

The Diary of Sylas Neville, 1767-1788. Edited by Basil Cozens-Hardy. (London, New York, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1950, pp. xvi, 357. Illustrations, index, and frontispiece portrait of Sylas Neville. \$4.00.)

There can be little doubt that Mr. Basil Cozens-Hardy has rescued Dr. Sylas Neville (1741-1840) from obscurity, and that once more a man destined apparently in his own times "to dumb Forgetfulness a prey" has through a diary of which he in part was ashamed earned for himself a place in history. Although Sylas Neville cannot be considered as "a village Hampden" or "some mute inglorious Milton" raised to "a place of fame and elegy" by a twentieth century Thomas Gray, his history will be read "in a nation's eyes." Henceforth all serious students of the broader social and cultural aspects of eighteenth century England will be forced to consult this book along with the diary of James Woodforde, that magnificent country parson, and the journal of James Boswell, biographer of Sam Johnson and London clubman. With the latter the Neville diary has much in common. Neville and Boswell both had Scottish connections, were born within a year of each other, kept daybooks covering certain years in the first decade of the reign of George III, and had printed editions of their long lost manuscripts appear in 1950. The publishing of Boswell's *London Journal* by McGraw-Hill and *The Diary of Sylas Neville* by the Oxford University Press are events of great significance to all interested in eighteenth century England.

From the pages of the latter come the intimate thoughts and observations of a pronounced Whig, professional sponger, man about town, squire, medical student, traveler, and physician. Born perhaps under the bar sinister, Neville during the period covered by his diary spent one year in London, two years at Scratby near Yarmouth where he attempted to play the role of a squire, thirteen years at Edinburgh and elsewhere studying to be a doctor, and five years at Norwich indifferently practicing medicine. It was at the latter place he died in 1840, but there is no indication that he continued his diary after 1788. Perhaps he was too busy begging money from his friends to write, for he was always in bad financial circumstances. In between times he traveled extensively and drifted through life. As Mr. Cozens-

Hardy states, "It is sad to reflect that a man of such culture and ability should have passed through this world without adding anything to its progress and wealth" (p. xiv). The editor might have added that Neville, read in many things and wise in none, had an inflated ego and caddish temperament which was as much to blame for his ill success in life as were the various female connections with which he burdened himself (p. xii).

Neville the man is a fascinating study and as such the publication of this would be worth while. The book is also living history, and delightfully records the views of a left wing Whig during the reign of George III. Neville was ready to believe every sort of rumor against those with whom he disagreed politically, and time and time again that little republican heart of his colored his reason and warped his judgment. To him Grenville was "an arch-Tory," Bute, the "paramour of George's mother" who was planning to make himself King, Dundee, "an arch-persecutor," Monck, "a traitor," Fox, "that arch-patriot Secretary," etc. His own status led him to oppose British laws of primogeniture, and his purse lined him up against coddling the poor. As he grew older he tempered his republicanism (p. xiii) which was more intellectual than anything else. He would have had much in common with modern "parlor pinks" and "cocktail party reds" who love the masses in general but not in the particular. Once after inviting all newly married couples in the neighborhood to tea, Neville commented, "Every person ought to be civil to those in inferior rank" (p. 184). On all January 30's he ate calves head to signify he approved that the men of the Commonwealth had executed Charles I, and he took great delight in such democratic gestures.

Neville, little, mean, filled with a sense of his own importance, was a hypocrite. His self-righteousness was at times nauseous. "Mrs. Willoughby said to me 'You are able to seduce any woman' Heaven forbid that I should seduce any woman from her virtue" (p. 67). At the time of writing he was preparing for his mistress to come live with him. Shortly thereafter he argued with her over the way she was rearing her child by another affair and moaned: "How miserable is the situation of a bachelor exposed to all the bad humours of low life, deprived of those real joys which a virtuous & well-educated wife afford" (pp. 85-86). He broke with a fellow

student, Thomas Baker, who dared suggest that he treat his mistress better, and he made nasty comments about the morals of Baker's mistress. He thundered forth against newspapers allowing men to advertise for women companions—*Saturday Review of Literature*, take heed! Yet he could marry off his beloved Sally to his man servant for purposes of keeping up appearances of morality with the neighbors. The diary is loaded with moral strictures, but that nasty little mind of his could not free itself from thoughts of the opposite sex. Some events and places made more lasting impressions because of the pretty ladies present than for any other reason. In some ways Boswell's hyper-animal spirits are refreshing when compared with Neville's freudian drives. His life was a series of attempts to enjoy the fruits of matrimony without its burdens and responsibilities.

Neville consistently informed his diary that people considered him the finest horseman they had seen and that he had great prowess on skates and with women. There seems little doubt that he was—if he so desired—a witty and interesting conversationalist, but he reminds us that person after person was not fit to talk to him. Scholars might tire of his boasting about his erudition, but graduate students will be shocked to learn that he told college authorities that his dissertation was his own work, but that he could not say the same for some of the classmates. Nevertheless, he was keen and observing and a man of varied tastes. He could be interested in everything from politics to nature, from industrial development in the west of England to medical science in Holland. Unlike so many diaries, Neville's is not centered in any one locale, and will be of great importance to any understanding of life outside London in eighteenth century England. The editor omitted publishing seven volumes covering a Continental tour, and it is to be hoped that those volumes will be published at some future date.

Three examples from the diary itself will do more than anything else to show Neville's style and his ability. On Garrick playing Hamlet he wrote: "The expression in his features, his eyes particularly, surpass anything I ever saw. He is a little man, but handsome and full of that fire which makes the stronger, and of the softness natural to the tender passions" (p. 99). While traveling he recorded the following: "Left Dumbarton at 6 o'clock. & passing through a pleas-

ant highland country soon came in sight of the celebrated Lake, the principle object of our journey, & indeed a fine one: The vast expanse of water with its islands & surrounding mountains present a picture of the grand & beautiful not to be described. Many of the islands are covered with verdure & small trees which form a fine contrast to the black and barren mountains on each side" (p. 209). "From Lancaster to Garstang . . . saw many Lancashire witches, i.e. pretty girls, on the road since we have been in this country, where the women are indeed remarkable handsome. Had a most comfortable supper at Gardner's (The Royal Oak) Garstang which is one of the best (at least most agreeable) houses upon the road—everything good—people obliging etc. We could not help taking notice of a most elegant Necessary, in which one might drink tea with more comfort than in a Scotch parlour; a tank of water directly under the seats keeps everything perfectly clean and sweet" (p. 250-251).

The transcribing of the diary offered some difficulties for the editor because Neville used code, Italian, and Aldridge shorthand to record things he wished kept quiet. Mr. Cozens-Hardy has made some interpretations, but he has also excluded material which was too "indelicate to be printed" (p. xv). He is to be congratulated for the former action, and condemned for the latter. The editing job is not as thorough as that performed by Professor Pottle on Boswell's *London Journal*, and Mr. Cozens-Hardy's treatment of the mechanics of scholarship leaves much to be desired. He points out in his introduction, "There is an admitted danger of over-footnoting, but I must bear in mind the possibility that this work may find its way into the hands of some who are unfamiliar with even the major characters in English history and with London topography" (p. xvi). Admittedly he has a point, but one wonders why many obscure items have no explanation while common words such as "post-chaise" and "phaeton" draw a footnote even though they can be found defined in any adequate dictionary. An item on page 110 mentions a Dr. John Jebb, Lord Oxford, and Swift, with the latter receiving a note and not the other two. Surely the "unfamiliar" would be apt to know more about Swift than the others. Similar examples can be cited. Not always does the note appear when the item is mentioned in the text for the first time. Neither in the notes nor in the index does the

reader discover who the king of Denmark was, but there is an explanation of a classical allusion made by Neville about Christian VII. Perhaps by a series of brief biographical sketches at the beginning of the book and by full index items with explanatory phrases Mr. Cozens-Hardy might have solved his footnoting problems as did Professor Pottle.

There are items when it appears that Mr. Cozens-Hardy is woefully lacking in an overall knowledge of the period, or at least in his bibliography. To use Lord Brougham's dated account of Pitt and the pension furor instead of the more recent studies by Brian Tunstall and the late Basil Williams fits the editor's text with Neville's Whig ideas, but leaves the erroneous impression that Pitt after taking pension and peerage was finished politically. In reality his illness was more responsible for his temporary political eclipse than either peerage or pension. The note on Grenville (p. 28) is stated in such a way that one wonders if Mr. Cozens-Hardy thought that the Stamp Act prime minister was a Tory. Often the thought occurs to this reviewer that if the editor knew something about an item or if the person was in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, it was annotated. If not, no matter how obscure it might be, it was ignored.

Whatever the minor editorial shortcoming, the discovery of the manuscript, the transcribing, and the printing of the *Diary of Sylls Neville* is a real historical contribution. American readers will be gratified by Neville's great sympathy for the American colonies during the American Revolution and will be rewarded by the understanding of a man and his era as is afforded by this book. Mr. Cozens-Hardy and the Oxford University Press are to be most highly congratulated for bringing forth a work rich in history and in entertainment, and it is to be hoped that we will be able to hear more about Dr. Neville, either through the publishing of those volumes treating his Continental tour or by an edition of the letters which the editor used while preparing the diary for publication. May we ask, however, that censorship and deletions be avoided and that more attention be paid to the mechanics of editing. As a single book of historical information, the *Diary of Sylls Neville* is every bit as important as the more highly publicized and ballyhooed first volume of the *London Journal* by James Boswell.

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