

Texts and Documents

COUNTRY PRACTICE IN DAYS GONE BY

(as recorded in contemporary diaries)

PART III

by

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4. THE FARINGTON DIARY*

THIS famous diary written by an artist covers the period 1793–1821 and fills several volumes. The writer, Joseph Farington, R.A., moved in high circles and met many famous men and women. Doctors and patients are hardly mentioned. There is an interesting account of the results of a duel.

1795. Lord Hampden had been a continued friend. He had bad health owing to a weakness of the bowels. He had been cured of this complaint by taking pepper corns, crushing them in his mouth and swallowing them. Dr. Darwin recommended them originally.

1810. Miss Roberts spoke of the very bad state in which Princess Amelia is. [She was the daughter of George III and died shortly after this entry.] She suffered so much from the exertion of being taken to Weymouth that she has never been so well since as she was in August last. She is now so weak, as to be unable to be taken from her bed but to have it occasionally again made. It is still a matter of conjecture only what her complaint is. It is an inflammatory disorder and internal. She is frequently bled and blistered etc. to counteract the inflammation. Her patience, resignation and piety are exemplary.

1807. Carlisle said he was one of the surgeons who attended Mr. Richardson who at the end of the last summer was wounded in a duel with Baron Hompesch. He was shot through the body, the ball passing through the liver, lungs and grasing some of the vessels near the heart. On receiving the wound, he fell, and was convulsed, and for an hour appeared to be dying, but afterwards recovered his senses, and was brought to his lodgings in Parliament Street and was able to walk from the carriage to an apartment on the ground floor, and to assist in undressing himself. His constitution being very strong, he was able to endure the vast evacuations that could alone save his life by preventing inflammation and fever, as had suppuration taken place his death would have been certain. In 13 days 236 ounces of blood were taken from his arm, besides 3 quarts of blood from his side. He was reduced to the lowest state possible without extinguishing life. For the five first days he had no sustenance allowed him, and then only a piece of toasted bread which had been steeped in water. Some female friends at one period having observed him to be very low, gave him $\frac{1}{2}$ a pint of milk porridge, which soon raised his pulse from 76 to 120 and it became necessary to bleed him twice to prevent the worst consequences.

At last he recovered and is now quite well and may live 30 years longer, but he is an intemperate man, and associating with officers at Woolwich has since been twice drunk, and been as many times bled.

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5. THE DIARY OF BENJAMIN NEWTON*

BENJAMIN NEWTON was the rector of Wath in the North Riding of Yorkshire. Born about 1760, his diary covers the years 1816–18. From its pages a cultured, vivacious liberal-minded character emerges full of humour and good nature, punctilious without being pedantic, and practically concerned in everybody's interests though he carefully avoided any trace of the busybody.

1818 February 22. Sat up last night till 2 waiting on Dr. Whaley who had come to see young Clarkson who was in great agony. The Doctor found his disorder to be an inflammation of the peritonaeum, took 50 ounces of blood from him, blistered, glistered, purged him, gave salines, etc. and he was almost immediately relieved. The Dr. thought he would not have lived 24 hours if he had not been sent for last night.

March 19. Rode to Pickhill with Anne (my sister) and Mrs. Newton, and the former this morning (20th) complained of a violent shivering before we went to church and which made her sisters prevail upon her not to go. On coming from church we found her alarmingly ill and immediately sent for Dr. Whaley who gave her a dose of calomel with salts and senna which however seemed to yield no relief to her head which continued most excruciating and she was scarcely anything relieved this morning (21st) when three leeches applied to her temples seemed to give a slight relief. Dr. Whaley came at once and applied eight more which seem to take off the pain from her head but as a large blister was applied to the nape of her neck which reached down between her shoulders she is left this morning (22nd) much exhausted from want of sleep and much evacuation.

March 22 Easter Sunday. I had the happiness of hearing on my return from church that my dear Anne was more improved than Dr. Whaley could have expected.

May 26. Two or three children are now ill at Wath and their disorder is pronounced to be water in the head.

6. THE JOURNAL OF A SOMERSET RECTOR†

THE Reverend John Skinner was born in 1772. His voluminous and almost illegible diary is in the British Museum. The most interesting part concerns the parochial affairs of the parish of Camerton during the years 1822–36. He seems to have had remarkably sensible ideas on medical matters. He had many family worries mainly because of the ravages of tuberculosis. In 1813 he wrote in his journal 'The mortality in my family has been great indeed, as I have lost my wife and child, two sisters and a brother, two great-uncles and my father-in-law'. Consumption, passed on from one to another, accounts for the deaths of all the younger people.

There is an entry in the Journal made on 27 June of the same year, which shows that Skinner himself had a narrow escape: 'I breakfasted this morning with Warren, who pressed me so much to preach I could no longer decline doing so; especially as he had one of my own sermons by him. I find no inconvenience as to the exertion, although in the morning I had a return of the spitting of blood, which for some time past has so constantly attended me.' Probably his love of the road and of the open-air saved him, and his readiness to ride or to walk or to go by water in order to see people and places rather than to study speed and ease.

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But these worries must have left their effects on him for he died in 1839 by his own hand among the beech trees in the wood near his home.

1823 January 3. A fractured spine. In the evening one of the colliers, A. Garratt, came to say his brother had broken his back in the coal works. I immediately went to his house in Wick Lane, and found him lying in a most deplorable state, the spine having been put out below the shoulder by a mass of coal falling upon him. This is the third instance within these last two years of the same accident having occurred. I found three or four of the Methodists assembled round the bed exhorting the poor creature to repentance, as they informed him his time was but short, and he must make the best use of it. What with his bodily pains and his mental fears, the sufferings of the man were almost beyond bearing.

January 4. I went to Wick Lane immediately after breakfast. The poor fellow was grown tranquil, but suffered from not having his water drawn off, the bladder being paralysed, as well as the lower extremities. As the man seemed desirous of having Mr. Flower's advice, as well as that of Mr. Curtis who attended him as doctor of the club, I sent for him by my servant, and, on seeing him after his visit, found he was of opinion that an operation might be performed with every prospect of success, that is, by removing the injured bone and relieving the pressure. I was almost inclined to persuade the poor fellow to submit, but was fearful of influencing him. I paid Mr. Flower a one-pound note, as he had expressly come over on the receipt of my note.

January 5. I walked before church to call on the sufferer in Wick Lane. Garratt had passed a more tranquil night, but had suffered from not having his water drawn off, nothing having passed since three o'clock on Friday afternoon, when the accident happened. Mr. Curtis had been sent for, and had relieved him by drawing off the water, and would perform the operation on the morrow.

January 6. I walked after breakfast to see the sick man, and learning that Mr. Curtis was then at John Rossiter's I went there to ask whether he actually meant to have the operation performed, and when? He replied whenever he thought proper; that I had no business to interfere, no more than any other person; the man was under his charge, and I had no business to send for another.

I said, that as I understood from Mr. Flower on Saturday, that every day's delay added to the risque of success in the performance of the operation, I should candidly tell him I would take minutes of everything that had occurred, and draw up the case, should the man receive any detriment from the delay. Mr. Curtis then said he did not care what I did, as he conceived I had no right to injure him in his business by sending for Mr. Flower.

I called in the course of the day on Mrs. Jarrett at the Manor, hoping her interference might be of service in quelling the discord among the doctors, since Curtis declared he would walk out of the house the instant Mr. Flower entered. I found it was agreed to send for Mr. Pope to meet Mr. Flower the next day to perform the operation, which was certainly the best method to accommodate the feud, as Mr. Crang, I find, is no less at enmity with Mr. Flower than Curtis. These doctors differ among themselves, but it is hard that their patients should suffer for their disputes.

January 7. I waited at home in expectation of hearing the operation was performed; but it did not take place till the evening, when Mr. Flower, with his partner, Mr. Leech, opened the back near the spine, and extracted a part of the protruding bone. The man bore the operation with great firmness, but did not experience the relief I expected. [There were no anaesthetics in those days.]

January 8. I walked after breakfast to the poor sufferer at Wick Lane and found him quite quiet after the operation and anxious for me to read prayers.

April 5. Garratt is better, but no chance of recovering the use of his limbs.

November 6. I afterwards visited poor Garratt, the collier, who is, I fear, in a dangerous state from a stoppage of water, which Mr. Flower does not seem to remedy. Poor fellow, his sufferings have been extreme; it will indeed be a happy release if it pleases God to take him.

November 8. Poor Garratt, the collier, died this morning.

November 18. Mr. Flower, the apothecary, in compliance with my request sent his bill for

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medicine, etc., for the collier, Garratt. It amounted to twelve pounds, but as his operation on the poor man had not been attended with success, he said he would take half the sum.

Small-pox and Scrofula

1825. April 1. Poor little Goold, the girl I have been so much pleased with as to her constant attendance at church and desire to improve herself, is laid up with the smallpox. She has been vaccinated by Mr. Crang, but it could not have taken properly, as she is fuller with pustules than any person I ever saw, but so very patient. I promised to send her some children's books for her amusement, which I did on my return home.

1828. April 10. I went to see Hannah Heal's boy, who I fear is in a very bad way through some scrofulous humour which is fixed in his leg, and the discharge is so great I fear it will exhaust him: the poor woman will have a heavy loss, as he is a well-disposed boy.

April 27. I walked to see the widow Heal's boy before morning prayers, and gave him something to buy oranges. The poor lad has the Evil dreadfully. He has no less than four open wounds in his leg and thigh. I fear he will be a cripple, if he survives the great discharge.

Consumption

September 5. I awoke about one o'clock with so great a giddiness in my head I was obliged to light my candle and walk about my room. I also bathed my head and temples with opodeldoc and took some medicine, but could not fall again to sleep; and there was all the time a kind of buzzing in my ears, which rendered it very uncomfortable. I left my bed, however, at seven, and continued my employment.

September 6. I certainly am far from well—heavy and stupid I feel, and collect my ideas with difficulty. It may be that bleeding may relieve me, but I do not like to begin this remedy.

1829. April 20. Mr. Crang, the apothecary, sent a message this evening to say Mrs. Hammond died as he expected in the course of the day. She had been so blooded there appeared to be little chance of her rallying. What a system do the gentlemen of the lancet now pursue in cases of inflammation! There appears to be little chance if the disorder be violent, and can alone be remedied by copious drafts of the vital stream. The only difference seems to be, the patient may die quiet through exhaustion, instead of quitting the world in a raging fever.

July 14. I felt low. Indeed, not all the powers of my mind are able to bear up against the depression of spirits I now feel.

July 15. I passed a bad night, and had a return of spitting of blood, so that I did not leave my bedroom till past eight.

1830. February 24. I have felt so unwell lately I am resolved to see what horse exercise will do, and accordingly purchased a little poney for my own riding this morning for twelve pounds. My son on old Jack, and my daughter on her mare, accompanied me for two hours on Clan Down, and whenever the weather is tolerably fair I mean to continue the exercise.

October 8. I felt in reality so unwell with the pressure of blood at my temples I was resolved to take some laudanum, and took three times fifteen drops at a time without producing any effect, so that I passed a miserable time in bed.

October 9. As soon as the morning was sufficiently light I dressed myself and went into my study and got some tea, which refreshed me greatly, so that I was able to look over my sermon.

1832. July 7. As [my son] Joseph's cough still continues unabated, and he complained this morning of a sharp pain on his chest, I did not feel comfortable in his delaying his visit to [Dr.] Norman, which has been put off from day to day on the plea of his being better. I sent to order a post chaise to convey him to Bath, entreating he would mention everything he complains of to Norman, since nothing could be more absurd than attempting to deceive his doctor. I am apprehensive, as he says when he coughs he feels a sharp pain like a knife running into him. I have had too much experience in these matters not to feel alarmed. Hitherto he has

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attributed the pains in his chest to rheumatism, and to a blow he received some time ago from a ladder: I am of a different opinion.

July 11. Joseph is not so well; his cough hard, and the expectoration considerable.

July 16. Poor Joseph was blooded on Saturday, and continues in Bath till to-morrow to come out with his brother Owen, and his friend Mr. Stewart.

[On July 22 John Skinner visited Bath to see his son and arrange for his son to go to Weston-super-Mare by carriage.]

July 23. Joseph bore his journey better than I expected, as he complained much on the road of a pain all round his chest, and his cough seemed hard and the expectoration difficult.

[On August 10 Mr. Skinner received a letter from his daughter Anna saying that] Joseph during a fit of coughing had ruptured a small vessel, and in consequence she had ordered a chaise to take him to Bath, and had gone with him. This intelligence, although I have long prepared my mind for the worst, gave me much uneasiness, and I passed a sleepless night.

August 11. I found Joseph much better for his bleeding, which Norman advised immediately on his arrival at my mother's. Norman told him he had taken too much nourishment since his return from Weston, and that it was absolutely necessary he should lose blood even if this had not occurred. I saw Norman, and had a plain straightforward conversation with him with respect to Joseph, saying I wished him to be under his care till he gave him full permission to move back again to Camerton.

August 13. On our arrival we were greeted with the sad intelligence that during a fit of coughing the bleeding had returned from his lungs, and that in consequence Norman had been obliged to take more blood. On seeing him, poor fellow, he seemed very low, saying if this continued it must soon be over with him.

Cholera

September 6. Pestilence stalks over the earth, but still we all eat and drink, and rise up to play. A beggar woman or, as they call them, mumpers, came to the place. On my asking where she lived, I found she was an inhabitant of that wretched place Avon Street, in Bath, and that she was come into the country to sell matches, etc. On questioning her about the cholera, she said it was not so bad as they had reported it to be.

September 8. I made a point of going to the shop, the public-house and several of the colliers' residences to caution them against receiving mumpers or beggars coming from other parts, especially from Avon Street, Bath, into their houses, since by this means the cholera might be brought into the parish, and rage in our collieries here as it is still doing in Staffordshire. I told them it was absurd to imagine it was not infectious, for I had heard from my son who is residing in London that the sexton of the parish where he resides had caught the infection from digging a grave and assisting at the funeral of a person who died of the complaint, and died himself the next day. The people seemed to be convinced of the prudence and propriety of my advice, and promised to be guided by it. I also recommended cleanliness; and this perambulation of my parish occupied me nearly till dinner time.

September 19. We passed through Mells, and thence to Nunney; I entered the little Inn for the purpose of procuring some bread and butter and was not very pleased at the intelligence conveyed that the landlord was upstairs ill of the cholera!

September 27. I hear that some cases have occurred at Timsbury which are considered as having much the appearance of cholera, which Mr. Collins has doctored with success by giving laudanum, spirits of wine and soda.

October 3. I find the cholera has broken out most violently in Paulton, and nine died of the disorder the day before yesterday, and three or four cases are considered hopeless. It seems one of these vagabond match-sellers from Bath conveyed it to the house where he was taken in for a night's lodging, and immediately conveyed the infection to the household and to others. He was buried in his clothes the following morning, and those who died are buried in a piece of ground without funeral ceremony. Curtis says that he finds bleeding the most efficacious remedy, and says he is pretty confident he can stop it if called in at the first; but it seems that

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out of nine cases the whole perished under his management and that of Flower and Baynton, of Radstock, so I for one should have little confidence in their skill. If it comes to us, I suppose *pro forma* we must send for some of these worthies, but perhaps we may as well let it alone. I am happy to hear the common people, now the danger is come to their own doors, begin to take some precaution, such as whitewashing their houses and purchasing camphor, upwards of a pound having been sold in one day at the shop at Camerton; they also burn juniper, which grows in quantities under Falkland Knoll. Curtis says that he takes no precautions to avoid infection.

October 8. The cholera, I hear, rages at Paulton, and four more cases are dead! This damp weather must, I think, contribute to increase the pestilence, especially within the confined residences of the colliers.

October 9. The clerk, who came for the surplice to have it washed, states that two of Hill's family in Bridge Place have been attacked by the cholera, which they caught at Paulton.

October 11. I hear that nearly forty persons have died of the cholera at Paulton, and that they are interred without funeral service.

October 13. After breakfast I received a letter from Mr. Lewton, the bailiff of the coal works, announcing the breaking out of the cholera at Camerton. I immediately walked to his house, taking with me some camphor and aromatic vinegar to give him. This being pay day with the colliers it occurred to me that if the infection be among them he must take every precaution to avoid it. The poor fellow seemed much alarmed, for the boy who died was at the evening school he keeps at his house yesterday, and appeared quite well; but he must have caught the complaint from old Mrs. Raisin, his grandmother. I immediately wrote to Curtis, the apothecary, desiring him to come to Camerton. I also saw Cook, the father of the boy who died and now lies in the same house with his grandmother, and said he must get the bodies put instantly in coffins and interred out of the way. I then spoke to White about digging a deep grave in the churchyard, out of the line where bodies are now interred, but within the consecrated enclosure.

Curtis, accompanied by Flower, the apothecary from Chilcompton, came to me about the middle of the day and said that prompt measures must be taken to prevent the spreading of the infection, and we must accelerate as soon as possible the interment of the bodies. I walked with them to the churchyard, where the clerk and his two lads were digging the grave. They said it was much better that I did not officiate at the funeral: that at other places it was not done. I said I should be guided by the feelings of the people themselves who attended the funeral, for if I shewed myself fearful of catching the complaint while interring the body, it would have the effect of deterring them from bringing it to the grave and of assisting at all at the interment.

I ordered the man at the shop to distribute two ounces of camphor among the people who came to his house, and desired him to say to them, if they kept a little in the mouth now and then it would be beneficial as a preventative.

I also told the clerk to purchase on my account at the public-house a bottle of spirits to give a glass to each of the people who attended the funeral in the evening, or rather those who conveyed the bodies to the grave. I determined to read the Funeral Service, which I did in the presence of five or six persons and the clerk after dinner, and saw the grave filled in. The foolish fellow White had let them have the velvet pall, but I made him bring it back and had it laid upon the ground for two or three hours, and ordered him to let it stay in the open air for some time to prevent infection.

I desired the schoolmistress to dismiss the girls' school till the disorder was abated, and give notice to their parents to keep them clean in their persons, and prevent them going to infected places. I desired Anna to send a bottle of port wine and one of elder wine to the school-mistress and her daughter, as they seem completely terrified, and really may be more liable to infection through apprehension if they have nothing to cheer their spirits.

October 14. Between the services we walked to Colliers Row to enquire whether the house where the infected died had been properly fumigated with the tobacco which I ordered to be taken there for the purpose. I found it had, and the people were also burning tar ropes in the other houses. Three fresh cases are lying: Perfett, who attended the coffin of Cook's boy, and assisted putting it in the grave; another at Redhill; and Raisin's wife, who is married to the

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son of the woman who first died. John Rossiter called at the Parsonage after dinner; he seems completely upset, and cried while speaking of the increase of the complaint and its probable consequences. I desired him to get some quicklime to put in the grave dug yesterday and the other graves which may be dug, also some juniper to burn; and I offered my glebe house as a receptacle of patients, should the number increase.

October 15. I walked into the village to enquire after the sick and see if I could be of any service. The boy Perfett, at Bridge Place, is in a fair way of recovery, but I was much hurt at the apathy of his parents, who had not bought anything for him with the money I gave them yesterday, although Curtis said he might take mutton broth; and when I spoke of the nasty dung-heaps, and filthiness of the children before the doors, which I said would prolong their son's illness, if not give contagion to others, the father replied, 'They ought to clear it away'. I asked who he meant by 'They.' He replied, 'The people of the parish'. I was really *angry*, and said, if they were so very careless and lazy as not to work for themselves in making their places clean, I for one would not assist them with one halfpenny of my money.

I spoke afterwards to Green, the under bailiff of the coal works, and told him he should see that the drains were opened, and the dung heaps removed or put into a hole in their gardens. He said, *it was the Lord's will they should die; that he could not prevent it*. I said he was a greater fool than I had supposed him to be, and if he would not see it done I would speak to Lewton, as overlooker of the collieries, who would enforce the performance of what the laws enjoined to be done. This seemed to have its weight, and he said he would see that the nuisances were removed. After dinner a note was put into my hand from Mrs. Boodle, who urges Anna and myself to come to Radstock while the pestilence is raging around us. I wrote as lively a note as I could in reply, saying I should be a poltroon to desert my post when the enemy was about to attack it.

October 16. On walking into the village after breakfast I learnt that Cook's girl died last night, and that they had buried her about four o'clock in the morning, but no new case has occurred. I cannot help thinking that the infection continues to be conveyed by the bed-clothes, as they ought to be burned.

October 21. I heard on going down to breakfast that the old woman Lockyear and her son-in-law were interred in the night, and that new cases had occurred. The mode of carrying the bodies in a cart to the grave is liable to great objection, as they must be handled to put them into the cart and take them out. We have a bier in the Church, which would be far better. I desired the harness maker to get an order for some straps to enable persons bearing the coffin to put over their shoulders.

By 2 November the parish was healthy again.

TAILPIECE

(from the Newton Diary)

1818. September 17. James Fendall told a story of a woman coming to his tutor Mr. Villers to request permission for her son to ride nine times round his pear tree with his face towards the tail of the jackass in order to cure the whooping cough.

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