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Fred A. Gannon**

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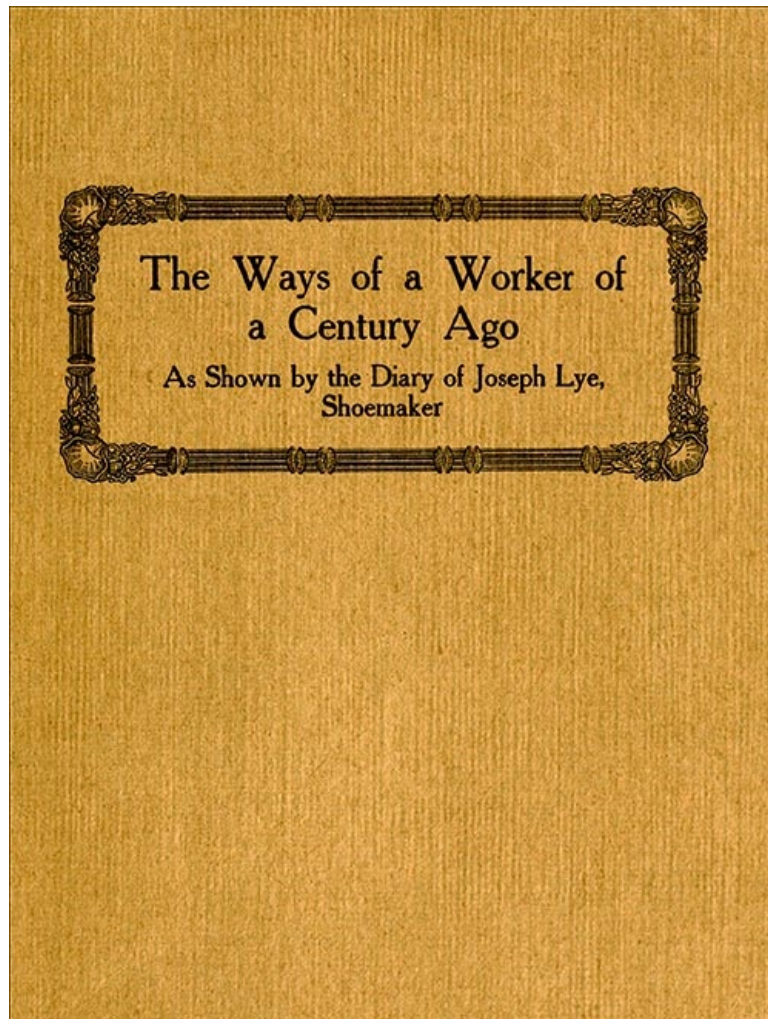
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE WAYS OF A WORKER OF A CENTURY
AGO ***



The Ways of a Worker of a Century Ago

As Shown by the Diary of Joseph Lye, Shoemaker

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THE WAYS OF A WORKER OF A CENTURY AGO

As Shown by the Diary of Joseph Lye, Shoemaker.

For all the facts in this little book the writer is indebted to Henry F. Tapley, who gave the Lye, or Tapley, shoe shop to the Essex Institute, and who related the record of it, as well as extracts from the diary of Joseph Lye, to the Lynn Historical Society, October 14, 1915.

Mr. Tapley's story is published in the Register of the Lynn Historical Society, Number XIX, for the Year 1915.

JOSEPH LYE HIMSELF.

Joseph Lye was born in Lynn, Mass., in 1792, being one of the nine sons of Joseph Lye, a shoemaker and soldier of the Revolution, and Ann Hart. He kept a diary which shows that he "was first clerk of the Second Congregational church (Unitarian), clerk of the Fire club, served as jurymen, trained in the militia, watched with sick friends and neighbors. He was something of a traveler in his modest way, worked as a shoemaker, painter, fisherman and skipper, and sailed small boats. He cleaned the chimney, set out posts and fences, fixed the pump, caulked boats and helped kill the neighbor's pig. Interested in religious matters, he led the active, useful life of a good citizen."

Altogether, he was a busy man. He viewed life from many angles. His diary is doubtless a good and accurate record of the acts and thoughts of the average man of his time. It furnishes material for contrast with men and their ways of these days.

In Lye's time all work was done by hand. Machinery was scarcely known. Men often worked alone, for the factory system had not been started. As they toiled in solitude they read from a book or meditated in silence. They were given to deep thinking.

He lived in extraordinary times. His father told him of the Revolution. Washington, Hamilton and Jefferson were laying the foundations of the new nation. Pioneers were pushing their way west. Inventors were busy. Fulton sailed the Clermont down the Hudson. Inventors dreamed of the steam locomotive. American ships opened trade with the Far East and brought back "the wealth of the Indies." The nation had prospered so much that it had a surplus in the treasury.

The shoe business flourished. John Adam Dagr, "the Celebrated Shoemaker of Essex," had taught his fellow workers of Lynn how to make shoes equal to the best imported from London and Paris. Newspapers of the time urged people to buy American shoes instead of imported footwear. Ebenezer Breed, an early captain of American industry, had induced Congress to put a protective tariff on American shoes.

Joseph Lye, the diarist, learned shoemaking of his father, the Revolutionary soldier, as did

many a lad of his time. He worked on the farm, too, and became a handy man, able to undertake most any of the simple tasks of his time. He was content to work industriously and to live thriftily. Ambition did not tempt him. He thought deeply upon matters of religion. The Puritan conscience then was alive. He kept a diary. Its records are a good standard by which to compare the acts and thoughts of an average man of a century ago with the acts and thoughts of an average man of today, should any reader desire to do so.

JOSEPH LYE'S SHOP.

Soon after his return from the war of the Revolution, Joseph Lye bought a parcel of land and buildings thereon near the Common in Lynn, paying 123 pounds, 6 shillings for the entire property.

Among the buildings was a small, sturdy structure, scarcely as large as a kitchen. In it were four "berths," or seats, on which shoemakers sat, their tools by their side and their stock on the floor, making shoes by hand. It was heated by a wood stove and lighted by candles, but aside from these it was as primitive as an old barn and had none of the hundred and one devices so essential to the modern factory. It had no steam, no machinery, not even running water. But it sufficed for the times. In it the Lyes made a comfortable living, first Joseph Lye, shoemaker and soldier of the Revolution, and then his son, Joseph, shoemaker and diarist.

This shop passed from the Lye family by purchase to Amos Preston Tapley, a shoe merchant, related to the Lyes by marriage. From him it passed to his son, Henry F. Tapley, who gave it to the Essex Institute in Salem. Here it is preserved as an example of an early type of American shoe factory.

JOSEPH LYE'S RELIGION.

Lye began his diary by writing:

"A Diary of my Daily occupations and a few remarks that do not relate to them, and a record of what deaths and marriages come to my knowledge."

"Let not ambition mock my useful toil,
My humble joys and destiny obscure,
Nor grandeur hear with a disdainful smile
The simple annals of the poor."

Lye thought much upon spiritual matters. He wrote in his diary frequently of his attendance at church and of his views of religious subjects. He worked leisurely and had time to reflect upon the meaning of life and its highest ideals. It may be his view of life has been lost among men of today, intent upon their affairs of the moment. The point is worth looking into, for the solution of many serious problems of business, labor and society is coming through Christianity and its interpretation by men.

Lye wrote in his diary many records of his acts and views of Christianity, and some of his records are these:

"Sunday, Nov. 23. This day attended the meeting at the meeting house in Lynn, heard Rev. Mr. Brown preach from Luke 23, 61-62 verse. In the afternoon from Matthew 26, 24-27 verse."

Lye went to church twice Sunday. Many of today do not go to church once.

"Sunday, Nov. 30. Rainy and warm. In the forenoon attended public worship, heard Mr. Brown, of Charlestown, preach a sermon from 2 Corinthians, 2 chapter, 15th verse and part of 16th. In the afternoon from Paul 39, 4th verse."

Rain did not keep Lye from going to church twice. Rain keeps many a churchgoer away from church these days.

"Thursday, Dec. 25. Christmas. Rev. Hosea Ballou was installed pastor of the Second Universalist meeting in Boston."

Christmas Day and no mention of Christmas joys. Puritans frowned on Christmas celebrations. Lye knew no Christmas cheer as do people of these days.

"Sunday, Jan. 18th. Read one of Laurin's sermons in the forenoon. In the afternoon attended divine worship in Chelsea. Heard an excellent sermon by the Rev. Mr. Tuckerman."

Lye could not go to church Sunday morning, so he read a sermon. Men of today read the newspapers Sunday morning, or play golf, or motor.

"Jan. 1, 1818. Fine day for the new year. Walked on foot to Chelsea, engaged a seat of Capt.



THE TAPLEY OR LYE SHOE SHOP OF A CENTURY AGO

Lye walked to Chelsea, a distance of eight miles, to church. Few of today will walk a mile to church.

A time of woe to Lye was in February and March of 1818, when he recorded in his diary:

"Sunday, Feb. 22. Attended public worship at the old meeting house. Sermon by Rev. Mr. Morse, son of D. Morse, of Charlestown, from the passage, 'Be ye reconciled to God.' The sermon was the true essence of Calvinism, very uncharitable, cruel as the grave, profitable to no one."

"Mar. 22. Staid at home this day, rather than to hear a Calvinistic preacher at the First church."

Lye was evidently a man of strong convictions.

A time of joy to him was in the early part of the year 1822, when he helped to form a Congregational church at Lynn and worked on its meeting house. He records:

"Tuesday, Nov. 5. Assisted in erecting two stages for the accommodation of the committee, clergymen and singers for the dedication of the new meeting house.

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"In the afternoon was laid the corner stone of the Second Congregational church (Unitarian) with appropriate ceremony. The treasurer, William Badger, having deposited under it a 25 cent piece, one half cent, a ten cent piece, an American coin and some newspapers of the day, and the copper plate with the inscription: 'There is one God, one mediator between God and man, the man Jesus Christ. God is no respecter of persons but in every nation he that feareth Him and worketh righteousness is acceptable.' The other side: 'Second Congregational society of Lynn, maintaining in their fullest extent the right of conscience and private judgment in Religion and the principles of Universal Charity was established, and this house devoted to the worship of the only true God, the Father of Jesus Christ, our Lord, founded under their patronage in the year of the Christian Era 1822. May God give thee increase.'"

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Deep interest in religion was common among shoemakers of the time of Lye. The Bible was kept in many a shop. The Sunday sermon was a chief topic of debate among the shoemakers. The minister himself often called at the shop. But these days there is no room in the shop for the Bible and the minister never calls. There may be business wisdom in the remark of a shoe man that each large manufacturing organization should have a minister on its staff.

THE WAGES OF JOSEPH LYE.

For his useful toil Joseph Lye was content with a modest wage. He was willing to turn his hand to most anything. He worked "as a shoemaker, painter, fisherman and skipper of small boats. He cleaned the chimney, set out posts, built fences, fixed the pump, caulked boats and helped kill the neighbor's pig." He also was a farmer. Evidently he had a good all around training which enabled him to adjust himself to the circumstances of each day. He did not become a specialist in shoemaking and limit his work to one branch of the shoe trade, as do shoemakers of these days. He undertook most any work that came before him. Yet he was not a plodder, living from day to day, for he took upon himself responsible tasks and financial obligations. For example, in April, 1822, he agreed to pay his mother \$150 a year for the use of the farm, comprising eight acres of tillage, two cows, a pasture and a wood lot, as well as buildings.

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He was taught his trade of shoemaking by his father, Joseph Lye, the cordwainer and soldier of the Revolution. In turn he taught his brother Robert to make shoes. He made mention of it in his diary. He was not apprenticed to a master workman for seven years, or until he was 21, as was the common practice of his time. His knack of painting, building fences, fishing, sailing boats, and farming was picked up in his boyhood life on his father's farm. A task came before him. His father showed him how to do it. He did it, and learned a lesson in the school of experience.

He made frequent entries about his wages in his diary. For example:

"Tuesday, Nov. 25. Made 3 pairs of shoes at 40 cents. Assisted in throwing up shop wood. Pleasant and cold."

His earnings for that day were \$1.20. Besides, he made fuel ready for the winter. The fuel was from the wood lot on the Lye farm. The labor of gathering it was its chief cost. He never dreamed of a time when a fuel administrator would limit supplies of fuel to people.

"Wed., Nov. 26. Made two pairs of village walking boots at 45 cents; two pairs military at 40 cents. Weather continues clear and pretty cold."

His earnings for this day were \$1.70. Business was brisk with him. Clear cold weather must have started people buying winter footwear.

"Friday, Nov. 28. Hauled the boat Ann into winter quarters, stripped her. Assisted Amos Tapley to get his boards in. Waited some time for shoes. Made one pair at 45 cents. Weather warm and cloudy."

His earnings this day from shoemaking were but 45 cents. Whether Amos Tapley paid him for getting in boards, or whether he just helped in a neighborly way is a matter he does not make clear in his diary. The ship Ann belonged to him. So he had no pay for his work on it.

"Saturday, Nov. 29. Made 2 pairs of shoes at 45 cents. This week's work comes to \$5.87 exclusive of other work."

Five dollars and 87 cents for a week's work in shoemaking! Some shoemakers earn that in a day these times. It was a normal week's wage for Lye. The next Saturday he records: "This week's work amount to \$5.40." It was less than \$1 a day. Small pay that seems. But \$1 went a lot farther then than these days. Lye's costs of living were low. He farmed and fished and produced much of his own food stuffs, and gathered his own fuel. His "humble joys" were by no means expensive. He speaks of taking a book of sermons from the library, of going to camp meeting, and of walking to Boston to attend a theatre. Nothing very expensive in these.

Lye speaks of earning \$5.87 "exclusive of other work." Evidently he had some source of income besides his pay for making shoes. Perhaps Amos Tapley paid him for helping to get in his boards. Later he "assisted Amos Tapley to repair wood shop." And Saturday, Jan. 3, he records that "Hugh Floyd and his boy Isaac moved into our shop." Doubtless they paid rent and he had an income as a landlord.

His ventures in fishing paid him well. He records:

"Friday, Sept. 2. Caught 750 fish about two miles southeast of Nahant."

A great haul that was. Plenty of food. Yet not much money, for fish was cheap, selling at six cents a pound, or thereabouts. He followed up fishing during the summer season. In addition to the profits from it he had a bounty of \$35 for engaging in the codfish industry for four months. He records that to collect that bounty he "went on foot to Marblehead."



Plainly Lye was a diligent, thrifty worker, willing to work in the sweat of his brow and to walk a long journey to collect his pay. But his ways are no more. Modern industry has changed the habits of men.

THE MISCELLANEOUS TASKS OF JOSEPH LYE.

The spring of the year 1819 was a very busy time with Lye, and a few entries in his diary reveal the versatility of his career.

May 5, "helped set fence in front of our premises in the forenoon. Performed military duty in the afternoon."

May 9, "helped move Mudge's new shop. Went to Chelsea to purchase pigs, but found none to be bought."

Saturday, May 23, he "trained again."

June 30, "sailed from this town for North Yarmouth in the sloop Jane, Capt. Ross, for the purpose of recovering the boat Humbird, which Ellis and myself sold to David Libby last November."

Sunday, July 12, "arrived in Lynn with the boat, which we took possession of July 1 without much difficulty, having had a quick voyage of ten days, Capt. Ross, S. Hutchinson and myself being all the crew to manage both vessels."

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Monday, July 27, "bought of James Austin one sixth part of the boat Humbird for \$16.66." (It was for using this boat in the cod fishing industry that Lye got the bounty of \$35, by the way.)

At some time or other during the year, Lye acquired the pigs for which he made his vain trip to Chelsea, and on Jan. 1 he "killed our two hogs. Their weight was 384 pounds."

The variety of Lye's tasks certainly surpasses those of the average shoemaker of these days.

THE PASTIMES OF JOSEPH LYE.

Joseph Lye lived a well rounded life. Besides shoemaking, fishing and farming, and other occupations that came to his hand, he trained with the militia, ran with the firemen, took part in politics, and sat up with sick friends, and lent a hand when help was needed. He took life seriously, not as sternly as did his Puritan forefathers, but nevertheless, with a deep and earnest purpose. For example, in his diary he records:

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"Monday, Mar. 20. This day I am 27 years old. I have, through God's goodness, been spared in life and health for another year, and may I improve the present year better than I have ever done before."

At the close of the same year he records:

"This day closes the year through which I have passed in good health and have enjoyed all the necessary comforts which I have needed. May I be suitably thankful for mercies received."

No birthday dinners and celebrations for Lye. The passing years of life were serious to him.

Yet Lye was not a sombre soul, given to overmuch piety. Jan. 2, 1823, finds him going to Boston in Breed's carriage, with three friends, a big event in his career, for he usually walked to Boston, a journey of ten miles or so. In the afternoon Lye and his friends attended the theatre and saw the comedy "Who Wants a Guinea" acted. He makes no criticism of that show. That is unlucky. It would be interesting to know what he thought of the show. He was a keen critic, given to speaking his mind, for, on the day after the laying of the church corner stone he records in his diary that "On searching under the corner stone a quarter of a dollar and one half cent was missing, purloined by some sacrilegious robber."

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Lye liked dancing, for he records:

"Feb. 3. In the evening attended a public dance at the hotel, under the direction of Mr. Jameson, who is teacher in the school. Much pleased with the performance."

A little later he records that he:

"Attended the town meeting. High party spirit is again revived, and has destroyed the good feeling which has for a number of years prevailed in town."

But that spell of bad feeling among townsmen passed, and July 4, 1821, finds Lye recording:

“Independence Day was celebrated by the citizens without distinction of party. Oration in the Methodist meeting house by Rev. E. Mudge. Procession by Artillery and Light Infantry. Dinner at hotel. Devoted this day to celebration.”

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Lye was always ready to do his part in the public service. He mentions his service in the militia several times, and once remarked that he “trained near Rum Rock, in Danvers.”

Certainly Lye’s pleasures in life were simple. He had a lot of satisfaction in performing his duties as a citizen and as a neighbor.

JOSEPH LYE AS A NEIGHBOR.

In a neighborly way Lye did many things, helping to fix fences, to mend boats, to kill pigs, to repair pumps, and to do any of the kind deeds that help a neighbor along the path of life.

Two records from his diary show what a kindly neighbor he was:

“May 4, 1820. Watched this night with our neighbor, David Farrington, who, it is feared, is approaching the last end.”

“Mar. 30, 1823. Watched last night with Thomas Cheever, who is bereft of his senses.”

A good and kindly neighbor was Lye, to watch with the sick.

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THE MEANING OF LIFE TO JOSEPH LYE.

The sum of Lye’s view of life is found in this entry in his diary:

“Friday, Sept. 2. Carried out a fishing party. Capt. Z. Atwell, S. Smith and six others. On our return off Bass Neck, Capt. Atwell at the helm, going before the wind, the boom jibed over and knocked Matthew Breed Jr. overboard. I jumped into the small boat and picked him up. He was considerable distance astern and quite exhausted, just ready to sink. Thus was I a feeble instrument in God’s hands.”

That was his view of life. “A feeble instrument in God’s hands.” In that spirit he pursued his useful toil, enjoyed his humble joys, and wrote his simple annals of the poor. His ways were the ways of other days, and will be known no more.

JOSEPH LYE’S EPITAPH.

After the death of Joseph Lye, his family placed a stone on his grave, bearing this inscription:

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In Memory of
MR. JOSEPH LYE,
who died
April 10, 1834,
Aged 42 Years.

Receive, O earth, his faded form,
In thy cold bosom let it lie;
Safe let it rest from every storm,
Soon may it rise, no more to die.

So that stone tells of the faith Lye had in eternal life, a faith which was his guide in each act of the days of his life.

THE TAPLEYS.

Amos Tapley, who purchased the Lye shop after the death of Joseph Lye, was of the Danvers family of Tapleys. He married a daughter of Joseph Lye, the shoemaker and soldier of the Revolution. His son, Amos Preston Tapley, engaged in the shoe trade and became the owner of the shop upon the death of his father. His son, Henry Fuller Tapley, became owner of the shop, and gave it to the Essex Institute. Henry F. Fuller is surviving partner of the house of Amos P. Tapley & Co., whose record is this:

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MORE THAN ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF PROGRESS A CENTURY

Ebenezer Vose, 1812-1816.
Ebenezer Vose & Co., 1817-1828.

(Josiah Pierce)

Josiah Pierce, 1829-1834.
Josiah Pierce & Co., 1835.

(Daniel Bingham)

Daniel Bingham & Co., 1836.

(Amos P. Tapley)

Amos P. Tapley, 1837-1838.
Bingham & Tapley, 1839-1846.
Amos P. Tapley, 1847.
Amos P. Tapley & Co., 1848-
1854.

(W. S. Messenger)

Amos P. Tapley, 1855-1868.
Amos P. Tapley & Co., 1869-
1905.

(Henry F. Tapley)

Amos P. Tapley & Co., 1905-
1917.

(Henry F. Tapley)

Surviving partner.

PROFIT AND LOSS.

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Lye didn't live long, didn't make money, didn't make a reputation, didn't build up a big business, didn't go into politics, didn't follow any sports as a fad, and didn't break into society. But it looks as if he enjoyed life while he lived.

Lye was contented to work for a living, to live in simple fashion, and to enjoy humble pleasures. He had a knack of getting along. When the shoe trade was dull he turned his hand to something else. He kept down his cost of living, for he farmed, fished and raised a pig. If anything around the house or shop needed repairs, he did it himself. He was an independent person. Yet he wasn't selfish. He was always ready to give a helping hand to his neighbors.

He read the Book of Life, and believed it, according to his views. He lived according to his conscience, and he was a contented man through the days of his life.

Did he get more out of life than a fellow these days of complex ways. Who knows?

Transcriber's Note:

Changes to the original publication have been made as follows:

Page 1

- October 14, 1915 *changed to* October 14, [1915](#).

Page 11

- has hand to most anything *changed to* [his](#) hand to most anything
- calked boats and helped *changed to* [caulked](#) boats and helped

Page 20

- by some sacriligious robber *changed to*
by some **sacrilegious** robber

Page 25

- lived according to his *changed to*
lived **according** to his

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