

**THE DIARY OF  
SAMUEL  
PEPYS, 1666**

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The Diary of Samuel Pepys, 1666 by Samuel Pepys & Henry Morley

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## INTRODUCTION.

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THIS volume of Pepys's Diary begins with the 1st of January, 1666, New Style. In Old Style it was 1665, for legally a year then ended on the 24th of March, and the new year began on the 25th, the day of the Conception. Usage went either way; but the 1st of January, 1752, was in this country the first legal January New Year's Day. From the 1st of January, 1665, Old Style, to the end of October, 1666, we have here the main part of an eventful year, upon which Dryden wrote a heroic poem, for it included war at sea with the Dutch, and the Fire of London. It was the theme of Dryden's "Annus Mirabilis." Dryden sought to weave its events into a piece of heroic tapestry-work, whereof Pepys here shows us the seamy side.

There is a great struggle at sea. France, joining Holland, declares war against England in January, and, observes Pepys, "God knows how little fit we are for it." The Plague has not wholly left London, and bills of mortality are nervously watched; slowly there is the return of citizens to town, and opening of shops that were still closed by seven or eight together. Physicians and clergymen reappear and give reasons for their early flight and late return. There is dread of the churches, in which the returned families



sit in the midst of churchyards heaped high with new graves of the plague-stricken. Into the churches on one Sunday come, handed from pew to pew, tidings of victory over the Dutch at sea, that turn soon into lament for a disastrous flight before the enemy. At last nobody could tell whether it was a defeat or a victory. The English fleet had been chased, but there was claim for it that a very great number of Dutchmen had been killed, and that the people of Amsterdam were in tumult. Those were the days before newspapers, in any modern sense, and long before the Special Correspondent had been born. Surrounded by ill news, and ordering an occasional public fast, the king and Court were for some days a little ashamed to be seen gaming and card-playing: and, in the absence of other occupation, Pepys tells us that they lay in bed.

Again and again Pepys notes the need of check over the robbery of public money. He himself is as a one-eyed man who is king among the blind; his plate-closet fills with gifts for private services. He secures for one trader an Admiralty contract for supply of material or stores in building or fitting ships during the press of war. From five merchant brothers he takes £200 for helping their ships out. But in all he does he watches over the king's interests. If he takes his bribe for a contract, he sees that the contract is carried out. He prospers by maintaining general confidence in his business habits, and by a fidelity to duty very much beyond the average of public honesty in those profligate times. One morning he is up before the sun to write a long report on urgent matters, and takes no food until, late in the day, the work is finished;

and he knows that he can conquer any difficulties if he can keep check enough over his love of pleasure.

Yet he will enjoy himself. He is thirty-three, and will gather rose-buds while he may; not wait to enjoy life when his powers of enjoyment are decayed. He counts his gains from time to time; is worth £4,600 on the 4th of March; this has become £5,200 by the end of April; and is £5,600 on the 3rd of July. He is profiting by opportunities of war-time, but what is that to the robbery everywhere about him in the public service; beginning with the king, though Pepys does not hint at that. Only he works a little sum, counts up the money paid by the country for the war, and money spent upon the war, then asks what has become of the balance, £2,390,000. His Diary, however, helps us to understand what had become of it.

Then there is the cruelty of the impressment of men to fill the ships which are to fight the Dutch at the mouth of the Thames, in the four days' drawn battle on the first four days of June. There is not cash even to pay the press-money. Men are illegally arrested and herded in Bridewell, for days almost without food, before they are carried down the river, bitterly resisting, to the fleet. And there is a picturesque group of the distracted wives and children, with eyes straining after the departing boats, as seen by moonlight on the Custom-house Quay.

Nobler touches of life blend with details of the meanness of the life at Court, the cowardice of the riband and feather captains who had been thrust in the place of sturdier men. The incident after the

funeral of Sir Christopher Mings, on page 88 of this volume, may serve as example.

And then there is the Fire of London, under which Pepys himself, and the citizens generally, bore themselves like honest and true-hearted men, although Pepys does not forget the very rich Alderman Starling who gave half-a-crown among thirty men, who by hard work had saved his home from being caught by the fire that was next door to him. The best account of the fire is Pepys's. His eye was quick for all significant details. To himself, in his private Diary, there was a significance that might touch his life, in a record that for some months past he had taken to snoring. The touches of affection for his father, quarrels and reconcilements with his wife, that leave a large balance of wholesome natural affection between them, bring Samuel Pepys very near to us. His record is the more human for its mixture of the threads of life: occupation in the morning with historical events, "and then home to a cold dinner because it is washing-day."

H. M.