

Arthur Young : Traveller and Preacher.

By VIOLET M. METHLEY.

THE well-known proverb which affirms that "Example is better than precept," does not always prove correct when the theory is applied to human nature.

This is especially true in the case of the Suffolk Squire, whose precepts have had a great and far-reaching effect upon agriculture. If, on the contrary, Arthur Young's concrete example only had been followed, it is to be feared that many would have found themselves, as he did, constantly on the verge of bankruptcy.

Young himself would probably have explained his own want of success in much the same terms as he uses in speaking of one Mr. Arthur Whyn Baker in the "Tour in Ireland." In fact the whole passage describes the writer himself so aptly that it is worth repeating.

"He wanted capital : without a sufficient one it is impossible to farm well ; a man may have all the abilities in the world, write like a genius, talk like an angel, and really understand the business in all its depth, but unless he has a proper capital, his farm will never be fit for exhibition ; and then to condemn him for not being a good farmer in practice as well as theory is just like abusing the inhabitants of the Irish cabins for not becoming excellent managers."

Arthur Young was born at Whitehall on September 11, 1741, but the greater part of his life was spent at Bradfield-Combust, near Bury St. Edmunds, where his ancestors had owned the property of Bradfield Hall since 1620. From the date of their establishment in Suffolk the family had gone steadily downhill, and from being large landowners became, in the person of Arthur Young, what he calls figuratively, "a poor little gentleman." The description did not apply to him in any other sense. Like his father, Dr. Young, Prebendary of Canterbury, he was remarkable for his great height and his

striking good looks. The boy was educated at Lavenham School, where he tells us that he was allowed to learn only what he pleased. Nevertheless, he acquired the habit of reading, and it is a curious foretaste of his enterprising spirit that he began to write a "History of England" at this time.

His parents intended Arthur for a mercantile career, and when he left school he was apprenticed to a Mr. Robertson, of Lynn, to learn business methods. However, his tastes lay in quite different directions, and when the death of his father left him free to follow his own devices, he speedily found his way to London. With money in his pocket, and a winning personality which gained him friends everywhere, it was natural that he should enjoy life, and enjoy it he did, to the full.

In 1762 he started a periodical at his own expense, called the *Universal Museum*, and in connection with this he especially mentions his visit to Dr. Johnson. That magnificent old curmudgeon declined to help him, and prophesied failure to the enterprise. This prediction was unfortunately verified, and in 1763 Young returned to Bradfield, considerably impoverished by this and other similar ventures.

It was now that he came into his own at last, for, at his mother's request, he rented a small farm and began to study agriculture in earnest. We can judge of how thoroughly he threw himself into the work from the fact that in 1767 he made the first of his famous "Tours," and before 1770 he had travelled over almost the whole of England, and published the result of his observations.

In 1765 Arthur Young married Miss Martha Allen of Lynn, sister to Fanny Burney's stepmother. From the very first the marriage was a tragedy. The couple were utterly ill-assorted, and from this time onwards a constant strain of complaint and misery runs through Young's writings, especially in his journal and letters.

In 1771 we read: "The same anxiety, the same vain hopes, the same perpetual disappointment. No happiness, or anything like it."

In 1776 comes the bitter cry : " What would not a sensible, quiet, prudent wife have done for me ? "

In 1799 we read : " I am alone, therefore at peace, " and in 1803 we find perhaps the most pathetic, in a way, of all these entries : " I have never lived so well with Mrs. Young as for five weeks past. " But again, on April 25th, 1806, we read this terrible indictment, all the sadder and more convincing when we remember that, when he wrote these words, Young had become a deeply and unaffectedly religious man : " Lamentable it was that no enemy ever did me the mischief that I received from the wife of my bosom by the grossest falsehood and the blackest malignity. "

Yet bitter as the wrongs must have been which induced the husband to write thus, we must look, in common fairness, at the other side of the question.

We gather from contemporary writings that Mrs. Young was narrow-minded, fretful and evil-tempered (" How could he ever marry her ? " sighs Fanny Burney), but it is nevertheless probable that Arthur Young was not an absolutely ideal husband. Those constant experiments in farming which swallowed up his own and his wife's fortunes, that very boyishness of disposition for which we love him, must have irritated and annoyed the nervous, fretful woman. Moreover, she was of a bitterly jealous disposition, and it seems possible that, in his younger days, he may have given her some cause to be so.

For about eight years after his marriage Young divided his time between the English Tours and a constant succession of experiments in farming, which exhausted both his soil and his pocket. He took farms successively in Suffolk, Essex and Hertfordshire, yet each fresh piece of land seemed less productive than the last.

During these years three children were born to him, Mary, Elizabeth, and Arthur ; and with a growing family his poverty also increased.

In 1776 Young made an agricultural survey of Ireland, and during this tour he obtained an agency to Lord Kingsborough.

However, he did not hold the post for long. The fact of his being an Englishman evidently caused a great deal of bad feeling. Jealousy and backbiting did their work, and Young finally resigned, on condition that he was paid an annuity of £72 for the remainder of his life.

This was not the only result of his residence in Ireland. The account which he published of these tours made him famous. For the first time he allowed himself to be carried away from his primary object of an agricultural survey and, as a result, we have obtained an invaluable picture of Ireland as it appeared to a clear-sighted Englishman of that day. In the opinion of Maria Edgeworth, herself, of course, an Irishwoman, Arthur Young gave, in his "Tours in Ireland," "The first faithful portrait of its inhabitants."

In 1779 Young returned to England in worse straits than ever from a pecuniary point of view. It was at this time that he had serious thoughts of emigrating to America, but his mother's declining health induced him to rent a small farm at Bradfield once more.

In 1783 two of the most important events of Young's life took place. On the first day of this year he embarked on what he calls one of the greatest speculations of his life, the publication of the "Annals of Agriculture." His labours brought him instant fame, if not wealth, and pupils came from all parts of the world to Bradfield to study the science of farming.

The other event of this memorable year would certainly have been considered by Young himself to be of far greater importance than any literary or agricultural success. On May 5 was born his youngest child, Martha—"My darling child, my lovely Bobbin."

All the pent-up love of an affectionate nature, which had found no outlet in his married life, was lavished on this little girl. He was fond of all his children, although his only son, Arthur, was, as a boy, a constant disappointment to his father, who longed for that confidence which the boy could not or would not give him. There are very pathetic little touches in

some of Young's letters to his daughter Mary from France. Arthur has not written from Eton. The father is intensely eager to hear from him, but Mary is not, on any account, to tell the boy to write. A forced letter would be worse than useless. Between "Bobbin" and her father there were none of these clouds. The little girl was always in his thoughts, and from all accounts she must have been indeed a most lovable child.

The ten years which followed were the happiest and most untroubled, perhaps, of Young's life. He made his famous survey of France in the years 1787 to 1789. It is somewhat ironical that in spite of his services to agriculture, and the immense mass of his writings on this subject, the book by which Arthur Young is mainly known now is that which, in his own eyes, was his least important work. Moreover, the "Travels in France" is valued not for its comprehensive view of the state of husbandry in that country, but for the wonderful pictures which it gives of the political and social life of the day.

Yet this result is very natural. Agriculture must inevitably alter from year to year, and it is probably an entirely different science now from what it was in the days of Arthur Young.

Young had intended, he tells us, to adopt the same plan when he revised the "Travels in France" for the press, as he had followed with regard to the "Tours in Ireland," and "reject without mercy a variety of little circumstances relating to myself only, and of conversations with various persons which I had thrown upon paper for the amusement of my family and intimate friends."

A friend who remains nameless, however, strongly advised the author to publish the journal as it was, saying: "Depend on it, Young, that those notes which you wrote at the moment are more likely to please than what you will now produce coolly, with the idea of reputation in your head." Arthur Young followed the advice and we cannot be sufficiently grateful to the unknown and candid friend.

If the author had held to his original intention, we should have lost most of those little incidents which bring the history

of those days so clearly before us. No writer gives a more vivid description of Paris as it was at that time. In a few words he paints the crowded cafés, the inflammatory orators, the subdued and yet violent excitement which prevailed at the opening of the great Revolution.

Over and above all this, we should have missed something else, the lack of which could have been supplied by no historian. We should not have caught those little glimpses of the father beneath the writer, whose tender heart made him love the Pyrenean peasants carrying home drums for their children, in "thinking of my own little girl." He tells us that one of his greatest pleasures on his adventurous journey was "choosing for her a French doll," and we read how he hastened back hot-foot on one occasion because he had a fear, happily unfounded, that all was not well at home.

It is for these and many other little touches that we grow to love and honour Arthur Young. We feel instinctively that he was a man whom one would like to have owned for a friend—or perhaps I should rather say that his readers, one and all, become his friends.

It must not be forgotten that the merely technical part of the "Travels in France" was extraordinarily well done, and that voluntarily, in the face of dangers which few men would have risked unless compelled to do so by absolute duty.

Young had unusual opportunities of seeing below the surface of events in France. He knew the misery of the poor in that country as few others did, for his tours carried him everywhere, and he could not have shut his eyes to the state of the people even if he had wished to do so. His enjoyment in the magnificent roads of the kingdom was spoiled by the thought of the forced labour which had gone to make them, and he came to his well-known conclusion that "you could judge of the greatness of a Seigneur by the misery of the peasants on his estate."

The enormities which so quickly followed on the rising of the people were a shock to Young, but he excused them at first

on the plea of that ignorance and wretchedness which he had seen everywhere. Later, however, the advance of the "Terror" destroyed, in a great measure, his sympathy with the aims of the Revolution.

The "Travels in France" increased Young's fame enormously. The book was translated into a dozen languages, and it led to correspondence and friendship with some of the most distinguished men of that time.

His riches did not increase in proportion to his reputation, and in consequence, when the Board of Agriculture was established in 1793, Young felt it to be his duty to accept the appointment of secretary.

The work was never congenial to him, and it is a proof of his extraordinary energy and powers of concentration that he filled the post thoroughly well, besides finding time for a vast amount of literary work, including his huge "History of Agriculture."

Young now took his place in the most brilliant circle of London society. No man enjoyed a good play, a good picture, or a good dinner more than he did, and we may be quite sure that he was welcomed everywhere. Yet now, when life seemed at its brightest, sorrow was coming upon him apace. His daughter, Elizabeth, died in 1794 of consumption. Only a short time later signs of the same disease appeared in his beloved Bobbin.

His letters to the little girl during her illness are pitiful reading. His eagerness to hear the exact state of her health is terribly painful. Her small commissions are of more importance in the eyes of her father than the cares of an empire.

Everything possible was done to save her life, but all to no avail. Bobbin died in the summer of 1797, and with her was buried a great deal of what had been Arthur Young.

Yet what was best in him remained. It was a brave spirit which could write in his journal after the record of his child's death: "This was my call to God. Oh, may it prove effective!"

A great change came over Young both in body and in mind. From the time of his little girl's death he resolved to forsake the world entirely and to devote himself to the care of his soul. His overpowering desire to "meet his child again," as he simply expresses it, led him on to an almost exaggerated degree of self-analysis, and he speaks of himself as the greatest of sinners, compelled to suffer this overwhelming sorrow that he might be brought to a sense of his wickedness.

It is strangely pathetic to watch Young's struggles to keep his grief always fresh. To a man of his buoyant temperament it was inevitable that time should bring healing, if not renewed happiness. He fights against this forgetfulness as against a fresh sin.

In April, 1799, he writes: "I have no pleasures and wish for none, saving that comfort which religion gives me; and the sooner I make it my only pleasure the wiser I shall be."

Young did not give up his secretaryship, and this was well. The routine of work, the necessity for strict attention to business details, even those petty worries which irritated him so sorely were doubtless valuable in their way. For the reaction in his case was so violent that his self-reproach occasionally became excessive.

A great part of his time was now spent at Bradfield, either alone or with his son and daughter-in-law. His journal gives us pathetic little pictures of him tending Bobbin's little garden beneath his study windows, and dusting the books and treasures in her small room with his own hands.

In November, 1807, a fresh trial came upon him. His sight began to give way under constant overstrain. At first he thought little of the symptoms of approaching blindness, but soon he was forced to have a secretary, and he could scarcely read even his own notes and reports. At last there came a day when he could no longer write his private journal, and the bold, regular handwriting comes to an end for ever with a blotted straggling word in the middle of a paragraph.

The operation for the removal of cataract was performed,

but it was not successful. Young's attitude with regard to his blindness was very curious. It would seem as though he scarcely considered that he ought to take any steps to cure it. The following entry in his journal expresses his feelings in the matter better than any other words can hope to do :

May 3, 1811.—"I do not think that for the last twenty years of my life my general health has been better than at the moment when discontent, I fear, with the will of God induced me to oppose that will." (He probably refers here to the operation upon his eyes.) "In the most mild and merciful manner He had nearly deprived me of sight, without my feeling the smallest pain. Heavy as this dreadful dispensation is and must remain to me, I feel, in proportion to my convalescence, that even blindness itself may be a temptation ; as a dispensation from God it must have been meant, as a calamity, and a calamity to be deeply felt. Is there not danger, then, that a mind which has been accustomed to look upon the favourable side of objects should gradually so accustom itself to its new situation as to deprive it in a good measure of the misery which might be the direct intention of the Almighty? . . . For a man of seventy to be struck blind and to continue worldly-minded, with his head and heart full of objects which, though not of sight, command attention, is to tempt God to send some deeper affliction in order to bring his heart home to its true centre. This is a subject which merits great attention, and may the Lord of His Mercy enable me to consider it as I ought to do!"

Although one may not agree altogether with Young's point of view, the courage and patient dignity with which he met his great affliction cannot be too much admired. He did not for one moment allow it to interfere with his work. He had two secretaries, and he kept them both most fully occupied all day long.

Every Sunday he catechized the children of the neighbourhood, and held an evening service at which he gave an address. Arthur Young is still remembered as a preacher in the country

district where his services to literature and agriculture are almost entirely forgotten. Until late in the last century, at least, old men and women of the country-side still preserved the memory of the tall, white-haired Squire. They told of the way in which his face lit up as he preached, standing erect with his blind eyes upturned, and they recollected the power and vigour of his sermons.

The last quiet years of that life of vivid contrasts, of brilliant successes and endless disappointments, were not the unworthiest, nor, we may be quite certain, the most unhappy. Arthur Young had always done with his whole strength whatever his hand found to do. It was the same now with the good works of his later days.

He died on April 20, 1820, and he lies buried at Bradfield, near the entrance to his old home. The quaint words on his tomb sum up his life not inaptly :

“ Let every real patriot shed a tear,
For genius, talent, worth lie buried here.”

This is the only outward memorial which has been erected to the memory of Arthur Young ; nevertheless, he will not be easily forgotten.

There is that spark of life in his writings which will keep them from falling into oblivion, yet the value of his books lies really in what we learn from them of the man himself.

His was a hopeful nature. Even after he has apparently been reduced to a state of utter despair, we find him, a little later, eager and willing to make a fresh start. He was interested in everything ; consequently he can make all things interesting. That boyish enthusiasm which inspired him makes us share his delight in a well-managed estate, or even in a finely-grown field of turnips or clover.

His very faults and weaknesses endear him to us almost as much as his great intellect and his kind heart. They help to make up the very human personality of the man whom Lord Morley has so truly called, “ That wise and honest traveller.”