

last meeting of the British Association, that we have here one of the most valuable reports which for a long time has been presented to the nation. It should be most carefully studied by all who have at heart the welfare of the poor, and especially by those who are called to work among them.

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ART. VII.—A PRINCE OF MYSTIFIERS.

A MIDDLE-AGED spare man, about forty years old, of a brown complexion and dark-coloured brown hair, but wears a wig; a hooked nose, a sharp chin, gray eyes and a large mole near his mouth."

So runs the description of Daniel Defoe in the *Gazette* of January 10, 1702. His pamphlet, "The Shortest Way with the Dissenters," had been adjudged a libel on the High Church party, and a reward was offered for his apprehension, with the result that he was not only pilloried, but imprisoned in Newgate for the best part of two years.

But Defoe, the political writer, the party hack, the hired satirist, has little interest for the reader of to-day, and if these were all his claims to remembrance the wave of oblivion which has engulfed so many of his tribe would have rolled over him long ago. The "middle-aged spare man" with the "hooked nose" and the "sharp chin" was, however, far more than this: he was a prince of mystifiers, and in this title lies his true distinction. His special power lay in producing fiction which his readers took for fact. Lord Chatham, we are told, believed in the authenticity of the "Memoirs of a Cavalier"; the "History of the Plague" was considered by the medical profession a highly valuable account of the ravages of that disease; and Gildon, a contemporary writer, says that every old woman bought "Robinson Crusoe" and left it as a legacy with the "Pilgrim's Progress," the "Practice of Piety," and "God's Revenge against Murder."

But the best illustration of his gift for what has been called "forging the handwriting of Nature" is the short tale known as "The Apparition of Mrs. Veal," a tale which his biographer, Mr. William Lee, designates as "perhaps the most perfect fiction of its kind that ever was written."

A curious but strongly-marked feature of the school of iconoclastic criticism is its assumption that a fact, historical or literary, as the case may be, is deprived of all claim upon our interest by the disproving of the statements that have grown up around it. Mr. Minto, in his "Life of Defoe," appends the

following remark to his passing allusion to the "Apparition of Mrs. Veal": "Mr. Lee has disposed conclusively of the myth that the tale was written to promote the sale of a dull book by one Drelinecourt on the 'Fear of Death,' which Mrs. Veal's ghost earnestly recommends her friend to read."

And so, apparently, all interest in Mrs. Veal is at an end for ever.

But though Mr. Lee may have "disposed conclusively" of the legend concerning the origin of the book, he has, by the very fact of so doing, indirectly suggested two questions, deeply interesting and very difficult to solve: firstly—What led Defoe to puff Drelinecourt's book if he was not hired to do so by the publishers? and secondly—Did the publishers, who afterwards bound that puff with Drelinecourt's book, do it with their eyes open, or were they genuinely convinced of the sincerity of Defoe's narrative?

What first induced Defoe to write his tale is nowhere recorded, but it was published in pamphlet form on July 5, 1706, by R. Bragg, at the Black Raven in Paternoster Row, with the title, "A True Relation of the Apparition of one Mrs. Veal the next day after her Death, to one Mrs. Bargrave at Canterbury; the 8th of September, 1705."

Drelinecourt's book was not published by Bragg, but by a man named Robinson, at the Golden Lyon in St. Paul's Churchyard. Its title ran as follows: "The Christian's Defence against the Fear of Death with seasonable directions how to prepare ourselves to die well. Written originally in French by the late Reverend Divine of the Protestant Church in Paris, Charles Drelinecourt. Translated into English by Marius d'Assigny, B.D." The third edition of the book had already been exhausted when Robinson obtained permission to prefix Defoe's pamphlet to the new issue, dated September 30, 1706, and a book of such established popularity certainly needed no puff to increase its sale.

What Defoe's motives for this curious transaction were, may be guessed, though they cannot be proved. A needy writer, with indifferent health and a wife and children to support, he was ready to catch at any means of making money, and instead of "The Apparition of Mrs. Veal" being used to enlarge the sale of Drelinecourt, may it not have been that the popular Drelinecourt was puffed in order to promote the sale of "The Apparition of Mrs. Veal"? Books which profess to unlock the mysteries of the future life have always been dear to the human heart, and the number of editions through which this volume passed both in England and abroad proves that it may be looked upon as "The Gates Ajar" of an earlier and more decorous religious age.

In the ninth edition, a copy of which may be found in the British Museum Library, the following account of it is given :

Charles Drelincourt was born at Sedan in the year 1595, his father being the Secretary of the Duke of Bouillon. He studied both at Sedan and at Saumur, was ordained as a Protestant pastor in 1618, and in 1620 went to Paris where he remained until his death in 1689. D'Assigny, his translator, speaks of him in glowing terms. "He was very faithful and zealous," he says, "in respect of his own Congregation and others, his Judgment being always desired in Matters of Moment. Our Eminent Divine, after a long Experience and Practice among departing Souls and in Houses of Mourning, at the request of some of his Congregation, who mightily approved of the proper and reasonable Arguments that he made use of to fortify dying Persons against the apprehensions of Death suitable to their Conditions and Temper, published this Book of Consolation. About twenty Editions have been printed in France and one at Avignon in the Pope's dominions, with a suppression of the Reverend Author's name. How many impressions have been published in Holland, Germany, and elsewhere, I cannot determine. We find it translated into several languages, but was not in our Mother Tongue, until at the request of the Author's Son, now Dean of Armagh in Ireland, I translated it into English. What Reception it met with among us, let this 9th Edition declare." A footnote adds: "This Book is of very great use to Divines for Funeral Sermons and is very fit to be given away by well-disposed Persons at Funerals and of excellent use to every Christian Reader."

It was, then, to this well-known and widely-circulated book that Defoe chose to allude in his tale, and whatever the publisher's belief may have been, M. d'Assigny, Bachelor of Divinity, expresses himself as perfectly convinced of the writer's sincerity :

"And now I cannot but take some notice here of the high Esteem and Commendation that a late Apparition too well attested to be slighted, hath given of this book. An exact Account of it you have in the printed Relation hereunto prefixed. It comes to us clothed with all the Appearance and Circumstance of Truth, that may reasonably be expected in this case, so that none but an unbelieving Sadducee or a profane Atheist will offer to question the Reality. As we live in such an incredulous Age that will not believe God and His Divine Oracles, though attested by the working of miracles, concerning the future state of the Righteous and Wicked, but requires a new testimony and evidence, as the Return of Souls from the Dead to witness the Happiness of Heaven and the

Torments of Hell and the Immortality of the Soul, who knows but to render men more inexcusable God may condescend that a Departed Soul, or its good Angel in its stead, may appear to declare these infallible and undoubted Truths to an unbelieving world?"

To question the good faith of such remarks as these seems almost impossible, but what are we to say of Defoe's preface to the tale of "The Apparition of Mrs. Veal"?

"This Relation is Matter of Fact and attended with such circumstances as may induce any Reasonable Man to believe it. It was sent by a Gentleman, a Justice of the Peace at Maidstone in Kent, and a very intelligent person, to his friend in London, as it is here worded: which Discourse is attested by a very sober and understanding Gentlewoman, a kinswoman of the said Gentleman's, who lives in Canterbury within a few doors of the House in which the within named Mrs. Bargrave lives; who believes his kinswoman to be of so discerning a Spirit as not to be put upon by any Fallacy, and who positively assured him that the whole Matter as it is related and laid down is what is really true and what she herself had in the same words (as far as may be) from Mrs. Bargrave's own mouth, who, she knows, had no reason to invent and publish such a story, nor any Design to forge and tell a lye, being a Woman of much Honesty and Vertue and her whole life a course, as it were, of Piety. The Use which we ought to make of it is to consider—That there is a Life to come after this, and a Just God, who will retribute to every-one according to the Deeds done in the Body and therefore to reflect upon our past Course of Life we have led in the World; That our Time is short and uncertain and that if we would escape the punishment of the Ungodly and receive the Reward of the Righteous, which is the laying hold of eternal life, we ought for the time to come to turn to God by a speedy Repentance, ceasing to do evil and learning to do well, to seek after God early if haply He may be found of us and lead such lives for the future as may be well-pleasing in His sight."

Defoe, the inventor of the tale, cannot possibly have believed in its truth; but, besides the desire of making money, there is another possible motive for this handling of sacred subjects. Better than anyone else, he understood the art of imparting an air of truth to his fiction by adding to it little touches of fact, and that the apparition should commend a book so well known as Drelincourt's "Fear of Death" would not only draw attention to the story, but insure for it a certain amount of credence. The more it is studied, indeed, the more we see that Mr. Lee's verdict—"a perfect piece of

fiction"—is well deserved, and the doubts said to be thrown on it by Mrs. Veal's friends and relations, who did all they could to "Null or Quash it," are a master-stroke of genius.

"Mrs. Bargrave is my most Intimate Friend," so the tale begins, "and I can avouch for her Reputation, for these last 15 or 16 Years on my own Knowledge; and I can confirm the Good Character she had from her Youth, to the Time of my acquaintance. Though since this Relation she is calumniated by some People that are friends to the Brother of Mrs. Veal who appeared; who think the Relation of this Apparition to be a Reflection, and endeavour what they can to Blast Mrs. Bargrave's Reputation, and to laugh the story out of Countenance."

Mrs. Veal and Mrs. Bargrave lived at Dover, and had been friends from childhood; many and great were their trials, for Mrs. Veal, who was "a maiden gentlewoman," had no near relation but an unsatisfactory brother, and was, moreover, troubled with fits; while Mrs. Bargrave was married to an unkind husband, who neglected and even ill-treated her. In these circumstances their friendship was a great consolation to them, and Mrs. Veal would often say:

"Mrs. Bargrave, you are not only the best, but the only friend I have in the World, and no Circumstances of Life shall ever dissolve my Friendship." They would often condole each other's "adverse Fortunes, and read together Drelincourt upon Death and other good books, and so, like true Christian Friends, they comforted each other under their sorrows."

This close companionship was, however, not destined to last; through the influence of friends, Mrs. Veal's brother was given a place in the Customs at Dover, and this prosperity withdrew her a little from Mrs. Bargrave, who eventually left Dover with her husband, and settled in a house at Canterbury.

"In this House, on the 8th of September, 1705, she was sitting alone in the Forenoon, thinking over her unfortunate Life and arguing herself into a due Resignation to Providence though her Condition seemed hard. 'And,' said she, 'I have been provided for hitherto and doubt not but I shall be still, and am well satisfied that my afflictions shall end when it is most fit for me': and then took up her sewing-work, which she had no sooner done than she hears a knocking at the Door; she went to see who it was there and this proved to be Mrs. Veal, her old Friend, who was in a Riding-habit: at that moment of Time the clock struck twelve at noon. 'Madam,' says Mrs. Bargrave, 'I am surprised to see you, you have been so long a stranger,' but she was glad to see her and offered to salute her, which Mrs. Veal complied with till their

lips almost touched, and then Mrs. Veal drew her Hand across her own eyes, and said, 'I am not very well,' and so waved it."

Mrs. Bargrave took her into the parlour and gave her a seat in the arm-chair, and Mrs. Veal said that she was going on a journey, and had come to ask pardon for her "Breach of Friendship," and reminded her of the conversations that they had had in old days and of the books that they read together, and what comfort in particular they received from Drelincourt's book, which was "the best," she said, "on that subject ever wrote."

She then asked Mrs. Bargrave to fetch Drelincourt and some other books from upstairs, and Mrs. Bargrave on returning brought some verses which she asked Mrs. Veal to read, but Mrs. Veal said holding down her head would make it ache, and desired Mrs. Bargrave to read them to her. When the reading was over she asked Mrs. Bargrave how she thought she looked, spoke of her fits, and mentioned how she wished some of her things disposed of at her death.

"Talking at this rate, Mrs. Bargrave thought that a Fit was coming upon her, and so placed herself in a chair just before her Knees to keep her from falling to the Ground if her Fits should occasion it. For the Elbow-chair, she thought, would keep her from falling on either side. And to divert Mrs. Veal, as she thought, she took hold of her Gown-sleeve several times and commended it. Mrs. Veal told her that it was a scower'd silk and newly made up."

Mrs. Bargrave then asked her if she would like to see her daughter, and on her saying that she should, she went out to ask a neighbour to fetch the child. On her return, she found Mrs. Veal "without the Door in the Street, in the face of the Beast-market on a Saturday (which is Market-day)."

Mrs. Bargrave tried to detain her, but she declared that she must be going, and "walked from Mrs. Bargrave in her view, till a Turning interrupted the sight of her, which was three-quarters after one in the afternoon. Mrs. Veal died the 7th of September at twelve o'clock at noon of her Fits, and had not above Four Hours senses before her Death, in which time she received the Sacrament."

On the next day Mrs. Bargrave was "mightily indisposed," but on the Monday she sent her servant to the house of Captain Watson, a cousin of Mrs. Veal's, with whom she had told her that she was staying, to ask after her. The servant came back with the message that they had heard nothing of her, whereupon Mrs. Bargrave paid a call in person, and told Mrs. Watson that Mrs. Veal had been with her on the previous Saturday, though Mrs. Watson declared that if she

had been in Canterbury they must have known it. While they were talking, Captain Watson came in, bringing the news of Mrs. Veal's death. Mrs. Bargrave then narrated her story in full, and mentioned "what gown she had on, and how striped and that Mrs. Veal told her it was scower'd. Then Mrs. Watson cried out: 'You have seen her indeed, for none knew but Mrs. Veal and myself that the gown was scower'd.'"

The Watsons being thus perfectly convinced of the truth of Mrs. Bargrave's story, she went home, and in the course of the next few days was besieged with inquiries on all sides. The writer of the account, having heard, he says, of the apparition, went to see her, and was fully informed by her of all that had passed, with many interesting details. She asked her, she said, if she would drink tea with her: "Says Mrs. Veal, 'I do not care if I do; but I warrant you this mad fellow' [meaning Mrs. Bargrave's husband] 'has broke all your trinkets.' 'But,' says Mrs. Bargrave, 'I'll get something to drink in for all that;' but Mrs. Veal waved it, and said, 'It is no matter; let it alone;' and so it passed." Mrs. Bargrave also informed him that she went out to a neighbour's the very moment she parted with Mrs. Veal, and told her what ravishing conversation she had had with an old Friend, and told the whole of it. Drelincourt's 'Book of Death' is, since this happened, bought up strangely."

The writer then goes on to draw his conclusions from the facts he had heard narrated:

"Mrs. Veal's often drawing her Hand before her Eyes, and asking Mrs. Bargrave whether her Fits had not impaired her, looks to me as if she did it on purpose to remind Mrs. Bargrave of her Fits, to prepare her not to think it strange that she should direct her in the disposing of her things. Her love and care of her that she should not be affrighted appears in her whole management, particularly in her coming to her in the Daytime and in waving the Salutation."

For Mrs. Bargrave "to hatch such an Invention without jumbling the Circumstances," would, he says, prove that she must be "more Witty, Fortunate, and Wicked than any indifferent Person I daresay will allow." For his part he is quite convinced, and he winds up his account with a declaration of his belief: "This thing has very much affected me, and I am as well satisfied as I am of the best grounded Matter of Fact. And why we should dispute Matter of Fact because we cannot solve Things of which we can have no certain or demonstrative Notions seems strange to me. Mrs. Bargrave's authority and sincerity alone would have been undoubted in any other case."

Defoe died in 1731, but editions of Drelincourt, prefaced

by his account of Mrs. Veal, followed one another from the press. The edition dated 1766, published by T. Luckman, "near the Cross, Coventry," is extremely interesting, as it professes to correct and amend the former account. The writer of "The Apparition of Mrs. Veal" is here described under the name of the Rev. W. Payne, "late Minister of St. David's, Exon"; and the publisher prefaces the tale with the following remarks: "The account of Mrs. Veal's apparition to Mrs. Bargrave at Canterbury was communicated to me by a gentleman, who transcribed it from the Rev. Mr. Payne's manuscript, who penned it from Mrs. Bargrave's lips seventeen years after the facts took place, in which space of time, had there been any possibility of collusion or falsehood in the matter, it would doubtless have been discovered and detected."

He goes on to correct various statements made in the first account and adds some new particulars, as that Mrs. Bargrave's maiden name was Sodowick, and that her father was a minister of Dover, and her dissolute husband a barrister. He enlarges upon Bargrave's cruelty to his wife, and says that on his coming home on the night of the apparition he shut her out into the garden, where she stayed all night, and that she said afterwards it was a mercy she had not known that Mrs. Veal had been a ghost, or she should have died of fright in the darkness. He gives much detail also with regard to the sceptical attitude of Mrs. Veal's brother, and says that he took such umbrage at the cross-examination to which he was subjected by the then Dean of Canterbury, Dr. Stanhope, that when he came to be married some time afterwards he refused to have the ceremony performed by him. But these additions are no improvement to the story; and the fact that the date is changed from a few months after the event is supposed to have taken place to seventeen years is a proof of greater timidity on the part of the writer. Mrs. Veal is said by Defoe to have appeared on September 8, 1705, in a pamphlet published on July 5, 1706; and the publisher either so entirely shared his audacity, or was so firmly convinced of his sincerity, that the pamphlet was added to Drelincourt's book on September 30, 1706. In those days, we may conclude, there was no Psychical Research Society, or if there was such an institution, it was terribly remiss in its duties! A circumstantial account of a ghost is published only nine months after its appearance, and no one goes to Canterbury to examine into the matter, or to discover if Mrs. Bargrave and her dissolute husband, Captain and Mrs. Watson, Mrs. Veal's brother of the Dover Customs, and all the other actors in the

story, were creatures of flesh and blood or only the visions of imagination.

Whether Defoe's performance was a monetary success or not, there is no doubt that it was a perfect achievement from the artistic point of view. No one seems to have shown either doubt or disapproval; and the identity of the eminent divine, Charles Drelincourt, was not more fully established than that of Mrs. Veal, nor his pious words more highly prized than those of the much-trying "maiden gentlewoman" who ministered Christian consolation to her friend after she had departed from the body.

What the effect of this success was upon Defoe himself we have no means of telling, unless a passage in the "Serious Reflexions," which formed a kind of sequel to "Robinson Crusoe," may be taken as an indication: "This supplying a story by invention is certainly a most scandalous crime, and yet very little regarded in that part. It is a sort of lying that makes a great hole in the heart, in which by degrees a habit of lying enters in. Such a man comes quickly up to a total disregarding the truth of what he says, looking upon it as a trifle, a thing of no import, whether any story he tells be true or not."

The hole in Defoe's heart must indeed have been very great! He was a prince of mystifiers; and he made such a fine art of "this sort of lying," that his "stories by invention" commanded the complete belief of his readers. Even now, in this more critical age, it is difficult to open his works without falling under the sway of his genius. Mrs. Veal never existed; she never had a striped and scower'd riding-gown, nor did she ever sit in Mrs. Bargrave's elbow-chair, and adjure her unhappy friend to seek consolation in Drelincourt's "Fear of Death"; and yet, on a sunny Saturday in Canterbury, "standing in the face of the Beast-Market" (for Saturday is still market-day in that ancient city), it is necessary "to pass the Hand across the Eyes," as Mrs. Veal so often did, before one can believe that she is not still visible, bidding farewell to Mrs. Bargrave, and walking down the street till a turning interrupts the sight of her at three-quarters after one in the afternoon.

MARY BRADFORD WHITING.

