

Dr. Messenger Monsey (1693-1788), resident physician of Chelsea Hospital

“Mandeville’s Fable of the Bees he often read”

In Mandevillean literature there are several anecdotic quotations from Newman’s work called *The Lounger’s Commonplace Book, or Miscellaneous Collections in History, Criticism, Biography, Poetry, and Romance* (1805–7).

Jeremiah Whitaker Newman (1759–1839), a surgeon who became a physician, was a medical and miscellaneous writer.

An important source for Newman was the physician Messenger Monsey (1693-1788). Newman was a favourite with Monsey.

Monsey “was a storehouse of anecdote - a reservoir of good things - a living chronicle of past times”, according to the anonymous author of *A sketch of the life and character of the late Dr Monsey* (1789), p. 83, who might quite well have been Newman.

Who was Messenger Monsey?

From the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography ODNB:

Messenger Monsey, physician, studied medicine at Norwich under Sir Benjamin Wrench, and was admitted as an extra-licentiate of the College of Physicians on 30 September 1723. He then settled in practice at Bury St Edmunds. While at Bury, Monsey had the good fortune to be called in to attend the earl of Godolphin, who had been taken ill on a journey. Monsey recommended himself so well by his skill or by his wit that Godolphin induced him to go to London and ultimately obtained for him the appointment of physician to Chelsea Hospital. Monsey held this post until his death. Through Godolphin's influence Monsey was introduced to Sir Robert Walpole, Lord Chesterfield, and other members of the whig party, whose principles he supported. Always eccentric and coarse-mannered, he treated his noble patrons with ostentatious familiarity. Monsey also acquired literary connections.”

A sketch of the life and character of the late Dr Monsey (1789) says that “as to religion, after long study and much reading, he was a staunch and rational supporter of the Unitarian doctrine, and early imbibed an unconquerable aversion to bishops and establishments, to creeds, and to tests.”

Monsey and Mandeville

Monsey read Mandeville, and he is likely to have met him personally.

Monsey’s copy of *The Fable of the Bees* is in [Sir John Soane’s Museum Library](#) in London. The library record contains: “Inscribed in ink on front pastedown as The gift of / Dr. Monsey / August 5th. 1781 / Aged 86 years / 10 months / and 3 days. / J Taylor Junr. [1757-1832]/ Hatton Street. Laid down on the recto of the front free-endpaper is a brief biographical note in ink dated M: Monsey / 1733 / with a list of publications by the author and some page references.”

From *A sketch of the life and character of the late Dr Monsey* (1789), p. 72-4:

"Mandeville's Fable of the Bees he often read, a book which, from the peculiar wording of its second title, and from the outcry at first made against it, has roused the groundless fears of the zealous, and, like many other books, attained an apparent consequence to which it is by no means entitled either for novelty or dangerous tendency.

The tenet of Mandeville, as old, I believe, as the Christian æra, was merely this: -- Providence severely punishes wicked men, but at the same time extracts advantages even from their vices. Is it credible that a doctrine setting Divine wisdom and policy in the highest point of view, should have been presented by a Grand Jury, and furiously attacked by a Bishop?

Mandeville inherited cunning by his Dutch extraction. His father fled from Holland, because, in a popular commotion, he had pointed out to an exasperated mob where there were cannon, with which they might soon level the house of a concealed, but unpopular, Burgomaster. - "We know he is in the house," said the Boors, "but we can't find him, so let's set it on fire."- "He'll escape in the smoke and confusion," said old Mandeville: "level the house into a heap of ruins with your great guns, and the bird cannot escape." His advice was instantly followed.

Mandeville (I speak of the Author of that name) had the art of adopting alarming, and of course saleable, titles for his works, such as *Private Vices public Benefits*, *The Virgin unmas'k'd*, *A Defence of public Stews*, and *An Attack on charitable Foundations*; in this last, though he carries his doctrine too far, his arguments are generally right, and his deductions proved by late experience to be just."

Newman on Mandeville

It is interesting to compare the passages above from *A sketch of the life and character of the late Dr Monsey* (1789) with Newman's extended article on Bernard Mandeville in *The Lounger's Commonplace Book, or Miscellaneous Collections in History, Criticism, Biography, Poetry, and Romance*. Most of Newman's additional information must have come from his talks with Monsey.

"MANDEVILLE, BERNARD,
a physician, patronized by the first Earl of Macclesfield, and author of the Fable of the Bees, a work which raised a violent outcry, was presented by a grand jury, and solemnly preached against by a bishop.

Yet after frequent perusals of his book, in which accumulating notes have almost buried the verses from which it derived its title, I have not been able to discover any dangerous tendency, or even novelty in the doctrine it inculcates. That Providence severely punishes wicked men, but at the same time extracts advantage even from their vices, is an axiom which surely sets divine wisdom and policy in the highest point of view, and effectually counteracts all the evils that have been supposed to result from the free agency of man.

The father of our author, a Dutch merchant [sic], and a democratic opponent of the Stadtholder's party, had fled precipitately from justice, having in a popular commotion, pointed out to an exasperated mob, where cannon were deposited, with which they levelled the house of an obnoxious burgomaster, who had concealed himself.

Mandeville, the writer, had the art of prefixing odd and alarming titles to his books, by which means he turned the attention of the public to his performances, and the purpose of an increased sale was generally answered. *Private Vices, Public Benefits* ; *The Virgin Unmasked*; a *Defence of Public Stews*, and his *Attack on charitable Foundations*, in which he takes an opportunity of speaking acrimoniously of Dr. Ratcliffe, and his vast testamentary bequests.

The motives and general conduct of managers of charitable institutions, are humorously described, the bad policy of charity schools, occasionally exaggerated, yet some of his deductions and cautions, from late experience, appear well founded. His calling Addison a parson in a tie-wig, and a reply which one of his clerical opponents made to him, not remarkable either for point or wit, that his name bespoke his character, man — devil or a devil of a man, have been often repeated.

Our physician found the dinners and port wine of his patron, no bad appendage to his fees. At table, his sallies were humorous, but not always decorous ; generally high seasoned with warm anecdote, and poignant raillery. The whimsical pride of Ratcliffe, a commonplace topic, and to put a parson in a passion, a favorite amusement. On these occasions, the chancellor who loved his conversation, and relished his humour, would affect to moderate, but by his irony, increased their asperity, and generally concluded, by joining in the laugh against the divine. Several clergymen, sacrificing their pride to their interest, purposely frequented Lord Macclesfield's table, submitted to the indignity of being butts to the company for a few months, and secured comfortable livings.

Mandeville was often interrupted by repeated questions from the Peer. "Is this ragout wholesome, Dr. Mandeville? may I venture to taste the stewed carp?"— "Does it agree with your Lordship, and do you like it?" (was his general reply.)— "Yes."— " Then eat with moderation, and it *must* be wholesome." The nervous Lady sinking under green tea, late hours, and Pharo, who cannot determine whether her chick is to be boiled or roasted, till Dr. Warren has called with the *whisper* of the morning; and the epicure, who fasts or physics to prepare space for *Cali Pash*, or *Cali Pee*, will do well to consider this salutary doctrine, and apply it.

Most men can tell when they have eat or drank too much ; but the rare and more useful acquirement of knowing when we have swallowed enough, is not easily attained. Any one with common strength of mind, may lose a meal without extreme mortification ; but it is no easy task for an English stomach after a morning ride and a keen air, to sit down to a modern table, covered with temptation, and make a moderate dinner.

In this, as in other trials of our resolution, he is most likely to prove victorious, who, like the Parthian, flies and fights. I am more and more convinced that half of our complaints are produced by over feeding ; and that the most moderate man of us all, eats and drinks to the full, one-third more than is sufficient and necessary for health and nutrition."