movements, so measured were their words and so stately were their periods that they seemed to be leading a bluestocking minuet from year to year. He had his classical pedantry and circuitous, dignified style of writing; and she was always staid and quaint, and never talked of having a flirtation with an admirer under ninety. There might be a bad Georgian world around them, where politicians had their price, andthere were high bouts at cards, and drunken revellers were under the table nightly, but they were almost overnice in their talk and severe and demure in their courtesies and bows. They were the last of the bluestockings of Mrs. Montagu's salon, and their portraits have been limned in Mr. Dobson's "Gentlemen" and "Gentlewoman of the Old School."

The new Pepys letters lack the sparkle and animation of the famous diaries, with the guileless old Samuel's snapshots at the free and easy habits and manners of the Restoration; but, wearisome as may be the correspondence and stilted and formal the exchange of compliments and morals, there is realistic drawing from the life of the period. The Pepyses and the Frankses were among the most reputable figures in English society of their day, and their letters are starched and bristling with the decorum and artificiality of Georgian manners and piety. The first Lord Lyttelton, Sir William Hamilton, Mrs. Chapone, Mrs. Montagu, Mrs. Thrale, Dr. Johnson, Sir Walter Scott, Boswell, the Hon. Miss Moncton, and the wits of Tunbridge Wells and Bath are all here in these volumes as Sir Joshua Reynolds, Gainsborough and Romney painted them. There are nearly fifty illustrations from portraits, miniatures and old prints, and the binding is as handsome and sumptuous as the court dresses of the Georgian period; and as the pages are turned there is the fragrance of oldtime manners, so that one half expects to see faded white roses fall from between the leaves. I. N. F.

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