THACKERAY'S DIARY

By John M. Patterson

AMONG the many delectations of collecting books and autographs, none perhaps is more compensating than the discovery of a manuscript that has never been published. This is especially true if the discovery add to the world's sum of knowledge on some point of literary history, or contribute a hitherto unknown fact concerning an author's life. Those of us whom the gods have blessed in this respect — seldom, of course, through any merit of our own — constitute, as we are quite ready to admit, a class apart from the remainder of our collecting brethren. The ordinary collector must rest content with the distinction of possessing this or that fugitive edition, in which some far sighted printer of a past age has been conveniently careless in making use of what we have come to regard as the "correct error" in type sticking. Such attenuated raptures are not for us, however.

Let me help you to understand what I am driving at by plunging, at once, into the heart of my mystery.

William Makepeace Thackeray has been, and still is, a very much talked about, and a very much written about, author. He has several biographers, the most prominent of whom are Merivale and Marzials, Charles Whibley, Lady Ritchie, and Anthony Trollope. Yet the present humble writer knows a number of important facts concerning Thackeray which his biographers — if we except Lady Ritchie — did not know.

How many people know that Thackeray kept a diary? I do, for one. I not only know that he did keep a diary, but I know what is in it. Furthermore, I am the owner of the diary.

Let me proceed to tell you how I made a discovery in Thackerayana, or rather, how the discovery was thrust upon me.

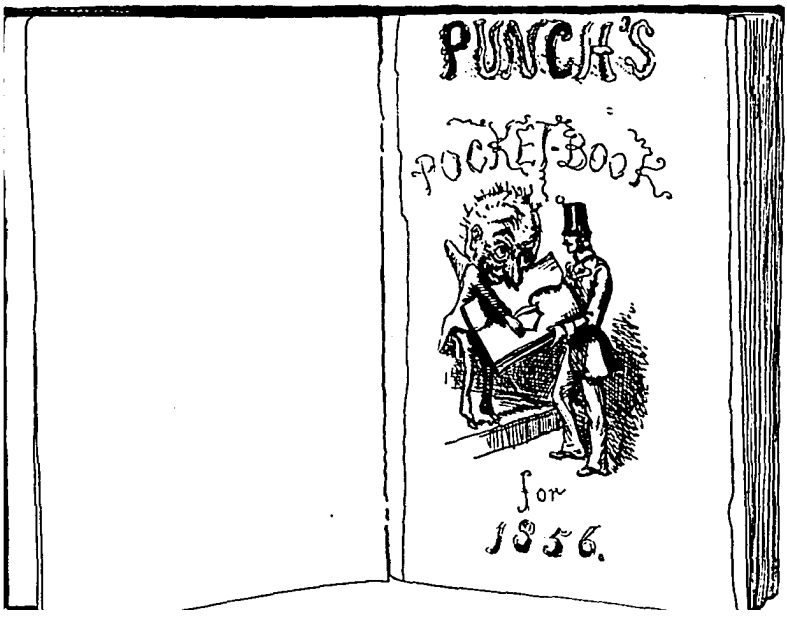
A couple of summers ago, while I was in London with my friend and fellow collector, John C. Eckel — of Dickens Bibliography fame — we "just dropped in" upon the Maggs Brothers to see their new bookshop on Conduit Street. As we entered the store I noticed one of the brothers engaged in most serious conversation with a lady. I am not in the habit of listening to other people's private talk, but I could not help hearing the word "diary" used several times by one of the speakers.

When the stranger departed, Mr. Maggs turned to us and said, "That is the granddaughter of —— and here is a very interesting little item." At the same time he handed me a small book bound in dark red Russian leather. It was a "Punch's" Pocketbook.

Mr. Maggs does not make a fuss over "Punch's" Pocketbooks — unless there be something unique about them. So I opened the little volume and found — in a handwriting which I recognized — these words:

Thackeray
36 Onslow Square, Brompton, London.

I know that house on Onslow Square. It is just across the street from a won-



The title page of the Diary, slightly reduced

derful little spot filled with trees and spattered with sunshine — except when it becomes darkened with fog, or splashed with rain, and then it is just as murky and depressing as any other London square on a wet day.

The little volume consists of some 190 pages. It is about 3¼ inches wide and 4¾ inches long. A number of humorous (?) short stories, illustrated with several spirited woodcuts; some printed matter, including a calendar and information pertaining to the seasons, holidays and festivals, as well as much data relating to the government and laws of England, take up the greater portion of the book. What interests us most, however, is those pages on which Thackeray has jotted down his daily doings.

Prior to 1854, the year of "The Newcomes", he had been one of the leading contributors to "Punch". His work covered every feature of the paper — burlesques of history, parodies of literature, songs, stories and jokes — in fact, everything from a line to a column. In addition, Thackeray contributed 380 drawings — for, like Clive in "The Newcomes", he had been a caricaturist from his early boyhood. One of his "Punch" drawings is famous because nobody has ever been able to see the point, though a rival paper ironically offered £500 for an explanation. With this single exception, his fun making powers seem to have been appreciated — even by his colleagues — for we know that he became an attendant at the regular dinner parties which formed so delightful a feature of "Punch's" cabinet council, and to which none but the elect were ever admitted.

Although he ceased to write and draw for "Punch", he nevertheless retained his friendship with the members of the staff. In proof whereof we find this entry in the Diary: "Wednesday August 13th, 1856. Dined Punch."

Those "Punch" dinners must have been wonderful. Wits of pen and pencil! Good fellowship! Work and serious aim! Nothing wanting because nothing was ever forgotten! In the beginning "Punch" dined on Saturday night, when the paper was made up and on the press. Then it was found that the dinners could be better utilized to promote the interests of the paper by having them on Wednesday; so the day was changed. It is, therefore, Wednesday, the thirteenth of August, that Thackeray "dined Punch".

The famous table around which the staff assembled — if it could only speak, what stories it might tell. Mark Lemon carved his initials upon it; so did John Leech and W. M. T. One day, while sitting around this very table, the three engaged in a friendly microscopic handwriting contest. Thackeray, as we know, made a fine art of penmanship. He has said of himself that he could always make a living by writing out the Iliad on a sixpence. So a sheet of writing paper was provided. Thackeray was the first to try his skill, and wrote the Lord's Prayer within the space of a threepenny piece; Leech then sketched the figures of thirteen persons, two horses and a dog; Lemon followed with two lines from "Punch", so small that they cannot be read without a magnifying glass. The formation of every figure and every letter in this odd contest is perfection itself.

But this has nothing whatever to do with the Diary, so let us open the pocketbook and read what Thackeray has written therein. He probably contemplated writing something about Rowley or Chatterton, for we find this memorandum:

> All that has hitherto appeared in print about Rowley or Chatterton is contained in the Monthly Reviews for April, May, June, 1777. In the Gentleman for May, June, July, August, September, 1778, and August and September, 1778 in the second volume of Wharton, Section VIII, in Walpole's letter.
>
> Love and Madness 167. In the same book see a very curious account of Doctor Dodd's execution. Charles Fox and Raynal looking on at it. 103.

Or, maybe the article on "Love and Madness" suggested thoughts of that poor sick wife of his, whose intellect had become clouded after four years of happy married life. Who can tell?

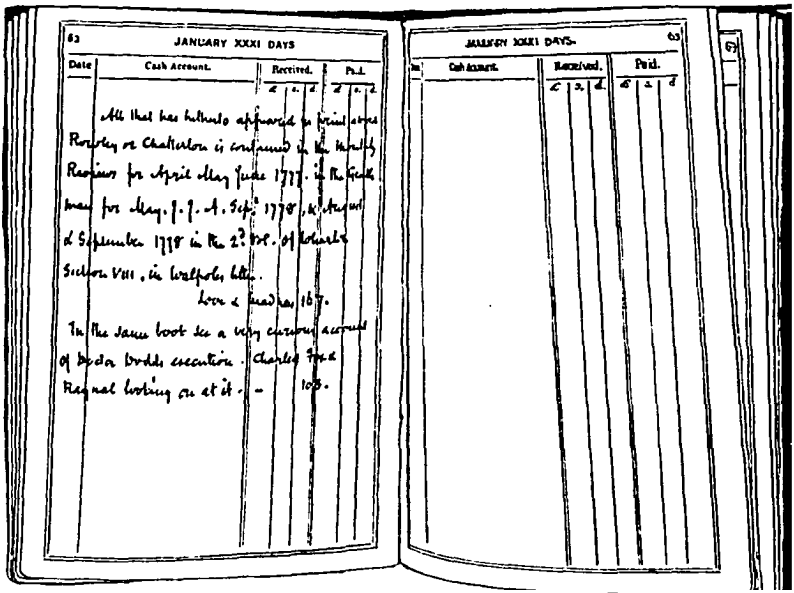
On another page he has set forth the various sums earned from his lectures, as follows:

Lectures from Nov. 4 to Dec. 30.

	£.	s.
Edinburgh	300	
Glasgow	105	
Paisley	25	
Dumfries	25	
Hull	100	
Bradford	50	
Liverpool	210	
Manchester	85	
Derby	25	
	925	
London	52	10
	977	10

It is interesting to note the difference between the London receipts and those from Scotland. Little wonder that he wrote from Edinburgh: "I have three per cent of the population here; if I could but get three per cent out of London!"

The Diary proper begins on May 21, 1856, when mention is made of Charles Wentworth Dilke. Then follow the names of such notables as M. Labouchère, Lady Stanley, Lord and Lady Ashburton, Lord Derby, Richard Monckton Milnes, Sir Edwin Landseer, and Gilbert Abbott à Becket. Reference



Facsimile of a page of entry in Thackeray's handwriting

is also made to such trifles as servants' wages and merchant tailors. "Trifles", did I say? Yes, but that was seventy five years ago.

One entry in the Diary reads: "Aug. 14th, 1856. Left house. S. E. Station at 1.30. Dover about 4.45, reached Calais about 7."

In fancy we can see the tall ungraceful figure, the massive head, the pink face, the heavy rimmed spectacles, the bridgeless nose, the tall hat, the loose fitting clothes. It is Thackeray coming down the steps of 36 Onslow Square. Entering his brougham, he waves a fond adieu to his daughters, and is driven to the railway station, whence he goes to Dover to embark for a two months' vacation trip on the Continent, via Calais. We know it was two months, because the Diary tells us so. For the same reason we know that he went to Ghent and Brussels and Spa and Düsseldorf and Aix-la-Chapelle and Cologne, and other well known places in Europe.

To my mind, however, the most interesting pages of the Diary are those which touch upon his Scotch tour. If anyone should like to follow Thackeray in the Land o' Cakes, he may find much information in the little book. It not only gives the places where his lectures were delivered, and the financial benefits derived therefrom, but also the names of those who entertained him. There was something in Thackeray's peculiar genius which appealed to the Scottish temperament. Nearly all the men with any literary talent whatever knew him personally, and some of them were very fond of him.

In November, 1856, he was lecturing on the Four Georges. He was forty five years of age and had already written "Vanity Fair", "Pendennis",

"Henry Esmond", and "The Newcomes". He had also delivered a series of lectures on the English humorists — both in Great Britain and the United States. Society had taken him up, as society does take up a successful author who is willing to be caressed — and Thackeray liked to be petted. Popularity and applause were stimulants to him. "If I don't go out into society, I can't write", he once said. The coruscating conversation, the soft candle light, the pretty faces, the clever men, the atmosphere of refinement, the flavor of ease, and the surroundings of opulence all drew him to "the 'ouses of the Great" as a candle draws a moth. But he had not always been the pampered darling of *le beau monde*. First a man of fortune, next a ruined and a struggling artist, then an obscure writer for reviews and magazines — barely eking out a hand to mouth existence — he had to wait until he was thirty eight before the first number of "Vanity Fair" was published.

When success came to W. M. T. he determined to make the most of it by working "double shifts" — lecturing as well as writing. Hence we find him in Scotland during the month of November, 1856, and "making such a pot of money" with those Four Georges of his that Douglas Jerrold suggested he had better go on with the eight Henrys, and then the sixteen Gregorys; by which time he might become so rich, and the public so exhausted, that he could afford to wind up with the one John — and that a cheap one. This particular pun is said to be as old as Magna Carta itself; but then Douglas Jerrold would always have his little jest.

"I heard", said Thackeray to Jerrold on one occasion, "that you have said 'The Virginians' is the worst novel that I ever wrote." "You are wrong", replied Jerrold; "I said, 'It is the worst novel anybody ever wrote.'"

Now I know that someone is going to tell me to stick to Thackeray's Diary; but remember it was the Diary that really started all this talk. The little book is so full of suggestions that it is hard to refrain from occasional wanderings into bypaths to pluck an odd flower.

Now take, for instance, this entry: "November 5, 1856. J. B. Dinner, Dr. Simpson, Aytoun, Mr. Stevens, Ladies."

Of course "J. B." is none other than the "good physician", Dr. Brown, who lived in No. 23 Rutland Street, Edinburgh, and wrote there a story of the immortal "Rab". The "Dr. Simpson" referred to is that eminent Sir James who discovered how chloroform might be used as an anæsthetic. Aytoun is the Scottish poet and humorist who, by his own confession, "followed the law, but never could overtake it". His "Bon Gaultier Ballads" and "Lays of the Scottish Cavaliers" are known to most of us. The chief quality of his poetry is its picturesqueness — reproducing as it does a bygone age.

More interesting, perhaps, than Aytoun's poetry was Aytoun's first wife. She was a daughter of John Wilson — the Christopher North of "Blackwood's Magazine" — and seems to have inherited some of her father's wit and humor. When Aytoun proposed to her, the young lady reminded her suitor that before she could give her absolute consent, it would be necessary for him to obtain her father's approval. "You must speak for me," said the bashful poet, "for I could not summon courage to speak to the Professor on this subject." The young lady proceeded to the library, and taking her father affectionately by the hand, announced that Aytoun had sought her in

marriage. She added, "Shall I accept? He is so diffident that he won't speak to you about it himself." "Then we must deal tenderly with his feelings", said hearty old Christopher. "I'll write my reply on a slip of paper and pin it to your back." "Papa's answer is on the back of my dress", said Miss Jane, as she reentered the drawing room. Turning round, the delighted young man read these words: "With the author's compliments!"

Christopher North was one of the most interesting figures of a time when learning was at a premium. Big man among big men, he could, with equal facility and felicity, conduct a literary symposium or a cock fight. The Ettrick Shepherd of his "Noctes Ambrosianæ" is, to me, one of the finest and most finished of literary creations.

Another name which suggests much is that of "Blackwood". It appears frequently in the Diary. Who has not heard of "Blackwood's Magazine"? And how many famous works of fiction first found their way into print through the great Scotch publishing house. In passing I can recall Wilson's "Noctes", Aytoun's "Glenmutchkin", Warren's "Diary of a Late Physician" and "Ten Thousand a Year", Scott's "Tom Cringle's Log" and "The Cruise of the Midge"; a number of De Quincey's — but not the "Opium Eater"; Bulwer's "The Caxtons", and last but by no means least, "Scenes of Clerical Life".

The Diary tells us that Thackeray stayed at John Blackwood's house, in Randolph Crescent, while delivering his Edinburgh lectures. The Scotch editor had earned the reputation of being a good host, and arranged his dinner parties with great skill. So one can easily understand why W. M. T. preferred to stay there rather than go to a hotel. I am sure, too, that he was a welcome guest and that the grey days and dark, frosty nights were brightened by his presence.

Thackeray never wrote for "Blackwood's". The two men had met at the Garrick Club when Thackeray was "beginning to write". Their friendship had come about entirely through mutual attraction and liking and not through any literary relations. W. M. T. gives John the credit, however, of having inspired him with the idea of "Lord Crewe". Many quaintly friendly notes of the Thackeray-Blackwood intimacy still exist.

With Aytoun almost next door, and with Sir Edward B. Hamley — hero of the Crimean War and contributor to "Blackwood's" — within a short horseback ride, one can imagine the good times which the author of "Vanity Fair" must have had.

Here is a quaint little entry: "November 16, Craigie Halkett. Walked to church and fat of land and claret in plenty and smoking too much." Evidently, Lieutenant Colonel Craigie Halkett, of Cramond, was one of those military gentlemen who believed in entertaining in the good old fashioned way.

Thackeray liked all sorts of dinners, but I believe he liked Scotch military dinners best of all, for we find him dining with Hamley at artillery mess the next day. Nor was he overcome by the doughty warrior, for five days later we find this entry: "November 22, Mr. Ritchie's dinner, where I almost took Edinburgh. Too much wine. Very good cooking. Russell, Findlay (Scotsman)."

John Ritchie was the proprietor of that great Whig paper known as "The Scotsman". Russell and Findlay were its editors. "Blackwood's Magazine" preached Toryism. Thackeray's middle name was Makepeace. Here was an opportunity to prove that there

really was something in a name. So, by means of John Ritchie's wine and "very good cooking", W. M. T. arranged a truce between the Whigs and Tories. He did more — he succeeded in reconciling the two clans. This is proved by a letter which John Blackwood wrote to Charles Reade in 1876. "Many years ago," says Blackwood, "when Thackeray was staying with us, he insisted on making us (Russell and Blackwood) better acquainted, and a great night we had when late one evening the sage walked into my smoking-room, bringing Russell with him. Heigh-ho!"

But I am afraid that I have said more about Thackeray than I have about his Diary. So let me devote the few minutes which we still have to the little red bound book.

Here are a few pen scratches which suggest a number of things: "November 27. Paisley. Lecture in old church. Entertained at Mr. P. Coates's magnificent house. Dinner. Supper. Took leave of kind Blackwood in the morning."

Have you ever been to Paisley, Gentle Reader? If so, you will recall the dirty little river, the smoking chimneys, the noise and the bustle — for Paisley is a busy manufacturing town. Its shawls used to be known the world over. Clark's O. N. T. and Coates's linen and cotton spool thread are household words, even in America.

In the heart of this busy town stands an abbey, its venerable appearance contrasting strangely with its surroundings. Crowds of operatives jostle past it; heavily laden carts cause its old walls to tremble; the whir of machinery and the whistle of the locomotive break in upon its repose. The old abbey seems decidedly out of place amid modern manufacturing. And so it should, for at one time it was a famous shrine of Scotland, sharing honors with Melrose, Scone, and Dundee. It was in this old abbey, or rather a certain portion of it, that Thackeray lectured. Originally Paisley was settled by the Romans. So, according to the Diary, we have Thackeray at an ancient Roman camp, delivering a lecture in a mediæval chapel before a modern Renfrewshire audience and being entertained at the home of one of the world's largest thread manufacturers — for the Mr. P. Coates to whom W. M. T. refers was not Mr. P. Coates at all, but Sir Peter Coates, one of Paisley's leading citizens and a proprietor of the Ferguslie Thread Mills.

The next day we find "Old Thack" at Glasgow — only seven miles away — where he lectured to an "immense audience in the City Hall". This appears to have been his fourth Glasgow lecture. On the twenty ninth of November he was at Dumfries, where he lectured in a "pleasant little theatre" and was given "kind entertainment" by the editor of the Dumfries "Courier". Of course he visited the graves of Bobby Burns and "Bonnie Jean" Armour, both buried there. From Dumfries he went to Carlile where he dined with Mr. Steel and Mr. Cockburn, and slept "at excellent station hotel".

On the first of December it was snowing and bitter cold. Thackeray was at Hull, where he lectured in a "snug theatre". He tells us that he met a Mr. Frost — whether it was our old friend Jack, we are unable to state, because the Diary does not give the gentleman's Christian name. W. M. T. seems to have liked Hull very much. He stayed there a week, writing many letters and meeting lots of people, including "jolly old Mr. Wrightson" and a clergyman "with three services on Sunday at 150 a year". The fact that

Thackeray had made one hundred pounds during his one week at Hull may have had something to do with his sympathy for the poorly paid clergyman.

Leeds, Bradford, Manchester, Liverpool, and Derby were his next stops. His visits to these places netted him nearly four hundred pounds within a fortnight, but the Diary tells us that he visited some of them more than once.

There are no entries in the Diary between the twentieth and the thirtieth of December. But it is not hard to guess the reason. It was the holiday season and in those brave old days Christmas was — well, it was just Christmas: hearty good wishes, spoken in all kinds of voices, from deepest bass to shrillest treble; the whole Island engaged in a general "handshake"; preparations making on every side for the social board around which friends and kindred were to be united. I am sorry that Thackeray did not give some of this fine early Victorian flavor to his Christmas books. Dickens did.

Even if the Diary fails to mention Thackeray's doings after the twentieth of December, nevertheless we can see him coming down from the north to enjoy the Yuletide. There he is greeting, with affectionate embrace, the two girls who were the idols of his heart. We can almost hear the big table groaning under the weight of Christmas dinner — smoking from the spit and flanked by the outposts of Bacchus. We can see the roundish face, with the little dab of a nose, as the glow from the open fire lights up his smiling countenance. Then, when the meal is finished, we can see him, cigar in hand, sink into an easy chair, take out his Diary and glance through it, his mind reverting to the people of the north who had been so kind to him.

Of all British cities there is none more appealing to the literary man than Edinburgh. It is Florence-like in its intellectual leanings and more than Florence-like in its beauty; while a thousand years of history are crystallized within the circuit of a single glance. Hill, crag, castle, rock, blue stretch of sea, the picturesque ridge of the Old Town, the squares and terraces of the New — these things seen once are not to be forgotten; but my time is up —

> The play is done; the curtain drops,
> Slow-falling to the prompter's bell:
> A moment yet the actor stops,
> And looks around, to say farewell.