

DANIEL DEFOE AND KENT :

A CHAPTER IN CAPEL-LE-FERNE HISTORY.

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THE question raised by the facts which it is the purpose of these notes to set forth, is to a large extent a literary one, and if its discussion is to claim inclusion in these pages, it must be that it introduces us to some Kentish families and tells us something of the manor and the land they held in the small Kentish village of Capel-le-Ferne.

Problems respecting the authorship of anonymous works are among the class that can scarcely ever be finally closed, and though the question to be here discussed is of less importance than the inquiry into the authorship of the letters of Junius, yet in its way it is not without interest, dealing as it does with Daniel Defoe.

Of all Defoe's works, one of the most successful was the *Strange Apparition of Mrs. Veal*, and this curious fact is to be noticed about it that, pure romance as the tale is, its foundation rests on real people whose existence can be proved by outside evidence. This artifice is one more than once employed by Defoe in pursuance of his policy of trying to make his readers believe that the romance he was weaving was a reality. His best known work, *Robinson Crusoe*, is founded on a real Alexander Selkirk, whose story is to be found in *Woodes Rogers* ; and the same will be found true of other of his imaginative tales such as *Captain Avery* and *Captain Singleton*, and if I cite these it is because I wish to call attention to the fact that they are both concerned with Madagascar.

It has often been a problem with those who have written on Defoe what share he had in a work which, on its first

appearance in 1729, attracted much attention, and has frequently been republished, namely, *Madagascar; or, Robert Drury's Journal during fifteen years captivity on that Island.*

The framing of the story is strongly reminiscent of *Robinson Crusoe*, being that of a boy who, shipwrecked on the island of Madagascar, spent fifteen years, mostly as a slave, among the natives. That there was a Drury, and that he had some experience and knowledge of Madagascar is true beyond all doubt, though it seems equally certain that he would have been quite unequal to the task of recounting his experiences in the clear and charming style which has helped to make the book one of the classics of its date, and has prolonged its interest down to the present day. The preface, indeed, admits that the work as we have it was not written by Drury. 'The original,' says the preface to the first edition, 'was wrote by Robert Drury, which, consisting of eight quires in folio, each of near an hundred pages, it was necessary to contract it and put it in a more agreeable method.' This was done by the 'transcriber,' and the problem is, was this transcriber Daniel Defoe?

The last editor of the book, Captain Pasfield Oliver, R.A.,* has entered more fully into this question than any other writer. His general conclusions are that there was a Drury, who knew from personal experience something of Madagascar, but that this experience was gained in the course of piratical and slave-trading voyages, and that the fifteen years residence among the natives, with all its wealth of detail, is purely imaginary, and must be mainly attributed to the 'transcriber,' who derived the facts which make the story so lifelike and vivid from earlier French writers on the island. For the details of the evidence on which these conclusions are based the reader must be referred to Captain Oliver's introduction; we are here only concerned with the question whether the 'transcriber' was Defoe, and the purpose of these pages is to bring forward certain evidence which was unknown both to Captain Oliver and to Defoe's

* London, 1900.

numerous biographers, evidence based on a coincidence so marked as, in the opinion of the writer, to establish Defoe's authorship beyond all question.

The nature of the story and the style in which it is written have already raised question whether it were not by Defoe; moreover, when we remember the success of *Robinson Crusoe*, published in 1719, nothing seems more likely than that the author of that work should have been anxious to repeat his success by another story cast in the same mould; and, in following it, to hope for an equal triumph. Further, Defoe had already dealt with Madagascar in the two works named above, published respectively in 1719 and 1720, which affords strong evidence that he had turned his attention to the island, and must have known much about it, seemingly from de Flacourt and other French writers who, if we are to believe Captain Oliver, are the sources whence much of the graphic detail of Drury's narrative was derived.

Coming by some chance upon Drury, and learning something of his tales of Madagascar, Defoe may well have seen the opportunity of a new *Robinson Crusoe*, and, seizing it, have given us Drury's fifteen years captivity.

The essence of Defoe's tales lies in their wonderful assumption of accuracy of fact. The introduction to the work we are considering tells us that 'it is nothing else but a plain honest narrative of a matter of fact,' just as the author of *Robinson Crusoe* 'believes the thing to be a just history of fact,' and again in the *Strange Apparition* assures us that 'this relation is a matter of fact'—the very similarity of the asseveration in the three cases rouses suspicion. In order to support this artifice Defoe, as we have seen, is given to introducing real people on whom to found his stories, and it is the remarkable connection between the persons on whom Drury's *Madagascar* and the *Strange Apparition of Mrs. Veal* are founded which forms the subject of these pages. It is but little likely that when the two works were first published—Mrs. Veal in 1705, Drury in 1729—this connection would have been noticed, to-day it would be even less capable of observation; that I

am acquainted with it I owe to the existence of certain family memoranda, as well as to the fact that I am connected by a marriage of 1698 with both the families concerned.

Let us now turn to the works themselves and see who are the characters appearing in them. In the *Strange Apparition of Mrs. Veal* we have Mrs. Veal herself, a lady of 30 years of age and unmarried, for the title is merely one of courtesy, and her brother William Veal, Controller of the Customs at Dover, with whom she lived, and for whom she kept house. The point of the story is that Mrs. Veal appeared to her friend Mrs. Bargrave at Canterbury on the 8th of September 1705, being the day after her death at Dover. Now as to Mrs. Veal's existence, as well as to the date of her death, there is no doubt, for her burial is entered in the Registers of St. Mary at Dover as having taken place on the 10th of September 1705.

The existence of William Veal, as well as the office which he held, can be proved with equal, indeed with greater, certainty. His sister, with whom he had lived, died in September, and within three months we find him marrying Elizabeth Hughes, a widow, of Capel-le-Ferne,* a small hamlet some four miles from Dover, and of this marriage I shall have more to say later.

I cannot prove that he was Controller of the Customs at this date, though it is so stated in the *Strange Apparition*, but that he held the post later appears from a note made by my ancestor Isaac Minet, then living at Dover, who says, 'Mr. Nathanael Matson died at Dover, 5th 9ber, 1719, and was buried 7th, and had a very pompous funeral, the bearers being [*inter alios*] Mr. William Vealle, Controller of the Customs.' A Mr. Henry Matson dies in 1721, when Mr. Vealle is again named among the bearers at the funeral, though on this occasion he is not said to be Controller. The same writer, however, again mentions him in 1724, and as holding the same post.

* The marriage is found in the Capel Registers, and took place on December 15, 1705.

There can therefore be no manner of doubt as to the existence of the Veals, brother and sister, and that William held the office assigned to him by Defoe, while that his sister kept house for him accords well with the fact of his marriage very shortly after her death. Here, then, Defoe is found basing his story, the rest of which is, of course, pure romance, on real people, who are proved to have lived at Dover.

Let us next turn to examine in the same way the folk who appear at the opening of the Madagascar story. Drury embarks for the voyage which was to end so disastrously for him, in February 1702, on board the 'Degrave' of 700 tons, a ship belonging to the New East India Company, for the two companies were not then united. The Captain was one William Young, who had with him his son William as second mate. Arrived in India, both the Captain and first mate died of fever, so the ship sailed for home under command of William the son. The 'Degrave,' so the tale goes on, was driven on to the coast of Madagascar, and ultimately only Drury survived, to pass fifteen years on the island. With this, however, we have nothing to do here, our only business being to establish the reality of the Youngs and the existence of the 'Degrave.' In the early part of the work, from which the above facts are taken, there is nothing to connect the Youngs with Dover, but in the account of the actual shipwreck is this touch: 'The Captain [*i.e.*, William Young, the son] got on shore with his father's heart in his hand, which, according to his request when dying, was put in a bottle to be brought to England, and buried at Dover.'

Here, for a moment, we will leave the Youngs to prove the existence of their ship. This can easily be done by quoting from Colonel Yule's edition of the diary of William Hedges, where is a letter dated 'from on board the "Degrave," Cap. William Young, commander, in Porta Nova road, July 26th 1699.' Again, in the same diary, is another letter of November 16th, 1600 (*sic*, but clearly an error for 1700), in which we find 'your Honour's chaplain put on board

the "Degrave," and approved by the Bishop of London, ran away herefrom and left the ship. Wee understand he is a very lewd, drunken, swearing person, drencht in all manner of debaucheries.* This establishes for us the reality of the ship, as of its Captain, while the story of his heart clearly connects him with Dover.

Hasted will be our next guide. The Youngs were a Capel family he tells us, and he adds that in 1691 William Young bought from one Oliver Wright the manor and certain lands there.† This we shall find fully confirmed later by Captain Young's will. His wife was Alice Watson, who survived her husband many years, and, dying at the age of 96 at her grandson-in-law's house, the Rector of Eythorne, was buried at Capel on August 29, 1750 (Capel Registers). They had three children, William, killed in Madagascar in 1702, Nicholas, died unmarried, and Elizabeth; and this last it is who gives us the connection between the Youngs and the Veals. Born in 1678 (Dover Registers), she married Henry Hughes of Deptford before 1699, as in her father's will of February in that year she is mentioned as then married. Of Hughes nothing is known except his will, which shews that, like his father-in-law, he was a sea captain. The document, dated at Falmouth October 24, 1702,‡ is in the form of a letter to his wife at Deptford, and runs thus:—

My most dearest life,

I have met with great fatigues and have had great annoyance with my men, six having been in prison for seven days. As for my will you writ me M^r Shylling had orders to make is not yet come to my hands, and here is now a faire wind that I must saile or be protested against; I therefore write this as my last to you, and doe in case of noe heirs of mine by your body shall survive give the whole estate to you and the heires of your body after my decease.

* Hakluyt Soc., Lond., 1888, II., ccxx., ccxxv.; III., xli.

† *Hist. of Kent*, ed. 1829, ii., 129. See also *Ireland*.

‡ P.C.C., Ash, 108.

This document was admitted as a will, administration of it being granted in 1704 to the widow, Henry Hughes having died in 'parts beyond the seas.' There was one child only of this marriage, Alice, born at Deptford in 1701,* and of her we shall hear more presently. Certain land passed to this daughter, land known as Hughes' Fields, a name still surviving in Deptford; left by her to her son Hughes Minet, it remained with him until 1810, when he sold it to one James Hughes, a shipwright of Broomfield Place, Deptford. The land must have been of some extent, as the purchase money amounted, in 1810, to £3,270.

Elizabeth Hughes must have returned to Capel after her husband's death, no doubt to live with her mother, who herself had just learnt of her double loss of husband and son. Three years later the young widow marries William Veal, Controller of the Customs, and thus we have the connection established between the Veals of Defoe's *Strange Apparition* and the Youngs of Drury's *Madagascar*.

Had Disraeli known of these facts he might well have added another chapter to the *Curiosities of Literature*, for a stranger, and may one not say a more convincing, literary coincidence it would be hard to find. Two works of imagination, each basing itself on persons proved to be real; the two families used for this purpose shewn to be not only from the same place, but also connected by marriage; the one book admittedly by Defoe, the other by (?). There can surely be but one answer that Drury's *Madagascar* was also the work of Defoe. What connection Defoe had with Dover, and how he came to know of these two families must be left among the unsolved riddles of literature.

Of the Veal-Hughes marriage were born eight children, of whom only the eldest has any interest for us, through his ownership of his grandfather's land at Capel.

He was christened Young, his mother's maiden name, and it is clear that after their marriage his parents must have lived at Dover, for Young was baptized at St. Mary's

* Registers of St. Nicholas, Deptford.

on August 10, 1708. The Veals must then have removed to Capel, where we find the baptisms of their seven younger children between 1709—1718.*

I find no record of Young Veal's death, except in family notes of my great-grandfather Hughes, who places it in 1753, which must be nearly accurate. The only trace of him during his life is the entry of his name in a Poll Book for Kent of 1734 as living at Capel, and as having a vote for Dover.

I may now turn to the records of my own ancestors at Dover, which will serve both to explain my interest in the question, and also to throw further light on some of the facts set forth above. There had come to Dover in 1686 one Isaac Minet, a refugee for religion's sake, from France. Established there as a merchant, he grew to success, and, marrying Marie Sauchelle, like himself a refugee, they had a large family. His eldest son John, born at Dover in 1695, went to Cambridge, where he graduated B.A. in 1717 and M.A. in 1721. Ordained priest at Lambeth in 1722, he was at once presented to the living of Eythorne, near Dover, which he held for fifty years. As deacon he had acted as curate to John Dauling, rector of Alkham-cum-Capel, for the two benefices go together to this day. Here in 1720 he must have met Alice Hughes, then a girl of 19. Falling in love with her, he married her so soon as he was settled in his new benefice. A business-like note of his father Isaac, whom I have already quoted, gives us the information, and is at the same time the confirmation of much that we have already learnt: 'The 14th Sep. 1724 my son John, Rector of Eythorne, married Miss Alice Hughes, daughter of Mrs. Elizabeth Yong, wife in second marriage of William Veal, Esq., of Capell, and comptroler of the Customs of Kent; her grandmother Madam Alice Yong, widow of Capt.

* I have set out these children in the pedigree on p. 75, most of which is compiled from the Capel Registers. The two daughters who survived longest are both named in their half-sister Alice Minet's will. It is clear from the dates of the baptisms of the first two Veal children, as well as from that of their parents' marriage, that Young must have been born some time before his baptism. This is of common occurrence in the Dover Registers, and is often noticed, though not in this instance. The dates given in the pedigree are, of course, old style.

William Yong.' Twelve children were born of this marriage, of whom only one concerns us here, namely, Hughes, doubtless so called after his grandfather, and born at Eythorne 1731 (Eythorne Registers). John Minet died in 1771, and his widow survived him some seven years; it appears not unlikely that after her husband's death she returned to Capel, where, as we shall see, she owned considerable property, for she was buried there in 1778. Hughes her son was a great book lover, and collected especially books of travel, among which we are not surprised to find two editions of Drury's *Madagascar*, one, the second, of 1731, and a later edition of 1807. He was in the habit of making notes on the margins and blank leaves of all his books, and in the later of his editions of Drury we find the two following remarks:—

'This, so far as my frequent conversations on this subject would and could admit of (with my dear mother), I say all or many of them corroborated and further confirmed (as to the loss of the 'Degrave' and the death of the Captain and his son particularly) in my mind the truth of Drury's narrative.'

'This, and many other passages relating to Captain Young the father, and afterwards his son, who became Captain, accords with what I have heard from my mother, who was grand-daughter to Captain Young the father, and whose wife, my mother's grandmother, I well remember [*i.e.*, Alice Young]. She died at Eythorn, aged 96 [1750], at my father's house. This book is particularly interesting to me, whose maternal great-grandfather Cap. Young the father was, and who am now reading these narratives above a century after they happened, and at 80 years of age.'

These remarks were written in 1811, and the writer lived on until 1813, when he died at Westerham, where he is buried. It will be noticed that his confirmation does not go beyond the facts which form the foundation of Drury's book, facts which are admittedly true, facts which the wife and mother of the chief actors in them had herself communicated

to him; he accepts the truth of the whole narrative because he knew from statements he could not doubt that the shipwreck story was true, nor is my purpose here to prove the truth of the whole of the Drury story, but only that the persons on which its foundation rests were real, and this Hughes does enable us to do.

If we now take up the history of the Capel property, we shall again meet with the same people, and yet further strengthen the evidence of the close connection which existed between them. Hasted brings the story of the manor of Capel-le-Ferne, or St. Mary-le-Merge as it is otherwise called, down from very remote times. Into this I am not curious here to enquire, but in 1691 the manor and certain lands were in the hands of Oliver Wright,* from whom they passed to Captain William Young. He must have been a Dover man, though an unfortunate *lacuna* in the registers from 1640 to 1664, which would seemingly cover the date of his birth, prevents our establishing the fact as certain. Previous to 1640 there were two families of the name in Dover, Thomas and William, both with wives Elizabeth, from either of which our Captain may have come. The registers, however, give us his marriage to Alice Watson on May 1, 1677, as also the births of two of their children, Nicholas in 1677 and Elizabeth (who became Mrs. Hughes) in 1678. Were we in any doubt as to the identification of these entries with Captain Young, his will would prove its correctness.† In it he describes himself as of Dover, mariner, outward bound, and intended on a voyage to East India.‡ He leaves to his wife Alice the house in Bulwark Street, Dover, in which he lived, and the manor and farm of Capel Church, and also a farm and lands called Upper Standen, which latter is near by Capel,§ for life, with reversion to his son Nicholas. In default of heirs the

* Hasted. *Loc. cit. sup.*

† Archdeaconry of Canterbury, 80, 331: dated February 9, 1699; proved November 28, 1705.

‡ This must have been the voyage which took him to Porta Nova, where he was in July 1699 (see p. 65, *supra*).

§ The only mention of this property; what came of it I do not know.

property was to pass to his daughter Elizabeth, wife of Henry Hughes, with an ultimate reversion to his niece Mary Watson.* Nicholas, dying unmarried, the manor of Capel Church, and land appurtenant amounting to 102 acres, came ultimately under this will to Elizabeth his daughter, and from her to the eldest son of her second marriage, Young Veal.

I now take up the story from my own family papers. Young Veal barred the entail in 1744; and, falling on evil days, died, it would seem, about 1753, when, by order of the Court of Chancery, the estate was sold to pay his debts; this it was insufficient to do, and Isaac Minet, from whom I have quoted above, is said to have lost a considerable sum through his connection with Young Veal.†

The purchaser was William, brother of John Minet, and his reason for purchasing it was to oblige his sister-in-law Alice, who by that time, as we shall see directly, owned the contiguous farm of Capel Sole. Dying in 1767, William devised Capel Church to his brother James for life; he, however, died in Berlin, unmarried, in 1774, when, still following the provisions of William's will, the property passed to Hughes Minet his nephew, son of Alice, for an estate for life.

We will now turn to Capel Sole, which forms the other half of the Capel property. Alice, widow of Captain Young, lived on at Capel Church, as tenant for life, for some years after her husband's death in India, and in 1709 purchased the estate of Capel Sole, which adjoins Capel Church; its area was 52 acres. This remained subject to her own disposition. After her granddaughter Alice's marriage to John Minet, she went to live at Eythorne, where she died at the age of 96, and was buried at Capel on August 29, 1750

* It is curious to note that Dan Shilling, scrivener, of Tower Street, Dover, is a witness; one wonders whether he was the Shylling employed to draw the will of Henry Hughes, the will that never reached him at Falmouth.

† William Veal, father of Young, was, of course, in no way concerned in the devolution of the manor of Capel, but I may note that his will is on record (P.C.C., Auber, 23). Proved January 21, 1729, he leaves his wife Elizabeth universal legatee and executrix.

(Capel Registers). Her will,* in which she describes herself as Alice, relict of William Young of Dover, devises to her granddaughter Alice, wife of John Minet of Eythorne, a tenement in Capel bought of John Stokes, deceased, and lands in Capel bought of David Crumpe and Elizabeth his wife. These no doubt formed the Capel Sole property. She also names her grandson Nicholas Veal, who must therefore have been still living in 1741, and her granddaughters Elizabeth (who later became Mrs. Ridley) and Amy Veal. Alice Minet is appointed sole executrix.

By 1753 then the manor of Capel Church belonged to William Minet, and Capel Sole to Alice, his sister-in-law. To this property Alice had already added, before her grandmother's death, 13 acres, called Badcocks, which she bought in 1748 for £152 12s.; and in 1752 she purchased 22 acres from Adam Hamond and 4 acres from James Southouse, thus adding 39 acres more, so that at her death, in 1778, Capel Sole consisted of 94 acres—these she devised to her son Hughes Minet absolutely; he therefore held (after 1774) Capel Church for an estate for life, and (after 1778) Capel Sole absolutely. The fact that he was not the owner of the manor of Capel Church in fee simple annoyed him very much, and in 1787 he took counsel's opinion on the point, but to no effect. This appears from a very characteristic note addressed, 'To him who will be alive as my eldest son after my death.' In this he says, probably without any reason, 'among the many inaccuracies in the will of my late uncle William Minet he bequeaths Capel Church not according to his intentions I am sure, since when he bought it in Chancery it was to oblige my mother in whose family it had always been [since 1691]; but, being entailed on the eldest son Young Veal, it was sold in Chancery to pay his debts. He promised my mother that on condition of her bequeathing to me Capel Sole he would bequeath Capel Church to me. But though I trust his heart was good, his head was not clear.' There is much more in the same complaining style,

* Archdeaconry of Canterbury, 94, 155. Dated 1741; proved 1750.

and he advises his son to bar the entail so soon as this may be possible. The same paper adds a note regarding Young Veal: 'He was Treasurer, as I have heard, of Dover Harbour and became insolvent. My grandfather who was bound for him I believe lost money by him.'

Hughes died in 1813, and was followed in the ownership of both estates by his eldest son William, who died unmarried. Some time before his death in 1827 he sold the whole estate to his younger brother Isaac. He, dying in 1839, devised it to his eldest son Charles William, who further added to the property by two purchases. Of the earlier purchase of 17 acres (1856) I have no information, the later of 23 acres (1858) was of land which had belonged to Robert Coxon, who sold in 1809 to Ingram Tucker, who died in 1858.

The whole estate, which now amounted, as we have accounted for it, to 233 acres, remained with Charles William Minet until his death, seemingly intestate, in 1874.*

Leaving six daughters and no son the estate was sold by order of the Court made in a partition suit then instituted, and was bought by the family of Morris. Quite recently, however, it has again returned to the family which had so long possessed it, for in 1909 Susan, second daughter of Charles William Minet, and widow of Sir Charles Staveley, repurchased it from the Morris family and remains its owner to-day.

The manor, as in the case of so many of these small manors, has sunk into silent oblivion. It was certainly purchased by William Young in 1691, but the particulars of sale of 1874 are wisely cautious on this point. 'The Vendors shall not be required to define the boundaries or constituents of the manor or reputed manor, or to give any information respecting such manor or reputed manor beyond that which

* The acreage at this date was given as 235 acres. Hughes Minet, whose methodical mind was much troubled by such small variations in measurement, wisely remarks on the margin of an old plan of the property, 'the quantities of land mentioned cannot be depended on in ascertaining this matter of admeasurement, as no nicety is observed, or highly needful so to be, as to the strict quantity of land in each field of which mention may be made.'

is afforded by the abstracted muniments of title,' nor do these go back to the purchase of 1691. Who may be its lord, or its lady, it would be hard to say, nor does the question seem to be one that need trouble us much in these days.

In order to bring out more clearly the relationships of the persons who appear in the foregoing pages I have added a pedigree, which will, I trust, make it easier to follow the various parts they play in the story.

