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# RECOLLECTIONS

**By David Christie Murray**

**With Photogravure Portrait of the Author and a number of Original  
Letters, of which one by George Meredith and another by Robert  
Louis  
Stevenson are reproduced in facsimile.**

**London**

**John Long Norris Street, Haymarket**

**1908**



Yours very truly  
David Christie Murray

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London

John Long

Norris Street, Haymarket

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# **RECOLLECTIONS**

## **CHAPTER I**

*The Unlucky Day of the Fool's Month—High Street, West  
Bromwich—My First Pedestrian Triumph—The Common English  
Bracken—The Sense of Beauty.*

I remember that in a fit of petulance at some childish misdemeanour, my mother once told me that I came into the world on the unlucky day of the fool's month. It was her picturesque way of saying that I was born on the thirteenth of April. I have often since had occasion to think that there was a wealth of prophetic wisdom in the phrase which neither she nor I suspected at the time.

I did the world the poor service of being born into it in the year 1847, in a house not now to be identified in

the straggling High Street of West Bromwich, which in those days was a rather doleful hybrid of a place—neither town nor country. It is a compact business-like town now, and its spreading industries have defaced the lovely fringe of country which used to be around it.

Its great peculiarity to a thoughtful child lay in the fact that even at his small rate of progress he could pass in an hour from the clink, clink, clink on the anvils of the poor nailmakers, who worked in their own sordid back kitchens about the Ling or Virgin's End, to a rural retirement and quiet as complete as you may find to-day about Charlcoote or Arden, or any other nook of the beautiful Shakespeare country. Since the great South Staffordshire coal fault was circumvented, nearly all the wide reaches of rural land which I remember are overgrown and defaced by labour. The diamond stream in which I used to bathe as a boy, where you could have counted the pebbles at the bottom, was running ink, and giving forth vile odours, when last I saw it. But fifty years ago, or more, there was the most exquisite green fringe to that fire-rotted, smoke-stained, dirty mantle of a Black Country. In the extreme stillness of the summer fields, and more especially, as I seem to remember, in a certain memorable hush which came when afternoon was shading into evening, you could hear the clank of pig-iron which was being loaded into the boats on the canal at Bromford, quite two miles away, and the thump of a steam hammer at Dawes's foundry.

I have begun many a child's ramble by a walk down Bromford Lane, to look in at the half-naked figures there sweating and toiling at the puddling furnaces, and have brought it to an end in the middle of the fairy ring on Stephenson's hills, only a couple of miles away, in what felt like the very heart of nature's solitude. Thus the old parish, which was not by any means an ideal place to be born and bred in, had its compensations for a holiday schoolboy who had Milton, and Klopstock, and Bunyan at his finger-ends, and had hell and the plains of heaven within an easy ramble from the paternal doorstep. But the special memory about which I set out to write was the one which immediately follows on the baby experience already recorded. It is almost as brief and isolated in itself; but I know by after association precisely where it took place, and I am almost persuaded that I know who was my companion.

I think it is Mr Ruskin who speaks of our rural hedgerows as having been the pride and glory of our English fields, and the shame and disgrace of English husbandry. In the days I write of, they were veritable flower-gardens in their proper season. What with the great saucer-shaped elderberry blooms, and the pink and white dogroses, and the honeysuckle, and the white and purple foxgloves, and harebell and bluebell, and the starlike yellow-eyed daisy, there was an unending harvest for hand and eye. But the observation of all these things came later. Below the hedges the common English bracken grew, in occasional profusion, and it was a young growing spray of this plant which excited in my mind the very first sense of beauty I had ever known. It was curved in a gentle suggestion of an interrogation note. In colour, it was of a greenish-red and a very gentle yet luxuriant green. It was covered with a harmless baby down, and it was decorated at the curved tip with a crown-shaped scroll. There is really no need in the world to describe it, for one supposes that even the most inveterate Cockney has, at one time or another, seen the first tender offshoot of the commonest fern which grows in England.

From the time at which I achieved my first pedestrian triumph until I looked at this delight and wonder, I remember nothing. A year or two had intervened, and I was able to toddle about unaided; but, for anything I can actually recall, I might as well have been growing in my sleep. But I shall never forget it, and I have never experienced anything like it since. Whether I could at that time think in words at all, I do not know; but the beauty, the sense of the charm of the slender, tender thing went into my heart with an actual pang of pleasure, and my companion reproved me for crying about nothing. I don't remember crying; but I recall the question, and I know that nothing has ever since moved me in the same way.

I was about nineteen years of age, I think, when I first awoke to the fact that I had been born shortsighted. I had had a year in the army, and when we were at the targets, or were out at judging-distance drill, I was aware that I did not see things at all as the musketry instructor represented them. But it happened one starlight night, after I had returned to civilian life, that a companion of little more than my own age, who had always worn spectacles in my remembrance of him, began to talk about the splendid brilliance of the heavens. I could discern a certain milky radiance, with here and there a dim twinkle in it, but no more. I borrowed my comrade's glasses, and I looked. The whole thing sprang at me, but rather with a sense of awe and wonder than of beauty; and even this much greater episode left the first impression of the child unchanged.

There is, or used to be, a little pleasure-steamer which starts at stated times for a voyage on Lake Wakatipu in New Zealand. For a while it passes along a gloomy channel which is bounded on either side by dark and lofty rocks of a forbidding aspect. This passage being cleared, the steamer bears away to the left, across the lake, and, beyond the jutting promontory near at hand, there lifts into sight on a fair day the first mountain of the Glenorchy Range. When I first saw it, the sky at the horizon was almost white; but the peaks of the distant mountains had, as Shakespeare says, a whiter hue than white, and through field-glasses its outlines could be perfectly distinguished. Then swung into sight a second mountain, and a third, and a fourth, and so on, in a progression which began to look endless. There is a form of delight which is very painful to endure, and I do not know that I ever experienced it more keenly than here. The huge snow-capped range gliding slowly up, "the way of grand, dull, Odyssean ghosts," was impressive, and splendid, and majestic beyond anything I have known in a life which has been rich in travel; but if I want, at a fatigued or dispirited hour, to bathe my spirit clear in the memory of beautiful things seen, I go back, because I cannot help it, to that tender little fern-frond in a lane on the edge of the Black Country, which brought to me, first of all, the message that there is such a thing as beauty in the world.

## CHAPTER II

My father was a printer and stationer, and would have been a bookseller if there had been any book buyers in the region. There was a good deal of unsaleable literary stock on the dusty shelves. I remember *The Wealth of Nations*, Paley's *Evidences of Christianity*, *Locke on the Human Understanding*, and a long row of the dramatists of the seventeenth century. I burrowed into all these with zeal, and acquired in very early childhood an omnivorous appetite for books which has never left me.

There was a family legend, the rights and wrongs of which are long since drowned in mist, to the effect that our little Staffordshire branch of the great Murray family belonged to the elder and the higher, and the titular rights of the Dukedom of Athol were held by a cadet of the house. My father's elder brother, Adam Goudie Murray, professed to hold this belief stoutly, and he and the reigning duke of a century ago had a humorous spar with each other about it on occasion. "I presume your Grace is still living in my hoose," Adam would say.

"Ay, I'm still there, Adam," the duke would answer, and the jest was kept up until the old nobleman died. Sir Bernard Burke knew of the story, but when as a matter of curiosity I broached the question to him, he said there were too many broken links in the chain of evidence to make it worth investigation. My father had, or humorously affected, a sort of faith in it, and used to say that we were princes in disguise. The disguise was certainly complete, for the struggle for life was severe and constant, but there was enough in the vague rumour to excite the imagination of a child, and I know that I built a thousand airy day-dreams on it.

To me the most momentous episodes of life appear to resolve themselves naturally into first occasions. Those times at which we first feel, think, act, or experience in any given way, form the true stepping-stones of life. Memory is one of the most capricious of the faculties. There is a well-known philosophical theory to the effect that nothing is actually forgotten or forgettable which has once imprinted itself upon the mind. But, bar myself, I do not remember to have encountered anybody who professed to recall his very earliest triumph in pedestrianism—the first successful independent stagger on his feet. When I have sometimes claimed that memory carries me back so far, I have been told that the impression is an afterthought, or an imagination, or a remembrance of the achievement of some younger child. I know better. It is an actual little fragment of my own experience, and nothing which ever befell me in my whole lifetime is more precise or definite. I do not know who held my petticoats bunched up behind to steady me for the start, nor who held out a roughened finger to entice me. But I remember the grip, and the feel of the finger when I reached it, as well as I remember anything. And what makes the small experience so very definite is, that after all this lapse of time I can still feel the sense of peril and adventure, and the ringing self-applause which filled me when the task was successfully accomplished. There was a fire in the grate on my right hand side, and beneath my feet there was a rug which was made up of hundreds of rough loops of parti-coloured cloth; and it was the idea of getting over those loops which frightened me, and brought its proper spice of adventure into the business. There is nothing before this, and for two or three years, as I should guess, there is nothing after it. That little firelit episode of infancy is isolated in the midst of an impenetrable dark.

Where a child is not beaten, or bullied, or cautioned overmuch, it is almost always very courageous to begin with. Where it survives the innumerable mishaps incident to the career of what Tennyson calls "dauntless infancy," it learns many lessons of caution. But the great faculty of cowardice, which most grown men have developed in a hundred forms, is no part of the child's original stock in trade. Even cowardice, in its own degree, is a wholesome thing, because it is a part and portion of that self-protective instinct which helps towards the preservation of the individual of the race. But it would be a good thing to place, if such a thing were possible, a complete embargo on its importation into the infant kingdom. I suppose the true faculty for being afraid belongs to very few people. There are many forms of genius, and it is very likely, I believe, that the genius for a true cowardice is as rare as the genius for writing great verse, or constructing a great story, or guiding the ship of state through the crises of tempest to a safe harbour. But every human faculty may be cultivated, and this is a field in which, with least effort, and with least expenditure of seed, you may reap the fullest crop.

Whilst I was yet a very little fellow, a certain big-boned, well-fleshed, waddling wench from the local workhouse became a unit in my mother's household. Her chief occupation seemed to be to instruct my brothers and sisters and myself in various and many methods of being terrified. Three score years ago there was, in that part of the country, a fascinating belief in witchcraft. There was in our near neighbourhood, for example, a person known as the Dudley Devil, who could bewitch cattle, and cause milch kine to yield blood. He had philtres of all sorts—noxious and innocuous—and it was currently believed that he went lame because, in the character of an old dog-fox, he had been shot by an irate farmer whose hen-roost he had robbed beyond the bounds of patience. He used to discover places where objects were hidden which had been stolen from local farmhouses, and he was reckoned to do this by certain forms of magical incantation. In my maturer mind, I am disposed to believe that he was a professional receiver of stolen goods, and I am pretty sure that the modern police would have made short work of him. But from the time that foolish, fat scullion came into the household service, we were all impressed with a dreadful sense of this gentleman's potentialities for evil; and darkened rooms and passages about the house, into which we had hitherto ventured without any hint of fear, were suddenly and horribly alive with this man's presence.

Speaking for myself, as I have sole right to do, I know that he haunted every place of darkness. He positively peopled the back kitchen to which we went for coals. He haunted a little larder on the left, and stood on each of the three steps which led down to its red brick floor, whilst at the same instant he was horribly ready to pounce upon one from the rear; was waiting in the doorway just in front; was crouching in each corner of the darkened chamber, and hidden in the chimney. That fat, foolish scullion slept in the same room with my brother and myself. He, as I find by reference to contemporary annals, was seven at this time, and I was five, and we got to know afterwards that the sprawling wench grew hungry in the night-time, and went downstairs to filch heels of loaves and cheese, or anything our rather spare household economy left open to her petty larcenies. And in order that these small depredations should be hidden, she used to play the

ghost upon us, and I suppose it to be a literal fact that many and many a time when she stole back to our room, and found us awake and quaking, she must have driven us into a clean swoon of terror by the very simple expedient of drawing up the hinder part of her nightdress, and making a ghostly head-dress of it about her face. That I fainted many a time out of sheer horror at this apparition, I am quite certain; but the sense of real fear was, after all, left in reserve. I had rambled alone, as children will, along the High Street on a lovely summer day, each sight, and scent, and sound of which comes to me at this moment with a curious distinctness, and I had turned at the corner; had wandered along New Street, which by that time was old-fashioned enough to seem aged, even to my eyes; had diverged into Walsall Street, which was then the shortest way to the real country, and on to the Ten Score; past the Pearl Well, where Cromwell's troops once stopped to drink; through Church Vale, and on to Perry Bar, and even past the Horns of Queslett, beyond which lay a plain road to Sutton Coldfield, a place full of wonder and magic, and already memorable to a reading child through its association with one Shakespeare, and a Sir John Falstaff, who afterwards became more intimate companions.

I had never been so far from home before, and the sense of adventure was very strong upon me. By-and-bye, I found myself in what I still remember as a sort of primeval forest, though a broad country lane was cut between the umbrageous shade on either side. I saw a rabbit cross the road, and I saw a slow weasel track him, and heard the squeak of despair which bunny uttered when the fascinating pursuer, as I now imagine, first fixed upon him what Mr Swinburne calls "the bitter blossom of a kiss." I very clearly remember an adder, with a bunch of its young, disporting in the sunlight; but there was nothing to alarm a child, and everything to charm and enlist the fancy. The sunlight fell broadly along the route. Birds were singing, and butterflies were fanning their feathery, irresponsible way from shade to shade. I saw my first dragonfly that day, and tried to catch him in my cap, but he evaded me. All on a sudden, the prospect changed. A cloud floated over the sun, and a sort of preliminary waiting horror took possession of the harmless woods on either side. Just there the road swerved, and I could hear a halting footstep coming. Somehow, the Dudley Devil was associated in my mind with that halting step, and there was I, in the middle of a waste universe, in which all the bird voices had suddenly grown silent, and the companionable insects had ceased to hum and flutter, left to await the coming of this awful creature. The stammering step came round the bend of the lane, and I saw for the first time a person whom I grew to respect and pity later on, but who struck me then with such an abject sense of terror as I have sometimes since experienced in dreams.

One might have travelled far before meeting a more harmless creature. He was on the local Plan of the Wesleyan Methodists, as I found out afterwards. He had been a metal-worker of some sort, and the victim of an explosion which had wrecked one side of his face and figure, and had made nothing less than a ghastly horror of him. The upward-flying stream of metal had struck him on the cheek and chin, and had left him writhen and distorted there almost beyond imagination. It had literally boiled one eye, which revolved amid its facial seams dead-white in a sightless orbit. The sideward and downward streams had left him with a dangling atrophied arm and a scalded hip, so that he came down on me, with my preconceived ideas about him, like an actual lop-sided demon. I let out one screech, and fled; but even in the act of flight I saw the poor fellow's face, and read in it the bitter regret he felt that the disaster which had befallen him should have made him unbearable to the imagination of a child.

A great many years after, when I was quite a young man, and was invited to read a paper on "Liberty" before a society of earnest Wesleyan youths who called themselves the "Young Bereans," this identical man stood up to take a part in the discussion, and I knew him in a flash. He began his speech by saying something about the inscrutable designs of Providence, and I recall even now some fragmentary idea of the words he used. "I was a handsome lad to begin with," he said, "but God saw fit to deform me, and to make me what I am." And now, when I am settling down to these reminiscences in late middle age, the most dreadful waking sense of real horror, and the first real touch of human pity, seem to meet each other, and to blend.

It is fully half a century ago, for I could not have been quite six years of age, when my brother Will and I were taken to chapel on one very well-remembered Sunday evening. The preacher was the grandfather of a gentleman who now lives in a castle, and does an enormous trade in soap. His theme was the omniscience of the Deity, and he told his simple audience how the same God who made all rolling spheres made the minutest living things also, and all things intermediate. It was a very impressive sermon for a child to listen to, and I can recall a great deal of it to this day. It set my brother's mental apparatus moving, and he thought to such effect that he started a new theory as to the origin of the universe. If God had made all things, it appeared clear to him that somebody must have made God. He suggested that it might have been a policeman. I accepted this idea with an absolutely tranquil faith, and I was immediately certain of the very man. The High Constables Act was not passed until some fourteen or fifteen years later, and it was that Act which finally abolished the old watchman and installed the policeman in his place, even in our remotest villages. But I cannot recall a time when there was not a police barracks in my native High Street. Its inmates were all "bobbies" or "peelers," out of compliment to "Bobby" Peel, who called them officially into being in 1829. I know no better grounds than those afforded by a baby memory that the particular policeman whom I supposed to have created the Creator was a somewhat remarkable person in his way. He was six feet four in height, for one thing, and he was astonishingly cadaverous. I once found a tremulous occasion to speak to him, and as I looked upward from about the height of his knee at God Almighty's maker, I thought his stature more than Himalayan. I forget what I asked, or what he answered; but the sense of incredible daring is with me still.

I learned later that this elongated solemn coffin of a man was the champion eater of the district I am not inclined to be nice in my remembrance of recorded weights and measures; but they had him registered to an ounce at the "Lewisham Arms," which was only a yard or two beyond the police barracks, on the road to Handsworth, where he figured as having consumed a shoulder of mutton, a loaf of bread, a pan of potatoes, and a dish of cabbage, each of such and such a weight, in such and such a time. I cannot be sure whether it were at this house of entertainment, or at another in the neighbourhood, where there was a glass case on view in which was displayed the ashy remnant of a pound of tobacco smoked, and the desiccated remnant of a pound of tobacco chewed, within so many given minutes by the local champion in these inviting arts. I am pretty certain now that the local glutton was not identical with the local champion consumer of tobacco; but

at that time I heaped all these honours on his head, and my belief in his original responsibility for the launching of the universe was not, so far as I remember, in any way disturbed by the contemplation of these smaller attributes of power.

It is something, even in the flights of baby fancy, to have known and conversed with the origin of all created things. It is perhaps something of a throwback to be forced to the recognition of that prodigious figure as it really was. But, after all, it is not quite impossible that a similar awaking may await the grown man who imagines himself to have mastered something of the real philosophies of life. The cadaverous peeler with the abnormal appetite fades out of recollection, and my next hero is a blacksmith, who, in a countryside once rich in amateur pugilists, had earned a local distinction for himself before he made a settlement for life at the "Farriers' Arms," in Queen Street. His name was Robert Pearce, and he dawns on me as second hero because of a physical strength which must have been remarkable even when all allowance for the childish ideal is made.

Sir Ernest Spencer, who was for many years the Parliamentary representative of my native parish, was an infant schoolfellow of mine, and on a birthday, or some other such occasion for celebration, his father made him a present of a small donkey; and we two took the beast to Bob Pearce's to be shod. I can see the great, broad-shouldered, hairy farrier at this minute, as if I saw him in a picture, with his smoky shirt thrown wide open at the collar, and his breast as bearded as his chin. When the small beast was trotted in to the farriery, the grimy giant laughed aloud. He stooped, and, placing his great palm under the donkey's belly, he raised the animal in one hand, and poised him at the ceiling, swaying him here and there as if he had been a weathervane in a high and varying wind. I suppose that the donkey was a little donkey; but I am sure that he was only an averagely little donkey, and that not one man in a British regiment could have performed Bob Pearce's feat with any approach to the air of ease and dexterity he gave it. There was no effort at all about the action, and no apparent idea that any exhibition of strength was being offered. There was a conquering comic spontaneity in that exhibition of great muscular power which irresistibly appealed to the imagination, and made the Queen Street farrier a god for years to come.

When I was sent to a regular day-school, many years afterwards, there were legends amongst us of this man's super-normal strength. There was a great lath of a fellow who kept the "Star and Garter" public-house. After all this lapse of time one hopes that one may not hit on any surviving prejudice against the use of names and places. His name was Tom Woolley, and I saw Pearce set his big hand underneath the chair on which he sat, and place him on an ordinary table in a smoke-room for some slight wager of a pint of beer or so. This was one of the ameliorations of the rigours of a committee meeting, of which my father was chairman, called to decide on the form of the public reception of a returning Chartist, who had spent six months in Stafford Gaol for the expression of such extreme opinions as are now daily enunciated in the columns of *The Times*.

There are no such liars as schoolboys, and no set of men could possibly be found who could as religiously believe each other's lies as they do.

We used to invent for each other's delight stories about this particular hero which went beyond grown-up credence altogether. But there are some few narratives that survive the application of the laws of evidence. For instance, it is recorded that, taking advantage of the temporary absence of a rival smith, he carried away an anvil under his cloak without exciting suspicion that he was bearing any weight at all.

There was a pork butcher in the High Street who sprang to the most dazzling height of fame amongst the schoolboys and other well-practised, self-believing liars of the parish. On the Wednesday the man was as mere and simple a salesman of dead pig as might be found within the limits of the land. On the Thursday he had obliterated the memory of the achievements of Nelson and Six-teen-String Jack. Surveying the circumstances from a considerable distance, I am inclined to think that there was some authenticity in the story which sent the whole parish into a gaping admiration. The tale was that the pork butcher had gone money-hunting on the afternoon of that eventful day which made a hero of him. He had gathered, so the local story ran, something like two hundred pounds, and he made an incautious brag of this fact in the bar-room of the old "Blue Posts," at Smethwick. Midway up Roebuck Lane, which was then without a house from end to end, three men sprang out upon him from the shadows of the bridge then just newly-erected across the Great Western line of railway, over which, if I remember rightly, no train at that time had ever travelled.

Then that pork butcher proved himself a paladin. He thrust one of his assailants to the rails at the bottom of the cutting with his foot; he laid out another upon the pathway with one prodigious buffet; and, seizing the third by the coat collar, he kicked him half a mile to the police station. Even now, I believe this story to be true, or near the truth; and the sympathetic reader may fancy what we boys made of the hero of it. I have worshipped many people in my time, and I have thrilled at the thought of many splendid deeds; but I have never since reached that high-water mark of hero-worship at which I sailed when I followed that pork butcher down the West Bromwich High Street, and persuaded myself beyond the evidence of my senses that he was ten feet high.

### CHAPTER III

*My Father's Printing Office—The Prize Ring—The Fistic Art—First Steps in Education—A Boy's Reading—Carlyle—Parents and Children—A School Chum—Technical Education—Plaster Medallions.*

At the age of twelve I was taken from school and set to work in my father's printing office. There must have been a serious fall in the family fortunes about this time, for a year earlier I had been removed from the respectable little private seminary I had hitherto attended and transferred to a school of the roughest sort, where the pupils paid threepence a week apiece to the schoolmaster and we used to give off the result of our



lessons in platoons. I learned a little freehand drawing here in the South Kensington manner, for we had a night school which was affiliated to the Art department there, and our teachers came to us once a week from Birmingham. I was secretly very unhappy all this time, and brooded much on the disguised prince idea among my rough companions.

My way to school led me past the Champion of England public-house, kept by the Tipton Slasher—William Perry, from whom Tom Sayers afterwards wrested the honours of the Prize Ring. I got to know that knock-kneed giant well, and took an enormous pride in my acquaintance with him. I remember one summer evening, seeing him eject an enormous fat Frenchman from his door—one of the colony of artificers in glass which lived there at this time. The champion's was the last house in the parish, and beside it lay the Birmingham and Worcester Canal. The big pugilist conducted his captive to the bridge and dumped him down there on the wall, the top of which was all frayed and crumbled by the action of the towing ropes. The fat Frenchman, who was good-naturedly tipsy, picked up a loose half brick and tossed it after the departing Slasher. The missile took him between the shoulders, and he, turning in wrath, flung out one windy buffet at his assailant, and toppled him over the bridge into the canal. There was a momentary flurry, and then a bystander lent the immersed Frenchman one end of a barge-pole, and he was drawn to the side, apparently quite sobered. The Slasher stood guffawing on the bridge, a little crowd of loafers roared with laughter, and the fat victim of the incident seemed as much amused by it as anybody. He struck a burlesque fighting attitude on the tow-path, and then went dripping homeward.

This small episode was quite in tune with the place and the time, and nobody thought it worth more than a laugh. The good old Prize Ring was even then sinking into disrepute and only the giant fight of years later, when England and America were matched against each other in the persons of Tom Sayers and The Benecia Boy, gave it a momentary flicker before, as it were, it fell into the socket, and one form of British valour died.

The Slasher was, of course, the central luminary, but there were scores and scores of lesser lights revolving round him. The fistic art in those days was very generally practised and a stand-up fight between two local champions was often undertaken for the mere love of the thing. It was not at all an uncommon practice for a party of eight to be brought together, lots would be drawn, and four would stand up against four, then two against two, and the survivors of the competition would fight it out between them. I witnessed many of these contests and can bear evidence that there was less rowdiness displayed than can be noted any day amongst the crowd on a modern race-course. It was good, serious, scientific fighting and the rules of the Ring were strictly observed. Any violation of them would indeed have aroused the spontaneous anger of the crowd, for the laws of the game were known to everybody and were universally respected. I hope I am not going to sermonise often in the course of this narrative, but I have always thought that the legislative meddling with the Prize Ring was a grave mistake. The hooliganism of modern days was absolutely unknown at the time of which I write and the roughest crowd might be relied upon to see fair play between any chance pair of combatants. But the best of the sport was that it was commonly carried on out of that pure hardihood which at one time made the rougher sort of Englishman the pick of the world for valour and endurance. The sentimentalists and humanitarians abolished the Prize Ring because of its brutality, and the result is that all sense of honour has gone out among the rougher classes, and the record of the police courts have familiarised everybody with the use of the knife in private warfare, a thing almost unknown until the Prize Ring was abolished.

I have very often thought it odd that I have not even a fragmentary memory of the very earliest steps in education. I recall quite easily a time when I could not read, and the recollection of one superb moment is very often with me. That moment came with the reading of a story, entitled *The Mandatés Revenge; or the Riccaree War Spear*, which came from the pen of Mr Percy B. St John, and may still be found in some far-away number of *Chambers's Journal*. I have never gone back to that story. I have never had the courage to go back. It would be something like a crime to dissipate the halo of romance and splendour which lives about it, as I know most certainly I should do if I read it over again. I daresay Mr St John was an estimable person in his day; but he could not have written one such story as that my memory so dimly, yet splendidly recalls, without having made himself immortal. In sober truth, I do not believe that any man, whatever, in any time or country, ever wrote a story quite as enthralling and as wonderful as I thought the *Mandans Revenge* to be. The curious part about this recollection to me is, not that I should have found so intense a joy in what was probably a very commonplace piece of hackwork, but that the faculty of reading at all was, as it were, sprung upon me, and that I remember clearly a feeling of surprise that I had not discovered this wonderful resource before. In effect, I said to myself, "This is the best thing I have yet encountered, and I am never going to do anything else, henceforward." Fortunately for myself, I have not quite kept that promise, though the printed page has never ceased to be a joy.

In my father's shop we sold not only such serious literature as the population cared to buy, but we dealt, too, in the ephemeral. Mr J. F. Smith wove stories for *Cassell's Illustrated Family Journal* and the *London Journal* which would have made the fortune of a modern man; and there was one writer in *Reynolds's Miscellany* who was most delightfully fertile in horrors. In one chapter he buried a nobleman alive in the family vault, and described his sensations in his coffin so poignantly that for weeks I was afraid to go to sleep lest I should dream about him. My father was an uncommonly well-read man; but he made no attempt to regulate my studies, except that now and then he would suggest to me that I was wasting time in the perusal of rubbish; and I do suppose that, as a boy, I read as much actually worthless stuff as anybody ever did within an equal time. But I do not know whether, after all, it matters very greatly what a child reads, so long as he has full and free access to the best of books.

Amongst my earliest literary treasures was a fat, close-printed volume, the binding of which had been torn away. I do not suppose it had ever been issued in the form of a single volume; but it contained *Roderick Random*, *Gil Blas*, *The Devil on Two Sticks* and *Zadig; or, the Book of Fate*, and it was my companion through many hundreds of delightful hours. It is both curious and touching to remember the innocence with which one's childish fancy ranged through those pages. I have not turned back to look at my old friend, Asmodeus, for a good many years; but there is one episode in the story of the unroofed city in which an artist is unable to take his mistress to a ball because she has no stockings, and the brilliant idea occurs to him that he should

paint a pair upon her legs. There is a special sly mention of the work upon the garter; and the whole business used to seem to me most magnificently comic. There was no more of a suggestion of an impropriety about it than there was about my breakfast bowl of bread and milk. It was just simply, innocently, and gloriously funny; and it has long been my belief that the time at which it is best that a reader should make acquaintance with our rather indelicate old classics is the time of innocence, when no grossness of suggestion has a meaning, though the mind is fully open to the reception of all the reader's own experience teaches him to understand.

I suppose I am going to say a Scythian sort of thing, but I do not remember any very keen or special pleasure in my first encounter with Shakespeare. Perhaps it came when I was too young; but at first the impression made upon me was certainly much inferior to that produced by Mr Percy B. St John, and he was only one of that assembly of wonder-workers of whom the nameless hacks of *Reynolds'* and *Bow Bells* were members. When it began to dawn upon me that the spell he exercised was of another kind, I cannot tell. I suppose that the conception of his greatness slowly expanded with the expanding mind; but I know that I had come to young manhood before any special sense of wonder dawned.

After that first discovery of the power to read at all, which came with the *Mandans Revenge*, the one salient thing in memory is the sudden finding of Carlyle's *Heroes* and *Sartor Resartus*. Some literary-minded compositor in my father's employ had placed the book in a rack of type-cases, and had apparently forgotten it. It bore on many pages the stamp of some Young Men's Christian Association in a Northern town, and my literary-minded compositor seems to have looted it. It was my most valued possession for some years. It was, no doubt, a very obvious duty to return it to the institution whose inscription it bore, but I do not think the idea ever presented itself to me.

How shall I speak of the extraordinary emotions which were excited in my mind at a chance opening of the pages at the first chapter of the *Sartor*? The hurling satire of the opening paragraph—the torch of learning having so illuminated every cranny and dog-hole in the universe that the creation of the world had now become no more mysterious than the making of a dumpling, though concerning this last there were still some to whom the question as to how the apples were got in presented an insoluble problem—this seized me with an amazement of pleasure. I do not mean to say a presumptuous thing at all; but it is a simple fact that from this first beginning of acquaintance with Carlyle, he never once appeared to teach me anything in the way of thought. I know he did so; I know that he profoundly coloured the fountains of my mind for many years; that long and long after the experience I am recording, I thought Carlyle, and wrote Carlyle; and that neither the thinking nor the literary mode could ever have occurred to me without his influence; but in my first reading of his pages, he seemed to be telling me things which were deeply implanted in my soul already. The truth about the matter is, probably, that he dominated me so completely that I did not think at all of domination. But all I know is, that I seemed suddenly to have found an unexpected and hitherto unimagined self. I leapt in transport to encounter a majestic Me; and in this impulse I can honestly aver that there was no tinge of vanity. I should say, rather, that it sprang from the utter humility of the disciple who instantly, absolutely, and unquestionably accepted the master's word. Be these things as they may, the Carlylean gospel came to me, not as a revelation of another's mind, but as an unveiling of a something which seemed to have been for ever my own, though until that great hour I had not dreamed of its possession.

I do not propose to make any immediate flight into sentiment. The thing for which I am trying is a genuine recollection of the way in which the growth of this emotion was marked within myself. Things are very much otherwise to-day; but nearly three-score years ago there was a certain purposed austerity practised by the most dutiful and praiseworthy parents, which froze the natural budding affections of a child. Before I had arrived at the technical age of manhood, my father had become the dearest friend I had in the world, and the friendship lasted till his death; but as a child I feared him. He was by nature as kindly a man as ever lived; but he had been bred in the old rigid Calvinistic creed of Scotland, and though I knew very well, in later years, how his heart had rebelled against him, he was, throughout my childhood and early youth, the embodiment of justice, certainly, so far as he could see it, but always of an apparently un pitying severity. Any judgment of his character based on the system of discipline in which he devoutly believed would have been false in the extreme, for the infliction of pain was actually abhorrent to him. I remember how, on scores of occasions, when I put him to the ordeal of administering a hiding to myself, his face would grow pale, and his hand would tremble.

Between my mother and myself there were none of those intimacies of affection which make life so happy to a child. The whole atmosphere of the house repelled love, and its whole principle seemed to be embodied in the belief that a child should think despitely of himself, and should repress all natural ebullitions of fondness or of gaiety. I have been trying hard to recall the surname of the boy to whom my heart first flowed out in a real affection, but memory fails me. He was a schoolfellow of mine, and I guess that he may have been of Scottish parentage, because his Christian name was Gavin. I can give no reason, at this time of day—nor ever in my maturer years have I been able to find a reason—why I should have loved that small contemporary as I did. I cannot say that he was conspicuously gifted in any way. He was certainly no Steerforth to my Copperfield, being neither distinguished for good looks, nor for brilliance at his schoolwork, nor for success in games.

It was at this time that there was an ebb in the family fortunes, and I was hastily taken away from a respectable private school in the High Street, and sent, as I have explained, to a big vulgar establishment a mile away, where a crowd of some three hundred lads attended, at a cost to their parents of threepence a week per head. I did not stay there long, but whilst I was kept there, by the strain on the family exchequer, I was very unhappy. It was in the midst of a sore-hearted loneliness that I encountered Gavin, who, to the best of my belief, was the son of a bargee who worked on the Worcester and Birmingham Canal. The impulse which took me towards him I have always regarded as one of the strangest, as it was undoubtedly one of the strongest, I have known. He and I were pretty much alike in age—somewhere between nine and ten we must have been—and we seemed to slide together like two separate rainspots which meet upon a window-pane in wet weather. We used to wander about the stony playground, from which every blade of grass was trampled, except in the remoter corners, and to walk with our arms about each other's shoulders, and to exchange

almost daily such trumpery schoolboy treasures as we owned. I never had a child sweetheart, and I never knew anybody with whom I exchanged a caress, or bartered a word of real kindness, until I fell in with this fascinating young ragamuffin. I never spoke about him to a soul, but he filled my thoughts night and day, and I was never happy out of his society. I am guilty of no exaggeration when I say that. The feeling I had towards him was, in its own time, so tender, so yearning, so complete in its absorption of my whole nature, that it stands altogether apart in my experience. And when, after a period of some six months, perhaps, the family fortunes revived a little, and I was restored once more to the society of my own social equals, I was broken-hearted at the thought of losing him.

The master of this rough school had a glimmering of the necessity for technical education, and on occasional afternoons a chosen number of us were drafted off into a big class-room to watch some craftsman working at his trade. One of these men set the whole class on fire with a spirit of emulation. He brought with him a number of medallions, a quantity of plaster-of-paris, a stick or two of common sulphur, and a small brazier, and he proceeded to show us how plaster casts were taken from his medallions. The first part of the process was to oil the surface of the medal, and to bind a strip of brown paper about its edge, so as to form a shallow little well. The next business was to melt enough of the sulphur to secure a cast of the medallion. This part of the process resulted in the production of a most appalling smell, which was not lessened in pungency when the odour of singed brown paper was added to that of melting sulphur. When the cast was cool it also was bound round with brown paper, and a compound of plaster-of-paris and water was poured over it. When this had hardened, behold! a snowy reproduction of the original medallion. We all went quite wild about this process, and when the workman filled in the hollowed head in the mould—it was a portrait of John Wesley—with the white preparation, very carefully, by the aid of a small spoon and a camel-hair pencil, we watched with wonder for the next development. The craftsman took a small quantity of chrome-yellow, and, having mixed it carefully with his creamy paste, poured it over the white stuff, so that in a few minutes we saw a snowy bas-relief of the great divine set on a golden-coloured background. From then until I left the school there was an actual fever for the making of plaster medallions, mainly from the heavy, half-effaced Bolton pennies which at that time were in circulation; and among those who were most devoted to this pursuit were my friend Gavin and myself.

We made casts by the dozen and the score, and when it was known definitely that I was leaving the school, he gave to me his *chef d'oeuvre*, in the shape of a reproduction in two colours of a medal which had been struck to commemorate the opening of the Crystal Palace in Hyde Park. There was a solemn understanding between us that I, likewise, should make a cast in two colours, and present it to my chum, and this was to be the symbol and token of an eternity of friendship. I took home the medal; I saved my infrequent pence for the purchase of materials; and one night, all being ready, I set to work to melt my sulphur in a cracked teacup in the kitchen oven. The whole family was assembled in that apartment, for the sitting-room was never used save upon unfrequent gala days, and before long there were sniffs of bewilderment and suspicion at the stench which began to fill the room. I had not thought of this, and I was afraid for the life of me to withdraw the teacup. It was a winter night, and a great fire was blazing on the hearth, so that it was no wonder when the cracked teacup burst asunder, and let out its contents on to the iron floor of the oven. Then there arose an odour of mere and perfect Tophet, and the room was filled with a sulphurous smoke. I confessed myself the author of the mischief by trying to bolt, and I suffered then and there. We were very near being driven entirely out of house and home that night, and I was very shy of reviving the experiment. But my promise lay upon my conscience like a cloud. I *had* to keep it. To fail in that would have been an unspeakable disloyalty, and very tremulously I made a new occasion when, as I fancied, the coast was clear. It was not so disastrous, in one respect, as the first, but the burning sulphur again betrayed me, and the very natural judgment was that I had been guilty of pure contumacy.

## CHAPTER IV

*A First View of London—Charles Dickens—The Photograph—On the Coach to Oxford—The Manuscript of Our Mutual Friend—An Unpublished Chapter—Dickens as Reader—The British Museum Reading Room.*

I worked in the ramshackle, bankrupt, old printing office at home until I was nearly eighteen years of age, and it was then decided to send me to London to complete my education in the business.

It is like an exhibition of the biograph, in which the scenes depicted go by at such a racing speed that it is difficult for the eye to follow them. There is an instantaneous vision of the old kitchen, seen at some abnormal unaccustomed hour of early morning in the winter-time. Three o'clock on the morning of January 3, 1865. A gas-lit scene of bustle and hurry. Gone. A minute's waiting in a snow-powdered road, carpet-bag in hand, and four-horsed coach ramping along with a frosty gleam of lamps. A jingle of harness, and an adventurous tooting from the guard's horn, as if a charge was being sounded. Gone. Snow Hill, Birmingham, all white and glistening. An extraordinary bustle and clamour. A phantasmagoria of strange faces and figures. Gone. A station all in darkness, but full of echoes and voices. Gone.

A buffet at Oxford, and an instantaneous glimpse of people scalding their throats with an intolerable decoction called coffee extract. The figure of an imperious guard with a waving lamp. The vision of a stampede. Gone. Then an interlude of sleep, during which an orchestra plays dream music, with a roll, roll, roll of wheels as a musical groundwork to the theme. Then Paddington, in a fog—a real London particular, now for the first time seen, felt, tasted, sneezed at, coughed at, wept over. Distracted biographic figures rampant everywhere. Gone. A vision of streets, populous, and full of movement, but half-invisible in a pea-soup haze, through which the gas that takes the place of daylight most ineffectually glimmers. Gone. Then a room, still gas-lit when it should be broad day; a table spread with napery none too clean; a landlady in a

dressing-gown and curl-papers; and breakfast. The biograph ceases to whirl by at its original speed, and I can take breath here, and can begin to analyse myself and my own surroundings.

To begin with, this is London; and to continue, I don't think much of it. This is a London egg, and this is London bacon, and this exiguous liquid which "laves the milk-jug with celestial blue" is London milk. All the flavours are strange. The atmosphere is strange. The sight of a lady in curlpapers at 10 a.m. is strange.

Now, in setting down all these things, I begin to take new notice of a fact which has long been familiar to me. It has been expressed by more than one poet, and the reason for it may be found in the works of more than one man of science; but the fact itself is that every one of these cinemato-graphical exercises is associated with a special odour. These special odours have each one so often recurred that they have driven home certain memories in such wise as to make them stick. The fire in the old home kitchen had been "raked" as we used to say in South Staffordshire, overnight, and it gave forth a scent of smouldering ash which, whenever and wherever I have encountered it, has not failed to bring back the scene in which I smelt it first. There is an odour less easy to define, but just as easy to recognise, in the air of the morning street; in the reek of horse and harness going up Snow Hill; in a mingling of wet rot and dry rot in the station; in the acrid, faintly-tinctured coffee smell at Oxford; in the scent of a London fog, or the fragrance of a London egg—any one of which will infallibly take me back to the scene and the time at which it was first perceived.

This, however, is an after-reflection; and here am I in London for the first time as a free man, and, to my own mind, master of my destiny. It really seems at moments as if one might pat it into any form one chose; and it really seems at times as if one were an insect without wings at the bottom of some unfathomable cranny. The fog of my first week in London is, I believe, historic, and its five or six days of tearful blindness and catarrh began to look as if they would reach to the very crack of doom. Those fog-bound days, in which it was impossible for a Midland-bred stranger to stray ten yards from his own door without hopelessly losing himself, are amongst the most despondent and mournful of my life. But, on a sudden, the dawning day revealed to me the other side of the street in an air as crisp, clear, and invigorating as the heart of any youngster, inured to the smoke of the Black Country, could wish for. Then what a joy it was to walk about amongst the bustling crowds, reading stories in the faces of the passers-by, and identifying scores and hundreds of people with the creatures of the great fiction writers. Above all, the people whose life-long friendship we owe to the works of Charles Dickens declared themselves. I lived off the Goswell Road, and that fact alone predisposed me to recognise Mr Pickwick in any spectacled, well-fleshed old gentleman of benevolent aspect. I tumbled across Sam Weller constantly. I was quite certain as to the living personality of one of the Cheeryble twins. When I knew him he was a tailor in Cheapside. It was merely by the accident of time that the shadows I identified with living men had assumed a dress dissimilar to that of the early Victorian era, and I think I may honestly say that for a month or two, at least, my London was mainly peopled by the creations of the author of *Pickwick*, *Little Dorrit*, and *Dombey*.

I never exchanged a word with Dickens in my life; but at this period, by some extraordinary chance, I met him twice. I knew his personal aspect well, for I had heard him read his own works in Birmingham. I was, indeed, a unit in the packed audience which greeted his very first professional appearance as a platform exponent of his own pages. That event took place at the old Broad Street Music Hall in Birmingham, a building which was superseded by the Prince of Wales' Theatre. It was not easy to mistake so characteristic a figure for that of any other man living.

There used to be in Cheapside, at the time of which I write, a window in which the Stereoscopic Company exhibited the latest achievements in photography; and it was my custom, in the dinner hour, to spend some odd minutes in front of this display. I was impressed one day by a new life-sized portrait of Dickens, an enlargement by a process then quite novel. The hair and beard, I remember, had a look of being made out of telegraph wire; but the features were quite natural and unexaggerated. I had taken a good look at the picture, and had, indeed, so firmly fixed it in my mind that I can positively see it now, and could, if I were artist enough, reproduce it; when, having an unoccupied quarter of an hour still on my hands, I turned to stroll towards St Paul's Churchyard, and there, at my elbow, stood the original of the picture. He was looking at it with his head a little thrown back, and somewhat set on one side, and his look was very keen and critical. I gave a start which attracted his attention, and, in the extremity of my surprise, I am afraid that I stared at him rather rudely. I looked back at the photograph, and I looked back at the living face of the great master of tears and laughter, who was then my reigning deity. I can only suppose that my face was full of a foolish wonder and worship, for when I had looked from Dickens to the portrait again, and then back to Dickens, the great man laughed, and gave me a little comic affirmative nod, as much as to say: "It is so, my young friend." With that he turned briskly, and walked away along Cheapside, leaving me wonder-stricken at what was not, perhaps, so very wonderful an adventure after all.

I rubbed shoulders with the great man again, within a month or two, on a coach which travelled from Thame to Oxford. I climbed that coach on purpose to enjoy the privilege of sitting next to him. He had a travelling companion, who was nursing between his knees quite a little stack of walking-sticks and umbrellas, and I overheard a brief colloquy between him and Dickens.

"Charles," said the man with the bundle, "why don't you have your name engraved on these?"

"Good God!" said Dickens, in a tone of almost querulous indignation. "Isn't it bad enough already?"

One can well believe that the poor great man found it hard to get about England without being stared at, and pointed out and run after; and we know, from his own pen, that outside his public hours he had a self-respecting passion for privacy.

I came into contact with Dickens in a far different way in the course of that spring. It is a little boast of mine that I was the first person in the world to make acquaintance with Silas Wegg and Nicodemus Boffin and Mr. Venus. My name-father, David Christie, was chief reader at Clowes' printing office in Stamford Street, Blackfriars, and month by month as the proofs of *Our Mutual Friend* were printed, it was his habit to borrow the Dickens manuscript from Mr Day, the overseer of the establishment, and to take it home with him for his own delectation before it reached the hands of the compositors. On each occasion, until I left London behind me, Christie would wire me always in the same phrase: "Dickens is here," and I would go down to his

lodgings in Duke Street and would read aloud to him the work fresh from the master's hand. It was written on long ruled foolscap on rather darkish blue paper in a pale blue ink, and it needed young eyes to decipher it. There were only a few of such nights, but the enjoyment of them remains as a remembrance. I shall never forget how he laughed over Mr Wegg's earlier lapses into poetry:

“And my elder brother leaned upon his sword, Mr Boffin, And wiped away a tear, Sir.”

Hereabouts befell the first tragedy of my life. In his time Christie had been “reader's” boy at Ballantyne's, in Edinburgh, and in that capacity he had laid hands with a jackdaw assiduity on every scrap of literary interest which he could secure. He had proof sheets corrected by the hands of every notable man of his time. He had been engaged for at least fifty years in making his collection, and he kept it all loosely tumbled together in a big chest, which he used to tell me would become my property on the occasion of his death. Amongst other treasures, I remember the first uncorrected proofs of *Marmion* and a manuscript play by Sheridan Knowles.

When Christie died I was in Ireland, and on my return to London I discovered that the whole collection had been sold to a butterman as waste-paper at a farthing per pound. There was one literary relic, however, of inestimable value; it consisted of an unpublished chapter in *Our Mutual Friend*, in which the golden dustman was killed by Silas Wegg. Dickens excised this chapter, had the type broken up, and all the proofs, with the exception of this unique survival, were destroyed. I am not ashamed to confess that when I got back to London and learned the fate which had befallen my old friend's collection, I had a bitter cry over it, which lasted me a good two hours. Christie was a very accomplished man, and was on terms of friendly correspondence with most writers of his time.

I think that first and last I heard Charles Dickens in everything he read in public. What an amazing artist he was in this direction can be realised only by those who heard him. A great actor is always a legend. In these days he may leave something behind him by means of the phonograph and science may yet contrive such an exhibition of facial display and gesture as will enable those who come after us to appreciate his greatness, but in a few years at the utmost, the last man who sat spellbound under the magic of the Dickens personality will have vanished from the face of the earth and nothing but a record will be left.

He depended, as I remember, in a most extraordinary degree upon the temper of his audience. I have heard him read downright flatly and badly to an unresponsive house, and I have seen him vivified and quickened to the most extraordinary display of genius by an audience of the opposite kind. The first occasion on which he ever read for his own profit was in the old Broad Street Music Hall at Birmingham, which for many years now has been known as the Prince of Wales' Theatre. There is so little that is subtle about his work as a writer that it was surprising to find what an illumination he sometimes cast over passages in his work. For example, in his reading of the *Christmas Carol*, there was one astonishing little episode where the ghost of Jacob Marley first appears to Scrooge. “The dying fire leapt up as if it cried: I know him—Marley's ghost.” The unexpected wild vehemence and weirdness of it were striking in the extreme. He peopled a whole stage sometimes in his best hours, and his Sykes and Fagin, his Claypole and Nancy, were all as real and as individual as if the parts had been sustained by separate performers, and each one a creature of genius. Who that saw it could forget the clod-pated glutton, with the huge imaginary sandwich and the great clasp knife in his hands, bolting the bulging morsel in the midst of the torrent of Fagin's instructions, and complaining “that a man got no time to eat his victuals in that house.” Concerning the scene between Sykes and Nancy, Charles Dickens the younger told me a curious story, at the time when I was writing for him on *All the Year Round*. They were living at Gad's Hill, and it was the novelist's practice to rehearse in a grove at the bottom of a big field behind the house. Nobody knew of this practice until one day the younger Charles heard sounds of violent threatening in a gruff, manly voice, and shrill calls of appeal rising in answer, and thinking that murder was being done, he unfastened a great household mastiff and raced along the field to find the tragedy of Sykes and Nancy in full swing.

I am afraid that like most newly emancipated lads I used my freedom in many foolish ways; but most of them were harmless, and some of my truanacies from work were even useful to me. Do what I would, I could not find the strength of will to go and pick up types in a frowsy printing office when the picture-gazing fit was on me; and many a time I shirked my duties for the vicious pleasure of a long day's intercourse with Turner in the National Gallery, or for a lingering stroll amongst the marbles at the Museum. One never-to-be forgotten day, my old name-father, David Christie, lent me a reader's ticket, and I found myself for the first time in that central citadel of books, the Museum Library. I went in gaily, with a heart full of ardour; but as I looked about me my spirits fell to zero. I knew that what I saw in the storied shelves which run round the walls, under the big glass dome, made but a little part of the vast collection stored away below and around them; and the impossibility of making even a surface acquaintance with that which lay in sight came strongly home to me.

## CHAPTER V

*I Enlist—St George's Barracks—The Recruits—From Bristol to Cork—Sergeants—The Bounty and the Free Kit—Life in the Army—My Discharge—A Sweet Revenge.*

I am not very good at dates, but there are a few which I can recall with unflinching accuracy. On 25th May 1865, whilst I was staring at one of the sunlit fountains in Trafalgar Square, and listening to the bells of Westminster as they chimed the hour of four, a venerable old spider in a blue uniform with brass buttons, and a triple chevron of gold lace upon his arm, accosted me without introduction and asked me what I thought about life in the Army. Until then, so far as I can remember, I had never thought about the Army at all. My eighteenth birthday was just one month and twelve days behind me; I had one and sevenpence in the wide world; I was smoking the last cigar of an expensive box, in the purchase of which I had not been justified by

the means at my disposal; and I was in mortal terror of my landlady. It had been discovered at the printing office of Messrs Unwin Bros., at which I had been engaged as an "improver," that I had no regular indentures, and I had been thrown upon a merely casual employment amongst as undesirable and as hopeless a set as could have been found at that time in my trade in London. Apart from all these considerations, the world had come to an end because a certain young lady, who, to the best of my belief, is still alive, and a prosperous and happy grandmother, had unequivocally declined to marry me. The blue-clad spider had no need to spread the web of temptation. I resolved in an instant, and he and I adjourned to a backyard somewhere in the neighbourhood, for which I have long since sought in vain. I rather fancy that the wide spaces of Northumberland Avenue have displaced it; but, in any case, the route we took led us towards the river, the smell of which comes back to my nostrils at the moment at which I write, with a queer mingled suggestion of sludge, and sunlight, and sewage.

In that backyard I was put to a sort of mild ordeal by question. Was I married? Was I an apprentice? Had I ever been refused for either of Her Majesty's Services on account of any physical defect? Was I aware of any such defect as would debar me from service? Had I ever been convicted of any crime or misdemeanour? To all these queries I was able to answer in the negative; but, whilst the solemn interrogation was going on, a young man with his head full of flour, and his hands and arms covered with little spirals and pills of dough, appeared at the top of a neighbouring wall. "Don't you believe a word of what that cove is telling you," he counselled, and so disappeared, in obedience to a rather urgent gesture from the blue old spider. I took the shilling, and the spider hinting that a dry bargain was likely to prove a bad bargain, I expended it in two glasses of sherry at some neighbouring "wine shade," to which he conducted me—the sort of institution which the Bodega Company has very advantageously superseded. It was a dirty place, with rotting sawdust on the floor, and little hollows beaten into the pewter counter, in which were small lakes of stale wasted liquors of various kinds; and the smell of it, also, is in my nostrils as I write. I was instructed to present myself at St George's Barracks, Westminster, at eleven o'clock on the following morning, and was told that if I failed in that respect I should become in the eye of the law a rogue and vagabond, and should be liable to summary indictment. I was dressed in my best, because I was going out to tea that evening with an old family friend in the Haymarket, a picture-restorer, whose shop and studio were next door to the old Hay-market Theatre. My host told me that at the very last appearance of Madame Goldschmit (Jenny Lind, the Swedish Nightingale), he had sat at his open window, and had heard her sing as clearly as if he had been one of a paying audience who spent anything from a hundred pounds to a guinea to enjoy that privilege; and I can well believe him, because I heard easily the quaint chuckle of old Buckstone's voice through the open windows of the studio. I am not sure at this distance of time, but I think he was then playing the part of Asa Trenchard, with Sothern, in *Dundreary Married and Done For*.

I got home that night without any interview with the dreaded landlady, and made a bolt very early in the morning, leaving books, pictures, and wardrobe to solve my bill. That night I slept in the great London depot barracks. I know perhaps as well as anybody how Tommy Atkins has improved in character and conduct since those days, but I can aver that never before or since have I encountered a crew so wholly shameless and abominable as I found that night at St George's, Westminster. It is not a pretty thing to be the only decently bred and sober man amongst a howling crowd of yokel drunkards, whose every phrase is built on a foundation of hitherto unconceived obscenities. The night was enough; and, with three half-crowns in my pocket, paid to me as subsistence money for the three days ensuing between that date and the date of my departure, I betook myself to a common lodging-house, and lived in comparative decency. Some score of us, or perhaps a dozen, went up together for surgical examination, and were made to strip stark naked in each other's presence. I had never objected to this amongst my own kind and kindred, when one exposed one's nudity by the side of the clean brook or yellow canal in which we used to bathe in boyhood; but amongst this crew it was hard, and even terrible. We had all been bathed, perforce, before the medical examination began; but a mere tubbing does not cleanse the mind or tongue, and I loathed alike the ceremony itself and the men amongst whom I was forced to submit to it.

We marched through the London streets to Paddington, and I, having ingratiated the sergeant who escorted us by a drink or two, was permitted to walk by his side, whilst the ragged, semi-drunken contingent went rolling and cursing ahead. We embarked for Bristol, and there spent a night at the Gloucester Barracks, where a cross-grained old sergeant, who had vainly tempted me to sell my clothes, and to exchange them for a suit of rags, compelled me to carry endless loads of coals up endless flights of stairs. He began his intercourse with me by addressing me in Greek, of which language I knew nothing; and he followed it with a dog-French which, ignorant as I was, I was able to detect. In the morning we were taken aboard the paddleship *Appollo*, bound for Cork, and I am in debt to the chief officer of that craft for the advice he gave me. "It's the ambition of these beggars," he said, intending thereby the convoying sergeants, "to land any decent chap at the barracks looking like a scarecrow. There's a good half of them no better than dealers in old clothes. You take my advice: go to your regiment looking like a gentleman. When you get your regimentals, you can sell your civilian clothes for twice as much as these sharks would give you." I followed the advice thus given, and I had reason to be grateful to the adviser.

The drunken, howling, cursing, foolish contingent with which I started were scattered far and wide from the Catshill Barracks at Cork, and I travelled thence under the care of a sedate old sergeant to Cahir, in Tipperary. The sergeant was talkative and friendly, but I paid little heed to him, for it was here, if I mistake not, that the joy of landscape first entered into my soul. I have an impression only of an abounding green and blue in general, but one or two stopping-points are as clear in my mind as if I had seen them yesterday. Amongst them is some old grey stone bridge near Limerick, where the train slowed down and my Irish companion—Limerick born and bred, and rejoicing to show his own country to a landscape lover—declared that he had travelled almost dry-shod over the backs of the salmon which once thronged along that river. I had my doubts at the moment as to the literal truth of this statement, and I am not quite sure that I do not nurse them still. Anyhow, the country struck me with that deceptive sense of fruitfulness which besets every Englishman on his first travels into the fertile districts of Ireland; and partly, perhaps, because I was half a Celt to begin with, the "wearing of the green" became then and there a symbol in my mind.

Finally, at the end of a fairly long day's run—for the cheaper kind of train travelled slowly in those days—

the conveying sergeant and I were dumped down at the station at Cahir, which had not yet become celebrated in that gorgeous fiction which was woven about it in later years by the claimant to the Tichborne estates. Night was falling as we tramped through the village, and on the road beyond we came across the ghostly shell of an old castle, standing, I think, in the Byrne demesne, which was packed full of jackdaws, who had caught one or two human phrases from some half-Christianised member of their fellowship, and who woke the echoes in answer to our footsteps with a hundred semi-human cries. They had only a phrase or two amongst them, but they gave one clearly the impression that they represented a Babylonian crowd intent on insurrection.

I was passed from one sergeant to another in the course of my transfer from St George's Barracks to Clare in the county Tipperary, and there was not one of them who did not try to induce me to change a reputable garb for a set of garments that would have done justice to a scare-crow.

The contingent with which I was shipped from Bristol to Cork composed as ribald and foul-mouthed a crew as I remember to have seen, and long before I assumed Her Majesty's uniform, I was sickened of the enterprise on which I had embarked. I think I am justified in saying that I was instrumental in bringing about one great and much needed reform. In those days, the recruit on enlistment was supposed to receive a bounty and a free kit; as the thing was worked out by the regimental quartermaster, he never saw one or the other. He had served out to him on his arrival at his depot a set of obsolete garments which he was forbidden to wear and was compelled to return to stores, when a new outfit at his own cost had been supplied to him. My gorge rose at this bare-faced iniquity, and as a protest against it, I attired myself on my first Sunday in barracks in the clothes which had been fraudulently assigned to me, and joined the regiment on church parade. I suppose no soldier had been so attired since Waterloo, and my appearance was the signal for a roar of laughter in which men and officers alike joined, and which was not extinguished until I had been ignominiously hustled back to quarters. In the Fourth Royal Irish Dragoon Guards at least, I know myself to have been the last man whom the wicked system attempted to pillage in that fashion. As a matter of course, I was marked from that moment.

People who have a practical knowledge of modern Army life tell me that things have changed altogether for the better since those far bygone days of 1865; and I am disposed to believe that no such shameless swindles as were then perpetrated could possibly continue for a week under existing conditions. A Press which makes us familiar with all sorts of grievances, and an inquiring Parliamentarian or two, would provide a short shrift and a long rope for the perpetrator of any such bare-faced robbery as I suffered under when I first joined the Fourth Royal Irish Dragoon Guards. The motive of my enlistment had no remotest connection with the bounty offered. I joined the Army simply out of that green-sickness of the mind from which so many young men suffer, and some nebulous notions of heroism in falling against a savage foe in some place not geographically defined. But in the printed terms of the agreement which I signed it was promised that I should receive a three pound bounty and a free kit. As a matter of fact, I received neither one nor the other. I was served out, as I have stated, with an absolutely obsolete uniform, which I was forbidden to wear, and my bounty was impounded to pay for regulation clothing.

This initial struggle made me from the first a personage of mark in the regiment; for when I was summoned to my first parade, I had deliberately donned the clothes which had been dealt out to me from the quartermaster's stores, and presented myself to public view in a uniform which had probably been seen on no parade ground in England since Her late Majesty's accession to the throne. It was a sufficiently solemn proceeding on my own part, for I was warned that I was being guilty of a military misdemeanour of the gravest sort. But if the thing was serious to me, it was a matter of rejoicing comedy—or even, if you like, of screaming farce—to the troops who were paraded for church that Sunday morning. Men fairly shrieked with laughter at the sight of the old Kilmarnock cap, the ridiculous tailed jacket, and the rough shoddy trousers bagging at the seat. The officers made an attempt at decorum which was not too successful; and I was hustled from the ground, and escorted to the guard-room, for the high crime and misdemeanour of presuming to appear in the clothes which had officially been served out to me. I appeared at the orderly-room next morning, and underwent a severe wiggling from the officer who was in temporary command of the regiment; but the incident was mercifully allowed to close with a mere reprimand. It did a little good, perhaps, for I never knew any other recruit to be served out with an utterly obsolete and useless kit so long as I remained with the regiment; but, until the hour at which my discharge was purchased, I was taught that it was not conducive to personal comfort to rebel against any form of tyranny and extortion which might be condoned by tradition in the Army.

Honestly, I do not think that I look with a jaundiced eye upon my remembrances of that most unhappy time, but, as I remember, to have had an education a little better than that of the average ploughman, and to show an inclination to be smart and quick at duty, was a certain passport to the hostility of the non-commissioned officers of the time. They regarded themselves, as I am now inclined to fancy, as a sort of close corporation, and I cannot help thinking that they felt it a kind of duty to themselves to repress the ambitions of any youngster who seemed likely to be marked for promotion. A mere recruit, who had not yet learned the simple mysteries of the goose-step, had registered an objection to being robbed at the outset of his career, and had thereby revealed himself as a person of dangerous ideas which, if pursued to their ultimate, would make an end of all manner of illegitimate profits; and I am not careful to suggest that any special aptitude for a soldier's life on my own part was responsible for the dead set which was made at me by all the non-coms, of the regiment. There was one troop-sergeant-major, as already stated, who was currently known throughout the corps as The Pig. A furious and determined attempt was made upon his life by a man named Lovell, who was sent to a military convict prison for twelve years, if I remember rightly. Now, I have never heard of any ordinarily decent officer, commissioned or non-commissioned, being assaulted by a subordinate; and the civilian observer of Army life may be assured that, almost without exception, whenever that kind of thing occurs, petty tyrannies and intermeddlings on the part of the superior are answerable for it. I met this particular man on one occasion only. I suppose that I had been pointed out to him as the young insubordinate who had dared to trespass on tradition by wearing the clothes served out to him. He stopped me in the middle of the barrack square at Cahir, and offered me a solemn warning: "You go on as you've begun, young man, and we'll make life hell to you." I do not claim that I am in any special sense a lover of justice, but I

know that my gorge rose less at the sense of personal injury, than against a scheme of organised robbery; but, luckily for myself, I refrained from answer, and passed on.

Every man had his nickname in the regiment, and I was christened Oxford. I was on stable sentry duty at some idle high noon of mid-summer, and a playful chum of mine, whose name was Barlow, laid a little trap for me. "Oxford," says he, "who do you think is the ugliest beggar in the regiment?" I answered, without hesitation, "Sergeant So-and-So;" and Sergeant So-and-So was at that very moment coming—miching mallecho—through the stables. He heard both the question and the answer, and he was naturally displeased. From that hour whatever chance I might have had of a peaceful life in the regiment disappeared. The non-coms, began to lay plots against me, and I recall one day in particular, after weeks of rain, during which the horses' legs had been thickening for want of exercise, we got out into a very muddy ménage with what we called the "young horse ride." I was mounted on a most unmanageable, untrained beast, and before the work was over he was in a lather from nose to tail, and I was encased in mud from the spur to the chrome-yellowed button on the top of my forage cap. It was the custom, after having unsaddled one's mount, to pass a hasty oil-rag over bit and bridoon and stirrups, and then to fall to upon the grooming of the horse. My ugly sergeant had found a collaborateur, who wanted to know what the blank blank I meant by leaving my horse to shiver in the cold whilst I loitered about this customary duty. I set to work upon the horse at once, and, as the collaborating sergeant disappeared at one stable door, my ugly friend turned up at the other, wanting to know why the blank blank I had not oiled my stirrup irons. I took up the discarded oil-rag with all activity; the ugly man vanished, and his collaborateur appeared at the door on the other side of the stables. "Now, didn't I tell you not to let your horse catch cold?" said he. "Haven't you the brains to go and groom him?" I had learned long since the wisdom of silence, and I began to groom with a will. When my ugly friend once more appeared with a command "to the stirrup irons;" back I went, forboding the disaster which swiftly came. The accommodating friend of the ugly man swooped down, and I was haled before the officer on duty on a charge of having thrice neglected to obey a given order. But the colonel of our regiment, the late Sir Charles Cameron Shute, since then for many years Member for Brighton, was at headquarters. He was a good deal of a martinet, but he was justice incarnate. I told my story, and I offered him my witnesses. His word to me was a simple right-about-face and march; but, as I put on my forage cap in the anteroom, I heard him thundering at the accusing sergeants to the effect that he would not have his recruits bullied, that he would not endure to have plots laid against them, and that on any repetition of the manouvre now exposed, he would break the pair of them, and return them to the ranks.

And here occurs what is to me a very curious reminiscence. A dear old great-aunt of mine had purchased my discharge, and had furnished me with money to go home. We were then stationed at Ballincollig, in County Cork, and I had secured a suit of civilian toggery from a Cork tailor. I was waiting for the jaunting car which was to carry me to town, when my ugly friend heaved in sight, and, finding a man in civilian dress with the undeniable air of the barrack-yard upon him, and being, as I guess, a little short-sighted, he saluted me as he would have saluted an officer in passing. Discovering his error, he was very angry, and he began to cite all the pains and penalties to which a man was liable who smoked a cigar within a given distance of some powder-magazine which then existed there. When I had pointed out to him the fact that I was twenty yards beyond the limit, I promised him, with all the sincerity of youth, that whenever and wherever I might meet him in civil life, I would do my honest best to give him a hiding for the twelve months of misery he had caused me. It was years before I saw him again, and he did not know me. I had grown a beard, and an increasing shortness of sight had forced me to the use of an eyeglass. He was a commissionaire at some glassworks which stand opposite to the offices of a journal with which I have been now intimately concerned for some years. I hailed him by name, and asked him why he had left his old regiment. He told me that he was suffering from hernia and pulmonary consumption; and when I left the place, after seeing the picture on glass which I had been invited to view, I enjoyed the sweetest vengeance of my lifetime in tipping the ex-sergeant half-a-crown, and in leaving him without any disclosure of my own identity.

## CHAPTER VI

*Towards Journalism—Dr Kenealy as Parliamentary Candidate—  
The Wednesday Advertiser—George Dawson—The First  
Private Execution—Misprints—The Black Country Sixty Years  
Ago—Aunt Rachael—Old Servants—Local Poets—Mining  
Dangers.*

I suppose that I should have gravitated into journalism in any case; but it was poor old Dr Kenealy, who was afterwards famous as the intrepid, if ill-tempered, counsel for the Tichborne Claimant, who gave me my first active impulse towards the business. The Borough of Wednesday had just been created, and my own native parish was a part of it. The Liberals chose as their candidate one Brogden, who had been unseated for bribery at Yarmouth, a fact in his history which did much to enliven trade amongst the local fishmongers, the bloater becoming, as it were, the Tory ensign in all processions and in all public meetings at which the Liberal candidate addressed his future constituents. Two or three men, who afterwards became well known, nibbled at the constituency, and went away again. Among them were the late Samuel Waddy, Q.C., and Mr Commissioner Kerr, who issued an electioneering address of astonishing prolixity, prefacing it with the statement that he had no time to be brief. But Brogden's only real opponent was poor old Kenealy. There was, of course, a Conservative candidate in the field; and, rightly or wrongly, it was said that Kenealy had been brought down in his interest to split the Liberal vote.

I found the doctor one night addressing a mere handful of people in a vast building which would have accommodated two or three hundred for every unit he had before him. That was the first occasion in my life on which I wore a dress suit; and amidst the unwashed, coally-flannelled handful, I daresay that my expanse



of shirt front, and the flower in my buttonhole, made me conspicuous. I was a red-hot Liberal in those days, for no better reason, probably, than that my father held that form of creed, and I was quite persuaded that Kenealy was a paid impostor. So when, in that raucous voice of his, he said, "I love the working man," I answered from below with a cry of "Bunkum, doctor, bunkum." The doctor paused and looked at me, but said nothing at the moment. By and by he flowed on: "When I go to the poll with ten thousand of the working men of this constituency behind me," and I chimed in with a cry of "When, doctor, when?" This time the orator fixed my flint, as the Americans used to say. He surveyed me from top to toe, and he said quietly, and in a tone of deep commiseration: "I pity that drunken blackguard." My first impulse was to spring upon the platform, and to throw the speaker from it; but it was so obvious that I could not clear myself of the imputation cast upon me in that way that I surrendered the idea in the very instant in which it occurred to me. I searched in my own mind for a retort, but I searched in vain; and I spent a good part of that night in the invention of scorching phrases. But the exercise afforded me no relief, and on the following day I sat down and wrote my first newspaper article. We had in our new-made borough, in those days, one ineffective, inoffensive little weekly journal called the *Wednesbury Advertiser*, and I posted my article to the editor, who, as much to my surprise as my delight, printed it in all the glory of leaded type. I believe I was under the impression that it would kill Kenealy; but, as all the world knows, the poor man survived for years, and died from wholly different causes. That was the determining incident in my career, and for months afterwards I wrote the *Advertisers* leaders without any sort of agreement, and without receipt or expectation of any kind of pay. It is not because I imagine my work to have been exceptionally brilliant that I am disposed to think that I must have seemed a sort of heaven-sent blessing to my editor (whom I do not remember, by the way, ever to have seen); but at least I did a good share of his work for nothing. I have addressed larger audiences since then; but I have certainly never been puffed up with such a sense of my own power and value as I had in writing those pompous, boyish essays, in which I trounced Disraeli, and instructed Gladstone and the chairman of the local Board of Guardians in the art of administration.

I have always held that there is no training for a novelist like that of a journalist. The man who intends to write books describing life can hardly begin better than by plunging into that boiling, bubbling, seething cauldron called journalism. The working journalist is found everywhere. Is there a man to be hanged?—the working journalist is present. Exhibitions, processions, coronations, wars, whatever may be going on, wherever the interest of life is richest and the pulse beats fastest, there you find the working journalist. There is no experience in the world which really qualifies a man to take a broad, a sane, an equable view of life in such a degree as journalism.

When first I joined the Press, I took a berth as junior reporter at 25s. per week. I went to George Dawson—one of the highest types of men I have ever known, but one who was a born idle man and loved to talk and talk, and so left no record of himself—I went to dear old Dawson and said, "You are starting a journal, and I want to be on it." What is the bottom rung of the ladder? Well, my work was to report police court cases and inquests. I do not know of a lower rung. I had ambitions and ideas of my own, but I went for whatever came in my way, and I have not repented it until this day, although a good opening into business life awaited me if I chose to accept it in preference.

Almost the first "big thing" I recall in my experience was the first private execution which took place in the English provinces. It was at Worcester, when a man named Edmund Hughes, plasterer's labourer, was hanged for the murder of his wife. I have often thought that if that man's story had only been rightly told, if there had only been a modern Shakespeare round about, there was the making of a new tragedy of Othello in it. His wife had run away with her paramour no fewer than three times, and each time he had followed her and fetched her back. But the last time she refused to come back and cruelly mocked him. He left her, saying that he would see her once again. He borrowed a razor from a friend, went to the place, and nearly severed her head from her body.

Well, I went to see that man hanged. I had never seen anyone die before, and such a thing as death by violence was altogether strange to me. I was told to apply to the sheriff for permission to be present at the execution. I devoutly hoped that permission would be refused, but it was not. I shall not forget the sensation that overcame me as I left the gaol on the night before the man was to be hanged. It was wintry weather and a storm was breaking. The sky seemed, in fact, to be racked with the storm clouds. But through them there was one open space with one bright star visible. That star seemed to carry a promise of something beyond, and I went away somewhat uplifted, though sick and sorry notwithstanding.

When I went to the prison next day I, for the first time, bottomed the depths of human stupidity. The wretched man was pinioned and led up to the scaffold. I pray God I may never see such a sight again. The man was just one shake of horror. The prison chaplain, who had primed himself rather too freely with brandy—it was his first experience of this duty—walked in front of the prisoner reciting the "Prayers for the Dead." The poor condemned wretch, who was gabbling one sentence without ceasing, and who was so terribly afraid as to be cognisant of nothing save the fact that he *was* afraid, had nineteen creaking black steps, newly-tarred, to mount on reaching the scaffold. He turned to the warder and muttered "I can't get up," but the latter slapped him on the back with the utmost *bonhomie*, and said, "You'll get up all right." He did get up and they hanged him. On the evening of the same day I read the amazing proclamation in the evening papers that "the prisoner met his fate with fortitude." Yet I never in my life saw anything so utterly abject as that man's terror. I have since then come to the belief that the average man has learned the measure of expression of emotion by what he sees in the theatre. In the theatre a man has to make his emotions visible and audible to a large number of people. But in real life deep emotion is silent—I have always found it so. This was my first lesson in this particular direction, and I came to the conclusion that the average observer has no faculty for reading the expression of human emotion at all. Only for the sake of that reflection have I ventured upon this really gruesome story.

Somewhere about this time there appeared in Birmingham the first illustrated provincial newspaper ever issued in England. It was called the *Illustrated Midland News*, and its editor-in-chief was Mr Joseph Hatton. France and Germany were at death-grips with each other, and I wrote many sets of war verses for the new venture, and made something like the beginning of a name. It was at this time that I first experienced an

agony which has since recurred so often that by dint of mere repetition it has worn itself away to nothing. I encountered my first misprint, a thing bad enough, in all conscience, to the mere prose-writer, but to the ardent youngster who really believes himself to be adding to the world's store of poetry, a thing wholly intolerable and beyond the reach of words. Brooding over the slaughtered thousands of Sedan, I wrote what, at the time, I conceived to be a poem.

I can recall now but a single verse of it, and that, I presume, is kept in mind only by the misprint which blistered every nerve of me for weeks. The verse ran thus:—

*"O! pity, shame, and crime unspeakable!  
Let fall the curtain, hide the ghastly show,  
Yet may these horrors one stern lesson tell,  
Ere the slain ranks to dull oblivion go.  
These lives are counted, the Avenger waits,  
His feet are heard already at the gates."*

And, as I am a living sinner, some criminal compositor stuck in an "n" for a "v," and made the stern lesson appear to exist in the fact that "these lines" were counted. I used to wake up at night to think of things to say to that compositor if ever I should meet him, and to the printer's reader who passed his abominable blunder. The most indurated professional writer who takes any interest in his work likes it to appear before the public without this kind of disfigurement; but it is only the beginner who experiences the full fury of pain a misprint can inflict, and I think that even the beginner must be a poet to know all about it.

Talking of misprints carries my mind at least a year farther forward than I should just yet allow it to travel. Mr Edmund Yates, who was at that time on a lecture tour in America, brought a story he was then writing for the *Birmingham Morning News*, under the title of "A Bad Lot," to a rather sudden and unexpected conclusion, and I was suddenly commissioned, in the emergency, to follow him with a novel. I wrote a first instalment on the day on which the task was offered me; but I had no experience, and no notion of a plot, and before I was through with the business, I had so entangled my characters that my only way out of the imbroglio I had myself created was to send every man Jack and woman Jill of them, with the exception of the hero and the heroine, to the bottom of a coal mine, where I comfortably drowned them all. In the last chapter my hero asked the lady of his heart, "Are there no troubles now?" and the lady of his heart responded, "Not one, dear Frank, not one." And then I wrote, very neatly, and in brackets, the words, "White Line," a professional instruction to leave the space of one line blank between the foregoing and the following paragraphs. And the "comp." who was entrusted with my copy, being obviously inspired of Satan, set out the heroine's response and the trade instruction in small type, thus, as if it had been a line of verse:

*"Not one, dear Frank, not one white line."*

I think the error was repaired in time; but I remember that the author of it was forcibly invested by his comrades with a leather medal, and that the whole establishment below stairs revelled in beer at his expense. In the same journal appeared a report of a speech delivered by its own editor, who having said of Shakespeare, "We turn to the words of this immortal writer," had a "t" knocked out for him, and was represented as having spoken of "this immoral writer." I was with the dear old chief at the time at which the blunder was discovered and the most eloquent conversationalist at that time alive in England surpassed himself. The offending "reader" was a married man with a family, and a hard-working, conscientious creature, as a rule, and he escaped with the mildest wiggling, though I should not like to have been responsible for the consequences which might have ensued had he been present at the instant of discovery.

For a good many years it had been my habit to tramp of a Sunday night some five or six miles out, and some five or six miles home, to hear George Dawson preach at the Church of the Saviour; and it was thus that I learned that he was to be the editor of a new daily newspaper, the *Birmingham Morning News*, and, as I have already said, I was employed by him at 25s. a week. He left little behind him to justify the belief I had in him, which was shared, by the way, by a good many thousands of people. I reckon him to have been, upon the whole, potentially the greatest man with whom I ever rubbed shoulders. He was a very wide, though possibly a somewhat shallow, student; he was, without exception, the best talker to whom I have ever listened. He possessed a certain magnetic quality which extorted in a really extraordinary degree the worship of thinking young men; and there was no man in his own day who was more courageous in the expression of his beliefs, though they were often enough likely to cost him dear. I cannot think of him as ever having entertained an intellectual fear. He was honesty personified; but his heart had established a curious mastery over his mind. He was telling me one day in New Street that promiscuous charity was a curse to the community, and that it was a man's duty to button up his pocket at the first sound of a beggar's whine. While he was still intent upon this moral lesson, he gave a half-crown to a mendicant Irishwoman, who did most certainly look as if she were in need of it. The great-hearted, big-brained, eloquent man has even yet his monument in the hearts of those whom he inspired; but he left next to nothing as a lasting memento of his own genius. The truth is that, when he took pen in hand, the genial current of his soul was frozen. In print he was curiously stiff and unimpressive; and it has been one of the wonders of my lifetime that a man so wise, so learned, and so original should have left so faint a trail behind him.

I suppose that really no greater stroke of luck could possibly have befallen a student of the oddities of human nature than to have been born in that desolate Black Country sixty years ago. Almost everybody was an oddity in one way or another and that defacing School Board which has ground the lower middle class of England and its labouring population into one common monotony had not yet laid a hand upon the people. They spoke a very beautiful old English there, full of the quaint plurals long since obsolete in most other places. "Shoon" and "housen," for example, and now and then a double plural—a compromise between the ancient manner and the new—would creep into their speech; "eysen" was the plural of "eye," "peasen" the plural for "pea;" and the patois was rich with many singularities which I have known often to be quoted as "Americanisms," although, as a matter of fact, the "Americanisms" are no more than the survival of the early English form.

If I had only had the brains to know it, there lay before me as fine a field as any craftsman in the art of fiction ever had a chance to glean in. It is an impertinence for a man to speak of his own work, but I have often thought in my own story of *Aunt Rachel*, there is at least an adumbration of what a man aimed with real sympathy and humour might have done with the people of that place and time. When I say that the characters in *Aunt Rachel* are all real, I do not mean to make the foolish boast that they are all alive. I mean simply to say that they are all sketches from the life and are as true to their own lineaments as my hand could make them. The old musical enthusiast who, having heard Paganini, laid down his bow for ever because he could be content with nothing less than the great virtuoso's perfections, was a maternal great-uncle of mine, and the pathetic little story of the manner in which the life-long severance between himself and his sweetheart was brought about is literally true. "Aunt Rachel" herself in her extremely starched and dignified old age was a constant visitor at my mother's house. She had, for a space of something like forty years, had charge of successive generations of children in a stately country house in Worcestershire, and when she was honourably pensioned and retired, she used to boast, in her prim way, that she was not unacquainted with the airs and graces of the higher powers. She must at least have reached the age of fourscore when on one occasion she had lingered at my mother's house until darkness fell. The cottage she lived in was a mile away and was approached by a somewhat lonely road. My brother Tom, at that time a stalwart lad of eighteen, was suggested to her as an escort. The little old lady drew herself up to the full height of her dignity. It was a saying of hers that she could not by any loyal person be described as a female of inferior stature, since she was but one barleycorn less in height than Her Most Gracious Majesty Queen Victoria. She rebuked my mother with a solemnity which laid a heavy tax on our politeness. "No, Mary, my dear," she said, "I will go alone; I have my reputation to consider."

One meets rarely at this time the example of the attached old school of servants, who used to identify themselves with the household to which they ministered. The faithful servant of the antique world is dead, but I remember dozens of instances in my childhood where even in establishments as humble as our own, a domestic who had entered into service in early childhood had stayed on until age or a by no means premature marriage put an end to the association. One of my mother's maids stayed with her for a matter of some thirty years and finally left her to share the destinies of a working mason. The honest fellow had just fulfilled a profitable, small contract in so satisfactory a manner that he was offered something bigger which, in due time, was followed by a something bigger yet. In a while, Jane was keeping her carriage, but on her frequent visits to her old mistress her demeanour never changed, unless one could read into it a trifle of apology for her rustling silk dress and black kid gloves. She developed a love for long words which had not distinguished her in her earlier years, and this tendency betrayed her into occasional malapropisms, the best of which is perhaps worth preserving. My mother was a very notable housewife and trainer of domestic servants. It was her pet hobby to take some neglected little drabble-tail from the workhouse and to turn her into an efficient maid-of-all-work. When this self-imposed duty was accomplished, the maid invariably went elsewhere in search of higher wages, so that my mother was rarely without some slatternly little pupil whom she was drilling into ways of household order. Jane came one day in her rustling silks and streamers to announce a discovery. "The very girl you want, ma'am, I am sure you could turn her into a perfect treasure." "Well, Jane," said my mother, "you know what I want. I want three qualities in a girl and if she has them, I can make a good servant of her. I want her to be honest and willing and clean. Is she honest?" "As the day, ma'am," says Jane. "And is she willing?" "Oh, as willing as the rising sun, ma'am." "And is she clean?" "Clean, ma'am," says Jane, raising her black gloved hands to emphasise the affirmation, "she's *scrofulously* clean!"

And then the poets! there was not a parish or a hamlet for a good ten miles round but had its own acknowledged bard. There were continual tragedies happening in the coal mines. Men were much more careless in the handling of naked lights than they are now, and the beneficent gift of the Davy lamp was looked on with mistrust. The machinery by which the men were lowered to their work was often inadequate. There was nothing like a scientific system of ventilation and fatalities were appallingly frequent. Whenever one happened, the local bard was ready with his threnody and the little black-bordered, thick leaflets were sold at one penny apiece for the benefit of the survivors. The prince of the poetic throng in my day was one Alfred Randall whom I used to encounter on Sunday mornings on his way to chapel dressed in black broadcloth, with huge, overlapping, rhinocerine folds in it—for, as I have remarked elsewhere, a Black Country tailor who had supplied the customer with merely cloth enough to fit him, would have been thought unpardonably stingy—a very high false collar tied at the back of the neck by a foot or two of white tape which as often as not trailed out behind, a woollen comforter dangling almost to his toes whatever might be the season of year, and the hardest looking and shiniest silk hat to be had for love or money—these were Mr Randall's Sabbath wear, and it always struck me as a child that he had very much of the aspect of a cockatoo in mourning. He was a preternaturally solemn man and when I felt that I could command my features, I used to like to talk with him about his Art, and hear in what manner his inspirations occurred to him. "It's no credit to me," he used to say, with a sort of proud humility, "it's a gift, that's what it is." Mr Randall's views were not always engaged on tragic themes, and I have the most delightful recollections of a pastoral of his entitled:—"Lines on a Walk I once took on a Day in May into the Country." It began thus:—

*"It was upon a day in May,  
When through the fields I took my way.  
It was delightful for to see  
The sheep and lambs they did agree.*

*And as I walked forth on that day  
I met a stile within my way;  
That stile which did give rest to me  
Again I may not no more see."*

I had the pleasure to put this effusion into type with my own hands. My father was generally his own proof reader, and when I went to him with the first impression and began to read to him from the manuscript, I was really very terribly afraid. My father was a man who hid a great deal of tenderness and humour under a very stern exterior, and I felt that it was my duty in his presence to go through my share of the proof-reading with

a grave and business-like countenance. I approached one couplet with terror, for I knew beforehand that it would break me down.

*"As on my way I then did trod  
The lark did roar his song to God."*

I had to laugh, whatever might happen, but to my relief my father laughed also. I believe that was the first real, honest, human communion that he and I had ever known together, and Mr Randall's poem did more to make us friends and to break down the life-long shyness which had existed between us than anything else I can remember. I remember this gem from Randall's hand concerning a comrade who met death by his side in the mine in which he worked:—

*"John Williams was a godly man  
Whose name was on Wesleyan Methodist plan,  
He rose one morning and kissed his wife  
And promised to be home at night.  
But ah! he met the fatal flame  
And never he went home again."*

The indifference with which these men lived in the face of danger was something truly remarkable. One would barely encounter a working miner at that time who had not, on face or hands, a deep blue mark like an irregular tattoo, branded where the blast of the exploding gas had driven the coal-dust into his skin, and every man thus marked had been in imminent peril of his life at least once, and had probably found himself in the midst of a dozen or a score of his dead comrades. After one of my own earliest descents into the underground region of the old Staffordshire ten-yard coal, I found myself in a great dimly lighted hall, where the men were pursuing the dangerous task of cleaning out the pillars which had hitherto been left to support the roof. This was a common enough procedure at the time, and many a life was lost in it. I was seated on an upturned wheel-barrow, talking to a doggy or ganger, who was taking his mid-day meal of bread and meat and cold tea. We were perhaps half a dozen yards apart when right between us from the invisible roof, thirty feet above, a cartload of rocky fragments fell without warning. A foot this way or that and one or other of us must inevitably have been crushed. It was the first close and immediate danger of which I had been conscious in my life, and I do not scruple to say that it set me trembling and shaking and left me with a curious sense of emptiness and nausea. But the old doggy just cocked his eye towards the invisible roof and looked down at the heap of débris, and saying, "That stuck up till it couldn't stuck up no longer," went on quite composedly with his meal.

## CHAPTER VII

*George Dawson as Editor—Birmingham Politicians—John  
Blight's Nervousness—The Black Lake Rescue—The Pelsall  
Hall Colliery Disaster—Archibald Forbes—Out of Work—  
Edmund Yates and The World—The Hangman—Human Oddities—  
A Mislaid Cheque—Hero Worship—Three Stories of Carlyle—  
Journalism.*

For two or three bright and happy months I acted as George Dawson's amanuensis after a rather curious and unusual fashion. In his unclerical suit of Irish homespun and his beaded slippers, with a well-blacked clay between his lips, he would roam up and down the Turkey carpet of the editorial room and talk about some topic of the day, and in that fashion he would make his daily leader. "Now," he would say, "take that to your own room and get as much as you can of it into a column." I made no notes, for I had a verbal memory in those days like a steel rat-trap. But I used to go away charged sometimes with matter enough for a newspaper budget, or nearly, and it was my business to condense and select from this material that which seemed worthiest of preservation. I offer here a fragment or two of the kind of thing he used to say at these times. Talking of Disraeli, whom he hated vehemently, he said: "The man has been writing all his life of the great Asian mystery without guessing that he is the greatest Asian mystery alive. His politics are romantic, his romances are political, and he himself is a fiction founded on fact." Of another person whom I will not name, he said: "You put the man into a book as you put a sponge into a bucket. You take him out and squeeze him, and he returns the stream uncoloured. He is a sort of *Half Hours with the Best Authors*, bound in man's skin; he is intellectually impotent, he never begot an idea."

But he could be as generous in praise as savage in condemnation, and his occasional lapses into tenderness of mood were very sweet and touching. I recall one night at the Church of the Saviour, after his return from a holiday in Rome, when he told us how he had purposely lost himself in the viler quarters of the city. The noon-day sun beat down, eliciting abominable stenches and revealing, without compromise, the ugly squalors of the region. He walked on right into the country, strolled on the Campagna, and at night-fall regained the city by something like the same route he had chosen in leaving it. The garish sun was down. The evening dews had laid the foul odours. The moon was at the full. Every ugliness was turned to beauty. Vile things were transfigured in that softening light. "Christianity," he said, "is the moonlight of the soul." It was note a complete saying, but Dawson was a creature of intimations. He startled one sometimes by an intellectual crudity, but he had always reserve.

There are many still living who remember the truly astonishing eloquence and devotion of those improvised prayers of his at the Church of the Saviour. Old mouthing George Gilfillan, by the way, author of the *Bards of the Bible* and other deservedly neglected works, wrote to Dawson when his congregation built this church for him: "You have started the Church of the Saviour, but you will never be a saviour to the church." To which

the other George fittingly responded "that the Church had its Saviour already and it was a plain man's business to preach His plain meaning." But those prayers! They were the mere breathing of a strong, sane soul towards an infinite hope, an infinite possible good, a great half-revealed Fatherhood. Doubt faltered there, hope exulted. I have not heard from other mortal lips—I do not hope to hear again—such an expression of humble hope and doubt, such a tone of complete abasement before the Divine Ideal, such a final triumphant note of praise in the far-off haven to which creation moves.

The best result of the life of my dear old chief was the effect he had upon the municipal spirit of that town of Birmingham. It was not then a city in those days to which he devoted so large a portion of his many gifts and his great energies. Such men are the salt of great communities. Not so endowed as to command the armies of the world, missing something of the ambition, or the vanity, or the push of potential greatness in its wider spheres, they gain in force by the very limits of the current to which they commit their powers. Many a generation will go by before the capital of the Midlands wholly forgets the influence of the man whose character I have so feebly indicated here, who was to its teeming thousands the lighthouse of honesty, and who still seems to me, after the lapse of all these years, the bravest, the sincerest and the most eloquent soul it has been my fortune to encounter. I owed to him a personal acquaintance with the leading politicians of the town. John Skirrow Wright—of whom Dawson always spoke as the "great Liberal party"—a big, noisy, vehement, jovial man, whom the phrase accurately fitted; Dr R. W. Dale, the Archbishop of the Nonconformists of his day and many others.

On one memorable afternoon, he introduced me to John Bright. I do not think I ventured to take any share in the conversation between the two, but I recall one interesting passage of it "Tell me, friend George," said Bright, "you have, I suppose, as large an experience in public speaking as any man in England. Have you any acquaintance with the old nervous tremor still?" "No," said Dawson, "or if I have, it is a mere momentary quail which is gone before I can realise it." "Now, for my part," said the great Tribune, "I have had practice enough but I have never risen to address an audience, large or small, without experiencing a shaking at the knees and the sense of a scientific vacuum behind the waistcoat."

When I enlisted under Dawson's banner, on the *Birmingham Morning News*, I was the junior reporter, but in the course of a month or two, I was promoted and became the recognised descriptive writer on the staff. Throughout my journalistic experience I have been fortunate in one respect. The men under whom I have worked have, for the most part, had the knack of extorting one's best, and one of the ways of extorting the best of an enthusiastic youngster is to let him know cordially when he has done well. I shall never forget the flush of resolve which came over me when Dawson first laid his hand upon my shoulder with a cheery "Bravo, my lad," in acknowledgment of a piece of work of mine. It was the first really great chance I had had. I was just newly married at the time and supposing my work to be over for the day I was taking my way homeward, when the printer's "devil" overtook me after a breathless run and told me that I was wanted at the office. I went back to learn that there was a mine on fire at Black Lake, some seven miles away, and I was bidden to go and see what was to be seen there.

A hasty search through the time-table showed that there was no train running in that direction for an hour or two and so I was bidden to take a hansom and to use all despatch. The scene of the disaster lay a mile or two past the house in which I was born, and by the time at which I reached this point I could see that the tale was true. It was a perfectly still and windless evening with an opalescent sky, and far away I could see a great column of smoke rising like the stem of a giant mushroom and over it a canopy of smoke like the mushroom's top, and as I drew near I could see that the lower part of the column was faintly irradiated by the flames at the bottom of the pit shaft. The mine was situated in the midst of an open field and there was a great surging crowd about it which made way for me at a word. Round about the bed shafts of the mine, the downcast and the upcast, a little space was held voluntarily clear and half a dozen men in coaly flannels were standing there. A little tin pot of an engine in a miniature of an engine-house was labouring and panting at a little distance, and almost as I arrived upon the scene, the great iron bucket capable of containing as I should judge some five or six hundred gallons, was brought from the upcast, lowered there, set upon a trolley and then run along the rails until it could be emptied into the shaft in which the fire was raging.

This poor attempt to extinguish the flames was continued for perhaps a quarter of an hour, but at last one of the little band said, "This is no good, lads, we might as well stand round in a ring and spit at it. We shall have to get the 'Stinktors' out. A man or two will have to go down." The coal-smearing men were all standing close together and they looked at each other with faces pale beneath the grime. For a second or two none of them spoke, but at last one said, "Will you make one?" and the first man answered with a mere nod and a sullen-sounding growl. The others were appealed to each in turn, and each gave the same sulky seeming acquiescence. I had at the moment no idea as to what it was actually proposed to do, but the plan was soon made clear. What the first speaker had called "stinktors" turned out to be little barrel-shaped objects about one foot by two.

They were called "l'extincteur," and they contained some gas which in combination with water was fatal to fire. But when I reflected that in a confined space like that into which they proposed to venture, any gas which was fatal to fire would in all probability be fatal to human life, I almost wondered if the men were mad. Mad or no, they made their preparations with a deliberate swiftness which showed that they knew perfectly well what they were about. The man who had first proposed the venture was the first to set out upon it. The large iron bucket, technically called "bowk," was attached to the steel wire rope which hung about the smouldering shaft. The man stepped into this, the chain was passed about his waist, he was smothered in heavy flannels which were tied about him with cords; the end of a long coil of dirty, oily, coaly, three-ply twine was fastened round his right wrist, and he was swung into the smoke. The word was passed to the engine-room, the little tin pot of an engine began to pant and snort 30 or 40 yards away and the man dropped out of sight. The coal-smearing comrade who had charge of the twine paid it out delicately fathom by fathom. It was the only link between the adventurer down below and the chance of life, and the merest tug at it would have caused an immediate reversal of the engine and would have brought him back to bank. But no signal came, and for anything that anybody there could have told, the man below might have been suffocated by the smoke. There was not a sound to be heard but the creaking of the wheel as it revolved above the shaft and

the hoarse panting of the little engine, and the crowd which had by this time grown to vast dimensions waited in so tense a silence that there was something awful in it.

How long we waited I cannot tell, but at last the signal came. The word was flashed to the engine room and the rope came gliding swiftly upwards. The hero was comatose and was hanging all limp and loose by the chain which had been passed about his waist. He was seized, swung to one side and lowered and landed and one great fiery flake of flannel as big as a man's hand fell from the rough garments in which he was swathed from head to foot. A bottle of whisky came from somewhere and was put to his lips and in a while he recovered consciousness though he was still gasping and choking and his eyes were streaming. In the meantime another man, as good as he, was ready, and he came back, as it turned out afterwards, blinded for life, but neither that nor anything that fear could urge could stay the rest, and man after man went down and faced that lurid smoke and hell of darkness undismayed, until at last their valour won the day and they brought out every man and boy and beast. One coaly giant yelled, "That's the lot," when the last batch came up, and then the crowd went mad, weeping, cheering, dancing mad. I have seen many deeds of valour in my time, both in peace and war, but I have never seen anything to match the Black Lake rescue for deliberate courage.

I feel inclined to say less about the courage displayed by the members of the next rescue party whose work I saw, for the very sufficient reason that I was a member of it. To tell the honest truth, I had not the remotest idea that I was courting any sort of danger. At the Pelsall Hall colliery, which lay two or three miles from Walsall, there had been an inrush of water from some old deserted workings near at hand, and twenty-two miners were imprisoned. The water filled the shaft to a depth of sixty feet, and so the rescuers were really hopeless of being able to pump the mine clear before the prisoners had been reduced to a state of absolute starvation. There was always the certainty that the inrush of water would be followed by an influx of poisonous gases. This, in fact, proved to be the case, and every man had been dead a week before the first body was recovered.

I began my friendship with Archibald Forbes at Pelsall, and I began it in a rather curious fashion. The place was a wretched little mining village with a solitary beer shop in it, and there was only one house in which it was possible to secure decent accommodation. I bargained with its tenant for a bed, and agreed to pay him half-a-crown a night for the accommodation. Forbes had made a precisely similar arrangement with the woman of the house, and there was but a single bedroom to be disposed of. Neither of us knew anything of the other's bargain until the following morning. Forbes was under the belief that an attempt at descent was intended to be made that night, and that it was to break into an old abandoned air-way which had long been bricked up at the side of the shaft, and was believed to lead to the stables of the mine which were situated at a point above the level of the flood.

The dialect of the Black Country, when spoken at its broadest, is not easy for a stranger to understand. I, as a native of the district, was of course familiar with it, but Forbes was out of his element altogether, and might almost have tried talking chockjaw. I, knowing perfectly well that the intended attempt could not be made for at least twenty-four hours, went away with a comfortable mind and slept in Bailey's cottage. When I left the door next morning I saw striding towards me through the mud a very begrimed and unprepossessing-looking figure. It was, after all, a man with a two days' beard, a very dirty face, a collarless, grimy shirt, who wore heavy ankle Jack-boots, and had his trousers rolled above his ankles. This person accosted me brusquely. "What are you doing in that cottage there?" he asked me, and I asked in turn, "what business of his that might be." He told me he had hired and paid for the only available bed in the house from the landlady, and I told him that I had hired and paid for the same accommodation through the landlord. The stranger claimed precedence, and was good enough to tell me that if he found me attempting to infringe upon his privileges he would take the liberty of throwing me out of the window. I was five-and-twenty at this time, stood five feet eleven in my socks, and reckoned myself a pretty good man with my hands, as a pupil of the old Slasher had a right to be, and in considerable wrath at the stranger's insolence, I drew myself up shoulder to shoulder with him, and told him hotly that that was a game that two might play at. There came a quiet humorous gleam into his eye, and when he looked at me for half a minute he burst into a great roar of laughter. "Newspaper man?" he asked me. I answered in the affirmative, and he stretched out an unwashed hand. "I am Forbes," he said. "I am here for the *Daily News*; if I can't bully a man I make friends with him."

Now Forbes for years had been one of my heroes and I was simply delighted to meet him. We struck up an immediate friendship but in an hour he turned into bed and I saw him no more until the following morning when I believed that I had made of him an enemy for life. I learned at the mine head the hour at which the rescue party was to descend and I made arrangements to join it. Then I walked in to Walsall and there hired a saddle horse which I bestowed in the stables of the beer shop. This done, I made my way back to the mine and found the party just in readiness to make the descent. There were six of us, all told, and the little contingent was captained by Mr Walter Neas, who, partly as a reward for gallantry as I believe, was afterwards appointed manager of Her Majesty's mines in Warora, Central India. We were all lowered in a skip together and the position of the air-way having been precisely ascertained one man lay face downwards on the skip's bottom and broke through the brickwork with a pick. The sullen waters of the pool were only some eight or ten feet beneath us. The bricks splashed in one after the other until there was a space large enough for a man to whirl himself into it, and one by one we entered the passage. It was a tremendous scramble, and here and there the roof of the place had sunk so low that we had hard work to squeeze through on our hands and knees. In places we had almost space to walk upright. We came at last upon a face of brick, the wall of the stable for which we were bound and beyond which there was some faint hope of finding the imprisoned men. The sound of our picks elicited no response though we paused more than once to listen, but the wall being at length broken down, we entered the stable and I was the first of the party to perceive the dead body of a man who sat leaning against the wall of coal looking for all the world like a wax-work figure.

I was holding a candle to the dead man's face and we were all gathered round when the light went out suddenly as if it had been quenched in water. In a second we were in pitch darkness and our leader called out "Choke damp—back for your lives," and in the pitchy darkness back we struggled. I have forgotten to say that water was running down the air-way like a little mill-stream, though it was barely over shoe-tops. We

scrambled on with the deadly gas following us, sucked and drawn along by the draught of air. I was last but one and was saved many of the bruises and excoriations which befell the leader. The warning voice would come out of the darkness, "duck here," or "hands and knees," and on we toiled, panting and perspiring, until we reached the shaft and were all drawn up again. I dried myself roughly before a roaring fire in the hovel of the mine and then made all haste to the beer shop where I mounted my horse and rode full tilt into Birmingham. The paper had gone to press early that night and the press was already clanking when I rode into Pinfold Street and sat down, all muddy and dishevelled as I was, to dictate my copy to a shorthand writer. What I had to say filled two large type columns and with the copy of the paper in my pocket, I rode back to Pelsall. There I found Forbes at breakfast—he asked where I had been and I produced the paper and showed my work in silence. He read it through without a word of comment, good, bad or indifferent, laid it down upon the table and left the room. I heard him rummaging about in the chamber overhead and by and by he came down with a portmanteau in his hand and without a word or a look left the house. I thought that he was galled to feel that he had been beaten by a novice.

Two years had elapsed when I met him again. I found him by hazard in the Ludgate Bar, which was then a great resort of the bigger men among the London journalists. As I entered he sat among a knot of his companions. Tom Hood was there as I remember, and Henry Sampson, founder of the *Referee* with Major Henty, the famous writer of books for boys, and poor brilliant young Evelyn Jerrold. Forbes greeted me boisterously, and, springing from his seat, clapped me upon the back. He took me to his friends and introduced me with words that put me to the blush. "Here," said he, "is a man who writes English, and here is the only man who ever beat me on my own ground." "No," I answered, "it was my ground, Mr Forbes, and I should not have beaten you if you had spoken the language of the natives." I never had a better or more generous friend than Forbes.

The *World Journal*, founded by Edmund Yates, was just then entering into its first dawn of success. Forbes had been asked to write a series of articles for it on a subject which, as he confessed, had no particular charm for him. He handed it over to me and that gave me my first chance in the higher journalism of London. But I am running far ahead now and there is much to tell before my narrative arrives legitimately at this point.

The *Birmingham Morning News* was a financial failure from the first, and towards the end of its second year its proprietors determined to reconstruct it. How or by whom they were advised I never knew, but a person who had no acquaintance either with finance or with journalism was entrusted with the command and Dawson threw up his post in dudgeon. I had fully intended to resign with him, but I had no time given me in which to do it, and in the space of a few weeks after the arrival of the newcomer, I was free to seek my fortune in London. By the good offices of the late Charles Williams, war correspondent on the staff of the *Morning Advertiser*, I was introduced to Colonel Richards, the editor of that journal, and did actually secure a berth as gallery reporter, but I was suddenly called back to the country by a grave domestic trouble, no less than the illness of my wife, which terminated fatally eight or nine weeks ago 97 Recollections later. When I returned to London my place was filled and for a while the outlook was extremely desolate. My funds were very limited to begin with, and in spite of all the care I could exercise they dwindled at an appalling rate. I abode in a shabby little back bedroom in a lodging off the Gray's Inn Road and sat at my table wrapped in an ulster to prevent myself from freezing, whilst I wrote, and sent broadcast prose and verse, essays, short stories, journalistic trifles of every kind. All were ignored or returned.

Where the handsome offices of the *Daily News* now stand in Bouverie Street, there was at that time a doleful place of resort for life's failures. It was called the Sussex Hotel. The *habitués* of the place were for the most part broken journalists and barristers, some of whom were men of considerable native talent and attainment. They were mostly given to drink, but they contrived to maintain at least such an outward semblance of respectability as enabled them to loaf about the Fleet Street offices and bars without being actually the objects of derision. I do not suppose that there is anywhere at this time such a contingent to be found in London. I went to live amongst them for economy's sake. We each paid sixpence a night in advance for a bed, the linen of which had a look of having been washed in tobacco juice and dried up a chimney. When a guest had paid his money, he was supplied with a key and about an inch of thin candle, which was affixed by its own grease to a broken shard of pottery. I spent about six weeks there and during the latter part of the time at least, my one daily meal consisted of a hard-rinded roll and thick chocolate. My belongings had all dwindled away, and at last I found myself penniless and homeless in the midst of London.

It is not, when all is said and done, a very dreadful thing for a healthy man to be without food for a few days, nor is it such a hardship as the fastidious might fancy to snatch one's nightly rest on the benches of the Embankment. I passed four nights there, chivied with the rest of the abject crowd by the ubiquitous policeman with his eternal "Wake up, move on there!" and for four days I was entirely without food. I can quite honestly say that I cared very little for these things in themselves, but where the iron enters into a man's soul in such conditions is when he feels that his degradation is unmerited and knows that he has powers within him which, if he could find a vent for them, might lead him on to fame and fortune. The exasperating raging bitterness of this, the grudging envy with which he looks at those more fortunate than himself, whose intellectual equipment he despises, these are the things which sear the heart.

I had resolved—let come what might come—that I would never go home to confess myself a failure. The thing, of course, might have had a tragic ending; there have been thousands of tragic endings to such enterprises as that in which I was engaged, but in my case, fate ordered otherwise, I have told the tale elsewhere, but it will bear re-telling. I was drifting about Fleet Street, mournfully conscious of the extent to which my appearance had deteriorated, of the unblackened boots and the yellow linen, and the general air of being unkempt and unwashed, when I found myself standing in front of the window of a filter-maker's shop, close by old Temple Bar. In this window were displayed a number of glass domes, under each of which a little jet of water tossed about a cork ball. The ball would soar sometimes to the roof of the dome and would then topple over, sometimes to be caught midway upon the jet and sometimes to fall to the bottom, but always to be kept drenched and dancing in a melancholy futile way. I was comparing it with myself when a hand was clapped upon my shoulder and a jolly voice accosted me. The speaker was John Lovell, the president of the Press Association, which had its offices in Wine Office Court hard by. He could not have failed to be aware of

my condition, but he gave no sign of having observed it and asked me if I could spare the time to earn a couple of guineas, by writing "a good, sea-salt, tarry British article about Christopher Columbus." Time pressed, he told me, and he was too busy to undertake the article himself. If I would accompany him to the office, he would supply me with the necessary materials and would pay money down for the work. On to the office I went with him, with a sudden bright confidence that here at last the lane of ill-luck had found a turning. I was ushered into a little private room, and writing materials were set before me. In a couple of hours I sent in my copy, and there came back to me at once a pill-box, on the lid of which was inscribed in a very delicate handwriting, "The prescription to be taken immediately." The box being opened was found to contain two sovereigns and two shillings, wrapped in cotton wool, and I went away to break a fast which was then entering on its fifth day. My next proceeding, after having somewhat refurbished myself, was to go back to the dingy old hole in Bouverie Street and to write an article on "Impecunious Life in London."

During the brief run of the *Illustrated Midlands News*, to which I had been a frequent contributor of verse, the late Richard Gowing, then editor of the *School Board Chronicle*, had officiated as Mr Joseph Hatton's assistant editor. He had just acquired the copyright in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, and I bethought me that here lay my opportunity. I took the article to him, and after turning the manuscript pages swiftly over, he decided to accept it. It ran, I think, to two and thirty pages, and I received his cheque for ten shillings and sixpence a page.

Thus armed, I felt more than fit to face the world again, and it was whilst I was yet in this new flush of fortune that I walked into the Ludgate Bar as already recorded, and for the second time encountered Archibald Forbes.

And now began a period of halcyon weather. A kinder, more discerning and more helpful chief than Edmund Yates no aspiring young journalist ever had. He was as genial and as quick to recognise honest effort as Dawson himself, and he knew ten times better what he wanted, and a thousand times more about the taste and temper of the public.

He had conceived the idea of a series of articles on our civilisation, in which the writer should deal with the sores and oddities of it, and into this work I plunged with all the splendid vigour and avidity of youth, I chose the hangman as my first theme, because I happened to have had an acquaintance with a gentleman of that profession, and to have been engaged in some personal dealings with him. His name was James Smith, and he lived about midway between Rowley Regis and Dudley. I held that property in trust for my infant daughter, and the rents were collected for me weekly by a little lame clockmaker named Chesson. At one time my business often led me along that road, and I was familiar with the figure of a great, sprawling, muscular-looking, idle fellow, who, whenever I passed him, was leaning across the garden-gate in his shirt sleeves and smoking. He seemed to have no sort of employment, and, though I did not notice it at the time, it occurred to me afterwards, when I knew the truth about him, that I had never seen him exchange so much as a passing salutation with a single human creature. The rents came in regularly for some time, and then it was reported to me that my idle tenant had not paid. Time went on, and the idle tenant *never* paid. I determined to look into the thing myself, and I set out with the lame clockmaker to interview the man. He was sprawling over the gate as usual when we reached his cottage, and, to my surprise, the little lame man lagged some yards behind and refused to approach him. I explained my errand to the idle tenant, and he lugged out a handful of half-crowns.

"That cove," he said, indicating the clockmaker "as never been a-nigh me this four months. The money's always bin 'ere for 'im if 'e'ed a-come for it. What d'you take me for?" he asked savagely. "I ain't a wild beast, am I? It's Government work, and somebody's got to do it." It turned out upon inquiry that my collector had actually paid three or four weeks' instalment out of his own pocket, rather than face the hangman, after he had discovered the nature of his trade. I am not writing melodrama, but it is a simple fact that I have never seen a man more profoundly distressed. The hangman's speech was broken and obstructed, his face worked strongly, and there was an actual glint of moisture in his eyes. He and my collector had been cronies until his dreadful secret was surprised, and had shared many a friendly half-pint together.

His ostracism seemed to have hit him hard. Even a hangman, one supposes, has some sort of human feeling.

At the time at which I wrote this narrative, I had gone into lodgings at Barnsbury, and shared rooms with a struggling water-colour painter, who, for the most part, in default of patrons, worked for the pawn-broker—a harum-scarum, ripe-hearted Irishman; and on the Sunday on which I turned out my first contribution to the *World*, he sat painting and smoking close at hand, and I read out to him, paragraph after paragraph, as I wrote. Those days are gone, but the glow, the passion, the very rage of achievement, which possessed one's work, are not to be forgotten. The work took Yates's fancy mightily, and he had the good sense and generosity to let me know it. The Bentley Balladist wrote years ago:

*"Excuse me, gents, but to poetic ponies,  
One ounce of praise is worth ten tons of corn."*

Yates did not stint the corn because he was generous with the praise, and throughout our association he was most unfailingly good and kind. He was a bitter enemy and a hard striker, and he went into battle with a good heart and made for himself many foes, but a more loyal colleague and leader it would have been hard to find.

My search for human oddities led me into strange places and made me acquainted with strange people. The most astonishing and complete example of human vanity and pretence I ever encountered was one of these. He was a pavement artist and he had a pitch outside the railings of the great terminus in Euston Road, where he used to sit and patronise London. There was something in the fellow's look which invited me, and when I got into conversation with him, I learned that nothing but jealousy had kept him from taking a high place as a scene-painter, and that artists of far less merit than himself had a place, year after year, on the line at the Academy. Where he had picked up his phrases it was of course impossible to guess, but he talked a good deal of the dissipation of the grey matter of the brain, which resulted from his artistic occupation.



He had one awful daub which he called "The Guardship Attacked," in which was depicted a vessel, broadside on to the spectator, wedged very tightly into the sea and sky of an impossible blue, with little pills of white smoke clinging to a porthole here and there. This work he told me was his "chef de hover," and he volunteered to furnish me with a copy of it on cardboard for half a crown, and to deliver it at my lodgings for his 'bus fare and a drink. I closed with that proposal and in a week's time he brought the work to me. My chum's painting tools and easels were scattered about the room in which I received him, and a dozen or so of sketches in various stages of progress were propped up on the buffet and the mantelpiece. He surveyed these with an ineffable sniff and said: "Oh! I perceive you are a brother of the brush." I took him outside to give him his promised drink and found that he was accompanied by an elderly, bearded, incredibly dirty man, who dealt in chick-weed, and who shared his room with him in Gees Court, Oxford Street. This fearsome person was absolutely alive with vermin and his unkempt grey beard was as the wrinkled sea. The pavement artist ordered a drink for him at my expense and when he had consumed it, he told me that I was a patron of the arts and wanted to embrace me. I held him off by the aid of an umbrella, and his companion told me that he had been a beneficed clergyman of the Church of England, and a companion for dukes and princes. However that might have been, the wretch had certainly the unmistakable *no* accent of a gentleman and spoke with a certain beery eloquence which reminded one of poor Tom Robertson's Eccles.

My acquaintance with these gentlemen led me to a somewhat familiar knowledge of Gee's Court I have not been near the place now for more than thirty years and, for aught I know to the contrary, it may long since have been wiped out of existence. But when I knew it it was an awful place, the haunt of thieves and prostitutes, the vilest offsprings of the streets of London. What with the aid of the Scripture-readers, the various nursing and charitable sisterhoods, and the young medical accoucheurs in their fourth year, with whom I scraped acquaintance, I got to be quite well known in Gee's Court and could go about in safety. But one evening as I was entering the low-browed slimy archway by which it was approached from Oxford Street, a young policeman stopped me and asked me if I knew where I was going. I told him that I was quite intimate with the place and quite safe there. "Well, sir," he answered, "you know your own business best, but I wouldn't go along there for a fiver." My investigations had by this time brought me acquainted as I have said already with all manner of queer people. Amongst others I recall an omnibus driver who told me that he was the rightful heir to a big estate by Guilford. At my invitation he told his story, and he began it with this astounding proclamation: "It's like this, sir," he began, "my grandfather died childless," and when I failed to disguise my amusement he explained. "He was not really my grandfather but he was my father's uncle and we always called him grandfather." Then he went into a long and tangled statement of which I could neither make head nor tail, but the fact remained clear that in his own opinion he ought to have been a millionaire or thereabouts, and by rights able to pass his time in smoking cigars and drinking champagne wine, which he appeared to regard as the summit of human felicity.

The contract I had made with Edmund Yates was for a series of thirteen articles, and when it was fulfilled, there was no more immediate work for me to do and another little period of stress set in. But in the meantime I had written a little handful of short stories, and one of these, entitled *An old Meerschaum*, I sent in to Messrs Chatto & Windus. It owed its immediate acceptance to an accident Mr George Augustus Sala had agreed with that firm to supply a two-part story entitled *Dr. Cupid*. For some reason or another the second part of this story was never forthcoming, and my copy arriving in the nick of time was used to stop the gap. It brought me a regular commission, and month by month thereafter, for quite a considerable time, I contributed a short story to the *Belgravia* Magazine. Very early in the history of this connection a curious accident happened. I was looking forward to a cheque for seventeen guineas and it came to me as a surprise when, from paymasters so scrupulously punctual, no cheque arrived at the date fixed for its delivery. I could afford to wait for a day or two and I waited, but by and by things became pressing. My landlord, who was a sorter in the Post Office and not particularly well paid, grew exigent. The supply in the cupboard became scanty and yet scantier. I found my way to "my uncle's" once more, and week after week went by until I was once more face to face with that grim phantom of actual want which I had already once encountered. Partly from pride and partly from fear of disturbing a valuable arrangement, I refrained from any approach to my publishers, but at last when I had decided upon it as an unavoidable necessity, a slatternly little maid came in with a dirty mildewed envelope between finger and thumb and said she thought that it was addressed to me. I pounced upon it and there, all soaked and bedraggled but still quite legible, I found the cheque, which had been sent to me nearly a month before, and it had been by some accident dropped into the area where it had lain unregarded all this time. There was a feast that night, but the truth is that life was one constant vicissitude, an unending series of ups and downs, of jolly happy-go-lucky rejoicings with comrades who were equally careless with myself, and of alternating spells of hardship. "Literature," said Sir Walter, "is an excellent walking stick but a very bad crutch," and so in truth I have found it all my days.

As one is drawn into late middle-age there are few things more affecting and in a measure more surprising than the recollection of the ardent hero-worship of one's youth. Whether, if my dear old chief were back again and I could survey him in the light of a riper experience than I had during his lifetime, I should still be able to offer him such an undivided fealty as I paid him then, I cannot guess; but all the other gods of youth and early manhood, with one exception only, have fallen somewhat into the sere and yellow leaf. For some six or eight enthusiastic years, I was saturated with Carlyle; I thought Carlyle and talked and wrote in unconscious Carlylese, and one day when in the library at the British Museum I got an actual bodily sight of my deity, I was translated into a heaven of adoration which is really, at this time of day, pathetic to remember. I knew him from his portraits at a glance and I was assured of his identity, if any assurance had been necessary, by the profound and flattering deference which was paid to him by the officials and by the unanimity with which the students in the big circular hall found it necessary to pass the place at which he had taken his seat. He was not there more than a quarter of an hour, and during that time he behaved quite like an ordinary mortal except when he once produced a dark red handkerchief of enormous size and broke the silence of the place by a nasal blast which sounded like a trumpet call to arms. When he arose to go I arose also and followed him; I could no more have helped it than if he had been a magnet and I a bit of iron filing. He walked to Oxford Street and took a seat in a 'bus bound for Chelsea. I followed and sat opposite, hardly daring to lift my eyes to him until I found that he was wholly absorbed in the notes he had taken. When he alighted I followed

him all the way to Cheyne Walk and watched until the door closed behind him.

A week later Dawson was lecturing at the Birkbeck Institute and I went to hear him and afterwards drove with him to the Victoria Hotel at Euston where he was staying for the night. I told him of the tremendous adventure just recounted and he asked me if I would like to meet Carlyle. In the explosive mood which came natural to seven and twenty, I answered that I would go on my hands and knees from there to Chelsea only to hear him speak and to be able to boast that I had shaken him by the hand. "No need for that," said Dawson, "I'll take you to him one of these days, when I have an hour or two to spare in town," and then he began to tell me that he had often thought of leaving behind him some intimate record of his association with the great man whose most popular and familiar translator he himself had been to the people of England. "But," he acknowledged, "I have always been too busy or too idle and I begin to fear that that duty will never be performed. I'll tell you what," he added suddenly, "I'll hand the whole thing over to you if you care to have it. I make a point of going now and then down to Rickmansworth, where I had my first cure of souls and where there are still a few of my old friends left. We'll go down there together and have a quiet day." Dawson began straightway to open, as it were, a bag of samples. He told me three stories of Carlyle; they were all I ever had from him, for that was the last occasion on which we met. I learned that when Carlyle, who was then engaged in the preparation of those seven tremendous volumes of *The Life of Frederick the Great*, made an excursion into Germany for the purpose of getting a view of his hero's battlefields, Dawson was one of his travelling companions—the other was a German gentleman who, according to my old chiefs account, did a great deal of what he called the underground work on which Carlyle's monumental edifice was reared. The trio, if I remember rightly, rested at Munich and the historian expressed a wish to find some quiet place in which he could assort his notes and at the same time enjoy a day or two's repose. Dawson and his companion set themselves to work and found a charming little farmhouse within easy distance of the city. "And between ourselves," said he, "we weren't sorry to be left for a little while to our own devices; we were like a pair of schoolboys broken loose. We went to the theatre and afterwards dropped in to listen to the music in the Beer Garden and altogether we made rather a late night of it. We were breakfasting in the open air at our hotel the next morning about eleven o'clock when suddenly I spied Carlyle with his coat tails flying and his old felt hat rammed on angrily anyhow. He was gesticulating wildly with his walking-stick and began to talk whilst he was twenty yards away. 'Ca' ye that a quiet place?' he shouted, 'ca' ye that a quiet place? At three o'clock they damned cocks began to crow, and a hour later they damned oxen began to low and every dog was barking for a mile around; and that,' he said, casting both hands to heaven as if he were appealing for a judgment on some heart-breaking iniquity, 'and that's your notion of a quiet place!' The culprits looked guiltily at each other, but for the life of them they could not refrain from smiling; the smile became a laugh in spite of effort, and Carlyle, after one withering glance at the pair of them and one frenzied exclamation of 'Ma Goad!' dropped suddenly into a chair and laughed uproariously."

When Emerson was in England, Carlyle and Dawson were his companions on his visit to Salisbury Plain. They went to Stonehenge together and on that day Carlyle was in one of his saddest and most pessimistic moods. Life was not worth living—the whole world was rotten and wrong—and he wondered, like the old monk in Longfellow's *Golden Legend*, why God didn't lose his patience with it wholly and shatter it like glass. Men were fools and liars, and impostors and quackery reigned supreme. "And in a world like this, George," he was concluding with a tragic emphasis, "I see nothing for it, for two honest men like you and me, but just to sit down on yon heap of road metal and have a quiet smoke together."

I wish I could tell the third story with half the gusto with which Dawson related it. At the time of that visit to Germany of which I have already spoken, there was no Prussian Empire. Bismarck may, even then, have dreamed of it, but what is now a united Germany was split into an infinite number of little principalities. In one of these, a Serene Transparency—or some personage of that order—held rule over a handful of subjects. It happened that he was a profound worshipper of Carlyle, regarding him as the greatest humorist, philosopher and historian of his age. He wrote to Carlyle a letter full of German enthusiasms, begging him to name an hour at which he could present himself for the personal delivery of his homage. "But," said Carlyle, "we are in the man's territory and it is only in the fitness of things that we should pay our respects to him." Accordingly the two set out together and reaching the palace proposed to send in their names. They were encountered by some kind of glorified flunkey, an official of the toy court of the principality—who assured Carlyle that it was impossible to present him to the Serene Transparency in the costume he was then wearing. Carlyle wanted sardonically to know what was the matter with the costume, and the major-domo instanced his hat. Carlyle tore the hat savagely from his head and punched it two or three times before he thundered: If His Serene Transparency objected to the hat he might object; it was the only hat the philosopher owned and he had no immediate intention to provide himself with another! And whilst he was brandishing the hat and raging at the astonished major-domo, who should appear on the scene but His Serene Transparency, who rushed forward and, falling on his knees, embraced the legs of the amazed philosopher. Dawson declared the whole scene to have been beyond pen and pencil. Carlyle's face was a wonder for wrath and astonishment, but that of the court official was beyond speaking for amazement. Who or what he supposed the visitor to be was altogether beyond conjecture!

I was still waiting for that promised invitation to Rickmansworth when Dawson died. He had suffered for some years, though he did not know it, from an aneurism of the aorta, and the bursting of the aneurism into the larynx was the cause of death. He used to say that he should pray to be taken suddenly and to be spared the misery of a prolonged deathbed. He had his wish, for it was all over in a few minutes and was absolutely painless. I was staying with a chum of mine in his chambers in Dane's Inn—long since gone the way of all stone, bricks and mortar. My host came in with a newspaper and laid it on the table before me with his finger on a cross-headed paragraph, "Death of George Dawson, M.A." Nothing in all my experience had ever hit me so before, and whatever may be held in reserve for me, nothing can ever so profoundly affect me again. The whole world went dark and empty—George Dawson dead! He had been my man of men, for years my dearest friend and helper, my Moses in the spiritual wilderness through which it is the doom of every young and ardent soul to travel, and with his going, everything seemed blank and waste.

If you search all the professions round, you will not find one in which men display such an extraordinary divergence of intellect and acquirement as you will if you turn to journalism. There are men employed in that

craft who are better qualified for Cabinet rank than half the men who ever hold it, and there are, or used to be in my time, hundreds of intelligences as purely mechanical as if they had been born to be hodmen. With one of the latter species I was officially associated for a year. He is now dead and no truth can hurt his feelings any more, but I think he was about as ignorant and self-satisfied an ass as I can remember to have encountered anywhere. There was one thing to be said for him: he had mastered the intricacies of Pitman's shorthand system and wrote it almost to perfection. You might rely upon him to get down in his note-book every word he heard, or thought he heard, but in transcription he sometimes achieved a most extraordinary and unlooked-for effect, as for example: A meeting of the Licensed Victuallers' Association was held in the lower grounds at Aston, and Mr Newdigate—the member for North Warwickshire—presided over it, and during the annual address—what else the right honourable gentleman had to say I have long since forgotten—he wound up by quoting a verse from Lord Tennyson's "Lady Clara Vere de Vere"—:

*"Howe'er it be it seems to me  
Tis only noble to be good.  
Kind hearts are more than coronets,  
And simple faith than Norman blood."*

This the shorthand genius rendered in the manner following:—"The right honourable gentleman, who resumed his seat amidst loud and prolonged cheers, concluded by remarking that however it might represent itself to others it appeared to him that the only true nobility consisted in goodness, that kind hearts were better than coronets, and that simple faith was more to be esteemed than Norman blood." Somehow this passed the printer's reader and appeared in all the glory of type the following morning. It fell to my lot to take the criminal to task, but he disarmed me by a mere turn of the hand. "I don't call it fair," he said, in his soft, insinuating Rother-ham accent, "to expect a man to have all English literature at his fingers' ends for five and thirty bob a week, and beside that, if you look at Mr Pitman's preface to his last edition" (he produced the book from his coat pocket), "you'll find it set down as an instruction to all shorthand writers that it's a reporter's duty to make good speeches for bad speakers. I have got down what he said right enough, but I thought I'd touch him up a bit!"

On another occasion the improver of Tennyson came across from the Town Hall to the office with the final "turn" of an address which had just been delivered by Mr Bright to his constituents. "I'm in a bit of a difficulty," he explained to me breathlessly, "there's old Bright been hawering about in his customary manner and he has been talking about Hercules and some kind of stables. I got a 'j' and an 'n' down on my notes, but I forgot to vocalise the word and I can't remember it." I suggested Augean. "That's it," he said joyfully, "but, my word! what a memory you've got to be sure!"

One almost incredible example of mental agility he gave me. He came to me one day beaming with an unusual complacency, and announced that he had made a discovery. He had an absolutely hairless, shining dome of head, and he confided to me the fact that the boys in Rotherham seventeen years ago had nicknamed him "bladder o' lard." "I could never make out what they meant by it," he said, "until this morning I was standing in front of my looking-glass shaving, and it came to me at a run—they gave me that nickname because I'm bald!"

## CHAPTER VIII

*The House of Commons Press Gallery—Disraeli as Orator—The Story of the Dry Champagne—The Labour Member—Dr Kenealy's Fiasco—Mr Newdigate's Eloquence—Lord Beaconsfield's Success—"Stone-walling"—Robert Lowe's Classics—The Press Gallery and Mr Gladstone.*

I forget precisely how it came about that I secured my first sessional appointment in the gallery of the House of Commons. Some member of the reporting staff of the *Daily News* was disabled or had gone upon the spree. Anyway the staff was shorthanded for a night, and I was told that I could earn a guinea by presenting myself to the chief at the House of Commons, and that there would probably be very little indeed to do for it. I attended accordingly and found that my whole duty for the evening consisted in inscribing on three separate sheets of paper, "Murray follows Murphy—Pullen follows." I got my guinea and was instructed to appear again on the following afternoon when I found a very different condition of affairs prevailing. Every bench was packed, the side galleries were full, and it would have been impossible to squeeze another person into the Stranger's Gallery above the clock. A great field night was toward, and from the time at which I first entered the box at about 4 o'clock in the afternoon until two the following morning, my pencil was kept going without cessation, note-taking or transcribing.

I have quite forgotten what the fight was about, but it was then that I first caught sight of the parliamentary heroes of the time. Gladstone was in his place with Hartington and Bright and the rugged Forster, and Sir William Harcourt and all the rest of his henchmen. Disraeli sat impassive opposite with folded arms and closed eyes, with his chin resting on his breast. The only clear impression I brought out of the rush and hurry of the night was that whereas Disraeli, whenever it came to be my turn to be in the reporter's box, was apparently sound in slumber and utterly oblivious of all that was going on, he rose an hour after midnight and presented a masterly analysis of the whole debate, interspersed with snatches of a fine ironic mockery. His method as an orator was far from being impressive or agreeable, his voice was veiled and husky, and once or twice when he dropped the ironic vein and affected to be serious, he seemed to me to fall into burlesque. "It would be idle," he said, and there he brought his elbows resoundingly to his ribs, "to suppose"—and there the elbows came down energetically again—"that at such a crisis"—and here was another repetition of the grotesque gesture—"Her Majesty's Ministers"—more rib and elbow work—"would endeavour," and so on and

so on, in what seemed to one listener at least to be the merest insincerity. His irony was perfect, his assumption of earnestness a farce. Robert Lowe was put up to answer him, and after coughing out a score or two of biting trenchant phrases, with a page of notes almost touching his white albino eyebrows and the tip of his nose, every sentence punctuated with a roar of laughter, cheers and protests, he sat down. Among the speakers I heard that night were Mr Beresford Hope and Sir Wilfrid Lawson, the latter of whom offered to the House quite a sheaf of carefully prepared impromptu. Again I got my guinea, and again I was asked to appear on the following night, and at the end of that week, the defaulting member of the staff not having again put in an appearance, I was formally enrolled for the rest of the session. I do not profess to record in anything like their chronological order the events which most impressed me, but many scenes occur to me as being worth remembering.

Perhaps the most remarkable example of Disraeli's careless audacity was afforded on the occasion on which, in the House of Commons, he contrived to denounce his great rival as a liar, without infringing the etiquette of the House. I was on what is called or used to be called the "victim" turn that week. It was the duty of the victim to stay on in the gallery after all other members of his staff had left the House, and to watch proceedings until the Assembly was adjourned. On one occasion, I remember, I was on duty for seventy-two hours. That was when Parnell made his famous stand against the Government, and the Irish members went off in detachments to sleep at the Westminster Hotel and came back in detachments to keep the parliamentary ball a-rolling.

Disraeli's famous escapade was made on another occasion in the small hours of the morning and so far as I know I am the only surviving eye and ear witness of the occurrence. Shortly before the dinner hour on the preceding evening, somebody brought up from the lobby to the gallery the intelligence that Mr Disraeli had called for a pint of champagne, and that was taken to indicate his intention to make a speech. When Mr Gladstone was bent upon a great effort, he generally prepared himself for it by taking the yolk of an egg beaten up in a glass of sherry, Mr Bright's priming was said to be a glass of a particular old port, and there was a malicious whisper to the effect that Mr Lowe, whilst Chancellor of the Exchequer made ready to enter the oratorical arena by taking a glass of iced water at the bar, being moved to his choice of a stimulant by considerations of economy. Mr Disraeli then was reported to the gallery as having taken his half-bottle, and very shortly afterwards he slipped into the House from behind the Speaker's chair and assumed his accustomed seat. Some quite inconsiderable Member of the Conservative party was on his legs, and we all supposed that on his chiefs arrival he would bring his speech to a close. He prosed along, however, until the House adjourned for dinner, and Disraeli's opportunity was for the meantime lost. He left the House at the hour of adjournment and did not return until about one o'clock in the morning. When at last he rose, he entered upon a long tale which at first seemed to have no bearing whatever upon any business the House could possibly have in contemplation. "Mr Speaker, sir," he began, "it will be within the memory of many right honourable and honourable gentlemen, members of this House, that one of the most distinguished ornaments at an earlier period of its history was the late greatly lamented Sir Robert Peel. One of Sir Robert Peel's most intimate friends was Colonel Ellis, a less distinguished member of this Assembly. Colonel Ellis, sir, was a noted authority in all matters relating to gourmandising and his opinion was especially respected with regard to the quality of wines. At the time of which I speak, champagne was a liqueured and sugared beverage, mainly relegated to the use and for the enjoyment of the ladies."

The House sat in an amazed speculation as to whither the orator was being led by this extraordinary exordium, but Mr Disraeli flowed on unmoved.

"It happened that a friend upon the continent sent to Sir Robert Peel a case of dry champagne, a beverage then almost unknown in this country. Sir Robert invited Colonel Ellis to dine with him and to taste and to pronounce upon the novel beverage, and when the repast had been discussed, Sir Robert turned upon his guest and inquired of him, with a solemnity befitting the occasion: 'Pray, Colonel Ellis, what is your opinion of dry champagne?' To which Colonel Ellis, with a solemnity equal to Sir Robert's own, responded: 'I believe that the man who is capable of saying that he likes dry champagne, is capable of saying anything.' Now, sir, it is not within my purpose or my province to charge the right honourable gentleman who controls the destinies of the party opposite with tergiversation, but this I will say that, on my honour and my conscience, I believe that he is capable of declaring that he is fond of dry champagne!"

This astonishing sally was greeted with roars of laughter and cries of disapproval, neither of which moved the speaker in the least. The incident somehow remained unreported, but one can easily fancy the avidity with which it would have been pounced upon by the alerter journalism of modern days.

Mr Thomas Burt was the first working man to be returned to Parliament, where his sterling qualities of character and his unassuming and natural demeanour made a very favourable impression. But a year or two after his return, he was joined by a Labour representative who displayed the characteristics of altogether a different sort. For one thing, he was a vulgarly overdressed man, and he used to sprawl about the benches with outstretched arms, making his cry of condescending patronage heard in answer to any utterance of which he might approve from such inconsiderable persons as Gladstone or Harcourt or Forster. His "Hear, hear, hear," was the very essence of a self-satisfied and unconscious insolence. He was a man who would have patronised the angel Gabriel, and he was quite unconscious of his own offensiveness until he tried his hand upon Disraeli, when he found his level once for all and with a ludicrous swiftness.

He and Mr Burt had together backed a Bill which was intended to do something to ameliorate the condition of the coal-miners of this country, and at the annual slaughter of the innocents, Mr Disraeli announced that it was the intention of the Government to carry on the measure. The statement had already fallen from his lips and he had just entered on another sentence when the intolerable patronising voice broke in, "Hear, hear, hear," "Hear, hear hear," as if a very great personage with too great a consciousness of his own greatness were expressing his approval of the conduct of a little boy. Disraeli stopped dead short in his speech and one of the finest bits of comedy I can remember to have seen ensued. He closed his eyes and began very deliberately to fumble about the breast of his frock-coat within and without in search of something which he was evidently not over anxious to find. Alighting at last on the object of this perfunctory search he produced an eyeglass and, still with closed eyes, he lifted the skirt of his coat and polished the glass upon its silken

lining. It began to occur to Mr Disraeli's patron that all this slow pantomime was in some way directed to his address. The House waited, with here and there a rather nervous expectant laugh. The Labour member, who was originally thrown abroad in his usual pompous fashion, began to shrivel. His widely-extended arms, which had been stretched along the top of the bench on which he sat, crept closer and closer to his sides. He shrank, he dwindled, he wilted like a leaf on a hot stove, and when Disraeli finally screwed his glass into his eye and, after surveying him for two or three dreadful seconds, allowed the glass to fall and resumed his speech at the very word at which he had broken off, the patron of the House was an altogether abject figure. The assembly literally rocked with laughter and Mr Burt's colleague never, never, never ventured to pat Mr Disraeli on the back again.

It does not fall to the lot of every self-sufficient ass who finds himself returned to Parliament and who imagines that he can at once make a figure in that assembly to learn his place in so abrupt a fashion, but there is no gathering in the world in which a man so inevitably finds his proper level. Poor Dr Kenealy had gifts enough to have carried him to a high place almost anywhere, but unfortunately for himself he came into the House in a mood of passionate defiance against the world. He chose to defy the rules of the Assembly at its very threshold. It has been the custom from time immemorial for a new member to be introduced by two gentlemen who are already officially known to Mr Speaker. I happened to be in the box apportioned to the *Daily News* when the Doctor attempted to evade this rule and to present himself before the Speaker without the customary credentials. He was of course forbidden to enter and after some unseemly altercation outside the bar, two members were found to volunteer to introduce him. He marched up the House with his umbrella in one hand and the certificate of the Returning Officer in the other, his eyes flashing a quite unnecessary defiance, poor gentleman, behind his gold-rimmed glasses, and his whole figure placed as if for instant combat. It was probably by an inadvertence that he hung his umbrella upon the Speaker's mace, but it was certainly counted as an act of intentional discourtesy against him. He was sent to Coventry from the first, and he was so sore and angry that he was almost fore-doomed to bring himself into trouble.

Kenealy succeeded in placing on the paper a motion in favour of triennial Parliaments very shortly after his first unfavourable introduction into the House. It was long after midnight when he rose to speak. He began at the beginning and favoured us with an analysis of the characteristics of the first gathering of a representative assembly under Alfred the Great. Sir Wilfred Lawson almost immediately rose to inquire whether the hour were not somewhat too advanced for a disquisition on parliamentary history, the facts of which were available to everybody, and Kenealy passionately retorted that he was in possession of the ear of the House, that he would stand upon his rights, would adopt his own methods and would speak at what length he chose. In answer to this defiance, the House rose *en masse* and its members solemnly filed away, leaving Kenealy to address the Speaker, the clerks at the table and a handful of reporters in the gallery. He struggled on for awhile, but by and by a member returned and drew the attention of the Speaker to the very obvious fact that there were not forty members present. The Speaker rose under his canopy and waved his cocked hat solemnly towards Kenealy and then towards the other occupant of the House.

"There are not forty members present," he said solemnly, "the House is now adjourned." That was the result of Dr Kenealy's first essay and in his second he came to final and irremediable grief. In a crowded House, he arose to impeach his enemies and traducers. He was ploughing along and I was fighting after him in my own gouty, inefficient shorthand, when one of the strangest premonitions of my life occurred to me. He said "If any of these unjust aspersions are cast anew upon me"—and I seemed to know as absolutely what he was going to say as if the whole thing were a play which I had seen rehearsed a score of times. I thought, "I hope to heaven he won't say that," and he went on in the very words my mind forebode. "If these unjust aspersions are cast upon me, I shall shake them from me as the lion shakes the dew-drops from his mane." There was a second's silence as he paused, and then there was a crash of laughter with peal on peal to follow. Three times I have known the House of Commons surrendered to illimitable mirth and on each occasion the victim of its derision is somewhat pitiable. But poor Kenealy! he stood there lost, astounded, vacant, a quite tragic figure, and when the crowded House had ceased to laugh out of pure exhaustion, he spoke again in a tone completely changed; all the forensic manner gone out of him. That he could find a voice at all after such a scathing was an evidence of his courage, but with that unfortunate sentence he had shot his bolt. He never attempted to address the House again. I do not remember even to have seen him within its precincts after that catastrophe.

It is not impossible there may have been a little touch of gratified malice in that Homeric laugh which killed Kenealy's parliamentary career, but there was certainly not a trace of it in that heroic peal of mirth which dismissed Mr Newdigate from the scene of his parliamentary activities. Mr Newdigate was undoubtedly a dull man, he was undoubtedly an eccentric, but he was just as certainly a gentleman and he enjoyed everybody's esteem. He was a long-backed Tory squire who for many years represented the Northern Division of the County of Warwick. His chief virtues were that he rode straight to hounds, that he dispensed an open-handed old-fashioned hospitality to his hunt and that he voted regularly and faithfully with his party. There was no man who could more quickly empty a full House than he. The very sight of him on his feet created a stampede, and throughout his parliamentary life it had been his lot to empty benches. But at last his chance came. Our present King, then Prince of Wales, was about to visit India, and the Government proposed a vote of 60,000L. to enable him to do the thing in proper fashion. Mr Peter Taylor, a distinguished Radical of that time, rose to move the previous question, and then Mr Newdigate, in recognition, as one supposes, of the faithful party service of many years, was allowed to support the Government resolution. Just for once in his life the House did not empty at his rising; his chance was here, the coveted opportunity of a lifetime, and in his own way he proceeded to take advantage of it. In sepulchral tones he assured Mr Speaker that if this vote were refused the loyal feelings of this country would receive a blow, and the popular confidence in that House would receive a blow, and the loyal sentiment of the Empire would receive a blow; and as he piled up the agony of his speech, he stooped lower and lower, driving his right hand down at the end of each period with a sledge-hammer force until the blow landed, not on the public conscience or the loyalty of the Empire, but on the white hat of one, Mr Charley, who sat directly below him and who in a second was bonneted to the very shoulders. Now Mr Charley wore a very tall white hat and it was his habit to wear his hair rather long, and as he struggled to release himself from the obscurity into which he had been plunged, the lining of the

tall white hat turned inside out and his long hair rose with it until he appeared to be expanding himself like some elastic snake. One gentleman on the front bench below the gangway actually fell from his seat and rolled upon the floor, and the House laughed itself almost into hysteria, whilst the hapless orator stood waving in apologetic dumb show. Now here was a tragedy indeed: to have the dream of a whole lifetime at last actually realised and concrete and then to see it go to ruin in that way. So swift a transition from the very height of triumph to the very gulf! When our laugh was over I am sure there was not one of us who did not profoundly sympathise with the sufferer, and Mr Newdigate never attempted to speak again at least in my time. He and Mr Whalley were the two members of the House who were the stern and unfaltering enemies of the Jesuits. They saw the emissaries of Jesuitry everywhere and were unceasing in denouncing all their wicked wiles, but it was notorious that each cast an eye askance upon the other and each was rather inclined to be persuaded to believe that his pretended fellow-crusader was a Jesuit in disguise.

On the night on which Disraeli's government fell he gave the House of Commons a last proof of his unconquerable "cheek and pluck." The Marquis of Hartington had delivered a speech which everybody knew to have sealed the fate of the party in power, but the great Jew statesman rose up imperturbable and audacious to the last "There is, sir," he said in that veiled voice of his which sounded as if it were struggling through dense fog and could indeed only have been made audible throughout the chamber by a trained master in elocution—"there is in war a manoeuvre which is well known. First the cavalry advance creating dust and waving sabres, then a rattle of musketry is heard along the line, and next the big guns are brought into play, and when the dust and smoke have cleared away the force which has created it is found to have removed to a considerable distance. This manoeuvre, sir, is known as the covering of a retreat and this manoeuvre has been executed with an admirableadroitness by Her Majesty's Opposition this evening." He knew, of course, that he was beaten, he knew that in an hour's time the reins of Government would have passed from his own hands to those of his rival, but he took defeat with his own sardonic gaiety and made a claim for victory with his expiring breath.

I had a curious little instance of this indomitable vein in him one summer morning when the House had risen after sunrise and I overtook him on his way to his official residence. The street was empty and he was crawling along leaning heavily on his walking stick and clasping his left hand on the small of his back with a gesture which bespoke him as being in severe pain. He heard my footstep behind him and turned; his careless and apparently unseeing glance had crossed my face a score of times and he could not fail to have known at least that he was known to me. At the second at which he became aware of me, he drew himself to his full height and stepped out with the assured gait of a man in full possession of health and strength. He twirled his walking stick quite gaily and he maintained that attitude until I had passed him by. I had not the heart to look back afterwards. I saw him once again and once only. One afternoon whilst I was sitting writing in my lodgings I received a telegram from Mr Robinson, afterwards Sir John—then the inspiring genius of the *Daily News*, instructing me to repair to the office. On arriving there, I received instructions to repair at once to the House of Lords and there, no other journalist being present, I witnessed the formal installation of Lord Beaconsfield. There were four peers present in their robes of scarlet and ermine and their beaver bonnets and the Lord Chancellor was seated on the woolsack. An attendant brought a scarlet cloak, and a very shabby and faded garment it was indeed, and adjusted it about the shoulders of the neophyte. The second attendant handed to him a black beaver which he assumed, then he was led in a sort of solemn dance to the four quarters of the House, at each of which he made an obeisance. Finally he was conducted to the Lord Chancellor and the ceremony came to an end. Everybody supposed that Disraeli's career had come to an end also, and I myself was one of the mistaken prophets. I was writing at the time a weekly set of verses for *Mayfair*, a sixpenny Society journal long since defunct, and in the next issue of that journal I took Mr Disraeli's formal installation for my theme. I remember two verses which may perhaps be allowed to serve as an expression of the almost universal opinion of the time, an opinion which everybody now *knows* to have been contradicted in the most extraordinary fashion by the happenings of the next four years. I wrote:—

*"Sitting last Thursday in the House of Peers,  
A little ere the hour of five I saw  
The Muse of History weeping stony tears  
Above the picture I'm about to draw.  
The saddest spectacle the place has known  
Since Barry planned its first foundation stone.*

*"Tired with the weight of triumphs worn too long,  
A man of genius sought a grave for fame;  
And far apart from Life's impetuous throng  
To this dim place of sepulture he came.  
And in the presence of a grieving few  
He read his own brief burial service through."*

The House of Lords had proved a grave for so many brilliant reputations which had been built up in the Lower Chamber that the general prophecy, mistaken as it was, was not at all a thing to be surprised at; Mr Punch's cartoon of Lord John Russell's entry into the House of Peers is not forgotten. The meagre little figure in robes and coronet is shown slinking by Lord Brougham similarly attired, and the latter addresses the arrival, saying, "You'll find it very cold up here, Johnnie."

I was in the House also when Mr Biggar introduced the great parliamentary art of "stone-walling." Mr Biggar would take the first half-dozen blue books he came across, and would begin to read aloud whenever any new measure of which he disapproved was about to be introduced. At half-past two he would begin to read, and continue, oblivious of the passing of the hours, until the time after which no new measure could be introduced. Sir Wilfrid Lawson, in his characteristic way, "wanted to know if the hon. member were in order in reading to himself for sixty minutes at a stretch?" Mr Speaker, who at that time was Mr Brand, rolled out the instruction that "the honourable member must make himself audible to the chair." Mr Biggar forthwith put three blue books under each arm, and taking up his glass of water said, "I will come a little nearer, Mr Speaker," and came. Mr Speaker told him on one of these occasions, "So far as I can understand the line you are taking, I do not see how these matters are related." "I will establish the connection by and by, sir,"

replied Mr Biggar. This art of "stonewalling" was practised in the House for a number of years until at last the rules were so altered as to make it impossible. It was remarkable how quickly a member found his level in the House. If he started with the idea that he would "boss" the House he would quickly find that the House "bossed" him.

I only heard Bright make one speech in the House. It was an impromptu one, and the orator was not at his best. But Bright in a passion was a person to be listened to. I heard him at Birmingham just after his appointment to the Presidency of the Board of Trade. A Conservative banker opposed his re-election, and Bright was very much annoyed, in fact he was profoundly indignant at being opposed. When he came on the Town Hall platform, that horse-shoe in the forehead, of which Sir Walter Scott speaks as becoming visible in moments of excitement, was flashing out scarlet. He plunged into his speech at once. He did not say "Ladies and gentlemen," or "Electorate of Birmingham," or anything of the kind. "I call it a piece of impertinence," he began, "and unsurpassed in my knowledge of political history that here in this home of freedom, and now at this hour when the fetters you have worn for a lifetime are but newly smitten from you, while your limbs are yet sore with their chafing, and the sound of their clanking is yet in your ears, that a Tory should come forward and ask your permission—to do what?—to rivet those fetters anew upon you. Will you give him that leave?" And in one voice eight thousand people answered "No," which sealed the doom of the banker.

Robert Lowe afforded one of the most noteworthy instances of a man who, having made a fine reputation in the House of Commons, failed to sustain it in the House of Lords. I did not myself witness the scene of his discomfiture, but I had the story of it at first hand within ten minutes of its happening. The unfortunate gentleman was so short-sighted that he could read only when his eyes were within one or two inches of the page. He had prepared himself with a sheaf of notes for his first address to the Upper House; he had contrived in the nervousness natural to the occasion to mix his memoranda, and finding himself unable to rearrange them, he sat down discomfited, and he appears to have accepted that one disaster as final.

In the Commons he had been a brilliant figure. I have good personal reason to remember his most striking effort. His speech had relation to an Army Reform Bill, and it was a mosaic of the aptest and most wittily applied literary quotations. It was of so fine a literary quality that I very much doubt if there were a score of people among his hearers who were able fully to appreciate its excellence.

Those who could follow his allusions were delighted beyond measure, and the House took its cue from them and laughed and cheered uproariously at many things it did not understand. Mr Gladstone acted as a sort of fugleman, and his rejoicing chuckle at some happy ironic application of a Virgilian or Homeric phrase was a cue which was instantly seized upon. Lowe was always a terror to the reporters, for he spoke at a pace which no stenographer's or phonographer's pen could follow, but it was not merely the speed of his utterance which made him so impossible. He would boggle at the beginning of a sentence, and would stammer over it until the reporter was half wild with expectancy, and then he would be away at racing pace, gabbling at the rate of three or four hundred words a minute. I was in the reporter's box when Mr Lowe caught the Speaker's eye on this particular evening, and the chief of the staff, who sat next to me, gave me an urgent whisper, "We want the fullest possible note of this." I suffered a twenty minutes' agony. I believe that for many years after I had left the national talking-shop, I was credited with having been one of the lamest shorthand writers who ever sat there, and in my anxiety and with the certainty of failure before my eyes, I fell into such a state of agitation that my hand perspired so that my pencil would not mark a line upon the paper. I threw it down in despair and stared upward at the painted ceiling, listening for all I was worth, and determined to rely upon what was then a really phenomenal memory.

"What are you doing?" my chief whispered to me. "For God's sake leave me alone!" I answered. He gave a moan and went to work feverishly at a supplementary note. The orator sat down amidst a great burst of cheers, just as my relief tapped me on the shoulder, and I walked away to committee room No. 18, which was then used by the gallery reporters as a transcribing room, feeling assured as I walked along the corridor that my career as a parliamentary reporter had reached an ignominious close. Near the door of the committee room I encountered old Jack O'Hanlon, one of the veterans of the gallery and reputed the best classic in all Westminster. His note-book was tucked in his armpit and he was rubbing his hands delightedly. "That's parliamentary eloquence, if you like," he said as I came up with him; "there's nothing loike that been heard in the House of Commons these thirty years. There's hardly a scholar in the classics left in the House." We sat down side by side, and when we had been at work in silence for a minute or two, the old scholar turned to me and asked, "Did you happen to catch that phrase of Sam Weller's?" I gave it to him without difficulty and then an inspiration occurred to me. The stammering tongue had plundered Father Prout and the prophet Malachi, Dickens and Ingoldsby, Pope and Smollett and Defoe, and as it chanced he had made no literary allusion in English which did not recall some long familiar text to my mind, I offered a bargain. If O'Hanlon would give me the classical stuff in respect to which I was in Pagan darkness, I would give him the English with which he was less well-acquainted. We exchanged notes and between us we turned out an excellent if a somewhat compressed and truncated report. I felt that I was saved, and on the following morning, I made an anxious survey of the work of my rivals. O'Hanlon represented *The Advertiser*, and I found that the report of a big meeting of the Licensed Victuallers' Association which had been held somewhere in the provinces had swamped him. He was cut down to a mere paragraph and as for the other journals—*The Times*, *The Telegraph* and *The Standard*—they were all hopelessly at sea. There was but one report of that amazing discourse which was even distantly worthy of it, and that was in *The Daily News*. I received a special letter of congratulation from Mr J. R. Robinson who, to the day of his death, persisted in regarding me as a classical scholar of exceptional acquirements. I never had an opportunity of undeceiving him or I would certainly have taken it, but I have since been content to regard this as an example of the haphazard way in which reputations are sometimes made. I learned, many years after, that I was still remembered in the gallery as the man who took a note of the most difficult speech of its year by staring at the painted ceiling.

It was surprising to notice to what heights party feeling ran amongst the reporters in the gallery. When Mr Gladstone came into power, hundreds of malicious and impossible stories were current about him amongst the supporters of the Opposition, and in the little Tabagie at the foot of the gallery stairs in which most of our spare hours were spent, there were heated discussions in which his eloquence, his financial capacity and his

scholarship were all decried. I remember one occasion when the veteran of *The Daily Telegraph* staff walked into the room with the announcement that "that eternal old woman was on her legs again," and a general groan went round. I was, and have never ceased to be, an ardent admirer of Mr Gladstone's character and genius, and I used constantly to chafe at his belittling by little men, but I never found a real opportunity for the expression of my own opinion until one day when I was sent down to report the annual outing of the Commissioners of Epping Forest. We had a jolly day, winding up with a very substantial dinner and a drive back to London in a string of open brakes. There was a basket of champagne aboard the brake in which I found a seat, and it turned out that nobody in the whole assembly was in possession of anything which could be utilised as a champagne opener. One gentleman, however, was very skilful in knocking off the necks of the bottles, and before we were half-way home we were all in a state of great contentment and joviality. There was a rather noisy discussion about politics and, with one exception, my companions were all fierce opponents of Gladstone. I fired at last—I daresay the champagne had something to do with it—and I ventured to tell those gentlemen that they seemed to me to be crawling about beneath the instep of a great man's boot, under the impression that they were taking an architectural survey of the man. "You will have," I said, "to travel to a telescopic distance before you will be able to realise his proportions," and there I burst into quotation:

*"Every age,  
Through being beheld too close, is ill-discerned  
By those who have not lived past it; we'll suppose  
Mount Athos carved, as Persian Xerxes schemed,  
To some colossal statue of a man:  
The peasants, gathering brushwood in his ear,  
Had guessed as little of any human form  
Up there, as would a flock of browsing goats.*

*They'd have, in fact, to travel ten miles off  
Or ere the giant broke on them,  
Full human profile, nose and chin distinct,  
Mouth, muttering rhythms of silence up the sky,  
And fed at evening with the blood of suns;  
Grand torso,—hand, that flung perpetually  
The largesse of a silver river down  
To all the country pastures. 'Tis even thus  
With times we live in,—evermore too great  
To be apprehended near."*

I supposed that even if the quotation were not recognised, everybody would at least know that it was a quotation, and that it could not conceivably have been an impromptu, but one man turned on another and said: "By Jove! that's eloquence," and a gentleman at the rear of the brake asked me out of the darkness why I didn't make a try for Parliament, and assured me that I had a future there before me.

## CHAPTER IX

*The Russo-Turkish War—Constantinople—His Friend the  
Enemy—Col. Archibald Campbell—The Courage of Non-  
Combatants—Father Stick—Turkish Economy—Memories of  
Constantinople.*

At this time trouble was brewing in the east of Europe and less than a year later war between Russia and Turkey was declared. In the early spring of the year, the opposing forces were playing a game of long bowls across the Danube, and very soon the forces commanded by "the divine figure of the North," as Mr Gladstone most infelicitously styled the Czar, had set foot upon the enemy's country. Just before this happened, I received a visit from a gentleman who announced himself as Colonel Keenan, the English representative of the *Chicago Times*, who wanted to know if he could enlist my services for the campaign. I assented eagerly, some sort of a hurried contract was drawn up between us, and on the morrow I was away, bound for Schumla, proposing to take Vienna *en route*, and thence to steam down the Danube to the theatre of the war. I found that the Donau Damp Schiff Company had despatched its last steamboat to the Black Sea twenty-four hours before I reached Vienna and that the service was temporarily suspended. There was nothing for it but to go on to Trieste and to take boat to Constantinople. I found the city proclaimed in a state of siege and filled with all the rascaldom and ruffianism of Tripoli and Smyrna, who held the respectable portion of the community in terror, so long as they were quartered there.

There was an encampment of these gentry about five thousand strong between the city and that dreary and dirty canal which enjoys the romantic appellation of "the sweet waters of Europe." They were soon to be let loose for the suppression of a wholly imaginary Bulgarian insurrection, and it was they and their comrades who, together with the Bashi-Bazouks, carried the banner of rapine, fire and slaughter throughout the land. They gave us a mere taste of their quality before they had occupied their quarters for a week. A Greek lady and her daughter, drawn by curiosity, ventured through their lines. They were subjected to unspeakable outrages and, together with their coachman, were cruelly murdered; and after this occurrence, the city never breathed freely until they were marched away up country. After their dispersal the authorities appear to have paid but little attention to their commissariat and they were left to live by pillage. Many months later I ventured to ask an officer of the regulars on what principle they were supposed to be paid. "Payés?" responded the gentleman whom I questioned, "ils ne sont pas payés, ils volent."

One of my fellow-passengers from Trieste was a young German officer who had fought through the Franco-German campaign and had now obtained leave to volunteer on the Turkish side against Russia. He was the



grandson of an Irish peer, but his father had long filled some diplomatic office in Berlin. On his death the family had settled in Germany and the young officer of whom I speak was a naturalised subject of the emperor. He and I put up at the Byzance Hotel together and there a strange thing happened. A fellow-guest at the hotel came to dinner one evening with a young French officer, a very handsome, alert and gallant fellow, whom I got to know intimately afterwards. His host sat him down at the *table d'hôte* opposite the young German, and almost from the first it was to be seen that the two looked at each other in a curious way. By and by the Frenchman arose and drawing his host aside made a whispered communication to him and withdrew. It turned out afterwards that the two men had been engaged on different sides in the great cavalry charge at Gravelotte. When the opposing regiments met, there was a tremendous *mêlée* after the first shock, and the Frenchman had engaged both the young German officer whom he now encountered and his brother, the latter of whom fell by his hand. They had never met before nor did they ever encounter afterwards, but the recognition on both sides was instantaneous. Captain Tiburce Morisot—that was the Frenchman's name—made another curious recognition of which I was a witness. I was dining with him at the Hotel Misseri when there entered a big stalwart fellow who sat down opposite to us. "I beg your pardon," said my entertainer, speaking across the table, "but I think that you and I have met before somewhere." "So I was thinking," the big man answered; "I was trying to size you up in my own mind but I can't manage it." "Were you ever in Africa?" the other asked him. "Yes," the big man answered, "I spent some years there." "Big game shooting?" asked my host "Yes," said the other. "Do you remember coming across a party of Frenchmen who were cutting a military road?" He named the region, and the man who was interrogated answered "Yes," he did remember it. "You brought a giraffe's heart into the camp," said Morisot, "and asked leave to roast it at our fire." "I did," the other answered, "and, by Jove! you're the man who was in command of that party." They renewed their acquaintance with a cordial handgrip, and clinked glasses together. The big Englishman was Colonel Archibald Campbell, afterwards known as Schipka Campbell, and there was a story told of these two, which is perhaps worth relating. They went up to Schumla together, and there for week after week they lived in a deadly monotony which was varied only by the intrusion of an occasional shell, hurled by one of the Russian guns from the other side of the river. "It's getting horribly dull here," said the Frenchman one day. "Suppose we go and sit, by way of a change, on the fortifications and get shelled at." The suggestion was probably made in a purely humorous mood, but the Scotchman chose to appear to take it seriously and said that it was a very good idea. In all likelihood the answer was as humorously meant as the suggestion, but each carried on the game with so much gravity that in the end they did actually go and sit upon the glacis, where they smoked their pipes until such time as a big shell burst between them, when the Frenchman hinted that they had done enough for honour, and the pair leisurely withdrew. And here I recall an experience of my own which befell me a year and a half later, but may perhaps best be dealt with now. I had been elected to the Savage Club, and one night I encountered there a number of old campaigning men—newspaper correspondents, artists, and doctors—who were swopping battle yarns among themselves, and who were all agreed with respect to one thing—the extraordinary exhilaration which came of being under fire. Now I have been under fire for weeks together in my time, and I am free to confess that I never liked it. I am going to be quite honest; I never showed the white feather, but I know quite well that many a time in the course of that campaign, if I could have bolted without disgracing myself in my own eyes, I should have done it. I stuck to my place because it was my place, but not in the least degree because I liked to be there, and all this talk about the exhilaration of being shot at, and the maddening pleasure inspired by it, hit me very hard indeed, and set me probing my own mind to ask if I were not, as a matter of fact, a coward who had just managed to disguise the truth from himself and others. I went out of the club that night in a melancholy mood, and as I was wandering purposelessly along the Strand, I felt a hand upon my shoulder and, turning round, saw Archibald.

Forbes beside me. "You look hit, young 'un," said he, "come and have a drink." He drew me into the Gaiety bar, and there, over a whisky and cigar, I unfolded my trouble. "My boy," said Forbes, "I have been through seventeen campaigns, big and little, and I have had a bit of experience. You can make your mind quite easy, and the first thing you can do is to go back to your club and give those fellows my compliments—Archibald Forbes's compliments—and tell them that they are liars to a man!" I did not take that message, which was delivered in a form more emphatic than I have given to it, but I went away a good deal comforted. I have compared notes since then with many an old campaigner, and I have never talked seriously with one who has not been in the end willing to confess to a very serious knowledge of his position at such a time. In the course of a siege men get inured to it, but even then there is no particular fun about it, and merely to sit still and endure is anything but a cheerful experience; to be on the move towards the enemy is altogether another matter.

I remember, for instance, an incident which occurred at Guemlik, when a rifle bullet passed so close by my left ear, that for a minute or two I was deafened on that side, and the ear itself was hot with the passing of the bullet. I remember that I yelled out to the little party which accompanied me, "We're under fire!" and flinging myself from my horse, dragged him into the shelter of a coppice. We held a council of war there, and it was finally decided that we should ride straight into the village and trust to what might happen. I had been compelled by the military authorities to travel with an escort, and I had with me four mounted Zaptiehs, a sergeant, my interpreter, and a fellow-correspondent. We all remounted and made a rush at the village, which was not more than three hundred yards away. We tore along at the charge, and what with the speed and the risk and the uncertainty, it was certainly all very thrilling, and even in a sense enjoyable. When we clattered into the cobbled street, we found a solitary Bashi-Bazouk armed with a Winchester repeating rifle. Him, the sergeant of my escort questioned. "Had he fired a shot lately?" "Evvvet," said the insolent ruffian, with a grin, answering in the affirmative. "What had he fired at?" asked the sergeant. "A small bird," was the answer. "Had he fired in the direction of the highway?" the sergeant asked him again. "Evvvet," once more. "And had he seen a party coming along the highway?" the sergeant asked. "Oh, Evvvet!" The sergeant rode towards a dilapidated wattled fence and wrenched from it a thick stake with which he administered such a hiding to that Bashi-Bazouk as I never saw one man bestow upon another before or since.

Good old Father Stick seemed to play a very large part in the Turkish administration. On the march to Plevna, for example, I saw two high military dignitaries chastised in the presence of their fellow-officers.

What they had done or failed to do I did not know, but I arrived upon the scene just in time to see each man step out in turn, fold his arms and with bent head submit himself to half a dozen resounding blows across the shoulders. It was no perfunctory ceremony, but the two took it quite quietly and went back to their separate posts of duty looking as if nothing at all had happened. A third example of the kind took place at the military hospital at Adrianople. Dr Bond Moore had charge there and one day I was with him when one of the irregular troops was brought in with a broken leg. The doctor dressed the limb with a dilution of carbolic acid and fixed it in a plaster bandage. He left the man fairly comfortable, and, through his interpreter, promised him a speedy recovery. But two days later, in the course of our rounds, we came upon the patient and found him in a state of dreadful suffering. On investigation it was found that the bandage had been changed and that the limb was hopelessly distorted, the toes being turned inwards in such a fashion that even had the man recovered he would have been a helpless cripple for the rest of his days. The bandage was huddled on anyhow, and Moore tore it away to discover to his horror, that the brown limb below it was hideously blanched and inflamed. It turned out on inquiry that a young Turkish haakim, who had watched the operation at which the limb was first set, had taken it into his head to rearrange the dressing before the plaster case in which the limb was bound had dried, and he had improved upon the process he had witnessed, pretty much as an intelligent monkey might have done, by applying a dressing of undiluted carbolic acid. I have rarely seen a man in such a towering rage as Bond Moore when he saw the full extent of the mischief which had been done. He was fertile in curses, but when he had exhausted all he knew or could invent on the spur of the moment, he begged me to send for my interpreter who arrived in a minute or two, and drew from the sufferer a description of the man who had so mishandled him. Bond Moore sent for that man, and having made sure of him, kicked him the whole length of the corridor and finally sent him flying down a lengthy flight of stairs, where, very fortunately for himself, he fell upon a load of hay which had just been delivered for the use of the cavalry regiment which was stabled below the hospital. The indignant haakim hobbled off straightway to the military commandant of the city and lodged a complaint as to the manner in which he had been treated by his English colleague. In less than a quarter of an hour he was back again and the Pasha with him, a little, black-avised man with a beard like wire, who bore a malacca cane in very truculent fashion. He was quivering with anger, and he demanded in fluent French an explanation from Bond Moore in a manner which was peremptory in the extreme. Bond Moore knew no more of French than he did of Turkish, but my interpreter having explained the position, the Pasha turned round upon the complainant and, after a few curt and angry questions, set about him with the malacca cane until he roared: "Amaan, Eccellenza, amaan!" (which, being interpreted, is "have pity,") and finally took to his heels and ran for it with the irate little Pasha in full cry after him.

Of course it would be useless to deny the existence of the delight in battle which affects some natures, but I am perfectly sure that it does not come as the result of standing still to be shot at. I have seen some extraordinary examples of cool courage and at least one of perfect panic, but the circumstances in which I saw the last, disposed me to understand and to sympathise with it. We were quartered at Tashkesen shortly after our enforced retreat from Plevna. The village in which we lived was two or three miles from the actual front of war, and on a certain foggy morning I set out with a little hill pony to visit the fortifications. I may as well make one bite at the whole story, and to do this I must go back to the time when I was at Vienna and had just discovered that it was impossible to make my way to Schumla by the Danube. At the Englischer Hof Hotel in that city I met a gentleman who had for years been engaged in a military survey of the Balkan country. He had been under some sort of contract with the Turkish Government, but on the very eve of the campaign, the authorities had refused to pay him a sum of £12,000 which he reckoned to be due to him for his labours and expenses, and at considerable risk and difficulty he had contrived to smuggle his map out of Constantinople. He was on his way to St Petersburg with it and eventually disposed of it to the Russian Government. Without it the Russian army would never have been able to force the passage of the Balkans and I always traced the defeat of the Turks to that poor economy of £12,000. The map was the most extraordinary thing of its kind I have ever seen. It consisted of a great number of thin wooden slabs of about a foot square on which were modelled in wax all the mountains and passes of the Balkan range, built exactly to scale and showing every road and bypath.

Now at Tashkesen the Russians were in possession of this map, with the result that they were able to adjust their guns to the precise range of positions which were out of sight. The road by which I travelled on that foggy morning was being swept by shell, the evident purpose being to prevent provisions and supplies from being carried along it to the troops in front. Probably from want of ammunition, the cannonade had been suspended from seven o'clock in the morning until about eleven, and I took advantage of this lull to attempt my visit to the fortifications. I was about half-way up the hill when a shell burst a few score yards in front of me; another and another followed. One which had been discharged at a higher elevation than the rest burst overhead, and I began to feel extremely nervous. I dismounted and led my pony into the wood on the right hand side. I had not penetrated ten yards into the wood when a shell burst in front of me and in something like panic I dragged my little steed across the road and sought a shelter in the wood on the opposite side. Crash! came a shell in front of me as I entered, and this time nearer than ever. Now it is one thing to be in imminent danger in the midst of your comrades or even when you have the companionship of a single friend, and it is another to find yourself surrounded by a ring of fire when you are absolutely alone and have nobody to lend you countenance. The memory of that time will always make me pitiful to the man who runs away. For one instant I was on the edge of an absolute surrender to physical fear. How I got a grip of myself I really do not know. I was certainly most horribly afraid and my nerve was almost gone, when I remembered that on a previous journey I had passed a great outcrop of granite rock, which afforded a perfect shelter. I reflected that it was just as dangerous to go back as to go on, and I estimated that my refuge was only two or three hundred yards in front of me. With this aim in mind, I mounted again and rode uphill as fast as my mount could carry me. When I reached my shelter the shells were howling and screaming and bursting everywhere, but I sat in perfect safety, and by and by recovered my self-possession. I had been there perhaps an hour and had begun to write an account of my morning's adventure when I heard a wild voice pealing down the road and the stumbling clatter of a horse's hoofs at a dangerous, breakneck speed, and the horseman passed and in his passage, swift as it was, we recognised each other. I knew the man quite well; he was an English

doctor, and I felt as keen a pang of pity as I have ever experienced in my life as I recognised in him that condition of abject surrender to fear from which I had myself so recently escaped, Heaven alone knows how! I had touched the line and had somehow been saved from going over it; the man who went howling past me had touched the line and crossed it. He was holding on to the front of his saddle and his horse's reins were trailing loose and broken; his face was livid and he was yelling with sheer terror at the top of his voice. He was gone in a flash and I learned afterwards that within an hour of his arrival at the village, he put in his papers on some plea of urgency, and immediately went down country. Years afterwards I brought my wife to town to hear an afternoon lecture from Mr Bennett Burleigh, who was just back from one of his numerous campaigns. We were staying on for the theatre, and in the interim we dined at the Criterion, A gentleman in evening dress came in with a theatre party consisting of three ladies. He busied himself for a while in arranging his party and then sat down facing me. Our eyes met, and I do not remember to have seen a man more painfully embarrassed. He blushed until his very ears were pink, and if I could have found the courage I would have taken him aside and have made to him a confession which might possibly have soothed his mind.

A reputation for coolness in danger, like other reputations, is often got without much deserving. At the time of the Russo-Turkish war, the railway had its terminus a few miles beyond Tatar Bazardjik. I was travelling north with a party of English doctors and we alighted at the station there for refreshment. We had been misinformed about the length of time for which the train halted there and were hurriedly summoned by the guard when it was already in motion. The engine-driver slowed down until it was possible, by hard running, to overtake our carriage. I was in heavy riding boots and somewhat hampered by that fact, and just as my fingers touched the brass guard at the side of the compartment, I tripped on a ground wire and fell beneath the approaching train in such a fashion that the carriage wheel was actually between my thighs. I clutched the *marche-pied* with both arms and clung on with all my might. The revolving wheel was actually rubbing at the inside of my legs and the spurs were torn from the heels of my boots. How I executed the manoeuvre I shall never know, but before the train was brought to a standstill, I was on my knees on the *marche-pied* and was being helped into the railway carriage by one of my companions. I suppose that it must have been the most imminent moment of danger I have ever known, but I can testify quite honestly to one queer thing—I was absolutely without fear—and with a horrible death actually grazing me, I was as coolly self-possessed as I ever have been in the whole course of my life. But there was the shock of consciousness awaiting me. I was violently sick a moment later, and for nights and nights to come, I experienced a horrible nightmare, in which all the terrors which might have seemed natural to the situation laid hold upon me.

In the Grande Rue de Pera there was a café *chantant* which was run by one Napoleon Flam. There was a little silver hell attached to it where there was a roulette table with twenty-four numbers and a double zero. There were always plenty of flying strangers who were prepared to throw away their money here, and I fancy that the fat Greek who presided over the table made a fat thing of it. In the concert room, the superannuated artistes of the poorer kind of Continental concert hall shrieked and grimaced and ogled, and after every item of the show, the performer came round with an escallop shell into which the more generously disposed dropped small copper coins. The place was nearly always crowded with men in black frock-coats and crimson fezzes. Ill-starred Valentine Baker had been employed by the Sublime Porte to create an English *gendarmérie*, and this fact had brought a large number of English military men into Constantinople, who were anxious to enlist under his banner. Many of them were men who had done good service in their day and held unblemished records, but there is no disguising the fact that a large contingent of the discredited riffraff of the British army was collected in the city at that time. The "Concert Flam" was the accepted rendezvous for both sets, and on my second night in Constantinople I went thither in company with the young Irish-German officer, of whom I have already spoken, and an American newspaper correspondent who had been in the city long enough to know the ropes.

Young Von A. was a big, genial fellow, full of animal spirits, and on this particular occasion, *Bacchi plenus*. He was under the impression that all the little swarthy men who sat about him in their red fezzes and their black frock-coats were Turks, He was boiling over with enthusiasm for the Turkish cause, and he had picked up a patriotic phrase or two. The spirit moved him to rise in an interval of the stage performance and to bawl out aloud the words:

"Chokularishah Padishah," which, being interpreted, signifies, "May the Sultan live for ever!" His enthusiasm was not contagious, for the assembly consisted almost entirely of people who did not care a copper whether the Sultan lived for ever or died next morning. There were lifted eyebrows and cynical stares, but the young gentleman was not in a condition to regard these and he went on to cry: "muscové dormous!" signifying that a Russian was a hog, and drawing a masonic forefinger across his throat to indicate what, in his opinion, ought to be done with him. The youngster stood there, big and burly and jolly, and meaning, I am quite sure, no harm to anybody, when a little Greek, who was seated opposite to him, said, "Je suis muscové, monsieur," and the lad leant across the marble table and aimed a mock buffet at him which unfortunately reached him and rolled him over as if he had been a ninepin. At the "Concert Flam" a porcelain coffee cup weighed something like a quarter of a pound, and half a dozen of these came hurling at the offender from various parts of the room. There were big mirrors all round the café reaching from the ceiling to the dado; one or two of these were smashed, and, before one could say "Jack Robinson," the wildest disorder reigned and all the place was in a *melee*. The nine or ten Englishmen who were there ranged themselves round the originator of the disturbance, who was really in some momentary danger. The whole posse of us formed into an irregular ring in the centre of the room, and for a while we had quite a merry time of it. There were flags of all nationalities hung about the little hall dependent from short wooden lances with gilt heads, and these our assailants tore down and used as weapons against us. The conflict was brief and decisive; numerically there were perhaps six to one against us, but we ended by forming in lines, and the barbarous English fashion of striking straight from the shoulder sent the enemy in a hurry towards the narrow and winding stair which afforded the only exit from the place, and here, in the exhilaration of the moment, two of our party did an unguarded thing; they took to dropping the fugitives in the rear over the banister on to the heads and shoulders of the crowd below. We were left masters of the field but, as it happened, the "Concert Flam" was situated right opposite to the lowest Greek quarter, the Rue Yildiji, I think it was called, and it was approached under a low arch by a dirty flight of stone steps. Up these steps thronged a great crowd of people

armed with anything they could snatch up at the moment—frying-pans, pokers, fire shovels, and any article of domestic use which at short notice might be turned into a weapon of defence. Luckily for us there was one cool head amongst us. Schipka Campbell, who had not then earned the title by which he was afterwards so widely known, was there, and he took command of the party. We were all armed, but though we displayed our weapons for the intimidation of the mob we were gravely cautioned not to fire a shot on peril of our lives. The Grande Rue de Pera was raging when we reached it, but we slipped out one by one, each man revolver in hand, and ranged ourselves against the wall. I cannot recall that a solitary blow was struck, but I know that the people in the rear of the crowd were in a mighty hurry to get at us and that those in front were in equal haste to retire, and little by little we made our way to the Byzance Hotel where the gates were closed and barred against the crowd. Shortly afterwards the Chief of the Consular Police was amongst us making inquiries into the origin of the émeute. He took an official note of the occurrence and drank a glass of wine or two and smoked a cigar with us, but we never heard any more about the business, and though we strolled thereafter into the "Concert Flam" quite freely, we suffered no molestation.

## CHAPTER X

*Constantinople Continued—The Massacre of Kesanlyk—A Sketching Expedition—Failure of Supplies—Correspondent for the Scotsman and the Times—Adrianople—The Case of the Gueschoffs—The Bulgarians.*

At first I thought the Constantinople fare the most delightful I had ever encountered anywhere. At the first dinner at which I sat down we were served amongst other things with red mullet, stuffed tomatoes and quail—all excellent of their sort and admirably prepared. Red mullet, *tomates farcies* and quail appeared again for breakfast and were not to be despised, but red mullet, *tomates farcies* and quail for luncheon, began to be a trifle tiresome, and when all three appeared again at dinner and at the next day's breakfast and luncheon, there were some of us who began to hunger for a change. We made a little party and we went across to the Valori restaurant. Here we encountered a polyglot major-domo, who spoke all languages of Europe indifferently ill. "What can we have for dinner?" asked our spokesman. "Ret moiled, domades varcies, et qvail!" He smiled ineffably and evidently thought that he was offering us food for the gods. We ate tough beefsteak, fried in oil, and cursed the delicacies of the country. The diners at Valori's made up the first really polyglot assembly I had ever seen. There were Bulgarian notables—caring apparently to speak their own language only—Spanish Jews from Eski Zaghra, Greeks, Turks, Germans, Italians, Armenians, Englishmen, native volunteers for the Polish legion then forming, and a Croat gentleman with bejewelled handles to his private arsenal of lethal weapons, and starched expansive white petticoats. Our major-domo was somehow equal to them all, and when the rush of service was partly over, I found an opportunity to ask him how many languages he spoke. He answered in a tone of apology and regret: "Onily twelluv, ich habe vergessen les autres!"

A day or two later I encountered the official interpreter of the Persian Embassy who spoke English as perfectly as I did and apparently all the languages of the civilised world beside. I asked him seriously how many tongues he professed to have mastered, and his reply was this: "If you ask me in how many languages and dialects I can converse, I suppose I should have to say seventy or eighty, but if you confine me to those in which I can construct a grammar I should have to tell you fifteen at the outside. No man can really say he knows a language until he can construct a grammar for it."

So much for a special detached faculty which I have found in the possession of people who are otherwise entirely stupid.

The utter lawlessness of the Asiatic troops, by whom Constantinople was supposed to be defended, gave me a fair foretaste of things to come.

It was certainly rather a curious thing that in a country about which I travelled freely, and which was overrun by the most murderous ravage, months passed before I heard a shot fired. It so fell out that I was the discoverer of the fields of massacre in the district of the Rose Gardens. I found twelve hundred unburied dead, all hacked and mutilated, in a vineyard near Kesanlyk. I found Kalofer a smoking wilderness, without a living soul left out of a population of twelve hundred. I found Sopot a howling desolation, where only the village dogs were left alive. Day by day, for weeks, I travelled stealthily in the rear of the roving bands of Bashi-Bazouks and Zeibecks who were laying the country waste and slaughtering its Christian population; but it was more than an Englishman's life was worth to show himself among them, and I never came near enough to see them actually engaged upon their dreadful business, except during one week, when, from one of the lower slopes of the Balkans, I could see the whole horizon red with the flame of burning villages, and could sometimes even hear the shrieks of outraged women.

But in all this time I never heard a shot fired, so far as I can remember, until I came to the Schipka, where a long-drawn artillery duel was dragging on in the pass between the guns of Sulie-man Pasha and General Gourko. Correspondents and doctors lived at that time, for the most part, at a respectful distance from the scene of that monotonous action. We were quartered at Schipka Keui, where we pitched our tents on the edge of a forest of wild plum trees, and spent our idle time as best we could, whilst we waited for developments. Amongst us was the English volunteer on the Turkish side, mentioned in the last chapter, who bore the rank of Colonel, and remembered by his old comrades as Schipka Campbell. He was a man of the most extraordinary and daring valour, and I really believe that he found a keen joy in danger. He was full of a scheme for a night attack upon a position which Gourko had taken up in a height which the Russians called St Nicholas Crag, and he got leave, after a good deal of characteristic procrastination, to go into the forts, and thence to take a sketch of the country he desired to travel in the night-time. I was very eager to see things closer at hand than I had been able to do till then, and it was arranged that I should accompany Campbell on

this sketching expedition. By the side of the winding mountain way a sort of covering wall had been built for some hundreds of yards, to shelter passing troops and convoys from the observation of the enemy. It was a rather flimsy structure, and it could have been beaten down by a single gun in an hour or two; but I suppose that the rocks which commanded it from the other side of the pass were inaccessible to artillery. In one place the ground dipped, and formed a cup-like hollow, and, the big guns having brought down a good deal of rain by their constant firing, a pond had gathered here, and had sapped the foundations of the wall. There was left a clear space of rather more than a dozen yards, and this place was thickly strewn with splashed bullets which had struck the face of the overhanging rock. There was probably a good cartload of spoiled lead strewn there, and the dark face of the rock was pitted all over with grey bullet-marks.

Campbell informed me, in a casual sort of way, that there were always some hundreds of the enemy's infantry on the lookout for a passenger at this point, and that we were sure to draw a volley. Now, I had no really pressing business to persuade me onward, and I had no special liking for the prospect; but Campbell scoffed at the very thought of danger. Even if the enemy were expecting us, he urged, a man could clear that space in quicker time than a bullet would take to travel from the opposite side of the pass, and it was just as likely as not that by nipping across quickly we might fail to draw fire at all. This had an air of reason about it, but I was not nearly so curious to see the fortifications as I had been. I represented that the two journals for which I was working at that time had no other representative on the ground, that big events were probably imminent, and that it was my duty to preserve a whole skin in the interests of my employers. Upon this Campbell assured me of his belief that I was funking, and I immediately concurred with him. It was a mere matter of fact, and I saw no ground on which I could dispute it. I have never run away from anybody or anything—though I have wanted to do so upon occasion—but I am not fond of unnecessary danger. My guide declined to waste time on me, and, leaving me in the shelter of the wall, he ran swiftly across the open space, and turned crouching on the other side. It has turned me cold a thousand times to think about it since; but I was just in the act of nerving myself for a run when he impetuously waved me back, and a perfect tempest of lead fell shrieking on the face of the rock. Had I obeyed my own impulse, I should have been riddled like any colander. The grey face of the rock seemed to flash white under the impact of the volley. One splashed bullet struck the rock some yards above me, and fell to the ground flattened to something like the form of a five-shilling piece, with irregularly starred edges. I stooped to pick it up, but it was at almost a melting-heat. I dropped it quickly, and then, in answer to Campbell's call, I cleared the open space in safety, and was followed by a belated random shot or two. But, to be quite honest, I had no pleasure in the adventure, and I was careful not to return until the shades of night had fallen.

The gentleman from Chicago, at whose instigation I had gone out to Turkey, had supplied me with a sum of forty pounds, and had undertaken to deposit more to my account at the Ottoman Bank. I called at that establishment daily and found news of no remittance. I was in the meantime vainly moving the Turkish authorities for a *teskerai*, which would authorise me to go up country. No remittance, no leave to move, the hotel bill growing to really alarming proportions, the outlook was unpleasant; in a while it had grown no less than desperate. I bombarded the Chicago man with cablegrams as long as I could afford it, but no answer came, nor have I, from that day to this, received any explanation of the circumstances which induced him to send me out and then to leave me stranded. I had already made application to the British Consul, Mr Fawcett, afterwards Sir John, to secure for me a passage home, when I was delivered from my embarrassments by as remarkable a chance as ever befell me in my life. After leaving the Consul's office, I strolled into the Valori gardens, which were a dreary waste of small pebbles and coarse gravel, with an oasis here and there consisting of a painted iron table and a few painted iron chairs, where men of all nationalities sat sipping vishnap and limoni, and extinguishing by their Babylonian chatter the strains of a very indifferent band. I was making the circuit of the gardens in tolerably low spirits; I had expended my last piastre, had emptied my cigar-case, had listened to a violent objurgation from the landlord of the Byzance Hotel and was now bound home at the expense of the Consular funds—a failure confessed. Nobody likes to be beaten, and it seemed to me at that moment that I tasted the full flavour of ignominy, and whilst I was floundering in the depths of my despondency I heard a voice speaking in English. "There you are—the *Weekly Dispatch*—Constantinople in a state of siege. If I could find the man who wrote that article, I should like to commission him to-morrow." Now it happened that I had written that article and had sent it home within a day or two of my arrival. I had not even known that it had been accepted and the revival of hope ran through me like an electric shock. I claimed the article for my own and in ten minutes I had concluded a bargain with the authorised agent of the *Scotsman*, had agreed to accept the services of an interpreter, and had arranged, with a *taskerai* or without one, to take the 7.30 train to Adrianople from the Stamboul station. There followed a hurried interview with the Vice-Consul, Mr Wrench, at which it was arranged that my hotel bill should be defrayed from future earnings, my baggage was released by the Consular influence, and next morning, at the appointed hour, my dragoman and I were being pulled across the waters of the Golden Horn by a pair of sturdy *caiquejees*, and were bound for the front. With what a rebound of high spirits on my part it is quite impossible to say. I thought I had never seen so beautiful a morning, and indeed the scene, apart from all considerations of mood, was very charming. The receding hill of Galata, with its bowers of green, its mosques and minarets and palaces, lay steeped in the early sunrise, and looked as lovely as a dream.

It was on the eve of the Feast of Bairam that we set out, and when we arrived at Adrianople, the city was illuminated and the street was filled with joyful crowds. News had arrived to the effect that a pitched battle had been fought between the Russian army and the forces of Raouf Pasha, and the Turks were reported to have been magnificently victorious. But Adrianople saw another sight next morning when the trains from Yeni Zaghra, where the action had taken place, crawled slowly into the station with their burden of one thousand two hundred wounded. To one who was new to war, the spectacle of this one thousand two hundred was a reminder of its horrors. There was a good deal of talk about the Russians having fired on the white protective flag, but if they had broken the rules of civilised combat in that way they had been but indifferent marksmen, for no one of the long row of carriages was so much as scarred. It was evident, however, that the trains had been unskilfully driven and that there had been checks and shocks upon the road, for the wounded, who had been bestowed along the benches at the beginning of the journey, were lying all higgledy-piggledy on the floor when they arrived. I helped to carry some of them from the train to the rough eight-wheeled springless

arabas in which they were borne to hospital. In these wretched vehicles the wheel was not a cycle but an octagon, and the wounded, who were jolted along the street, filled the air with cries of agony. I made an immediate dash to the scene of conflict and there I encountered seventeen officers who, with the exception of the wounded I had seen already, were the sole survivors of Raouf's army of seventeen thousand. One man, an artilleryist, who had been educated at Chatham and who spoke English faultlessly, gave me the history of yesterday's battle. The man had looked at doom, and there was doom still in his eyes. "We were beaten by their artillery," he said, "there was never such a scene of carnage. The Russians had a shell for every man."

In Philipopolis I was introduced to the Gueschoffs, a Bulgarian mercantile family who had been established there for some generations. The two sons had been educated at Owen's College, Manchester, and might easily have passed anywhere for Englishmen. One of them was Deputy Vice-Consul for Great Britain and the other held a similar office for the United States. I dined with them and spent a very pleasant evening, and I am sure that no visible shadow of mischance was then hanging over the household. But a fortnight later I was amazed to learn that the father and the two sons had alike been arrested on a charge of treason, that they had all three been tried before a military tribunal and condemned to death, whilst the whole of their possessions had been sequestrated by the commandant of the city, Ibrahim Pasha. This was in no special degree an affair of mine, but as soon as I heard the news I hastened back to Philipopolis, and in the course of a hurried interview with Mr Calvert, the British Vice-Consul, the conclusion was arrived at that the official position of the two younger men was of a character to afford them some protection against proceedings of so summary a nature. It became entirely obvious as the result of a mere surface inquiry that the charge against the Gueschoffs had been trumped up by the military authorities simply and purely because they were wealthy people, and the commandant saw his way to a handsome windfall.

Armed with such scanty proofs as I could gather, I set out for Constantinople and, arriving there in the space of two days, I laid my case before Sir Arthur Laird, who was then our Ambassador to the Porte, and the Honourable Horace Maynard, who was Minister for the United States. Sir Arthur was a pronounced Philo-Turk and would not for a moment believe that any such abominable intrigue as I suggested could have occurred to the mind of any Turkish official. He received me with marked coldness and I felt from the first that I could make no headway with him. Mr Horace Maynard met me in another spirit "One of these men," he told me, "is under the protection of the American flag and in his case I shall insist upon a new trial and in the meantime the execution shall be suspended." A fortunate chance threw me into communication with Lady Laird, who was less violently prepossessed in favour of the Turkish Government than her husband. She promised me her most cordial assistance, but for three days I hung about Constantinople in a fever of apprehension, waiting for the imperial *firman*, by virtue of which I trusted to secure an arrest of sentence.

The execution of the three Bulgarian merchants was fixed for eight o'clock on the morning of the ensuing Saturday, and late on Wednesday night the longed-for document came into my hands. I attempted at once to telegraph the news to Philipopolis, but the wires had been cut in a score of places and communication was impossible. The next train up country started at seven o'clock in the morning and it seemed as if I had ample time before me, but somewhere in the neighbourhood of Adrianople a culvert had been blown up by the Bulgarian insurgents and we were brought to a decisive standstill. There was nothing for it but to complete the journey on horseback and here I was heavily handicapped by the fact that I had mastered but a scattered phrase or two of the language, and had the greatest difficulty in making my wants known. At length, by good hap, I encountered a Bulgarian who spoke a little French and by his aid I contrived to get a mount. The moon was almost at the full and it was absolutely impossible to miss the road. I set out upon my journey with a better heart than I should have had if I had known what I learned afterwards. The whole district between Adrianople and Philipopolis had been suddenly overrun by the Irregulars, who were carrying everything before them with fire and sword. Luckily for me they shunned the high road and devoted their attentions to the outlying villages. Anything at once more dreary and more exasperating than that ride I cannot recall. I was badly mounted at the first and at each succeeding stage, when after an infinitude of difficulty and misunderstanding I had secured an exchange, it seemed to be always for the worse. Some two months before at Kara Bounar, I had been affected by a touch of dysentery and this assailing me anew when my journey was only half through, made progress dreadfully difficult. But in the failing light of Friday evening the great rock on which Philipopolis is built came into sight and I could afford to make the last stage of my journey at a foot pace, with the certainty that I held a good nine hours in hand. I rode to the Roumelia Khan, the hostel at which I had left my interpreter, and thence after a hurried meal, he and I set out in search of the commandant who, with his staff, had taken possession of the mansion of some Bulgarian notable. I produced the *firman*, duly signed and sealed, and demanded that, in accordance with its provisions, the prisoners should be removed, under safe escort, for re-trial at the port of Varna. The Pasha—a little man with a close-cropped beard, which looked like black varnished wire—glanced at the document and angrily pronounced it an impudent forgery. I have not often seen a man so inspired by rage; the hand in which he held the official document was apparently as steady as a rock, but all the while he talked to us, the stiff paper rustled noisily. He declared that the execution should proceed and he threatened to hang me with the others. It was not at all impossible in the existing condition of the country that he might have ventured on that course, but I saw fit to remind him that I was for the moment the authorized representative of Great Britain and the United States, and that if he did violence to me in that capacity Turkey would be wiped off the map of Europe in a fortnight. The little commandant spoke French, and he surprised me greatly when I spoke of "*Les Etats Unis*," by interjecting in a tone of incredulous scorn: "*Les Etats Unis! où sont les Etats Unis?*" My interpreter broke in volubly with the statement that *Les Etats Unis* were twenty times the size and had twice the power of Great Britain, and he and the little Pasha were both shouting together when, as Providence would have it, Mr Fawcett, the British Consul-General, was announced. His presence calmed the storm at once and he sternly bade Ibrahim to obey the "*firman*," on peril of his own head.

The Gueschoffs were duly deported, were retried and acquitted, and were allowed, I believe, to retire to Odessa until the close of the campaign. After that they returned to Philipopolis and, according to the latest news I had of them, were prospering exceedingly. I had many other things to see to for months to come, but it surprised me somewhat to find that no communication reached me from them after they were known to be in safety. I had a notion that the salvation of three lives at some personal risk and trouble and expense was

worth at least a "thank you," but years went on and the whole thing had almost faded out of mind when it was brought back suddenly by my encounter with another Bulgarian merchant, Melikoff by name, whom I met one fine summer's day at the Strand end of Waterloo Bridge. I had met him at the Gueschoffs' table and I asked for news of them. Such intelligence as he had to give was wholly favourable; they were all well and prosperous. I suggested to him that I thought it at least a little odd that no one of them had ever thought it worth while to send me a line. "Well," he answered, in some embarrassment, "they found it impossible to recover a very large part of their property when they got back to Philipopolis, and for some time I can assure you that they were in considerable straits." I answered that they could scarcely have been in such straits as not to be able to buy a postage stamp, but the upshot of the matter was simply this: At the time at which I had been able to be of service to them I was the representative of the *Scotsman* and the *Times*, and was supposed to be something of a personage. It was impossible at the time for them to have offered what they thought would be a fitting recognition of my services, and on the whole: it seems that they had thought it best to let sleeping dogs lie and to say nothing at all about the matter. I might, it appeared, have made some kind of claim against them which, though I could not have enforced it legally, they would have been bound in honour to recognise. I told him that this did not quite accord, with British ideas of gratitude, but he appeared to think that he had offered a perfectly satisfactory explanation. It was quite obviously beyond him to conceive that I could have extracted any satisfaction from a mere acknowledgment of service rendered, or that such an acknowledgment would not have been used as the foundation for some more substantial claim.

As Edmund Burke said years ago, "It is impossible to indict a nation," but my experience does not lead me to believe that the Bulgarians are a grateful people. In Kalofer, for example, I was introduced under circumstances of dramatic secrecy to a refugee who was hiding for his life and who had been concealed for days in a dark cupboard with a sliding panel. I shall never forget the face of the haggard and fear-stricken wretch who crawled out of that hiding-place into the light of a solitary candle, or the enthusiastic protestations of gratitude on the part of his wife when I proposed that he should disguise himself as a farm labourer and should take a place amongst the men who were driving down for me a set of empty arabas to Philipopolis. The simple plan succeeded and the fugitive got over the frontier. The wife was very eager to show how much she felt beholden to me. Her husband had been a rose-grower and she had for sale a quantity of the precious attar which she was willing to dispose of to me, and to me only, for a mere song. She would have given it gladly but she had to join her husband and some small amount of ready money was essential to her purpose. I bought from her five very small phials each containing perhaps a spoonful and a half of the liquid. She assured me that the essence was absolutely pure and that I could hardly have secured its like for love or money elsewhere. I was not the best pleased man in the world when I discovered that she had palmed off on me a perfumed olive oil, which, by the time I examined it in Constantinople, had turned rancid.

When I was engaged in the administration of the Turkish Benevolent Fund., the raising of which was mainly due to the late Baroness Burdett-Coutts, the fact that I was bound upon an errand of mercy, and that I was instructed not to spare relief by any consideration of religion or race, enabled me to penetrate into parts of the disturbed districts into which I should not otherwise have dared to venture. In the course of my journey I came to Kalofer, where I found a singularly intelligent and attractive little Bulgarian boy whom I resolved to rescue from the almost certain starvation which lay before him. His father had been the Vakeel of the place and the child of course had been decently reared. He was pinched and pallid with hunger, and he had but a single garment, a pair of the baggy knickerbockers worn by the peasants of the district, which enveloped him from heel to shoulder. I got him decently attired, and in a while managed to place him in the care of a colleague in Constantinople, and when I left the country my brother-in-law, Captain William Thompson, who was engaged in the Levantine shipping trade, gave him a free passage to Liverpool, where for the space of some months he lived with my sisters, the younger of whom turned schoolmistress for his advantage, and began to teach him English. Mr Crummies used to wonder how things got into the papers, though perhaps he was under some slight suspicion of having contributed to their circulation. How the news of the young Bulgarian's arrival in England got there I do not know, but there was a considerable journalistic fuss about him, and the result was that a wealthy Bulgarian family, resident in Manchester, made overtures to my sister, and with my free consent, formally adopted the child. Before this happened he paid them a preliminary visit during which he was presented with a pony, and a male domestic was told off specially to his service. When his adoption was finally decided upon he went back to my sister's house in Liverpool to gather up his belongings and to say good-bye. The little ingrate refused to say one word of farewell to either of them. "I not English any longer," he declared, "I Bulgar again," and Bulgar through and through he was, to my thinking, sure enough. It is quite true that you can't indict a nation, but I shall need some persuasion before I go out of my way again to be of use to any member of that particular section of the human family.

## CHAPTER XI

*Retrospect—Return to London—Interview with Mr Gladstone at  
Hawarden—Reminiscences.*

The memories of that adventurous year in Turkey come thronging back so quickly that it is hard to choose amongst them. In the retrospect it looks as if it had been in the main a rather jolly sort of picnic, and at least there were streaks of splendid enjoyment in it. Even our hardships made fun for us at times. I suppose you can know more about a man in a month if you go campaigning with him than you might find out in the course of years in a mere stay-at-home existence. Little generosityes and selfishnesses display themselves more freely when commons are running short and shelter is scanty than they do amongst those who, in the phrase of Tennyson's northern farmer, "has coats to their backs, and takes their regular meals." One British gentleman we had with us during the siege of Plevna was a perpetual source of joy to me. He was a sort of human jackdaw, the picker-up of unconsidered trifles; and especially in the way of provender and of medical

comforts he took care to be well provided whatever might befall the rest of us. It happened one day during the siege that some member of our party discovered in some huckster's shop in the village a couple of bottles of rum. He bore these triumphantly to the two-storeyed hut in which the greater number of us lived together, and that night we held a symposium. The liquor was vile stuff, but we set fire to it and burned most of the malice out of it. I made a ballad about that night a year or two later, and perhaps I may be forgiven if I quote a verse or two of it here. It gives at least a fair picture of the scene.

*"Through ceaseless rain the rival cannon sounded  
With sulky iteration boom on boom,  
And while assailant and defender pounded  
Each other with those epigrams of doom,  
I sat at table, by my friends surrounded,  
Where mirth and laughter lit the dingy room  
And we made merry one and all, though dinner  
Had failed for days, and we were growing thinner.*

*There, while that sulky iterated boom  
Shook the thick air, our songs of home we sang;  
And memory wrought for each on fancy's loom,  
Unmoved, unshaken by War's clash and clang,  
Some dreamy picture woven of light and gloom,  
Of home and peace."*

*Who shall forget that night who took a part in it?  
The ceaseless downpour of the rain,  
The incessant thundering of the guns,  
The shells that ricocheted from the glacis  
Or went howling overhead.*

*"We pushed the gourd about and jested hard,  
Sang rattling songs, told many a rattling tale,—  
A jest might keep the heart's deep floodgates barred.  
Chant gaily, Pity! lest thy blood grow pale:  
Bid every sprightly fancy stand at guard!  
Be noisy, Mirth! lest all thy mirth should fail,  
And yet, and yet our neighbour miseries  
Would blur the sparkle in our hearts and eyes.*

*"For near at hand there lay such countless woes,  
Such up-heaped horrors as no tongue can tell,  
Where helpless Pity's ineffectual throes  
Made that long shambles seem one ghastly hell,  
And all the broken, battered, blood-stained rows  
Of dead seem blessed in that they sleep so well;  
Where the soul sickened and the heart grew faint  
At scenes which Dante scarce had striven to paint."*

The rum was all drunk and the wine-gourds were all empty—the last song was sung and the last tale told, and we betook ourselves to rest. Our jackdaw friend, for economic reasons, had found a lodging elsewhere. He found it better to drop in upon the rest of us when there was anything special going than it would have been to forage for himself. By the time at which he left us, it had turned much colder, and the rain was freezing as it fell. The village streets were covered with a slippery *verglas* and here and there, where a siege shell had fallen, there was an embarrassing hole, not easily to be distinguished in the night-time from the merest puddle. There was scarcely a light gleam in the whole village, and it is not at all a thing to be surprised at that our jackdaw lost his way and had a stumble or two into the icy pools which beset him. He did succeed at last in finding the hut in which he lived, or rather, he found the site of it, for an 18 centimetre shell had burst there in his absence and the hut was not. We were making our apology for breakfast in the dusk before dawn when he returned to us. He was clothed in a thin armour of ice from head to foot and it trickled from him in little showers as he stood forlornly before us. The hardest heart must needs have pitied him, but it was he himself who gave the pathos of the show away. "Has nobody got a cup of tea?" he asked. "Tea," cried Bond Moore, who had a special mis-liking for him, "tea, you——" (the blank may be filled in according to fancy, on the understanding that it was neither polite nor complimentary) "there's no tea within five hundred miles." "Oh!" said the unhappy man, "I wish I had never come on this campaign, I do so miss my little comforts!" There was nobody there, I am sure, who would have been much shocked if, in the circumstances, our jackdaw had been even blasphemously profane. A man in his condition may say almost anything and may expect to be forgiven, but at this most inadequate bleat we yelled with laughter, and the poor jackdaw stood staring at us with eyes of suffering wonder for a full three minutes before we could rouse ourselves to attend to his necessities.

When I first went out to Turkey I was very much under the domination of Mr Gladstone's opinion. I was quite full of the unspeakable Turk and his wickednesses and was quite as anxious as the great Liberal statesman himself to see the "sick man" bundled out of Europe bag and baggage. But when I began to move about the country and to meet, as I was forced to do, men of all sorts and conditions among its native population, my sentiments with respect to the Turk underwent a thorough and rapid change. The real people, the men of the commercial and artisan classes and the rank and file of the army, are amongst the best people I have ever known. Their religion enjoins them to sobriety, and as a race they are brave, truthful and kindly, and I never met one authentic instance in which an act of cruelty was chargeable to the men of the regular forces. The hordes of Bashi-Bazouks, of Smyrniotes and Tripolites were of course a set of most unspeakable ruffians, and there are probably no more deplorable specimens of human nature in the world than are to be found among the Paris-bred spawn of the harem.

Almost immediately on my return to London I lunched with Canon Liddon of St Paul's. Our talk naturally turned upon the campaign, and in the course of it I gave him an account of the affair at Guemlik, as being typical of whatever disturbances had taken place between the citizen Turk and the Bulgarians. When General



Gourko first broke into the great plain south of the Balkans with his Cossack advance guard, the Christian population rose rejoicingly to receive them and persuaded themselves without difficulty that the rule of their Mahommedan masters was dead and done with then and there. They were supplied with arms and were urged to revolt. There is no doubt whatever that they had a great deal to complain of. They had been under the heel of official oppression for centuries, although in that respect they were not much worse off than their Mahommedan neighbours, but they were a despised and abject race who ate forbidden food and who lived in an almost inconceivable condition of personal uncleanness. To the Turkish peasant dirt is anathema maranatha; in his own station of life he is the cleanest man in the world, and if there is any dirtier person to be found than a Bulgarian peasant, as I knew him in the war year, I can only say that I have not yet discovered him. The Christian population (God save the mark!) were forbidden by law to bear arms, and they were cowards by tradition. Villagers of the two races lived peacefully enough together, though there was an open disdain on the one side always and a smouldering hatred on the other.

It befell that in a neighbouring village the Bulgarians broke into revolution, and all the able-bodied Turks in Guemlik sallied out to the assistance of their countrymen, leaving only a few infirm old men and the women and children. The Guemlik Christians, being persuaded that the fighting force would never return, rose *en masse* and put every Turkish soul to death. The massacre was characterised by a terrible ferocity; the bodies of the dead were hideously mutilated and were all hurled pell-mell into the well at the Turkish end of the village, and all the houses of that quarter were looted and burned down. Contrary to the expectations of the victors, the Turkish residents returned triumphant. They took their revenge; they put the Christians to the sword, fired the Christian houses, and filled up the Christian well with corpses. The account was quite equally balanced, but it is certain that the Bulgarians made the first move in the game. It was so everywhere, so far as my experience went, wherever the citizen Turk was drawn into the conflict. Nothing viler than the conduct of the Government in letting loose its vast hordes of irregular soldiery with license to slay and pillage an unarmed population could possibly be conceived. But what I was concerned to prove was that the Mahommedan villagers had no part or lot in the cruelties of that time unless by way of stern reprisal.

Canon Liddon was anxious that I should lay my facts before Mr Gladstone. He despatched a telegram to him and ascertained that he would be willing to receive me at Hawarden on the morrow, and armed with a brief letter of introduction, I set out next day, and found the great Liberal statesman placidly dozing in an armchair in a little study on the ground floor of the house. At first he hardly seemed to recognise why I was there, but in less than a minute he became astonishingly alert, and providing himself with hat and walking-stick took me out into the park. He walked at an extraordinary pace and plied me with questions in those ringing, rolling, parliamentary tones of his, with which I had been familiar in the House of Commons two or three years before. He could not for one instant lay aside his platform manner, and before I had been in his society for two minutes I appreciated the statement attributed to Her late Majesty Queen Victoria, that Mr Gladstone always addressed her as if she were a public meeting. Every sentence was rounded, polished and precise, every syllable had its particular rhythmic weight and value, and with it all there was a certain suavity and courtesy which, for my own part, I thought very gracious and charming. I had heard one of his remarkable Budget speeches and knew already with what ease he handled figures, but he surprised me more than once by his quickness in calculation. He was questioning me as to Turkish methods of taxation: population of a province so many—piastres per head of population so many—what was the precise value of the piastre? Twopence and a fraction of a farthing.—Ah! in pounds sterling that would be approximately so much. He made his reckoning with lightning rapidity and he was always accurate, as I could tell, having all the figures at my fingers' ends just then.

After two hours' hard walking, he took me in to luncheon. We were by this time in the thick of our theme, and on our arrival at table he banished the servants from the room and himself carved at the sideboard and handed round the dishes. He ate his own meal standing, and he carried on his questions all the while. I do not know if he had then made his famous rule about the seventy-two bites to a mouthful, but I certainly thought him anything but deliberate in eating. Whether he took much or little I could not tell, but he was certainly talking all the time, and I shall never forget the noble sonorosity of the tone with which he approached me with a dish in either hand and asked: "Can I assist you to another potato, Mr Murray?" The simple query was offered in the finest parliamentary manner. There were present at the meal the members of the family and one guest beside myself, a Mr Howard, a corpulent, silent gentleman, who accompanied us when we went out into the park again. We recommenced our walk at about two o'clock, and kept it up until the evening shades were growing pretty thick about us. I was inclined to be pretty glad when it was over, for though I was as hard as nails at that time, being fresh as I was from the severe training of the campaign, I was walked almost off my legs. The talk went on ding-dong all the time, and in the course of it my host asked me with what weapons the Zaptiehs—the mounted police who were relied on to keep order—and the irregulars who were committing unchecked atrocities everywhere, were respectively armed. I was compelled to tell him that the Zaptiehs carried an old-fashioned matchlock, whilst the Irregulars were in great part armed with the Winchester repeating rifle, which was then the latest invention of destructive science. The corpulent visitor had long since resigned the effort to keep within hearing. Gladstone faced round, and in those noble, oratorical tones of his called out, "Is it not odious, Howard; is it not odious?" The gentleman appealed to was utterly out of earshot, and came trotting briskly towards us to find out what the question meant, but Gladstone was away again at score, and he was again out-distanced in a minute. Gladstone spoke of the duty which was imposed upon him to turn out the Government of Lord Beaconsfield, of whom he invariably spoke as Mr Disraeli. I ventured to say to him, "You will have to fight for that, sir," when he turned upon me with a most vivid gesture, and striking his walking-stick upon the pathway with such vehemence that he made the gravel fly, answered me, "Aye, sir, and we shall fight." When the time came for me to go, he accompanied me to the hall, and with great courtesy assisted me into my overcoat with his own hands. It was a rather remarkable-looking garment, that overcoat, and one of a sort not often seen in England, but I had passed through London so rapidly that I had had no time to replenish my wardrobe. The garment itself was woven of camel's hair, and it was lined with bearskin. As he was helping me into it he asked, "Where did you obtain possession of this extraordinary garment, Mr Murray?" "I bought it, sir, in Bulgaria," I answered. "Ah," said he, with a perfectly grave face and falling back a step to look at it, "I have had much to say of the

Bulgarian atrocities of late years, but this is the only one of which I have had ocular demonstration."

I met Mr Gladstone afterwards at a big social function which was engineered by the late William Woodhall, some time member for Stoke and Master of the Ordnance. Finding him unoccupied and alone, I ventured to ask to be recalled to his remembrance. "No need for that, Mr Murray," he answered, "no need for that," and plunged back straightway into the talk at Hawarden as if it had taken place only yesterday. There were all manner of amusements provided for Mr Wood-hall's guests, and into one of them at least he plunged with the delighted enthusiasm of a boy.

Poor Charles Bertram, the conjurer, was there, and it was arranged that a hand of Napoleon should be played under his direction between the statesman and Sir Francis Burnand, then editor of *Punch*. "You, gentlemen, must decide between you," said the conjurer, "as to who is to win." It was agreed that Gladstone was to be the victor, and Bertram, who, of course, had not apparently seen the cards, instructed him as to what he was to lead and what to play in sequence, securing for him all five tricks out of an apparently impossible hand. He was immensely delighted and interested, and held a very animated conversation afterwards with Bertram on the art of conjuring.

A good many years later yet, when I brought over from Australia the nucleus of a comedy company to perform here in a piece of my own writing, I had amongst them a very remarkable child actor, whose name was Leo Byrne. He played the title rôle in my comedy of *Neds Churn*, and when the provincial run of the piece was over he was employed by Sir Henry Irving to play the child's part in Lord Tennyson's tragedy of *Becket*. Mr Gladstone was present at one performance, and not wishing for some reason of his own to be identified by the public, took his seat out of view of the audience on the prompt side of the stage. Whilst the curtain was down, Mr Gladstone took the fictitious son of the Fair Rosamund on his knee and began to question him. "You come from Australia, my little man?" he said. "Yes, sir," the boy answered. "And what do you think of England?" he was asked. "I think it is being ruined by the Liberal Party," Master Byrne responded. The great man laughed and suffered him to escape, which I am told he did very willingly. Mr Bram Stoker afterwards took the child apart and told him that one of these days he would be very proud of having been taken on that old gentleman's knee. "Oh! I know," the imp responded, "it's old Gladstone; I don't want to be bothered with him. I have promised another boy to go and spin tops with him behind the scenes."

## CHAPTER XII

*First Fiction—A Life's Atonement—The Casual Tramp—Poor Law Relief—Charles Reade—The Cloister and the Hearth—Wilkie Collins—The Figure in Mediaeval Costume—Joseph's Coat—At Rochefort—Rainbow Gold—The Anarchist—The Police—The Text of Scripture.*

Whilst I was still engaged on the staff of the *Birmingham Morning News*, as I have mentioned previously, Mr Edmund Yates was running through its columns a novel which he entitled *A Bad Lot*. He was lecturing in America at the time, and must have been living a hand to mouth life with his story, for he brought it to an abrupt and rather disastrous conclusion. When the final instalment of copy was received there was a momentary consternation in the office. New arrangements were pending, but we had supposed ourselves to have at least two months in hand. In these circumstances my chief came to me and asked me if I thought that I could fill the gap. I was simply burning for a chance to try my hand at fiction, and I leapt eagerly at the opportunity. I began that very day and I wrote a chapter which I am quite sure must have led my readers to expect a tolerable weekly entertainment for some time, but I had no plot in mind and I had not the remotest notion as to whither I was going. I struggled on week by week and succeeded, as I now believe, in producing absolutely the most formless and incoherent work of fiction which was ever put in type. Scores of letters were sent week by week to the editor protesting against its continuance, and at last I had worked all my characters into such a tangle that, with the exception of the hero and heroine and a few subordinates, whose fate it was not necessary to particularise, I sent them all into a coal-mine, flooded the workings and drowned the lot of them.

A very able and kindly critic told me that this amorphous first attempt at fiction had flesh and blood but no bones, and I have learned since that in writing a work of imagination as in much more serious enterprises, the first essential is to be aware of your own purpose. For some years afterwards I tried my hand on the short story, but before I left England for the Russo-Turkish campaign, I had embarked upon a more ambitious work, which finally took shape in *A Life's Atonement*. In the hurry of departure I forgot my manuscript and left it at my lodgings. I had quite resigned myself to think it lost, but when I received my first commission for a three-volume story, it occurred to me that the manuscript was worth inquiring after, and it surprised me agreeably to find that it had been preserved. It was finished, sent in and accepted, and achieved more than a commonplace success. New commissions came in, and I found myself fairly launched as a novelist.

There is one queer thing about that first book which no critic ever noticed so far as I know; it was, from beginning to end, a wholly unconscious plagiarism of *David Copperfield*. Had there been no Peggotty, there would have been no Sally Troman; had there been no Steerforth, there would have been no Gascoigne. The greater part of the fable and nearly all the characters I owed to Dickens, and yet I can aver in perfect honesty that, at the time of writing and for years afterwards, I was entirely unconscious of the fact. One thing in the book, in any case, was real. I sent my tragic hero wandering about the country, finding shelter in all manner of low lodging-houses, and living generally the life of a tramp. Before I put him to that experience I went through it religiously myself, and for a whole seven weeks in the summer, after my return from Turkey, I was "on the road" as a casual tramp. It was my purpose to prove in my own person what I knew very well already, namely, that it was, as most unhappily it still is, actually impossible for a poor man honestly in search of work, to make his way through England and to hold body and soul together without infringing the law in one

way or another.

I found that it was not possible. Well, I had seven weeks of it. I went under the name of "David Vane, compositor," as of course, I knew something about the printing trade. My clothes were shabby at the outset, but were utterly in rags when I had done. "David Vane" had many strange adventures, but the funniest was reserved for the close. I may say that I took a ten-pound note with me, and through the Post Office sent portions of it on before me and walked towards it.

When I got to the "George" at Hereford I had £7, 13s. 6d. left out of the £10. I slept in workhouses or in the fields; the professional term for the former is the "spike," for the latter the "skipper." I went on "spike" and "skipper" both. I had sent a little portmanteau on before me to the "George" at Hereford, with the initials "D.C.M." at the side. In it I had a change of clothes and a shaving kit. When I got into Hereford I had had no shave for three or four weeks, my boots were absolutely worn out, my clothes were rags and tatters, and exposure to the sun had tanned my face. I drew my money at the Post Office at Hereford, and carrying it in my hand, for all my pockets were worn out, I reached the "George," a good old-fashioned county hotel.

A set of steps reached up to the main entrance, where stood a waiter with a professional napkin. He looked up the street, down the street, and across the street, smiling all the time—a proprietorial sort of smile. I talked to him from below—one always speaks from below with a sense of disadvantage—and said, "I want a room." He gave a wave of his napkin in answer, and said, "Go away, go away." But I did not go away. I went up the steps, showed him my money, and told him not to play the fool. I said, "I want a room." He looked at me stolidly, but suddenly I discovered my portmanteau in a corner. I claimed it at once and mounted the stairs, the waiter following with his curiously feline footsteps, and murmuring at intervals, "Well, I am——!" He said it with great conviction, but he took me to the bath room nevertheless. I got a shave, changed my suit, and, as I was something of a dandy at the time, I affected certain airs as to the arrangement of my watch-chain and the like. I came out cleanshaven and with an eye-glass, and generally looking as different from the man who went in as it was possible to imagine. On the stairs I found my waiter ready, and when he saw me he said most emphatically that *he was* ——. He took me to the coffee room, where I had a meal. He stood behind my chair, and by means of a mirror opposite I *saw* him keep saying to himself that *he was* ——. I stayed in Hereford for some time, both to rest and to write articles about my experiences, which appeared in *Mayfair*, a society paper, long since dead. I took a private room, and this particular waiter seemed to be told off to attend me in all my doings. Everything seemed to surprise him; he could not measure me up at all, and he was continually saying that *he was* ——, although I knew quite well that he wasn't. One day his worship the Mayor of Hereford called to see me. When I asked the waiter to show his worship up he said that *he was* ——. The mayor was a flamboyant sort of individual, and said, "Now, Mr Christie Murray, Lord Lyttelton is in Hereford, and is most par-tic-ular-ly interested in the subject of which you are treating in *Mayfair*. He will be delighted to meet you, and I have arranged with his lordship that you shall meet him at my house (the mayor's house) at 7.30 on Friday. You will not fail his lordship?" I said that I would not for the world, and I escorted his worship to his carriage. At the door he turned and said, "Half-past seven on Friday, Mr Christie Murray, at my house, to meet Lord Lyttelton. Profoundly disappointed if you don't turn out. His lordship will be grieved, Mr Murray." The mayor having gone I turned round—to encounter my waiter, and for the last time he said that *he was* ——. And although I had known that he was not, he said it with such sincerity that I more than half believed him.

Either the man must beg, which in itself is, of course, a misdemeanour, or he must starve. To sleep out of doors is a crime, and for a man to appeal for shelter at the workhouse means that he will be detained until every chance of obtaining employment is lost. I remember an unfortunate fellow, whom I overtook near Tewkesbury, a man of about sixty as I should judge, who was sitting by the roadside cooling his blistered heels in a little runnel of clear water, and crying quietly to himself as he tried to rid his fingers of the tar which stuck to them after his workhouse morning's experience of oakum picking. I sat down beside him and offered him a fill of tobacco, and by and by got into talk with him. He was a man of some intelligence and education, and had begun life as a journeyman watchmaker. He had risen to be an employer, and had kept a small workshop in Coventry, but misfortune had overtaken him and he had failed in business. The immediate cause of his distress was that he had received notification that employment at his trade of watchmaker was open to him at Evesham. The poor fellow was quite penniless and had been compelled to walk; his strength had failed him by the way, and he had had to take refuge in the workhouse. In payment for his lodging, his two chunks of dry bread and his pint of skilly, he had been compelled to pick his quantum of oakum. The man's fingers were, of course, as delicate as a lady's, and in the course of our talk he held them out to me, showing the tips all raw and bleeding and thick with tar. He sobbed bitterly as he told me that he would be unable to do a hand-stroke at his trade for at least a fortnight. He carried with him letters of recommendation which ought to have guaranteed him from any such usage as that to which he had been condemned. He had tried to show them to the labour master, but he had been waved contemptuously aside, and had been forced by threats of being imprisoned as a refractory pauper to betake himself to the task imposed upon him.

It need hardly be said that all the men one encountered were not of this type. I met one engaging ruffian who unbosomed himself to me with the utmost frankness. "Oi meets genelmen on the road," he said, "as arsk me why Oi don't gaow to wurk; a great big upstandin' chap loike you, they sez, loafin' abaht and doin' nothin'—why it's disgraceful! Well, I sez, guv'nor, I sez, 'ow can Oi go to wurk? Oi'm a skilled wurkman, I sez, in me own trade, but Oi'm froze aht by modern machinery. Oi'm a 'and comb-maker, I sez, and the trade's bin killed this dozen years. Oi'm too hold a dawg to learn new tricks, I sez, Oi'm a middle-aged man and what ham Oi to do to yearn my means of loiveli'ood." He added with a wink that there was only one hand comb-maker in business in that wide district of England and Wales over which he wandered. "And," said he, "you can bet your sweet loife Oi don't go nigh 'im." This cadging rascal would very rarely have occasion to present himself as a casual pauper at the Union workhouse, but had he done so, he and the unfortunate watchmaker would have been treated on perfectly equal terms.

The whole system of casual poor law relief is about as rotten and as stupid as it can be, and its administration is in itself a scandal. There is no general rule throughout the country as to dietary or as to the nature of the labour executed, or as to the hours over which that labour shall be extended. The habitual loafer

knows perfectly well the places where life is made easy to him, and as a matter of course avoids those in which the fare is poorest and the work most arduous. The honest seeker after work knows nothing of these things and the whole iniquitous and idiotic system is at once a direct bribe to the inveterate work-shirker and a scourge to the honest and industrious poor. I published the result of my own researches into it in the columns of *Mayfair* now nearly thirty years ago, and suggested a very simple and easy remedy for its defects. I had some hope that I might be attended to. The late Lord Lyttelton, Mr Gladstone's friend, was at one time disposed to take the matter up, but his melancholy death put an end to that, and recent inquiries assure me that the old intolerable methods of casual relief are still unreformed.

Looking back now, I can see how very large a part that seven weeks' experience played in my life as a novelist. For years afterwards it cropped up as inevitably in my work as King Charles's head in Mr Dick's Memorial, but at least it has enabled me to feel that few writers of fiction in my time have gone nearer to reality in their studies than myself. I certainly worked the little mine that I had opened for all that it was worth, and readers of mine who give themselves the trouble to remember will recall the wanderings of the hero of *Skeleton Keys*, of Frank Fairholt, of Hiram Search and of young George Bushell. Speaking of Hiram Search naturally reminds me of Charles Reade. I dedicated the book in which Hiram appears to that great writer and sent a copy of it to him with what I daresay was a somewhat boyish letter. I have the terms of my dedication in mind still, and I remember that I wrote of a great genius which has always been put to lofty uses. Reade's letter in response has always held a place amongst my treasures. "It is no discredit," he wrote, "for a young man to appreciate his seniors beyond their merits." I have always thought that very noble and modest and well-said. Reade is the only one of the writers who in my own boyhood were already reckoned great with whom it was my happiness to come into personal contact.

I have met with but four men in my experience who have been distinguished by that splendid urbanity of manner which was once thought to express the acme of high breeding. Charles Reade was one of them. I never knew him intimately enough to get beyond it, but that he himself could break through it upon occasion was known to everybody. A beautiful, stately cordiality commonly marked his social manner, but he could be moved to a towering rage by an act of meanness, treachery or oppression; and in his public correspondence he was sometimes downright vitriolic. Hardly anything could have excused the retort he flung at some unhappy disputant who had called one of his facts in question. "You have dared," he wrote, "to contradict me on a subject in which I am profoundly learned, while you are ignorant as dirt." It was true enough, but perhaps it was hardly worth while to say it in that fashion. Nearly all his life he was embroiled in controversy of one sort or another. He spent himself in the exposure of abuses and the people whom he exposed assailed him rashly. He took prodigious pains to be accurate, and before he assaulted the prison system in *It's Never Too Late to Mend*, or the conduct of private lunatic asylums in *Hard Cash*, he had gathered and indexed huge volumes of information culled from every available source. These memoranda he called *nigri loci*. His system of indexing was so precise that he could lay an instant finger on any fact of which he was in search, and nobody who ventured to impugn his facts escaped from him unscathed. In one instance, a barrister was so misguided as to tell him publicly that a legal incident in one of the two books I have mentioned was obviously impossible and absurd.

Reade was down upon him like a hammer: "The impossibility in question disguised itself as fact and went through the hollow form of taking place" on such and such a date, in such and such a court, and the proceedings were recorded in volume so and so, on certain pages of the official Law Reports for a given year. His adversary was left with no better resource than to charge him with hurling undigested lumps of official documents at the head of the public; and this left his equanimity undisturbed.

But it was when they charged him with plagiarism that his critics hit him on the raw. About the time when I first knew him somebody started a controversy with respect to his story of *The Wandering Heir*, and the accusation was made that he had lifted a page or two out of Swift's *Polite Conversations*. "Of course I did," said Reade to me, "but the essence of a plagiarism is that it shall have some chance of going undetected; it is the appropriation to one's self of the property of another with the intent to display it as one's own, and to me it was impossible to suppose that a writer like Dean Swift was so obscure that I could play a trick like that with him with impunity. A recognisable quotation is not a plagiarism. They brought the same charge against me because I translated the etchings of Corot into accurate English. The sources I tapped for *The Cloister and the Hearth* are open to anybody, and any man who chooses may study them and make a romance out of them if he can. It is perfectly true that I milked three hundred cows into that bucket, but the butter I churned was my own." It seems scarcely fair to have brought such an accusation against a writer who not only made no disguise of his literary methods, but who so openly proclaimed and defended them.

In the last page of *The Cloister and the Hearth* he acknowledges his debt to the great Erasmus, for example, in these very noble and eloquent phrases:—"Some of the best scenes in this new book are from his mediaeval pen and illumine the pages where they come; for the words of a genius so high as his are not born to die: their immediate work upon mankind fulfilled, they may seem to lie torpid; but at each fresh shower of intelligence Time pours upon her students, they prove their immortal race; they revive, they spring from the dust of great libraries; they bud, they flower, they fruit, they seed from generation to generation, and from age to age." The professional critics have never been just to Reade, but it is a fact that I have never encountered a workman in the craft of fiction who did not reckon him a master among the masters. It has long seemed to me that *The Cloister and the Hearth* is, in fiction, the only real revival of a dead age in the whole range of imaginative literature. When Mr Conan Doyle, as he then was, was lecturing in the United States, we met one evening at the Parker House in Boston, and he said one thing about that immortal book which I have ever since thought memorable. "To read *The Cloister and the Hearth*" he declared, "is like going through the Dark Ages with a dark lantern." And indeed the criticism is true. You travel from old Sevenbergen to mediaeval Rome and every man and woman you encounter on the way is indisputably alive, though there is no he or she amongst them all who has a touch of modernity. They are of their epoch, from Denys of Burgundy to the Princess Clælia, from the *mijaurée* of the Tête D'Or to the tired and polished old gentleman who for the time being presides over the destinies of the Church of Rome. Here, for once, a prodigious faculty for taking pains is used with genius, and the chances are that the author of this monumental work, despised as he too often was as a mere sensationalist in his own day, will survive a score

of his contemporaries who are even at this hour, by common critical consent, placed over him.

He was always fighting against some legal oppression. In the latest case in which I knew him to be engaged, an attempt had been made by a wealthy ground landlord to squeeze an unprotected widow lady out of her rights and to compel her to surrender the house and grounds which had belonged to her deceased husband. With the impetuosity which distinguished him in such matters, Reade flung himself into the conflict. It was enough for him to know that an injustice was being done or attempted to fire him at the centre. He caused to be inscribed on the outer wall of the garden of the mansion in dispute the words, "Naboth's Vineyard," and he used to relate with great glee how a Jew old clothesman one day translated this into "Naboth's Vinegar," and after a wondering reading of it, said: "Good Lord! I should have taken it for a gentleman's houth." "From which," said Reade, quaintly, "you may conclude that Houndsditch thumbs not the annals of Samaria!"

That shapeless production *Grace Forbeach* had one idea in it which I was able to use later on to some advantage. In those days a writer of fiction expended much more care upon the actual mechanism of his plot than seems to be thought necessary nowadays. Even a man of the genius of Charles Dickens did not feel himself at liberty to work untrammelled by the exigencies of some intricate and harassing framework of invention on which he made it his business to hang all his splendours of description and his observation of human character. The power of the plot in English fiction found its culmination in the work of Wilkie Collins, whose *Moonstone* is probably the finest piece of mere literary cabinet-making in the world. All the younger writers of his time were strongly under his domination and it was quite a necessity for us to have some merely mechanical central idea round which we could evolve a story which, in its serial form, should keep the reader perpetually upon the tenterhooks of expectation. Such an idea I had stumbled on in *Grace Forbeach* where one of the characters was made feloniously to possess himself of his own property and thereby rendered himself liable to penal servitude. I elaborated this notion in *Joseph's Coat* and made the development of the whole fable dependent on it.

Leaving forgotten *Grace Forbeach* out of the reckoning, *Joseph's Coat* was my third novel in the order of writing and the second in order of publication. The second half of *A Life's Atonement* was written under difficulties which would have been absolutely insurmountable if it had not been for that spirit of camaraderie which distinguished the jolly little Bohemian set amongst whom I had fallen. One chum who lived over an undertaker's shop in Great Russell Street found me house-room, and I had a resource from which, for the space of some ten weeks, I was entitled to draw one pound a week, which came to me in rather an odd fashion. Every morning a half-crown was slipped under the doormat, except on Saturdays, when three were left there, one for the needs of the day and a double allowance for the Sunday. A loaf and a tin of Chicago beef stocked the larder, and that being once attended to, the remnant of my income served for such necessities of life as beer and tobacco, and pen and ink and paper. The bargain I had made with Messrs Chambers was that I should receive one-half payment for the book—one hundred and twenty-five pounds—on delivery and acceptance, and the other half on the conclusion of the serial publication of the story in their journal. This left an interval of twelve months between the two payments, and the first was all but exhausted when my second commission from the firm reached me. It was then drawing towards the close of the year, and Mr Robert Chambers wrote me to say that the writer with whom he had bargained to follow *A Life's Atonement* had broken down in health, and asking if I were in a position to supply her place. I went off post-haste to Edinburgh and saw him there, and it was arranged between us that I should deliver to him six chapters of an original novel per week, that I should remain in the neighbourhood of Edinburgh in order to give him opportunity for consultation from time to time, and that whilst the book was being written I should receive a living wage. He recommended me to locate myself in Portobello, and there in the dead season I had no difficulty in finding lodgings.

I had scarcely deposited my portmanteau when I set to work. I began to write without the faintest idea of a plan, and for the first day or two I swam boldly enough along the stream of chance. The first chapters pleased Robert Chambers greatly and he was wise and generous enough to say so. For six tremendous weeks I wrote, beginning punctually every morning at eight o'clock and pretty generally bringing the day's work to a finish in the neighbourhood of midnight. I gave myself two half-hours for exercise and rambled in all sorts of weather about the sands and the deserted promenade. I was approaching the end of the work when a very curious experience befell me. I was sitting towards the end of the day's labour at my table when I felt suddenly that somebody was standing just behind me. The impression was so strong that I turned round hastily and made a survey of the little room. There was nobody there and I went back to work again. The feeling returned so often that I repeatedly found myself turning round in the middle of a sentence, but in an hour at most I was able to dismiss the fancy for the time. I got to bed too excited and too tired to sleep, and whilst I was lying there in the dark, the idea of that fancied presence came back again. It was standing at my bed-head in the darkness, and though I knew that to be a physical impossibility because the bed and the wall were close together, I found myself no longer able to dismiss the image. I went to sleep in spite of it at last, but at the instant at which I sat down at my table to take up the thread of last night's work, it was there again. Little by little it assumed shape and colour in my imagination, until at last it was as clearly present to me as if I had seen it with my bodily eyes. I have it before me at this instant; it was the figure of a man in mediaeval costume, in trunk and hose and doublet, and his clothing was red on one side and yellow on the other. The face, so far as it could be seen, was cadaverous and cruel, but half of it was concealed by a black vizor of velvet, through which lamped a pair of dark, unwinking eyes. The figure was there all day and every minute of the day, but I pegged stolidly on and gave as little heed as I could to it. But that night when I had got to bed, a development occurred. The figure took up that impossible position at my head, and I became aware that it had, balanced over its shoulder, an axe with a broad back and an edge like a razor, with which it stood in act to strike.

I got out of bed and re-lit the lamp, refilled my pipe and sat down to think things over. Wherever I went, the figure was behind me and always in the same threatening attitude. I began to talk to it at last in set phrases: "I know perfectly well what you are," I said; "you are an inhabitant of the land of Mental Overwork. I'm going to hold you at arm's length, because if I allowed you to take liberties, you might grow dangerous. We will travel together if you will insist upon it until this book is finished and then I will take you into some quiet,

rural, restful place and lose you." I did not lose him when the work was over; he went about with me for a week or two. He travelled with me from Edinburgh to London, then from London by the long sea-route to Antwerp; from Antwerp to tranquil little Roche-fort in the Belgian Ardennes; and it was not until I found myself one day with my easel and my paintbox sketching some quaint bulbous old trees in the Avenue des Tilleuls, that I woke up to the fact that I had lost him. He came back to me once more and once only. I think it was owing to the fact that a fire had occurred at the printing premises of Messrs Grant & Co. in Turnmill Street, in which the manuscript of a work of fiction had been destroyed, that I was asked by my old friend Gowing to put extra pressure upon myself for the completion of a story on which I was engaged for him. It was a question of days and almost of hours, and I remember that at the last, from Friday morning until late on Sunday night, I wrote almost incessantly, snatching an hour or two's sleep in an armchair, only when Nature imperatively demanded it. I delivered the manuscript in person on Monday morning and as I was walking home along Holborn, I suddenly became aware of the presence of my old unpleasant comrade. I giped at him with a feeling of perfect security, but I was brought to a halt by a sudden horrible discovery—the paving-stone in front of me was not a real paving-stone at all but a mere paper imitation, with an actually measureless gulf below it. The delusion was so real and convincing that I was able to pursue my way only by the most desperate resolution, and all the way to Fitzroy Square, where I was living at the time, the fear clung to me. I took a liberal dose of whisky, went to bed and slept the clock round, and woke to find the whole thing vanished.

I spent five happy years at Rochefort, and although when I first went there I had no idea of staying for more than three or four weeks' rest and quiet, it was actually eighteen months before I left the place at all.

In dealing with my experiences in the Press gallery of the House of Commons, I had occasion to speak of the curious premonition which assailed me at the instant at which the unfortunate Dr Kenealy made use of the rhetorical symbol of the dewdrops and the lion's mane. I do not know that I have any right to claim the possession of any psychic faculty which goes beyond the ordinary, but I do know that that sort of premonition of a coming circumstance has not been at all rare in my experience. Something very like it befell me whilst I was living at Rochefort, and in that instance it proved of signal service to me, I wrote the final scene of *Joseph's Coat* on a certain wintry day and was within a page or two of the conclusion of the story when I was called to luncheon. In the ardour of work I had allowed the fire to die out in my bedroom stove, and encountering on the stairs a certain lout, whose name was Victor, who did duty about the stables of the hotel, I gave him instructions to see to it. Ten minutes later a dreadful inspiration occurred to me, and I dashed upstairs. The man was kneeling before the stove and was in the very act of striking a lucifer match when I arrived. A glance at my writing-table showed me that the impulse on which I had acted was only too well-founded. The man had taken a dozen pages of my manuscript, and an instant later he would have set them blazing. In those days I wrote on an unruled large quarto, and since it was my habit to crowd sixteen hundred words into a page, the loss of time and labour would have been, at least, considerable. I recovered my MS. all crumpled and dirty, and I applied to that ostler pretty nearly all the opprobrious names in his language with which I was acquainted. "Mais, monsieur," the criminal responded, "le papier était déjà gâté; vous avez écrit là-dessus." If this had been intended as a literary criticism, it might possibly have been justified, but seeing that it was offered by a man who could not read, there was something in the frank imbecility of it which disarmed me, and I daresay that the shout of laughter with which I received it was just as incomprehensible to the man as the rage with which I had fallen upon him only a moment earlier.

When I first took up my residence in that little Belgian village, I mistook it for an Arcadia, but a more intimate knowledge of it and the acquaintanceship I formed with the village doctor and the *doyen* of the little local cathedral served to undeceive me. It was full of poverty and of all the more sordid forms of vice which everywhere seem inseparable from physical distress and overcrowding. I taught both the medico and the cleric to appreciate the flavour of Scotch whisky, and on many a score of winter nights I used to sit and listen to them whilst they engaged in long discussions on the Christian faith. The venerable *doyen* laboured hard to convince the doctor, who was an Agnostic of the aggressive type. "La religion," said the latter, on one occasion, "est une bonne et belle chose pour les femmes, les enfants et les imbeciles," but in spite of their antagonism in this respect, they worked together with a devotion which was beyond praise amongst their poor. The priest used to tell the doctor that he would have been the best of Christians if he had only known it, and the doctor used to assure him in return that he would have been the best of men if only his mind had never been distorted by the fables of the Church. They met on the common ground of benevolence and scholarship and I think they were a pair of the most lovable old fossils I have ever known. The doctor was a man of prodigious attainment and I often used to wonder what had induced such a man to bury himself in such a place, until I learned that the genial old bachelor bookworm had known a day of romance long before, and that the lady of his choice had, on the very eve of marriage, resigned herself, like Carlyle's Blumine, to wed someone richer. The romance spoiled his career, but it was a godsend for his native village, where he laboured till the day of his death, expending the whole of his professional income in works of charity. He has no place in this simple record apart from my affectionate remembrance of him and these remembrances may be taken simply as a flower laid in passing on the burial mound of an old friend.

The hunting lodge of Leopold, King of the Belgians—the Château des Ardennes, as it is called—is situate some half a dozen miles from Rochefort, on the road to Dinan on the Meuse. It was a favourite relaxation of mine when I found myself in want of exercise and a holiday, to mount a knapsack and to stroll to Dinan, which is only a score of English miles away. On one of these jaunts I had my only interview with a reigning monarch. I was sauntering homeward in the dusk of a summer's evening when I saw at the gate of the château, a tall, gaunt figure with a long, peaked beard, a pheasant's feather stuck in the ribbon of a bowler hat, and trousers very disreputably trodden into rags behind. As I passed him he raised his hat and gave me a courteous "Bon soir, monsieur." I returned his salute and answered "Bon soir, sire." "Ah, ha!" said His Majesty, like a pleased child, "vous me connaissez alors?" I responded that everybody knew the King of the Belgians and I added that I had never ventured to enter His Majesty's dominions without carrying his portrait with me. "Comment donc!" said His Majesty, and when I produced a brand new five-franc piece, the jest enjoyed a greater prosperity than it deserved. We got into conversation on the strength of it and he stood for perhaps five minutes chatting not unintelligently about English books and authors.

The years I spent in Rochefort were, I think, the happiest and most fruitful of my life, but the last piece of work I did there came very near to landing me in a contretemps which might, for a time at least, have had an uncomfortable result. At that time Mr James Payn had just taken over the editorship of the *Cornhill* magazine, the price of which he had reduced to 6d. My story—*By the Gate of the Sea*—had been the last to appear in the original series founded by Thackeray, and I was invited by Mr Payn to inaugurate the new and cheaper issue. With this purpose I wrote *Rainbow Gold*, and since it was Mr Payn's unbreakable editorial rule not to take any work into consideration until its last line was in his hands, and he at this time was in a mighty hurry about his literary supplies, I had to undertake again pretty much such a spell of work as I had undertaken with *Val Strange*, and with an almost equally unfortunate result. My methods of work have often brought me near a nervous breakdown, and by the time at which *Rainbow Gold* was finished, I was all but a wreck. It had been arranged between the editor of the *Cornhill* and myself that the completed copy of my book should be in his hands on a given date, and for some reason I was afraid to trust it to the post, and determined to carry it to London and deliver it with my own hands. For this purpose it was necessary that I should catch the Malle Des Indes early on the Sunday morning at Jemelle two miles away. I had a little leather case constructed, in which to carry my manuscript, and this I had seen more than half completed on the Thursday afternoon. I strolled into the shop of the village *cordonnier* on Saturday morning to ask why it had not been delivered, and I found the man busy on a duplicate of it which he promised to deliver before the evening. It came out on inquiry that he had sold the case I had ordered to a person who described himself as a commercial traveller, and who was staying at the Chevaux Blancs, a little hotel in the village which was frequented by people of his class. I satisfied myself that the work would be done in time, and when it was delivered in the course of the evening, I naturally supposed that there was an end of the matter. I met the purchaser of my box on the platform at Jemelle, and we travelled by the same train as far as Lille. There I got another momentary glimpse of him and thenceforth saw him no more.

I travelled on to Dover without adventure, but there, as I was quitting the boat, I was encountered by a man who, although he was in plain clothes, was immediately recognisable as a member of the police force. He laid his hand upon my shoulder and said: "I beg your pardon, but I must ask you to accompany me to the Captain's cabin." I not unnaturally asked him why. He pointed to the box I held and asked if that were my property. I answered of course in the affirmative and he said in quite the official manner that he must trouble me to go with him, and made a motion to relieve me of my burden. I handed the box to him and he conducted me, still with a hand upon my shoulder, to the companion-way. In the captain's cabin I found two or three men who were all very grave, and all very suave and polite. One of them asked me my name, and another whether I had not left the village of Rochefort by such and such a train in the morning. I answered both questions without hesitation, and I noticed that my interlocutor looked a little puzzled. I was asked next what I was carrying in that leathern case, and, by way of answer, I unlocked the box and produced my manuscript. There was a curious restraint visible in the manner of my examiners when I performed this simple action, and I could not in the least understand it at the time, although its reason became clear enough a minute later. "I beg your pardon, Mr Murray," said the man who had first laid a detaining hand upon me, "there has been a mistake, but we were compelled to do our duty." He intimated that I was at liberty to go, which in some heat I declined to do, until I had received some explanation of this arrest of a private citizen bound on legitimate affairs. I had missed the tidal train, and I represented that this had caused me some inconvenience.

Then the truth came out. The hotel des Chevaux Blancs, in innocent seeming little Roche-fort, had been for some months past a hot-bed of European anarchy. The people who went and came there were surrounded by spies, and the police of Dover had been advised by telegraph, of the departure of a noted anarchist, who was carrying precisely such a box as that in which I had bestowed my manuscript. Before I left Dover, it transpired that a man had been arrested in Folkestone who was carrying with him enough of Atlas dynamite to have wrecked a whole square. The movements of each of us had been watched by the continental police, and had been wired to England. There had been a moment at which the two boxes had been laid on the same bench on the platform at Jemelle, and I have often since pictured to myself the imbroglio which might have ensued if they had been accidentally exchanged. It could not have lasted long in the nature of things, but it would certainly have afforded me a new experience.

I have had a good deal to do with the police in my time, as most working journalists have, and this reminds me of one or two adventures which, if I had preserved a chronological order in my narrative, should have been told earlier. Before I left Birmingham I became acquainted with an officer who afterwards became eminent in the service of Scotland Yard. The fashion in which we were introduced to each other was sufficiently dramatic. It was an hour after midnight in a heavy rain and the place was Pinfold Street, at the back of the premises of the *Birmingham Morning News*. A bedraggled woman ran shrieking uphill with cries of "help" and "murder," and behind her staggered a drunken ruffian brandishing a club which, when we came to examine it later, proved to have been sawn from the top of an old-fashioned mahogany bedstead. It was simply rounded at one end and square and heavy at the other, and it would infallibly have done the business of any person with whose head it had come in contact. I was encumbered with a heavy ulster which was buttoned down almost to my feet and I should certainly have been too late to prevent mischief, but just as the pursuer came within striking distance an agile figure darted round the corner and the murderous-minded drunkard dropped like an ox in the shambles at a single blow. The newcomer was a plain-clothes policeman and he had used a pair of handcuffs as a knuckle-duster and had taken the ruffian clean on the point of the chin. I accompanied him and his captor to the Moor Street police station and got a paragraph out of the incident before the paper went to bed.

I saw no more of my plain-clothes man for a month or two and then an odd circumstance threw us together again. My father, who was still carrying on business in West Bromwich, was a letterpress printer only, but he received an occasional order for copperplate and lithographic work which he handed over either to a Mr Storey in Livery Street, or to the firm of W. & B. Hunt in New Street. I had been over to call on him one evening and he had asked me to attend to some slight commission with either of these firms. I called first on the Livery Street man, whose establishment was just outside Snow Hill station, and found him looking at a queer copperplate impression which lay on the counter before him.

"There's something uncommonly queer about this," he said, "and I don't know that I ought to go on with it;



it strikes me very forcibly that an attempt is being made to forge a Russian note and that this is a part of the process." The lines on the paper made a sort of hieroglyphic puzzle which it was quite impossible to decipher. I asked him what he intended to do with it and he answered that he would fulfil his order and set the police upon the track of the people who had given it. I went on to Messrs Hunt's printing works in New Street and there I found one of the partners poring over what at first sight looked like a replica of the impression I had just seen. I said nothing about the matter and nothing was said to me, but when I had transacted my business and had got out into the street again the first man I encountered was my plain-clothes policeman. I told him that I thought I was on the track of a little bit of business in his line and I took him back into the office of the copperplate printer and introduced him. It had just occurred to me that if the two plates I had seen were accurately registered they might fit into each other and make out a consecutive document, and so in the sequel it proved to be. A gang of Polish forgers had conceived the idea that in a foreign country it would be possible to get two separate engravers to imitate each a portion of a fifty-rouble note and they had made arrangements to do their own printing when they had secured the plates. I made arrangements with my detective that he should bring me first hand and exclusive information with respect to the development of the case and within eight and forty hours he had effected his arrest and I was the only journalist in the town who was allowed to know anything about it. Had I stayed on in Birmingham I might have developed a sort of specialism in this direction, but circumstances drifted me away and it was not until some years later that I met my friend again and found him to be occupying a position on the detective staff at Scotland Yard. He told me how he came there and, in its way, it is one of the most remarkable little stories I remember to have heard.

There was a manufacturing jeweller in Camberwell whose name was Whitehead, who had a showroom somewhere in the neighbourhood of St. Paul's Cathedral. Seventeen years there had been in his employ a commercial traveller in whom he reposed the completest confidence. This traveller had a very pretty turn for the invention of ornamental designs in fgold and precious stones and he was an accomplished draughtsman. In his journeys about the country he carried with him a tray of pinchbeck and of coloured glass, which represented in duplicate a tray of real jewellery and precious stones which was kept under lock and key at the showroom. It happened, whether by accident or design, that the one tray was substituted for the other, the pinchbeck imitations being left in the jeweller's safe and the real thing carried away by the commercial traveller. The fact of the substitution was not discovered for some days and by that time the traveller, following his ordinary route, should have been in Manchester or Liverpool. He was wired to at both places but no reply was received from him. Not a doubt of the man's probity entered into his employer's mind, but when all efforts to trace him had failed the jeweller became alarmed for the safety of his employé and communicated with the police.

Now, as fortune would have it, the young Birmingham detective had been sent up to London at this time and, calling at Scotland Yard, he had put into his hands some copies of the document by which the police were circulating the news of the traveller's disappearance, together with a woodcut reproducing a photograph which had been taken some years before and had willingly been surrendered to Mr. Whitehead by the traveller's wife, who was naturally in great distress concerning him. It was the general impression at the time that he had been decoyed away and murdered for the sake of the valuable property he carried, which was of such a nature that it might easily have been disposed of by the criminal—the gold being melted down and the precious stones being disposed of in the ordinary way of business. At Euston Station that afternoon, on his way back to Birmingham, the provincial detective had one fellow-traveller to whom, but for one singular little circumstance, he would probably have paid no heed whatever. The fellow-traveller had one article of luggage only, but he seemed to be unusually anxious about it. It was a hat-box and when he had placed it on the rack overhead he appeared to be unwilling to leave it out of sight for more than an instant at a time. He arose a score of times to readjust it and when he was not occupied in that way he kept a constant eye upon it. "I'm no great Scripture reader," said the detective to me, in telling me the story, "but when I was a kid my mother used to read the Bible to me every day and one text came into my mind when I saw that cove so anxious about his hat-box: 'Where the treasure is, there will the heart be also.' It kept coming back into my mind and somehow I got to thinking that if it had not been for certain things about him the man in the carriage would have been very like the man whose portrait and description I had just been looking at. The man described had features of a marked Jewish cast and so had the man in the carriage, but the man described had red hair, thick red eyebrows and a beard and moustache of the same colour. The man in the carriage was clean shaved and his hair and eyebrows were as black as a crow's back, but I had got the idea in my mind and I couldn't get it out again, and when he turned his face sideways to look out of the window the light fell on his cheek and, though the whisker had only just begun to sprout after his last shave, I could see that by nature he was as rusty as a jot. I felt downright certain of him from that very minute. He got out at Rugby, taking his hat-box with him, and as I had no funds with me I was afraid I was going to lose him, but he only went into the refreshment room for a glass of beer and a sandwich and came back with me and travelled comfortably on to Birmingham. There he engaged a room at the Queen's Hotel for the night, and having locked up his hat-box in it he went away to order a supply of clothes and linen, as I found out afterwards. I nipped down to Moor Street and told them what I had to say. I got my authority to act, and when my gentleman got back again, I was there all ready for him with a fellow-officer and we nabbed him at his bedroom door. He nipped out a revolver and tried to shoot himself, but we were too quick for him. We made him give up the key of the hat-box and there, sure enough, was every one of the missing jewels. He had torn the velvet lining out of the case and had thrown everything into it pell-mell and wrapped it up in two or three towels so, I suppose, that the contents of the hat-box couldn't jingle. My getting him was just an accident from start to finish, and if it had not been for that text of Scripture I should never have given the man a second thought, but it was reckoned a smartish capture and it ended in my promotion and my coming here."



## CHAPTER XIII \*

*Eight Hours Day in Melbourne—The Australian Born—  
Australians and the Mother Country—The Governor—The  
Sydney Bulletin—The Englishman in Australia—Australian  
Journalism—The Theatres—The Creed of Athleticism—The  
Future.*

It is many years since I saw a sight which so pricked and stirred my blood as the final episode of the procession of Eight Hours Day in Melbourne. The day was wintry and dismal. Early rains had threatened the dispersal of the patient crowds which lined the roads; the pavements were muddy and the sky was lowering. The march of the trades bodies did little to dispel the gloom of the day for the one onlooker concerning whose sentiments I am authorised to speak. The vast crowd gave each trade a reception as it passed, and sometimes the marchers passed below the Treasury windows and cheered the governor. There was plenty of noise and enthusiasm, but I was unawakened until the tail-end of the procession came. Two brakes drew up below the governor's standing-place, and some score of grey-bearded men rose up in these vehicles and waved their hats with vigour, whilst the whole orderly mob roared applause at them and Lord Hopetoun himself clapped his hands like a pleased boy at the theatre. All the men in the two brakes were elderly and grey-headed, but as far as I could see, they were all stalwart and able-bodied, and the faces of a good many were bronzed with years of sun and wind. Over the leading vehicle was suspended a strip of white cloth, and on this was painted the words, "The Pioneers." These men were the makers of Victoria, the fathers of the proud and populous city which lay widespread about us. There is no need to be eloquent about Melbourne. Too many people have sung its praises already. But it is one of the cities of the world; it has a population of over half a million; it has its churches, its chapels, its synagogues, its theatres, its hotels; it is as well furnished in most respects as any other city of its size; and these grey men yet staunch in body, bronzed and bright-eyed, were among the beginners of it. When I first visited Melbourne I was introduced to a man who, between the present site of the Roman Catholic Cathedral and the present site of the Town Hall, had been "bushed" for a whole day and lost in the virgin forest. I knew already how young the city was, how strangely rapid its growth had been; but I did not realise what I knew, and these elderly strangers' bodily presence made my thought concrete. That beautifully appropriate and dramatic finish struck the same chord of wonder, but with a fuller sound.

*\* These Antipodean notes, dealing with the conditions of some twenty years ago, have lost nothing of their vivid interest by the lapse of time, and illustrate in a remarkable manner the process of history being made for the world, while it hardly has time to wait.*

The city is commonplace enough in itself, but the Victorian, quite justifiably, refuses to think so. Men come back from London, and Paris, and Vienna, and New York, and think Melbourne the finer for the contrast. In reality, it is very very far from being so; but it is useless to reason with patriotism and its convictions. The men of Victoria run devotion to their soil to an extreme. I was told an exquisite story, for the truth of which I had a solemn voucher, though it carries its evidences of veracity and needs no bolstering from without. An Australian-born—he came of course from that Gascony of the Antipodes which has Melbourne for its capital—visited the home country. An old friend of his father was his cicerone in London and took him, amongst other places, to Westminster Abbey, and "There, my young friend," said the Englishman, when they had explored the noble old building, "you have nothing like that in Australia." "My word," said the colonial export, "no fear! You should just see the Scotch church at Ballarat!"

The tale is typical. I would tell it, in the hope that he would find it an *open-sesame* to many things, to any fair-minded and observant man who was going out to Victoria. It is a little outrageous to the stranger, but in it the general public sentiment is drawn in grand outlines, magnified many times, but not in the least caricatured. The patriotic prejudice goes everywhere. It lives at the very roots of life. Truthful men will tell you that London is vilely supplied with cabs in comparison with Melbourne. They believe it. They will tell you that the flavours of English meats, game, fruits and vegetables are vastly inferior to those they know at home. And they believe it. To the unprejudiced observer Melbourne is the worst cabbied city in the world, or amongst the worst. A gourmet would find a residence in Australia a purgatory. For my own part, I have learned in a variety of rough schools at whatsoever meat I sit therewith to be content. In matters of gourmandise I am content wi' little and cantie wi' mair.

But, Shade of Savarin! How I relish my morning sole, after two years banishment from that delicious creature! How I savour my saddle of mutton! What a delightful thing I now know my English strawberry to be! But to the New South Welshman my doctrine is a stumbling-block and to the Victorian it is foolishness. Mr Sala preached it years ago and the connoisseurs of the Greater Britain of the south have never forgiven him.

Another patriotic delusion is the glorious climate. The plain fact is that there is no such thing as a climate. They take their weather in laminae, set on end. You walk from the tropics to the pole in five minutes. A meteorological astonishment lies in wait at every corner of the street. It blows hot, it blows cold, it scorches, it freezes, it rains, it shines, and all within the compass of an hour. Yet these wonderful Australians love their weather. Other people would endure it. They brag about it. I think they must be the happiest people in the world.

By the way, I must qualify, before I forget to do so, the judgment expressed above with respect to the Australian table. I tasted in Adelaide a favourable specimen of the wild turkey, and I believe it to be the noblest of game birds. Its flavour is exquisite and you may carve at its bounteous breast for quite a little army of diners. And the remembrance of one friendly feast puts me in mind of many. Is there anywhere else on the surface of our planet a hospitality so generous, so free and boundless, as that extended to the stranger in Australia? If there be I have not known it. They meet you with so complete a welcome. They envelop you with kindness. There is no *arrière pensée* in their cordiality, no touch lacking in sincerity. This is a characteristic of the country. The native born Australian differs in many respects from the original stock, but in this

particular he remains unchanged. You present a letter of introduction and this makes you the immediate friend of its recipient. He spares no pains to learn what you desire and then his whole aim and business in life for the moment is to fulfil your wishes. Your host will probably be less polished than an Englishman living in a like house and boasting an equal income, but his *bonhomie* is unsurpassed. I used to think there was nothing like an English welcome. Australia has killed that bit of English prejudice.

This very openness of welcome, the sincerity of heart in which your host stands before you, is the means whereby the traveller first learns to be dissatisfied. He has come out with his own judgment of things raying from him in all directions—a very porcupine of pre-conception. He is not merely persuaded that the colonies are loyal but he is certain they are loyal after his own conceptions of loyalty.

So long as he encounters only the old folks he will find his pre-conceptions flattered, but he will not go long before he meets a member of the A.N.A. (which letters being interpreted signify the Australian Natives Association), and then he must be prepared to be astonished beyond measure. In a while, if he be a man of sense, he will begin to see how natural the position of the Australian native is, and then he will cease to be astonished, though he may still be grieved. The society is large and powerful. It includes within its ranks a great number of the most capable of the rising men and the younger of those already risen. Speaking broadly, its aspiration is for a separate national life. It will “cut the painter”—that is the phrase—which ties it to the old ship of state. In its ranks are many who love the old country and reverence its history and traditions, and these an Englishman only remarks with a readier excuse for what he must esteem an error. But there are others, and the melancholy fact, too long concealed or slighted, is that they are many and growing in numbers, who hate England and all things English. There are many, not stigmatised as dullards or as fools, who publicly oppose the teaching of English history in the State schools. The feeling against England is not a fantastical crank, it is a movement growing yearly in strength. I have seen men keeping their seats in serious protesting silence when the health of the Queen has been drunk at public banquets, and have found in private converse that hundreds approve their action but do not follow it because they dislike to be thought singular. The out-and-out journalistic supporters of the country vilify the mother country as a whole. They belittle its history and besmirch its rulers. Loyal Australians pooh-pooh these prints and entreat the stranger within their gates to believe that they are despised and without influence. The stranger has only to travel to learn better than this. The strongest current of Australian feeling is setting with the tide of growing power against the mother country.

That this statement will excite anger and derision in the minds of many Australians is certain. They live entrenched in the flutters of their own opinion, and are blind to the fact of the power which is mustering against them. They are as little instructed as to what is going on around them as we are at home, and our ignorance of our great dependencies is shameful and criminal. Our colonial governors, from some of whom we are supposed ourselves to learn something, and many of whom have been men of especial capacity, do not come in contact with the crowd. Lord Carrington saw more of the people amongst whom he lived than any governor before him, and I had from him a single story of a man of the country who expressed in drunken Saxon his opinion of existing forms of government; but the tale was jocularly told and was not supposed to have any importance. It could have had no importance to one who found it a single instance, as a governor would be likely to do. A governor sees smooth things. All sorts of people (except the working sort) frequent his receptions—the fashionable classes, who are far more loyal to England for the most part than the English themselves, their fringe, and then the wealthier of the tradespeople. It is proven every day that a democracy is the happiest hunting ground for a man with a title. The very rarity of the distinction makes it more precious to those who value it, and the titled governors of one of our great colonies occupies a position which is vastly higher in public esteem than that of his fellow-noblemen at home. He is the local fount of honour. To sit at his table, and to be on terms of friendship with him is to gratify the highest social ambition. He is the direct representative of the Crown, and the people who desire to associate with him must not have views which are inimical to existing forms of government, or, if they hold them, they must keep them carefully concealed. The governor responds to the toast of his own health and talks of those ties which bind and must bind the mother country to her children. His hearers are at one with him, and cheer him with hearty vigour. Absence from the dear old land has made their hearts grow fonder. Their loyalty is perfervid. Everybody goes home in a sentimental glow and the native born working-man reads his *Sydney Bulletin* over a long-sleever and execrates the name of the country which bore his father and mother.

The journal just named is very capably written and edited. The brightest Australian verse and the best Australian stories find their way into its columns. Its illustrations are sometimes brilliant, though the high standard is not always maintained. And having thus spoken an honest mind in its favour I leave myself at liberty to say that it is probably the wrongest-headed and most mischievous journal in the world. People try to treat it as a negligible quantity when they disagree with it. But I have seen as much of the surface of the country and as much of its people as most men, and I have found the pestilent print everywhere, and everywhere have found it influential. For some time past it has been telling blood-curdling stories of the iniquities of prison rule in Tasmania, with the tacit conclusion that nothing but the power of the working classes makes a repetition of these atrocities impossible. It compares the Russian Government with the English, and compares it favourably. It loses no opportunity of degrading all things English as English. England and the Englishman are as red rags to its bull-headed rage. Of course, its readers are not all sincere, though doubtless some of them are. Vast numbers of people who do not agree with it read it for its stage and social gossip; but there is a class of working-men who take its absurdities for gospel, and it is one of the factors in the growing contempt for the mother country which is noticeable amongst uneducated Australians.

Another and more potent factor is supplied by Englishmen themselves. I have never in my life known anything more offensively insolent than the patronising tolerance which I have seen the travelling Cockney extend to men of the colonies, who were worth a thousand of him. I have seen an Englishman unintentionally insult a host at his own table, and set everybody on tenterhooks by his blundering assumption that the colonists are necessarily inferior to home-bred people. Nobody likes this sort of thing. Nobody finds himself feeling more kindly to the race which sends out that intolerable kind of man.

"Met a girl the other day," says the eye-glassed idiot, beaming fatuously round the table, "little colonial girl, don't you know. She'd read George Eliot. Never was more surprised in my life." And this to a company of Australian ladies and gentlemen bred and born.

This kind of person has his influence, and on that ground he is to be regretted. The students of men and manners find him as good as meat and drink; but we cannot all be Touchstones, and perhaps, on the whole, it would be well if he were buried.

Yet another and a still more potent factor is found in the habit which prevails amongst English fathers and guardians of sending out their incurable failures to the Colonies. "You shall have one more chance, sir, and it shall be the last. You shall have £100 and your passage out to Australia. This is the last I shall do for you. Now go and never let me see your face again." So the whisky-bitten *vaurien* goes out to Melbourne, has an attack of delirium tremens aboard ship, finds his alcoholic allowance thenceforward stopped by the doctor's orders, swaggers his brief on the block in Collins Street, hangs about the bars, cursing the colonies and all men and all things colonial in a loud and masterful voice, to the great and natural contentment of the people of the country, pawns his belongings bit by bit, loafs in search of the eleemosynary half-crown or sixpence, and finally goes up country to be loathed and despised as a tenderfoot, and to swell the statistics of insanity and disease. The most loyal and friendly of Australians resent this importation. The uninstructed and untravelled native accepts him as a pattern Englishman, and the satirical prints help out that conclusion in his mind. There is no signboard on the Australian continent that rubbish of this sort may be shot there, and the English tendency to throw its waste in that direction has never been regarded in a friendly spirit. We gave them our convicts for a start and now we give them our most dangerous incapables. They do not like this and will never be got to like it. At the Bluff in New Zealand people show the stranger the southernmost gas-lamp in the world. It is the correct thing for the stranger to touch this in order that he may tell of the fact thereafter. The traveller may take the spirit of Sheridan's excellent advice to his son, and *say* he has touched it, but as a rule he takes the trouble to go down and do it. I was escorted for this festal ceremony by a resident, and leaning against that southernmost lamp-post was a Scot in an abject state of drunkenness, and as Stevenson says of a similar personage, "radiating dirt and humbug." Nigh at hand was another drunkard, sitting pipe in mouth on an upturned petroleum-tin, and the two were conversing. "Et's a nice letde coal'ny," said the man against the lamp-post, "a very nice lettle coal'ny, but it wants inergy, and it wants interprise, and it wants (hie) sobriety." He spoke with a face of immeasurable gravity, and I laughed so that I forgot to touch the lamp-post.

There are countless little matters which help the growing distaste for English people in the Australian mind. Our London journals for the most part leave us in profound ignorance of the colonies. We see now and again a telegram which is Greek to most of us, but we get no consecutive information about our kindred over seas.

The colonists are perhaps curiously tender to the feeling of the mother country and they resent this indifference. It is difficult to express the varying sentiments of a community, but in many respects the Australia of to-day resembles the America which Charles Dickens saw on his first visit. There is an eager desire to ascertain the opinion of the passing English visitor, and this exists inexplicably enough even amongst the people who despise the visitor, and the land from which he comes. They ask for candour, but they are angry if you do not praise. A good many of them, whilst just as eager for judgment as the rest, resent praise as patronage. It is certain that, in a very little while, this raw sensitiveness will die away, and leave a feeling of national security, which will not need to be shored up by every wanderer's opinion. At present the curiosity for the traveller's opinion is a litde embarrassing, and more than once I was reminded of a drawing of Du Maurier's in *Punch* where a big man standing over a little one declares: "If any man told me that was not a Titian I would knock him down, and I want your candid opinion."

There is a stage of national hobbledehoyhood and Australia has not yet grown out of it. Vanity, shyness, an intermingling of tenderness and contempt for outside opinion, a determination to exact consideration before yielding it—all these are characteristics. The working man is surly to the man who is better dressed than himself, not because he is naturally a surly fellow, but because he has not yet found a less repellent fashion of asserting independence. I shall come to the consideration of the great colonial labour question by-and-by, but the attitude of the working man is curiously consonant with the monetary characteristics of the land he lives in. Labour is growing towards such a manhood of freedom as has never been achieved elsewhere. It, too, has reached the hobbledehoy height and has all the signs which mark that elevation, the brief aspirations, the splendid unformed hopes, and the touchy irascibility.

I have said what I can to justify the dislike of England, but have by no means exhausted the explanations of the fact. There are explanations which do not justify and the most important of all seems to me to come under that head. The greatest danger to the contented union of the Empire is the protecting of a selfishness so abnormal as to excite anger and impatience. But since anger and impatience are the worst weapons with which it is possible to fight, it will be wise to lay them by, and to discuss the question unemotionally. Australia is governed by the working man. The working man has got hold of a good thing in Australia, and he has resolved to keep it and, if he can, to make it better. He has got it into his head that the one thing to be afraid of is the influx of population. He takes no count of the fact that all the wisest men of the country admit the crying need of people—that labour everywhere is needed for the development of giant resources. His loaf is his, and he is quite righteously determined that no man shall take it from him. He is not in the least degree determined that he shall not take away another man's loaf; but that is a different question. England is the one country in the world which can, under existing circumstances, or under circumstances easily conceivable, seek to send any appreciable number of new people into the colony. Therefore England is to be feared and hated, and any scheme which may be promulgated in favour of further emigration is to be resisted to the uttermost. Men talk of war as the answer to an attempt to deplete by emigration the overcrowded labour markets of the home country. No public man who sets the least value upon his position dares discuss this question. The feeling is too deep-rooted and its manifestations are too passionate. The scheme propounded by General Booth afforded an opportunity for a striking manifestation of this fact. Long before the nature of the scheme was known or guessed at, before any of the safeguards surrounding it were hinted, it was denounced

from one end of the country to the other. It is not my present business to express any opinion as to the feasibility of the plan. The point is that the mere mention of it was enough to excite an intense and spontaneous opposition. Australia will never, except under compulsion, allow any large body of Englishmen to enter into possession of any portion of her territories. The ports for emigration on a large scale are finally and definitely closed.

The population of Australia is 3,326,000. These people have an area of 3,050,000 square miles from which to draw the necessities and luxuries of life. Suppose it be allowed that one half the entire country is not and will not be habitable by man. Australians themselves would resent this estimate as being shamelessly exaggerated, but the supposition is, so far as the argument goes, in their favour. Take away that imagined useless half and every man, woman and child in the community would still have very nearly half a square mile of land if the country were equally divided. It is evident that the populace is unequal to the proper exploitation of the continent. Let them multiply as the human race never multiplied before and they must still remain unequal to the task before them for many centuries. The cry raised is that of "Australia for the Australians." Well, who are the Australians? Are they the men of the old British stock who made the country what it is, or the men who had the luck to be born to the inheritance of a splendid position, for which they have not toiled? It is the honest simple truth, and no man ought to be angry at the statement of it—though many will be—that Australia was built up by British enterprise and British money. It is a British possession still, and without British protection, British gold, and the trade which exists between it and Britain, would be in a bad way. Looked at dispassionately, the cry of "Australia for the Australians" seems hardly reasonable. The mother country has a right to something of a share in the bargain.

The argument would be infinitely less strong if the Australians were using Australia. But they are not. The vast Melbourne, of which Victoria is so proud, holds half the population of the colony, and produces little or nothing. Melbourne is the city of brass plates. There are more brass-plates to the acre in the thoroughfares which diverge from Collins Street than could be found in any other city of the world. The brass-plate, as all the world knows, is the badge of the non-producer—the parasite, the middleman, agent, call him what you will—the man who wears a tall hat and black coat, and who lives in a villa, and lives on and by the products of the labour of others. As society is constituted he is an essential when he exists in reasonable numbers. In Melbourne his numbers are out of reason. For almost every producer in Victoria there is a non-producer in the capital. In the early days men went into the country and set themselves to clear and till the soil. That impulse of energy has died out and a new one has succeeded it which is infinitely less profitable and wholesome. The tendency is now towards the city. The one source of permanent wealth is neglected, and commerce and speculation occupy the minds of men who fifty years ago would have raised mutton and wool, corn and wine. With every increase of growth in the great city there is a cry for rural labour to preserve the necessary balance of things. The call is not listened to or answered, and Melbourne is a hundred times more abnormal than London. London deals with the trade of the world, and a good half of its population could not be dispensed with. Within its limits five and a half millions do the business of a hundred millions. In Melbourne half a million do the business of another half a million, and the country necessarily suffers. No student of social economy can deny the position, but the working man will have it otherwise. He is the ruler of Australia and the destinies of a people, pointed out by nature for greatness, are stationary in his hands. He is worth studying, however, and to convince him may mean the salvation of a continent. There, as here, the working man is the victim of a prodigious blunder—a mistake so obvious that the on-looker wonders at his blindness. A month or two ago he was in the thick of a struggle which was everywhere called a fight with capital. The real battle, however, was never with capital for a moment. The one engagement—and it ranged all along the line for months—was between organised and unorganised labour, between the unionists and non-unionists. Wherever a working man of the union declared against the conditions imposed by the employer, a working man outside the union accepted those conditions. The capitalist changed his staff—that was all. The unionists were thrown permanently out of employment in large numbers, and when at last the strike fizzled out, their leaders made a melancholy proclamation of victory, which deceived nobody, not even themselves. The unionist clock in Australia has been put back a year or two. It is probable that the men will know with whom they have to fight before they are again lured into conflict. It is an old adage that much will have more. The Australian working man is the best fed, the best paid, the best housed, and the least worked of all the workers of the world. In the great towns house rent is dear, much dearer than it has a right to be in so new and so wide a country. This is the consequence of the rush for secularisation and the ensuing neglect of the resources of the land. Clothing is dear as the consequence of protective imposts. The Australian working man is a staunch protectionist, being somehow persuaded that it is essential to his interests that he should suffer for the benefit of his only enemy, the middleman. There are hundreds of restaurants in the second-rate streets of colonial towns where you may see painted up a legend, "All Meals—6d." For that small sum a man may have a sufficiency of hot or cold beef or mutton, bread, tea and a choice of vegetables. I can testify from personal knowledge that the meals are well cooked, well served and plentiful. I have eaten a worse luncheon in a London club or restaurant than I found at one of these eating-houses in Sydney and have paid five times the price, although it has to be confessed that for five times the price one *can* get a finer meal. More wholesome or more plentiful fare no man need ask for.

Well, as I have said, much will have more. The working man has got his whole programme filled up. There is one vote for one man, and about that fact almost the whole land is jubilant—though the practical good of it may as yet be a problem. The aspiration expressed in the old quatrain is fulfilled.

*"Eight hours work,  
Eight hours play,  
Eight hours sleep,  
And eight 'bob' a day."*

The Eight Hours movement has been crowned with success, and there is a magnificent annual procession to commemorate it. It is announced that a movement is to be set on foot for the further reduction of the hours of labour. Six hours a day has to be the limit of the future. The comic journals, or to speak by the card, the journals which study to be comic, prophesy four hours, two hours, and then no hours at all; but these celestial

visions are out of the working man's eyeshot.

Here and there an individual may be found who, being entrusted with an irresponsible power, would not desire to use it tyrannically. But since corporations are never so moral, so high-thinking so forbearing as individuals, corporate bodies tend always and everywhere to the misuse of their powers, and demand constantly to be held in check by some influence outside their own. The working man of the Antipodes is told so often that all the power (as well as all the freedom and the honour) lies in his hands, that he is disposed to do strange things.

But a mere glance at the history of two phases of the great strikes which have lately shaken Australian society may be of service.

In New Zealand, where, under conditions similar to those of Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland, the labourer has grown to think himself more worthy of his hire than anybody else could possibly be, the fight between unionists and non-unionists, with capital as an interested spectator, began on a curiously trivial question. A firm of printers and stationers in Christchurch were ordered to reinstate or discharge an employee. The firm declined to obey the mandate of the union, and an order went forth from the representatives of the latter body to the effect that no one belonging to any of its branches should handle the goods of the obdurate company. This was all very well in its way, until the order touched the railway hands, who are in the employ of the government. The union appealed to the railway commissioners to remain "neutral" and not to carry the goods of the offending firm. The commissioners responded that they were the servants of the public; that it was not part of their business to recognise the quarrel, but that it was their business to carry for any and every citizen who did not infringe their rules. The representatives of the union renewed their appeal for "neutrality." Why should these domineering commissioners take the side of capital and fight in its interests? The commissioners again wrote that they were the public carriers, that they had no right to refuse to work for any law-abiding citizen, that they had no place or part in the quarrel, and intended simply and merely to do the duty for which they were appointed. The din which arose on this final declaration was at once melancholy and comic.

Here was the government lending all its power to crush the working man. Here was the old class tyranny which had created class hatreds in the old country! This was what we were coming to after having emancipated ourselves from the trammels of a dead or effete superstition! Here was a government so crassly wicked and purposely blind as to profess neutrality and yet refuse to fight our battles! What had we—the working men of New Zealand—asked for? We asked that the government should hold our enemy while we punched him; and while they traitorously proclaimed their neutrality, they refused this simple request for fair play. Therefore are we, the working men of New Zealand, naturally incensed, and at the next election we will shake these worthless people out of office, and we will elect men like Fish, who know what neutrality really means!

The Hon. Mr Fish was one of the labourers' faithful. The palpable interference of the Commissioners wounded him profoundly.

The more recent strike of the Queensland shearers has afforded opportunity for a display of an equal faculty of logic and reasonableness. The shearers, at loggerheads with the squatters, proposed to arrange their differences by arson. They threatened openly to fire the grass upon those vast northern plains where fire is the thing most to be dreaded amongst many and terrible enemies. They not only threatened but they carried their threats into effect in many places; and but for the exceptional rains, which mercifully interfered between them and their purpose, they would have created scenes of boundless desolation. Here again a government has no sense of fair-play. Troops were sent to watch the shearers' camps and to prevent active hostilities. A natural thrill of horror ran through the country at this autocratic and unwarrantable act. Here at the Antipodes we have founded a democracy, and in a democracy the government motto should be nonintervention. The unionist workmen roared with indignation at countless meetings. Why were not the shearers allowed to settle the dispute their own way? Why were the poor men to be threatened, intimidated, bullied by armed force? A continent cried shame. When, in that eight hours' procession to which I have already twice referred the shearers' deputation rode by, they were received with rolling applause all along the line, and a free people cheered the victims of oppression.

In the middle of all this madness it was good to see that the greatest of the democratic journals had the courage of honesty and spoke its mind plainly. The *Melbourne Age* is a very wealthy and powerful journal, but it risked much, for the moment at least, in opposing the mingled voices of the populace. Excited leaders of the people denounced it in unmeasured epithets, and the crowd boo-hoed outside its offices in Collins Street, but the writers of the journal went their way unmoved, as British journalists have a knack of doing.

I find here an opportunity of saying the most favourable word I can anywhere speak for the Australian Colonies. The Press is amongst the best and most notable in the world. The great journals of Melbourne and Sydney are models of newspaper conduct, and are nowhere to be surpassed for extent and variety of information, for enterprise, liberality, and sound adhesion to principle, or for excellence of sub-editorial arrangement, or for force, justice, and exactness in expression. It is not only in the greater centres that the Press owns and displays these admirable characteristics. Adelaide, Brisbane, Dunedin, Christchurch, Auckland, Wellington have each journals of which no city in the world need be ashamed; and when the limitations which surround them are taken into consideration their excellence appears all the more remarkable and praiseworthy.

It is not unnatural perhaps that a man trained in English journalism and having worked in every grade of it should esteem it highly. But allowing all I can for personal prejudice and striving to look impartially upon it and its rivals, I am compelled to think it far and away the best in the world. In Australia the high traditions of the parent Press are preserved, and among many strange and novel and perplexing signs one can but gratefully and hopefully recognise the splendid enterprise and the lofty sense of public obligation which guide the youngest school of journalism in the world.

In one respect Australian journalism surpasses English. We have nothing to show which will at all compare with the *Australasian* or the *Leader*; but it is easy to see that they and similar journals of other cities (which

are all worthy of the same high praise) are established excellences to local conditions. These great weekly issues give all the week's news and all the striking articles which have appeared in the daily journals of which they are at once the growth and compendium. They do much more than this, for they include whatever the gardener, the agriculturist, the housewife, the lady of fashion, the searcher of general literature, the chess-player, the squatter can most desire to know. They provide for 'all sorts of tastes and needs, and between their first sheet and their last, they render to their readers what we in England buy half a score of special journals to secure. The reason for their existence is simple. There is not population enough to support the specialist as we know him at home, and an eager and enquiring people will be served.

The first unescapable belief of the English traveller is that the Australian is a transplanted Englishman pure and simple. A residence of only a few months kills that notion outright. Many new characteristics present themselves. To arrest one of the most noticeable—there is perhaps no such pleasure-loving and pleasure-seeking people in the world. I wish now I had thought of securing trustworthy statistics with respect to the number of people who present themselves on the colonial racecourses within the limit of a year. It would be interesting to know what proportion of the population is given over to the breeding and training of horseflesh and the riding of races. The Melbourne people exult—and not unjustifiably—in the Melbourne Cup and on the spectacle presented at its running. That spectacle is quite unique as far as I know. Neither the Derby nor the Grand Prix can rival it for its view of packed humanity, and neither can approach it for the decorous order of the crowd. Is it Jane Taylor who tells the story of an English village? I am not quite sure, but I remember the genesis. You must have a church to begin with. For a church you want a parson and a parson must have a clerk. From this established nucleus grows everything. In Australia they begin with the race-course. This statement is not to be accepted as a satiric fable, but as a literal fact. Nearly two years ago, travelling in the Blue Mountains—miles upon miles away from everywhere—I came upon a huge board erected in the bush. The board bore this inscription, "Projected road to site of intended race-course." There was not a house visible, or the sign of the beginning of a house, but half-an-hour later, in apparent virgin forest, I found another board nailed to a big eucalypt. It had a painted legend on it, setting forth that these eligible building sites were to be let or sold. The solemn forest stood everywhere, and the advertisement of the eligible building sites was the only evidence of man's presence. It was for the benefit of future dwellers here that the road to the site of the "intended race-course" had been "projected."

Again there are more theatres and more theatregoers to the population than can probably be found elsewhere. The houses and the performances are alike admirable. Like the Americans, the Australians endure many performances which would not be thought tolerable in England, but they mount their productions with great pomp and luxury. Whatever is best in England finds an early rendering in the great cities, and for serious work the general standard is as high as in Paris or in London. The Princess Theatre in Melbourne has given renditions of comic opera which are not unfairly to be compared, for dressing, *mise-en-scène* and artistic finish to those of the Savoy. The general taste is for jollity, bright colour, cheerful music. Comedy runs broader than it does at home and some of the most excellent artists have learned a touch of buffoonery. The public taste condones it, may even be said to relish it to *finesse*. The critics of the Press are, in the main, too favourable, but that is a stricture which applies to modern criticism in general. There is a desire to say smooth words everywhere and to keep things pleasant.

Outside the southernmost parts of Victoria Australia has a climate, and the people can rejoice in midnight picnics. In the glorious southern moonlight one can read the small print of a newspaper. The air is cool after the overwhelming furnace of the day. The moonlight jaunts and junketings are characteristic and pleasant, and they offer an opportunity for the British matron who flourishes there as here—heaven bless her—to air her sense of morals in letters to the newspapers.

The creed of athleticism speaks its latest word here. The burial of poor young Searle, the champion sculler of the world, was a remarkable and characteristic sight. That he was a great athlete and a good fellow seems indisputable, but to the outsider the feeling excited by his early and mournful death looked disproportionate. Every newspaper, from the stately *Argus* down to the smallest weekly organ of the village sang his dying song. He was praised and lamented out of reason, even for a champion sculler. The regret seemed exaggerated. At his funeral obsequies the streets were thronged, and thousands followed in his train. It was mournful that a young man should be struck down in the pride and vigour of his strength. It is always mournful that this should be so, but it is common, and the passion of the lament provoked weariness. The feeling was doubtless genuine, but it might possibly have had an object worthier of a nation's mourning.

Another fine athlete and good fellow is Frank Slavin, the prize-fighter. I have acknowledged a hundred times that I belong to a lost cause. My sympathies are with the old exploded prize-ring. Rightly or wrongly, I trace the growth of crimes of violence to the abolition of that glorious institution. I want to see it back again, with its rules of fair-play, and for its contempt for pain and its excellent tuition in temper and forbearance. I am an enthusiast, and being almost alone, am therefore the more enthusiastic. But I grew tired of the wild exultation in Slavin's prowess, the mad rejoicing over a victory which meant less than it would have done in the days which I am old enough to remember. In Australia better be an athlete than almost anything, except perhaps a millionaire.

Take the average native and ask him what he knows of Marcus Clarke, of James Brunton Stevens, of Harpur, Kendal, or the original of Browning's *Waring*. He will have no response for you, but he will reel off for you the names of the best bowler, the best bat, the champion forward, the cunningest of half-backs. The portraits of football players are published by the dozen and the score, and the native knows the names and achievements of every man thus signalled out for honour. In England the schoolboys would know all about these people, but in Australia the world at large is interested. The bank clerk who has a recognised position in a football team enjoys professional privileges which another may not claim. His athletic prowess reflects upon him in his business. His manager allows him holidays for his matches, and is considerate with him with regard to hours for training.

From all this one would naturally argue the existence of a specially athletic people, but the conclusion is largely illusory. The worship of athleticism breeds a professional or semi-professional class, but it is surprising to know how little an effect it has upon the crowd of city people who join in all the rites of

adoration. The popularity of the game is answerable for the existence of the barracker whose outward manifestations of the inward man are as disagreeable as they well can be. The barracker is the man who shouts for his own party, and by yells of scorn and expletives of execration seeks to daunt the side against which he has put his money or his partisan aspirations. When he gathers in his thousands, as he does at all matches of importance, he is surprisingly objectionable. He is fluent in oath and objurgation, cursing like an inmate of the pit. This same man is orderly enough at a race meeting and takes his pleasure mildly there.

The barracker and the larrikin are akin. The gamin of Paris, grown up to early manhood, fed on three meat meals a day, supplied with plenteous pocket money, and allowed to rule a tribe of tailors, would be a larrikin. The New York hoodlum is a larrikin with a difference. The British rough is a larrikin also with a difference. The Australian representative of the great blackguard tribe is better dressed, better fed and more liberally provided in all respects than his *confre* of other nations. He is the street bully, *par excellence*, inspired to this tyranny by unfailling beef and beer. When Mr Bumble heard of Oliver Twist's resistance to the combined authority of Mrs Sowerberry and Charlotte and Noah Claypole, he repudiated the idea of madness which was offered as an explanation of the boy's conduct. "It isn't madness, ma'am," said Mr Bumble, "it's meat."

There is the true explanation of the larrikin. He is meat-fed and is thereby inspired with ferocity, Darwin, if I remember rightly, tells of a sheep which was gradually accustomed to a flesh diet. Its wool began to take the coarseness of hair and the mild beast grew savage. The fore-runners of the larrikin were never very sheep-like in all probability, for if one could trace his pedigree, it would in most cases be found that he is the descendant of the true British cad. But he has improved upon the ancestral pattern and become a pest of formidable characteristics and dimensions. The problem he presents has never been faced, but it will have to be met in one way or another before long. The stranger is forced to the conclusion that magistrates are absurdly lenient. I recall a case of some few months ago where a gang of well-fed ruffians assaulted an old man in Flinders Street, Melbourne. The attack was shown to have been utterly unprovoked, and the victim's injuries were serious. Three of the most active participators in the sport were seized by the police and were each sent to prison for six weeks, A sentence of six months, with a brace of sound floggings thrown in, would have gone nearer to meet the exigencies of the case; but there is a widespread objection to the use of the cat, the argument being that it is wrong to brutalise these refined young men by its application. The same spirit of false sentiment exists in England, but in a less marked degree.

Crimes of violence are of exceptionally frequent occurrence and it is still felt necessary to punish rape by the imposition of the final penalty.

The democracy is determined to test itself completely and female suffrage seems to be within measurable distance. It is conceivable that it may have a refining effect, and that it may act as a curative, though the experiment is full of risk. The one-man one-vote principle, together with the payment of members of the legislative chambers, has not, so far, achieved the happiest conceivable results. The parliament of New South Wales is occasionally notorious as a bear-garden. The late Mr MacEhlon (who once informed the Speaker that, when he encountered outside an honourable gentleman, to whom the ruling of the chair compelled him to apologise, he would "spit in his eye ") has a worthy successor in the presence of a Mr Crick. Sometime ago Mr Crick was expelled by an indignant house, wearied of his prolonged indecencies of demeanour, but his constituency sent him back untamed and rejoicing—his mission being to prove that the Ministry was composed of thieves and liars. The miserable charges dwindled into nothing; but one at least of his constituents is persuaded that the debates, as printed in the newspapers, would lose so much of sparkle if Mr Crick were banished permanendy from the house that the breakfast enjoyment of the public more than atoned for his presence there. The women are notoriously deficient in humour, and it is possible that, when they come to vote, the reign of Mr Crick and his like will be over.

The best hope which lies before Australia at this hour is the federation of her several colonies. Her determination to keep her population European can hardly fail of approval, but the immediate work to her hand is to consolidate her own possessions. The attempt to find material for six separate parliaments in a population of three and a half millions has, it must be confessed in all candour, succeeded beyond reasonable expectations, but concentration will be of service. There will be a laudable rivalry between the colonies which will result in the choice of the fittest men, and a combination parliament will be a more useful and dignified body than has yet been assembled within colonial limits. But this is one of the smallest of the results to be anticipated. The ridiculous tariff restrictions which now harass individuals and restrict commerce will pass away and with them the foolish hatreds which exist between the rival colonies. At present if one desire to anger a Victorian he has only to praise New South Wales. Would he wound a Sydneyite in the fifth rib, let him laud Melbourne. There is a dispute pending about the proprietorship of the Murray River. It lies between the two colonies and New South Wales claims it to the Victorian bank. When it overflowed disastrously a couple of years ago, an irate farmer on the Victorian side is said to have written to Sir Henry Parkes, bidding him come and pump the confounded river off his land, and threatening to agitate for a duty (by the gallon) on imported New South Wales water. The dispute is nothing less than childish, but I have the personal assurance of the leading statesman of New South Wales that he is perfectly satisfied with the position. It is probable that he sees in the existing riparian rights a chance for a concession which may win concessions in its turn. The Victorians are imminently dissatisfied and would seem to have a right to be so. Federation is on all accounts to be desired, but it has yet to be fought for, and will only be gained with difficulty. Wise men long for it, but the petty jealousies of rival states will hold it back from its birth-time as long as delay is possible. How infinitesimally small these jealousies are nothing short of a residence in the land can teach anybody. Wisdom will have its way in the long run, but the belief of the veteran leader of New South Wales, that he will live to see the union of the Australian colonies, is a dream. It is a dream which only his political enemies will grudge him.

The wide and varied resources of the country, and the ups and downs which men experience, breed a merciless courage which in some of its manifestations is very fine. During my first stay in Melbourne the waiter who attended to my wants at Menzies' Hotel brought up, with something of a dubious air, a scrap of blue paper, on which was written, "Your old friend———" I instructed him to show my visitor in, and a minute later beheld the face of an old companion, a little more grizzled and wrinkled than I had last seen it,

but otherwise unchanged. When we had shaken hands and he was seated, I found that he was dressed like a common labourer; and in answer to my inquiry he told me, bravely and brightly, that he had fallen upon evil times. "I should like a glass of champagne, old man," said he when I asked him to refresh himself, "and a square foot will run to enjoy it." We talked away, and he told me of a history of success and failure, and at last he explained the purpose of his visit. He wished to hear the three lectures I was advertised to deliver, and he had come to ask me for a pass. "I shall not disgrace you, old boy," he added, "I have been down on my luck for a couple of years past but I am not going to stay where I am, and *I have kept my dress clothes.*" I do not know that I ever saw a finer bit of unconscious courage, and the incident gave me a certain faith in the spirit of the colonies which has never left me. There is a gambling element in it no doubt but the ever present sense of hope is a great and valuable thing. It finds such a place in a new country as it can never have in an old one. The English gentleman who in England had fallen to be a mere hewer of wood and drawer of water would never have "kept his dress clothes." He would have known that he was permanently under, but here the British pluck had rational hope of recovery, and on that rational hope survived and even flourished.

And this leads me back to that question of the self-confidence of the Australian-born colonial with which I started. Hope looks so sure, that what Australia wants and has not it seems self-evident in a little while she will have. And so she might if she would go the right way for it, and instead of keeping three-quarters of her sparse inhabitants in towns, would take the work that lies before her nose and subdue the land and replenish it; and instead of shutting the gates deliberately on rival labour, would draw the stranger to her coasts and pour population on vast tracts of land which now lie barren and unproductive, but only wait for the hand of man to break into beauty and yield riches.

In a hundred ways timidity would have been criminal, but when one sees in what direction courage and hope have led the way, and to what effort they have prompted, a little over-confidence looks pardonable. Everywhere the colonists have worked for the future. They have made railways and roads which will not be fully used for many and many a day. Their public buildings are made to last, and are of dimensions nobler than present needs can ask for. Generations to come will laud the wisdom and the generosity of the men of the last fifty years. In certain places there is an admirable spirit of emulation amongst private citizens who have set themselves to beautify the towns in which they live. This is very notable in Ballarat, where it has grown to be an excellent fashion to present the town with statues. Should that fashion continue and should the same spirit of local patriotism prevail, Ballarat may grow to be the Athens of the Southern Hemisphere. The plan is a little large perhaps, but it is in the colonial fashion, and one would willingly believe in the chances of its ultimate justification.

The unborn generations will have to thank their predecessors for some of the loveliest blessings of the world. Every town has its gardens, the property of the citizens. Those of Brisbane, Sydney, and Adelaide are extensively beautiful. But more beautiful than the grounds themselves is the inscription which I found at the gates of the loveliest of them all. I wish I had the *ipsissima verba* of it, for it seemed to be characterised by an admirable simplicity and directness. The sense of it is this,—

*These gardens belong to the public and the owners are requested to protect their property.*

There to my mind speaks the true voice of democracy, and that inscription afforded me the pleasantest spectacle I saw in the course of my two years pilgrimage through the Australias.

## CHAPTER XIV

*Mr Rudyard Kipling and Bruggksmith—New Zealand—Its Climate  
—People—Fortune—Ned's Chum—Sir George Grey.*

Whilst I was in Australia I found in the pages of the *Melbourne Argus* a very remarkable poem and an equally remarkable prose story which had originally appeared in one of the great Anglo-Indian journals. They were alike anonymous, but it was quite evident that they came from the same hand. A few months later they were known to be the work of Rudyard Kipling; and when I returned to London the new writer was at the zenith of the literary firmament and was shining there like a comet. For the first few years of his career he looked inexhaustible, and whilst he was still at his most dazzling best, he produced a little masterpiece of roaring farce which, for sheer broad fun and high animal spirits, surpasses anything else I know in English fiction. The story is called *Bruggksmith*. I myself read it and still read it with intense enjoyment, dashed with a very singular surprise, for the principal episode in that story had actually happened to me some years before Mr Kipling told it, and I had related it scores and scores of times in public and in private. I have a theory about this matter which I shall here make it my business to unfold. But I must first relate my own adventure. It was between Christmas Day and New Year's Day, and I was dining quite alone in the Grand Hotel at Dunedin, when a stranger entered and took his seat beside me. I paid no heed to him at first, but by and by he laid a hand upon my sleeve and said: "I believe that you are Mr David Christie Murray?" I pleaded guilty and turning round to my companion found him to be a person of a sea-faring aspect with a stubbly beard of two or three days' growth. He was smartly attired in a suit of blue pilot cloth with brass anchor buttons, and there was a band of tarnished gold lace around the peaked cap which he nursed upon his knees. His accent was of the broadest Scotch and his nationality was unmistakably to be read in his sun-tanned, weather-beaten face. It was pretty evident that he had been drinking, though he was by no means drunk. "I'm proud and delighted beyond measure to meet ye," he began. "I hope ye'll do me the honour to shake hands with me." He went through the ceremony with great apparent enthusiasm, and I had, indeed, some difficulty in recovering my hand from him. "I'm a ship's engineer," he went on, "and I can tell ye, sir, that for years past ye've been my treasured companion; through mony and mony a lonely night on the rolling ocean yer books hev been my treasured friends, and mony and mony's the time I've laffed and cried over ye. Mon, but I'm



pleased and proud to meet ye—pleased and proud.” I expressed my gratification at this statement as well as I could and he said, suiting the action to the word: “Ye’ll not mind my ringing for a glass of whisky? I shall esteem it an honour to take a glass with ye and to be able to boast hereafter that ye once stood a drink to me.” He got his drink and absorbed it gravely, with a wish that I might enjoy long life, health and prosperity. Now there was never a man who was better pleased than I am to learn that he has given pleasure to another by his work. I dare imitate the candour of Oliver Wendell Holmes and confess that I am fond of sweetmeats, but one can have too much even of sugar-plums, and I was getting a little weary of my friend’s ecstasies when he began to change his tone. “Perhaps,” he said, “ye won’t think me impertinent if I say that your work is sometimes curiously unequal. Ye’ve written a lot in yer time that’s very far from being worthy of ye. D’ye know that, now I begin to think of it, I’m inclined to fancy that ye’re about the most unequal workman I’ve ever made myself familiarly acquainted with.” He maundered along on this theme for two or three minutes and at last he clinched the nail. “A lot of what ye’ve done,” he told me, “is the merest piffle, and if ye were to ask me for a candid judgment, I should say that ye’ve never written but one work which has really expressed your genius. I can’t mind the name of it just at the moment, but there’s nae doot at all about it; there’s real power in it, there’s plot, there’s construction, there’s style, there’s knowledge of character. Mon! it’s a great book; I’ll mind the name of it in a minute. Ay! I’ve got it—it’s the only thing ye ever wrote that maks ye worth your salt as a literary mon and the title of it is *Lady Audleys Secret!*”

Now no man, neither Mr Kipling nor any other, could possibly have evolved from his imagination a story like that which had already, years ago, translated itself into fact. Mr Kipling is a man of such prodigious resource and experience that he is the last man in the world to accuse of a plagiarism. It is just within the bounds of possibility, of course, that he may have heard some version of my story, but the theory to which I cling is that there was, somewhere about that time, a Scottish ship’s engineer who played off that particular form of humour on two writing men whom chance threw in his way, and that his victims were Mr Kipling and myself.

I was confidently assured in Australia that I might see New Zealand thoroughly in the course of a two months’ trip, and when I set out to visit it, it was my purpose not to extend my stay greatly beyond that limit. In effect, I found a year all too litde for my purpose. The physical aspects of the country alone are so extraordinary and delightful that a lover of nature finds it hard to withdraw himself from the influence of their charm. New Zealanders delight to speak of their country as the Wonderland of the South. They are justified, and more than justified. The northern island is an amazement, but its gruesome volcanic grotesqueries please less than the scenic splendours of its southern neighbour. The sounds of the west coast more than rival the Norwegian fjords. Te Anau and Manipouri and Wakatipu are as fine as the lakes of Switzerland. The forests, irreverently called “bush,” are beyond words for beauty. A little energy, a little courage, might make New Zealand the pet recreation ground of half the world. The authorities are already filling its lakes with trout, and will by-and-by people its forests with game. There is a very large portion of country which, except for purposes of sport and travel, is not likely to be utilized by man. The lake trout grow to enormous size, and as they multiply, and food grows comparatively scarcer, they are learning to take the fly. It was an understood thing for years that there was no sport for the fly-fisher with the trout at Wakatipu, but that theory has died out, for the very simple reason that the facts have altered. There is no reason in nature why an acclimatisation society should not succeed in a very few years in making the south-west portion of the middle island an actual paradise to the sportsman. It is the plain duty of New Zealand to invite the outside world to enter its borders, and, for once in a way, a plain duty is recognised. I shall remember, so long as I remember anything, the three avalanches I saw and heard thundering down the side of Mount Pembroke as I sat on a boat in the glassy waters of Milford Sound. In many and many an hour I shall see Wet-Jacket Arm and Dusky Sound again with their vast precipices, luxuriant forests, and rejoicing cataracts. I shall dream, thank heaven, of the awe and worship I felt as the steamer crept round the edge of Rat’s Point, and little by little, one by one, the white wonders of the Earnslaw range slid into view, until at last the whole marvellous, unspeakable panorama stood revealed, a spectacle the world may perhaps rival elsewhere, but cannot surpass. So long as I remember anything I shall remember a summer day on the banks of the Poseiden. I sat on a fallen log on the track which leads to Lake Ada; and the robins, in their beautiful fearless unfamiliarity with man, perched on my feet, and one feathered inquirer ventured even to my knee. The sunlight steeped the thick foliage overhead until the leaves shone transparent with colours of topaz and of emerald. The moss on the trees was silver-grey and vivid green, and there were fingsolds of vermilion and cadmium, and scaly growths of pure cobalt blue; the most amazing and prodigious riot of colour the mind can conceive. The river ran below with many a caverned undertone.

In Sir John Everett Millais’ latest days, I met him at a cricket match at Lord’s, and made some attempt to describe to him the truly indescribable riot and glory of the colour of the New Zealand forests. He turned to me with an odd mixture of petulance and humour and asked me: “Why the devil didn’t you tell me all this when I could paint?” I believe he was the only man alive who could have translated those splendours truly.

It is the desire of all good New Zealanders that the beauties of their country should be advertised. I offer this humble contribution to that end with a willing heart. I shall be thankful to my latest day to have seen those beauties which I have been able only to hint at. The traveller who misses New Zealand leaves unseen the country which, take it all in all, is probably the loveliest in the world. The climate varies from stern to mild. That of Auckland is warm and sluggish; that of Dunedin keen, inspiring. Situate midway between the two you find perfection. Napier will be the sanatorium of that side of the world one of these days. All over New Zealand one meets people who went out there to die, twenty, thirty, forty years ago, and who are living yet, robust and hale. The air is fatal to phthisis, as it is also in Australia. The most terrible foe of the British race is disarmed in these favoured lands. Take it in the main, the climate of New Zealand is fairly represented by that of Great Britain. The southern parts remind one of Scotland, the northern of Devon and Cornwall. The variety of which Lesser Britain has so much reason to complain is absent. The British climate is idealised in New Zealand.

This fact alone is one of the utmost importance in the estimation of the future of the race. In similar environment the British people have already pretty clearly shown what they can do, and in New Zealand I found myself absolutely unable to trace the beginning of a variation from the British breed. Dunedin, allowing

for an influx of Southern Britons, might be Aberdeen; Christ-church, population and all, might be planted in Warwickshire, and no tourist would know that it was not indigenous there. They call their local stream the Avon, and boating there some idle summer days, I easily dreamed myself at home again, and within bow-shot of the skyward-pointing spire which covers the bones of Shakespeare. It is, I believe, a fact that the stream is christened after another river than that which owes its glamour to the poet's name, but in a case of this kind mere fact matters little, and the inhabitants themselves are, for the most part, quite willing to ignore it.

It was in New Zealand that I made my first practical acquaintance with the stage. I have already spoken of that remarkable child actor whom I brought over to England and introduced to the London public in my own comedy of *Ned's Chum*. I saw him first in *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, and I expressed myself in such terms about him to his manager that I was offered a commission to write a play in which he should be the principal figure. I was making holiday just then, and having nothing to detain me, I anchored myself in one of the quietest places in the world and threw myself into my task with so much vigour that in a fortnight the comedy was completed, and within a month from its inception was produced at Auckland. Sir George Grey who was then, though he had long retired from office, the tutelary genius of the place, supplied me with the means for the production of such a stage illusion as can hardly have been seen elsewhere. The second act of the comedy was supposed to take place in the heart of the New Zealand bush. "That's a thing," said Sir George, "which no scene-painter's brush can imitate; you must have the real thing upon the boards." And straightway he gave me an order for the cutting down of any number of forest trees I might require in his own grounds at Cawai. How these were got into the theatre I do not remember, but the scene produced by their aid was the most perfect and beautiful I can remember to have seen. They were braced by invisible wires, and the severed trunks were concealed behind mounds of real forest moss and cart-loads of last year's withered leaves. There was an artificial waterfall on a level with the upper entrance and the back cloth conveyed the impression of an illimitable vista. As anybody may guess who has the slightest knowledge of work behind the scenes, the preparation of this spectacle and its removal necessitated two tediously protracted waits, but the audience appeared to think that the show atoned for tedium, and our only three performances in Auckland were an overwhelming popular success. The author—good, easy man—naturally attributed that success at the time to the charm of the comedy, but though that went well enough in other places later on, it never afterwards secured the same enthusiastic acceptance. It was the realism and originality of the forest scene which did the trick. Its glories were evanescent, and on the third night the characters, who had moved amidst all the splendours of full summer, were straying under brown and withered autumn leaves.

There are few of us who have not discovered that the affability of a distinguished man may be amongst the most disagreeable of all human characteristics, though when one encounters the real thing which has its root in nature and not in policy it is certainly amongst the most delightful. In Sir George Grey one knew it instinctively to be spontaneous; the man seemed to have been born out of his time; he was a survival from another age, In South Africa, South Australia and in New Zealand he proved himself almost an ideal manipulator of men, and wherever he went he reaped a harvest of personal affection. Nobody meeting him without a knowledge of his record would have guessed that he was in the presence of a man distinguished alike as a diplomatist, a soldier and a scholar; he would have been conscious only of a singularly unassuming urbanity and charm. His manner with children was patriarchal. I was strolling one day during my stay in Auckland with that child actor for whom I had written my comedy of *Ned's Chum*, when we met the ex-governor of the colony at the foot of Mount Eden, now a green turfed slope and at one time a volcano. "Look here," said the boy to the venerable welder of Empire, "you take my ball and see how far you can throw it uphill." "Certainly," said Sir George. He threw the ball to a considerable distance and it settled in a hollow on the hillside. The child raced after it, and before he returned the veteran statesman and myself had each forgotten all about him and were deep in the history of Auckland. By-and-by the young gentleman came back again and tugged at the skirt of the diplomatist's frock coat. "I've been standing up there," he complained, "for three or four minutes calling coo-ee, and you never answered once!" "Did I not?" the statesman answered, "now that was very wrong of me. You try me again and you will see that I shall not misbehave myself next time." The child sped away in pursuit of the ball which Sir George once more threw for him, and in a little while we heard his call. The old gentleman responded to it and the boy came racing back to have the game repeated, and throughout the whole of our ramble which lasted for an hour or two, the game was carried on with a tireless persistence on the child's side and an unflagging patience on Sir George's. He was talking to me with great animation about the Maori legends which he had himself been the first to collect and translate, but he never neglected to respond to the child's call, and left him, I am sure, under the impression that he was the one person of interest in the party.

## CHAPTER XV

*The Dreyfus Case—Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Opinion—Meeting at the Egyptian-Hall—Interview with Zola—Maitre Labori—M. Henri Rochefort—Major Esterhazy.*

One of my hobbies for the last forty years has been the study of character in handwriting. It is pretty much with the various forms of caligraphy as it is with the human face or with the human voice. The vast majority of faces that one sees are essentially commonplace, but each has somehow an individuality of its own. Handwriting has its physiognomy, and everybody who has been accustomed to a large correspondence knows how instinctively and unfailingly he recognises a caligraphy which has been presented to him only twice or thrice. It was as a result of my pursuit of this hobby that I first began to take a real interest in the Dreyfus case. When the first rough and ready facsimiles of the famous *Bordereau* and of the authentic letters of Captain Dreyfus were published side by side, it struck me with an immediate amazement to conceive that any person who had given even the most casual attention to this study of handwriting could possibly have

supposed that the various documents had emanated from the same hand. The forgery of a signature is one of the simplest businesses in the world, but the truly deceptive forgery of a document of any length is an absolute impossibility—an impossibility as complete as would attend the continued personification of a dual character by the most skilful mimic under the observation of one who was able to maintain a sustained and microscopic examination of the two.

It was an article in the *Strand Magazine* communicated by that eminent statistician, Mr Holt Schooling, which first enabled me to form a judgment in this matter, and until it and its accompanying photographs of original documents were brought to my notice, I had taken no more than an ordinary passing interest in the case. But since it had been decided, on the strength of an imagined resemblance between the handwriting of the prisoner and that of the author of the *Bordereau*, I had not a moment's hesitation in arriving at the conclusion that the charge against him was unfounded and absurd, and it seemed to me to be no less than a duty to bring other people to the conclusion which I so strongly held. It was not easy. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle wrote to me:—

*"My dear Murray,—Its being a week-end will prevent my coming up for I have always several visitors. I hope when you can come down you will let me know. Very much interested in your views upon the Dreyfus case. I fancy that the Government may know upon evidence which they dare not disclose (spy or traitor evidence) that he is guilty and have convicted him on a bogus document,—Yours very truly,*

*"(Sgd.) A. Conan Doyle."*

For nine long days I went over the photographs of the authentic letters and the incriminating *Bordereau* with a powerful magnifier, and in the end I succeeded in establishing no fewer than twenty-two distinct and characteristic differentiations between them. I had already entered upon the preparation of an alphabetical synopsis when I learned of the existence of that work of monumental patience and research which had been prepared by Monsieur Bernard Lazare of Paris, and a consultation of its pages showed me that part of the work I had undertaken had already been performed by Monsieur Gustave Bridier, an acknowledged expert in handwriting in Switzerland.

I caused all the documents at my disposal to be photographed on glass, and thus prepared I betook myself from my home in North Wales to London, where I found an immediate and enthusiastic helper in the person of Mr J. N. Maskelyne of the Egyptian Hall. He lent me the use of the most powerful oxyhydrogen magnifying lantern in London and prepared for me a great screen on to which the photographs could be most delicately and accurately thrown in an enormously magnified form. Until the fact of my intended demonstration was announced by the Press, I had not the remotest idea as to the intense interest with which the case was regarded by the British public.

I had caused it to be announced that anybody desiring to be present might secure a ticket of admission by forwarding to me a stamped directed envelope. The Egyptian Hall seated about 360 people, and I received applications which would certainly have enabled me to fill the vast auditorium of the Albert Hall twice over. The result was that I was enabled to make a choice, and when the night arrived the little hall was packed with the pick of the brains of London, drawn from both Houses of Parliament, from the Bench, the Bar, the diplomatic services of Europe, the Royal Academy, the learned professions generally and the Press of London. When a page of the *Bordereau* was first thrown upon the screen side by side with the authentic handwriting of the prisoner at Devil's Island, I knew that I had my work cut out for me, for there were murmurs everywhere of "Identical!" "Damnatory!" "That settles the whole question," and so on. The mood of the audience was not to be doubted for an instant, but I knew my case and I was confident. Little by little, as demonstration succeeded demonstration, the temper changed, and at the conclusion I achieved a triumph such as I have never before or since enjoyed. I hope sincerely that I do not take more credit to myself for that night's work than I deserve, but so far as I could judge there was not one of my hearers who went away unconvinced. The Metropolitan Press woke up and in its turn awakened the yet more influential journals of the provinces, who exert an intenser as well as a narrower influence, and in a very little time there came a reverberating boom in answer from the other side of the Atlantic. Before the lecture was delivered I received many threatening letters from truculent Frenchmen, who regarded any foreign criticism of the evidence on which Dreyfus had been found guilty as an insolent assault upon the honour of the French army. Two of my correspondents threatened me with assassination if I should dare to carry out my project, and scores of them expressed themselves in terms of indignation and contempt. The most popular idea appeared to be that I was a hireling in the employ of the Jews, and that I was being very handsomely subsidized to take up the cudgels in a base and disgraceful cause. I confess that I rather wished that this idea of a subsidy were true, for in time and money I had spent considerably more than I could legitimately afford, but the truth remains that Mr Maskelyne and I stood the whole racket and that, so far as we were concerned, there might as well have been no Israel in Great Britain or outside it.

It was this incident in my career which brought me acquainted with Emile Zola, for whose work I had until that time felt a profound aversion. I do not profess to be in sympathy with that work even now, but I got to know the man and to recognise his purpose. When he published in the pages of *L'Aurore*, his famous article entitled "J'accuse," and was brought to trial on account of it, I went over to Paris, eager to meet him and to assure him that the intelligence of the world outside the boundaries of France was entirely with him. I reached Paris a day before the trial was appointed to begin, and I made my way at once to the office of the *Steele*, where I applied to my old friend, Monsieur Yves Guyot, for an introduction. He refused it flatly: "The man," he said, "is up to his eyes in responsibilities and labour. Every moment he can spare is given to consultation with Maître Labori, who is engaged to defend him, and I must refuse in his own interest to trouble him further." It was impossible not to recognise the justice of Monsieur Guyot's plea, but when all was said and done I felt that I was there as one of the rank and file in a losing cause, and that I had something of a right to be near my leader. "I assure you," said M. Guyot, in parting from me, "that nothing

will persuade Zola to receive a stranger at this time. He is one of those publicists who hate publicity, and he knows you already as one of the bitterest critics of his literary methods; it is quite hopeless to dream of bringing you together now." In my perplexity I bethought me of Monsieur Bernard Lazare who, as Zola's acknowledged champion in the Press, was in constant communication with him, and who had sent to me an enthusiastic appreciation of the effect of my London lecture. I went to see him and in one minute over the telephone an interview was arranged for six o'clock that evening. I was there to the minute, but at the entrance to the Rue de Bruxelles I was stopped by a posse of *gendarmes* and subjected to a vigorous examination. Zola's house was like a castle in a state of siege. It became evident later on that he was under police protection and that it was felt necessary to guard him against the violence of the mob, but it appeared at first sight as if he were a pre-judged criminal whose escape it was necessary to make impossible. When the gates of the courtyard were at last opened reluctantly to me, I was ushered into a chamber which might have been one of the exhibition rooms of a dealer in *bric-à-brac*. There was a sedan chair in one corner, and it was hardly possible to move without disturbing some Japanese or Chinese grotesquerie in brass or porcelain.

I waited here alone for half an hour and then in came Zola with both hands hospitably outstretched. "Vous parlez Français?" he began, "Bien!" and with that he thrust me to a sofa and talked as I never heard man talk before. "We know all," he said, by way of exordium, "all, all, all! and here is the history of this lamentable case." That half-forgotten American chronicler of English manners—Mr N. P. Willis—somewhere described Disraeli as "talking as a racehorse runs." That was Zola's way that evening; he threw himself headlong into his narrative and he talked with head and feet and arms and shoulders. His speech was almost incredibly brilliant and painted, but I have very often thought since then that in the constant preoccupation of his mind with this one theme and the constant repetition of the strongest points he had to make, he had acquired, as it were, the faculty of threading all his conversational pearls upon a single string, and that he was, in fact, presenting himself to his latest audience with a discourse which was already finished and polished at Adunguen. He gave me a description of the scene of Dreyfus's public degradation on the Champ de Mars which was like a chapter of Carlyle's *French Revolution* at first hand. It was crammed with detail and so intensely dramatic that it made the scene live over again. I asked him at last in surprise: "But surely you were not there?" "No," he explained eagerly, "I was not there, but you know my method; I have had the scene described by a thousand eye-witnesses, and at last I have reconstructed it for myself." He told me of the prospect for the defence and described the man upon whom the burden would mainly rest—"un véritable géant," he told me with a voice to rally an army in retreat.

I met Maître Labori in Court next morning and admired the cool intrepidity of his defence, though it was only when he came to address the jury that he gave us a real touch of his quality. I know little of the French method of judicial procedure, but anything more transparently hollow than the pretence of justice which was offered to Emile Zola it would not be easily possible to conceive. Whenever the defending counsel put a question to any one of the witnesses for the prosecution which bade fair to touch the marrow of the case, Monsieur Delegorgue consulted with his colleagues and invariably closed the consultation by saying: "La question ne sera pas passée." In that case it was Labori's habit to answer: "I shall have to enter an interpolation," which he did, to the effect that the progress of the case was arrested for a space of anything from five minutes to a quarter of an hour, until he had drawn up his formal protest. Meanwhile the courtyard of the Palais de Justice was rigorously closed against all who could not establish a right to entry, but outside the railings a great mob continually surged, and at such times as they could escape from their scholastic labours an army of students marched up and down singing: "Conspuez Zola!" to a tune roughly based on the air of "La Donna é mobile." Evening after evening Zola and his defenders had to escape from the court under the shelter of a cavalry escort, and on occasion the crowd made an ugly rush in its effort to get at them.

I was standing near the locked gate in the great courtyard awaiting the outcoming party, when I witnessed an episode which was very prettily illustrative of one aspect of the popular mind. In the crowd outside, close to the railings, stood a big man and a little one. I don't know whether I was in at the beginning of the altercation, or if it had been led up to in any way, but what I heard and saw was this. "Tu es juif, n'est ce pas?" said the big man, with a sort of bullying jocundity. "Mais oui, monsieur," the little man assented. "Ah!" said the other, "you wear your nose too long for your face." With that simple but sufficing explanation, the big man hit the little man on the obnoxious feature and felled him to the pavement. There was a bit of a student rush at that moment, and the crowd went over the prostrate figure, but a detachment of the *gardes de ville* which happened to be near at hand, went in and rescued him, and he was borne away all muddy and tattered and bleeding.

The sport of Jew-baiting went on quite merrily all over Paris at this time, and on the Place Bouge, on the Sunday afternoon on which M. Henri Rochefort elected to surrender himself to the prison authorities, there was at least a score of merry little chases in which a hundred or so of whooping and roaring citizens would pursue some member of the unpopular race until he found refuge amongst the soldiery or the police, when he was hustled on to take his chance amidst another portion of the crowd. There was more horse-play than anger in all this, and cases in which serious mischief was inflicted were rare. But the mob was in a highly explosive state for all that, and any sturdy attempt at resistance or self-defence might at any moment have led to bloodshed.

The surrender of M. Rochefort was really, when all things are considered, one of the drollest spectacles I have ever seen. That venerable political firebrand had been adjudged guilty of contempt of court and had been sentenced to seven days' imprisonment as a first-class misdemeanant. He was mulct in some inconsiderable fine as well, and he was allowed to suit his own convenience and fancy as to the time and manner of surrender. He chose to present himself to his gaolers on a Sunday, and to arrive in an open carriage at the head of a small procession. All Paris turned out to see him. There were fifteen thousand troops along the line of route, and fifty thousand more of all arms quartered near at hand. Why there should have been any necessity for the collection of such a force, or for the provocation of a possible riot under the conditions, it was difficult to see. The crowd groaned and cheered with tremendous enthusiasm, and when at last somebody waved a tri-colour flag from an upper window, it went roaring mad with cries of *Vive Rochefort! Vive la France! Vive Fannie!* In the end it dribbled away quite peacefully, overflowing into all the neighbouring cabarets, or trailing off homeward through the dusk and mud. Here and there a street orator

found his chance and gathered a crowd about him, but these were quietly moved on by the police, and before seven o'clock, that part of Paris had resumed its normal aspect. I tried hard to discover some intelligible reason for this curious outburst of popular feeling, but I could find none except that the condition of the popular mind was such that almost any excuse for gathering in crowds, and indulging in noisy cheers and groans, was welcome as a sort of safety valve.

Whilst that travesty of a trial was going on, and every suggestion in favour of the accused was being trampled on, and every one of the chartered liars who had sworn falsely for the honour of the army was being bolstered by the authority of the court, I had many opportunities for conversation with Zola, and in the course of one of them, he offered me an almost passionate justification of his literary methods. He did not complain, he said, that he had been misunderstood; he had been charged with being a pornographer and with revelling in filth and horror for their own sake. "It is not so," he declared, "but look you! I love and revere this beautiful and noble France, and I believe that she has yet a splendid destiny before her. At this moment she seems to lie dead and drowned beneath a river of lies, but she will yet revive and justify herself. I picture her," he went on, marching up and down the room, "as a great suffering angel stricken down by a disease which only a cruel cautery can cure. It has been the aim and effort of my life to apply that cautery, and if I am fated to be remembered in the future, the future will do me justice." All this left me as far as ever from an approval of the methods he defended, but it was absolutely impossible to doubt his sincerity.

Two English journalists, who were at that time resident in Paris and who felt strongly at the time that the notorious Major Esterhazy was a much maligned and injured man, engineered an interview between him and myself. The major, it appeared, was extremely anxious to be rightly understood by the British public. He complained that on several occasions he had consented to be interviewed by the London Press and that in each case his statements had been maliciously distorted. He asked me if I would represent him truly and would allow him to tell his story without comment. I made the promise and, of course, I kept it, but as a matter of fact he had no case to offer. He described the general staff of the French army as *un tas de scélérats*, and he alleged that he had been hounded down by his enemies and betrayed by those who had pretended to be his friends. As he talked he leant forward in his chair, tapping the parquet nervously with his walking-stick, and every now and then sending a curiously furtive glance in my direction, for all the world as if he were asking in his own mind: "Have you found me out yet?" "I would ask nothing better," he told me, "than to put myself at the head of my regiment and to march my men through Paris, and to shoot down every Jew who lives in it. I would shoot them down like rabbits, 'sans rancune et sans remords.'" He flashed that strange furtive glance at me and took his walking-stick in both hands: "I have a dream," he went on, "it comes to me often. I see myself in a room where the walls are white and the ceiling is white and the floor is white, and all my enemies are there before me. I rush amongst them with this stick only and I strike, and I strike, and I strike until the walls are red and the ceiling is red and the floor is red. Ah! I shall have my turn one day." I wired all this meaningless farrago to the *Daily News* that night, but with much more nonsense to the same effect, and on the following day it was all duly printed. I mention this little fact for a reason. In M. Anatole France's novel, *L'Anneau d'Améthyste*, which appeared much later than the account of my interview with Esterhazy, a character is introduced who talks precisely in that gentleman's manner and who, amongst other things, relates that identical dream; from which one gathers that he must have told it more than once. It was most probably a habit of his, for all his phrases had a manufactured air, and he seemed much more like an actor reciting a familiar part than as if he spoke on the spur of the moment. Later on, as everybody knows, he sold a confession in which he proclaimed himself the author of the *Bordereau*. Later still he repudiated the confession, though by that time there was no doubt in any sane man's mind that it was true. So long as the *affaire Dreyfus* is remembered, Esterhazy will in all likelihood be regarded as a villain of the very deepest dye; but so far as I can make him out, he suffered merely from a total absence of moral and mental responsibility. He seems really to have persuaded himself that he was an ill-used man, and until circumstances became too strong for him, to have acted in accordance with his own queer code of honour.

I have listened to many 'great speakers in my time, but never to one who displayed such fire and force and fluency and so wide an emotional range as Maître Labori. When he arose to address the jury for the defence, he seemed to hurl himself into his subject with every fibre of soul and body. He gesticulated with all the vehemence of a man engaged in a deadly bout with the rapier, and the impetuous torrent of his speech dashed on as if nothing could arrest it. I remember thinking to myself that twenty minutes of this would bring him to the limit of his forces, but he went on for hours, as if he were incapable of fatigue. At one point of his speech he used the words: "Un héros comme Zola." There were some two hundred privileged spectators of the scene, all squeezed into a sort of pen at the extreme end of the court, and nearly everyone of them held a latchkey in readiness, so that he might whistle down it if the orator afforded any opportunity for derision. A shrill scream of sound rose as Labori uttered the words. He paused and faced squarely round upon his interrupters, turning his back on the tribunal. The clamour lasted for a minute and then died away, and then with a cold incisiveness, in strange contrast with his previous manner, he addressed the crowd. "I repeat the phrase—a hero like Zola. I tell you that his courage, his honesty and his devotion will be held in reverence by his countrymen long after you have sunk into your unremembered and unhonoured graves." He towered there in silence for a full half minute and there was not so much as a murmur of reply. "Eh bien!" he said, "je résume," and turning round to the tribunal he took up his speech at the point at which it had been arrested. The rebuke was enough; he was interrupted no more.

Zola read a statement in his own defence and was in a condition of pitiable nervous agitation from the beginning of it to the end. The foolscap pages he held in his hand quivered as if they were stirred by the hot air rising from a stove, and in his anxiety to be heard throughout the court he pitched his voice too high. In the middle of his address it cracked harshly and the packed crowd at the end of the court broke into derisive laughter. He too turned upon the scoffers, but not as Labori had done before him. He was not on his own ground as the great advocate had been, and he seemed to search for words that would not come. The incident, however, seemed to brace him for a while and for a minute or two he read in a firmer tone, though that pathetic tremor of the papers he held still went on and sometimes seemed to make it difficult for him to read.

When at last the tragic farce was over, the foregone conclusion arrived at and the sentence of fine and

imprisonment pronounced, I found Zola alone at home in a state of profound dejection. "I don't pity myself," he said. "I am not to be pitied but this poor France, ce pauvre France." He returned to the words again and again. "I thought," he said, "that one had only to light the torch of Truth and to throw it into that pit of darkness to make everything clear, but they have stifled the flame with lies. It is finished, it is all finished." I ventured to tell him that I could not and would not believe it, that the verdict of the Court of Cassation was the merest nothing in comparison with the verdict of the world which he had beyond doubt secured. France would come to reason yet. He refused to be cheered, and saying that he was in need of rest, bade me goodnight dispiritedly and went to bed. Now that the trial was over I had no further business to detain me in Paris, but I saw him by appointment next day before I left for London. He was in full fighting trim again. "We shall do something yet," he said; "despair wins no battles and there are still honest men in France." I made a farewell call on Maître Labori and found him so husky that he could barely speak, but he poured scorn on the idea that he had worn his voice by the prodigious effort of that sustained relation. He had been so imprudent as to drive home in the humid air of a January evening and he had caught a cold. For his own part he was quite sanguine of ultimate success—not sanguine only, but assured. "We shall win yet," he prophesied confidently. "No cause ever failed in the long run which had such an array of truth behind it." He might well have added that no cause ever succeeded which had behind it such a battalion of lies and liars as was ranked upon the other side.

## CHAPTER XVI

*A Few Letters—J. M. Barrie—George Meredith—Advice on  
Going to America—A Statue to Washington—Sir Arthur Conan  
Doyle and the Rt. Hon. Joseph Chamberlain, M.P.—Robert  
Louis Stevenson—Mr Edmund Gosse on the Neo-Scottish School—  
My Contemporaries in Fiction—Sir A. Conan Doyle—Mr.  
Joseph Hocking—Robert Buchanan—Mr. E. Marshall Hall, K.C.*

March 12<sup>th</sup> 97

BOX HILL.

DORKING.

Dear Mr. Christie Murray,

I am reminded

by the paper you send me  
of times when your work

gives me great pleasure.

In spite of the material  
feeling I must have in

reading American history,  
I could wish you  
were engaged upon  
creative work. - Do  
not say - 'the specialist.'  
None of us can tell  
until our skies are  
clear. The title gives



point, we are all working  
together & indebted  
to one another. Let  
authorship have the  
distinction of an  
exemption from  
rank & file.  
claim ours. But  
I am glad indeed.

to be appreciated  
by men like you.  
I am, very  
faithfully yours  
J. M. Barrie

Copy of Letter to David Christie Murray. 15th December 1893.

My Dear Christie Murray,—Your book (my book) followed me up here, where I had to come unexpectedly two days after our dinner. It is delightful. I accept your challenge, and do hereby undertake to talk to you at tremendous length the first time we meet again about the making of another novelist. Not that he, worse luck, has had anything like such varied experiences. I hope you will go on with the second volume you promise. You will find a capital chapter for it in the Pall Mall Magazine Xmas number. I thought that dog worth all the Xmas tales I have read this year. Its death is almost unbearably pathetic, and so comic all the time. The illustrator rose to his chances in one picture, when Punch struts past the bull-dog. The one thing I wonder at is what you say of acting, I would argue that everyone with imagination must find delight in the stage, but I can't understand the author of Aunt Rachel having a desire, or rather a passion, to exchange a greater art for a smaller one. It is not smaller, you hold. But surely it is, as the pianist is less than the composer. I need not tell you again what it is to me to have the dedication. The whole arrangement of this house has been altered to give the book its place of honour, the positions of hundreds of books has been altered, the bringing of a small bookcase into a different room led to the alteration of heavy furniture in the other room, a sofa is where was a cupboard, flowerpots have been brought inside, and red curtains have given place to green. This is a fact.

I hope you are flourishing, and with best regards to Mrs. Murray,—Yours ever,

(Sgd.) J. M. Barrie.

Letter of Advice sent by a Distinguished American to David Christie Murray prior to a visit to America on a Lecturing Tour.

Friday, 7th September.

My Dear Old Friend,—I am sending.... some letters for you

by this same post. They are to three splendid fellows, full of power to help you, and certain to be eager to use it

If I could have seen you personally, I had it in mind to say many things which don't lend themselves to pen and ink. Some of them perhaps can be put down with a minimum of awkwardness.

You are primarily, in the American mind, an eminent novelist. They have read you (in printed cheap editions) by the score of thousands. They think of you as a cousin of Dickens, Thackeray, Reade and the rest. Now that is your rôle marked out for you by God. Stick to it, wear reasonably conventional clothes, cultivate an intelligently conventional aspect, and do not for your life say anything about the stage or the latter-day hard luck you have had, or anything else which will not commend itself to a popular sense which, although artistic on one side is implacably Philistine on the other. They have a tremendous regard for Reade. Carry yourself as if you were the undoubted inheritor of the Reade traditions. Think how Reade himself would have borne himself—then strike out from it all the bumptious and aggressive parts—and be the rest.

Two things destroy a man in America. One is the suggestion of personal eccentricity, Bohemianism, etc. The other is a disposition for criticism and controversy on their own subjects. The latter is the more dangerous of the two. It is a people devoured by the newspaper habit, like the Irish or the old Greeks of the Areopagus. They ask every few minutes "What is the news?" Thousands of smart young men are hustling about fifteen hours a day to answer that ceaseless question. If it occurs to any one of them anywhere to say: "Well, here is a cocky Englishman who is over here to make some money, but who is unable to resist the temptation to harangue us on our shortcomings"—just that minute you are damned—irrevocably damned. That one sniff of blood will suffice. The whole pack will be on your shoulders within twenty-four hours.

Yet, don't mistake me. These same newspaper men are nice fellows, kindly to a fault, if you avoid rubbing them the wrong way. Swear to yourself that you will be genial and affable with every human soul you meet, and that you will never be betrayed into an argument—on any American subject, mind—with any living being, from the bartender up. It is not so hard a rule, old man, and observing it vehemently day and night will make all the wide difference to you between miserable failure and a fine and substantial success.

You will meet two classes of men—scholarly men like my friends, who will take you to clubs where writers, thinkers, students, etc., congregate, and less scholarly but not less likeable ordinary newspaper men. Live your life as much as possible among these two classes. You will catch swiftly enough the shades of difference between the two. It is the difference between, say, the Athenaeum and the Savage. Only there is next to no caste spirit, and points of similarity or even community crop up there between the two which couldn't be here. The golden key to both is unvarying amiability.

You are better calculated than most men I know to charm and captivate them all. They will delight in your conversation and in you, and they will see to it that you have a perfect time and coin money—if only you lay yourself out to be uniformly nice to them, and watch carefully to see that you seem to be doing about as they do.

A good many minor people—hotel baggagemen, clerks, etc., tram conductors, policemen and the like—will seem to you to be monstrously rude and unobliging. You will be right; they are undoubtedly God-damned uncivil brutes. That is one of the unhappy conditions of our life there. Don't be tempted even to wrangle with them or talk back to them. Pass on, and keep still. If you try to do anything else, the upshot will be your appearing somewhere in print as a damned Britisher for whom American ways are not good enough. The whole country is one vast sounding board, and it vibrates with perilous susceptibility in response to an English accent.

Don't mention the word Ireland. Perhaps that is most important of all. You will hear lots of Americans—good men, too—damning the Irish. Listen to this, and say nothing, unless something amiable about the Irish occurs to you. Because here is a mysterious paradox. The America always damns the Irishman. It is his foible. But if an Englishman joins in, instantly every American within earshot hates him for it. I plead with you to avoid that pitfall. The bottom of it is paved with the bones of your compatriots.

So I could go on indefinitely, but I have already taxed your patience. Briefly then—

1. Express no opinions on American subjects, political, social or racial—save in praise.

2. Be polite and ready to talk affably with everybody; men who speak to you in a railway train, or the bar tender or the bootblack, quite as much as the rest.

3. Avoid like poison eccentricities of dress and all contact with actors and theatrical people.

4. Rebuff no interviewer. Be invariably affable and reserved with him; talk literature to him, and reminiscences of Reade, Matthew Arnold, Dean Stanley, anybody you like especially mention things in America which you like, and shut-up about what you don't like.

5. Keep appointments to a minute. No one else will, but they respect immensely in others.

6. Bear in mind always that people think of you as a big novelist, and will be only too glad to treat you at your own valuation, gently exhibited or rather suggested by courteous reserve. There is nothing they won't do for you, if only you impress them as liking them, and appreciating their kindness, and being studious of their sensibilities.

Take this all, my dear Christie, as from one who sincerely wishes you well, and believes that you can and should do well. It lies absolutely in your own hands to make a fine personal and professional reputation in America, and to come back with a solid bank account and a good, clear, fresh start. You have lots of years before you; lots of important work; lots of honest happiness. You were started once fair on the road to the top of the tree. Here is the chance to get back again on to that road. I am so fearfully anxious that you should not miss it, that I take large liberties in talking to you as I find I have done. Write to me at Attridge's Hotel, Schull, County Cork, where I shall be from 14th to 20th September, to tell me that you are not offended. Or if you are offended, still write to me. And I should prize highly the chance of hearing from you from the other side, after you have started in.

And so God be with you.

Copy of Letter to David Christie Murray, 8th May 1896.

My Dear Christie Murray,—I have been in Egypt and have only just got back and received your note. Poor Holmes is dead and damned. I couldn't revive him if I would (at least not for years), for I have had such an overdose of him that I feel towards him as I do towards *pâté de foie gras*, of which I once ate too much, so that the name of it gives me a sickly feeling to this day. Any old Holmes story you are, of course, most welcome to use.

I am house-hunting in the country, which means continual sallies and alarms, but I should much like to meet you before I go away, to talk over our American experiences. I do hope you are not going to allow lecturing to get in the way of your writing. We have too few born story-tellers.—With all kind regards. Yours very truly,

(Sgd.) A. Conan Doyle.

Copy of Letter to David Christie Murray (undated).

My Dear Sir,—I think that your idea of a statue to Washington to be erected by public subscription in London is an admirable one. The future of the world belongs to the Anglo-Celtic races if they can but work in unison, and everything which works for that end makes for the highest. I believe that the great stream which bifurcated a century ago may have re-united before many more centuries have passed, and that we shall all have learned by then that patriotism is not to be limited by flags or systems, but that it should embrace all of the same race and blood and speech. It would be a great thing—one of the most noble and magnanimous things in the history of the world—if a proud people should consent to adorn their capital with the statue of one who bore arms against them. I wish you every success in your idea, and shall be happy to contribute ten guineas towards its realisation.—Yours very truly,

(Sgd.) A. Conan Doyle.

Copy of Letter to David Christie Murray, 6th May 1897.

Dear Sir,—I have to acknowledge with thanks the receipt of your letter of May 1st I thoroughly appreciate the spirit of your suggestion, but am inclined to doubt its wisdom at the present time. I do not see how any human being on either side of the Atlantic can dispute the good-feeling already

entertained towards the United States by every class of the population here. I am afraid, however, that it is not generally reciprocated, and the Americans are apt to misunderstand some of our efforts to conciliate them, and to attribute them to less worthy motives. I have heard several distinguished Americans protest against the "gush," as they call it, in which we indulge. Under these circumstances, I think the project of a statue to George Washington should be, for the present, postponed,—I am, yours truly,

(Sgd.) Joseph Chamberlain.

Copy of Letter to David Christie Murray, 22nd February 1897.

29 Delamere Terrace, Westbourne Sq., W.

My Dear Sir,—May a delighted reader of your articles in the Sun presume on a very slight acquaintance with their author to say how greatly he admires them? The paper on Dickens seemed to me to dissolve that writer's peculiar charm with a truer alchemy than any criticism I had ever read. And now that with such splendid courage you tilt against the painted bladder-babies of the neo-Scottish school,—with so much real moderation too, with such a dignified statement of the reasons for such a judgment,—I cannot rest, I must say "Bravo." The distinction between the false North Britons (mere phantoms) and the true Stevenson and Barrie (real creatures of the imagination, if sometimes, in their detail, a little whimsical, even a little diminutive) is put so admirably as I had not yet seen it put.

I am eager for next Sunday's article, and as long as these papers continue I shall read them with avidity. I detect in every paragraph that genuine passion for literature which is so rare, and which is the only thing worth living the life of letters for.

Pardon my intrusion, and accept my thanks once more.—Believe me to be, faithfully yours,

(Sgd.) Edmund Gosse.

Copy of Letter to David Christie Murray (undated).

Undershaw, Hindhead, Haslemere

My Dear Murray,—I shall be delighted and honoured to have a first glance at the ms. I never read anything of yours which I did not like, so I am sure I shall like it, but there are degrees of liking, and I will tell you frankly which degree I register.

Now you will bear that visit in mind and write to me when you are ready and your work done.—With all kind regards, yours very truly,

(Sgd.) A. Conan Doyle.

Copy of Letter to David Christie Murray (undated).

Undershaw, Hindhead, Haslemere.

My Dear Murray,—I have just finished your critical book and think it most excellent and useful. I couldn't help writing to you to say so. It is really fine—so well-balanced and clear-sighted and judicial. For kind words about myself many thanks. I don't think we are suffering from critical kindness so much as indiscriminate critical kindness. No one has said enough, as it seems to me, about Barrie or Kipling. I think they are fit—young as they are—to rank with the highest, and that some of Barrie's work, Margaret Ogilvy and *A Window in Thrums*, will endear him as Robert Burns is endeared to the hearts of the future Scottish race.

I have just settled down here and we are getting the furniture in and all in order. In a week or so it will be quite right. If ever you should be at a loose end at a week-end, or any other time, I wish you would run down. I believe we could make you happy for a few days. Name your date and the room will be ready. Only from the 16th to the 26th it is pre-empted.—With all kind remembrances, yours very truly,

(Sgd.) A. Conan Doyle

Copy of Letter to David Christie Murray. 9th Sept. 1897.

148 Todmorden Road, Burnley, Lanes.

My Dear Sir,—Will you kindly excuse the liberty I take in writing? I have just bought and read your new book *My Contemporaries in Fiction*. and feel that I must thank you. The task you assumed was, I think, necessary, and your estimate of the various writers just, and on the whole

generous. I know my opinion is of little value, but I have long felt that several of our modern novelists were appraised miles beyond their merits, and I have often wished that some man of position, one who could speak candidly without fear of being accused of being envious, would give to the world a fair and fearless criticism of the works of novelists about whom some so-called critics rave. Thousands will be glad that you have done this, and I hope your book will have the success it deserves.

It will be a matter for thankfulness, too, that you have tried to do justice to George Macdonald, and to give him the place he deserves. To read the fulsome stuff which is so often written about Crockett, and then to think that Macdonald is quietly shelved, is enough to make one sick at heart. Certainly, I shall do all that lies in my power to make your work known.

I do wish, however that you had devoted a few pages to one who, a few years ago, loomed large in the literary horizon. I mean Robert Buchanan. I know that during these last few years he has poured out a great deal of drivel, but I cannot forget books like *The New Abelard*, and especially, *God and the Man*. It is a matter of surprise and regret that one of Buchanan's undoubted powers should have thrown himself away as he has done. All the same, the man who wrote *God and the Man* and *The Shadow of the Sword*, hysterical as the latter may be, deserves a place in such a book as yours, and an honest criticism, such as I am sure you could give, might lead him, even yet, to give us a work worthy of the promise of years ago.

I am afraid you will regard this letter as presumptuous, nevertheless, I am prompted by sincere admiration. Years ago I read Joseph's *Coat and Aunt Rachel*, and still think the latter to be one of the tenderest and most beautiful things in fiction. I also remember the simple scene which gave the title to the book called *A Bit of Human Nature*, and shall never cease to admire what seems to me a flash of real genius. Consequently, when I stood close by you at a "Vagabond's" dinner, on the ladies' night some months ago, I was strongly impelled to ask for an introduction, but lacked the necessary audacity to carry out my one time determination.

Again thanking you for a book which has afforded me a genuine pleasure to read, besides giving me much mental stimulus,—I am, dear sir, yours very truly,

(Sgd.) Joseph Hocking.

Copy of Letter to David Christie Murray. 17th June 1897.

Dear Murray,—I am getting so weary of controversy that I must decline to take part, directly or indirectly, in any more. Possibly, in the heat of annoyance, I may have said harsh things about Mr Scott, but if so, I have forgotten them, and I think all harsh things are better forgotten. I am sorry, therefore, to hear that you are on the war-path, and wish I could persuade you to turn back to the paths of peace. You are too valuable to be wasted in this sort of warfare. I daresay you will smile at such advice from me, of all men, but believe me, I speak from sad experience.

I was sorry to hear about the fate of your play, but 'tis the fortune of war, and I hope it will only stir you to another effort which may possess, not more merit, possibly, but better luck, which now-a-days counts more than merit. —With all good wishes, I am, yours truly,

(Sgd.) Robert Buchanan.

Copy of Letter to David Christie Murray, Sept. 1st.

"Merliland," 25 Maresfield Gardens, South Hampstead, N.W.

Dear Christie Murray,—I thank you for your kind breath of encouragement, and am very glad that my *Outcast* contains anything to awaken a response in so fine a nature as your own. It was very good of you to think of writing to me on the subject at all.

I can't help thinking that men who still hold to the old traditions should stick together and form some kind of a phalanx. I was not sorry, therefore, to hear that you had expressed yourself freely about the craze of a noisy minority for formlessness and ugliness in realistic literature. Ibsen's style, regarded merely as style, bears the same relation to good writing that the *Star* newspaper does to a Greek statue. I don't myself much mind what morals a man teaches, so long as he preserves the morality of beautiful form, but at the rate we are now going, literature seems likely to become a series of causes célèbres chronicled in the language of the penny-a-liner. And over and above this is the dirty habit, growing upon

*many able men, of examining their secretions, always an evident sign of hypochondria.*

*I am awaiting with much interest your further steps on the plane dramatic. Meantime, I hope I shall see more of you and yours. With kind regards.—Truly yours,*

*(Sgd.) Robert Buchanan.*

*Copy of Letter to David Christie Murray. 17th January 1905.*

*75 Cambridge Terrace, W.*

*Dear Sir,—I trust you will forgive my writing you, but I cannot make use of another man's brains without some acknowledgment. For years I have been a reader of the Referee, and of late years nothing has interested me more than the articles above the name of Merlin on the front page. This week you have put the real issue so clearly and so freely, that I am going to avail myself of it tonight in my speech at Blandford, and I hope I have your permission so to do. If only a few more men would grasp difficult subjects as boldly and broadly as you do, we should be a better and a happier people.—Yours very faithfully,*

*(Sgd.) E. Marshall Hall.*

Honolulu

Dear Mrs Christie Murray,

Here is a strange place for me to date a letter from, to a Brother Britton, a Brother artist and (unless your three names belie you strangely) a Brother S. W. But the truth is I am committed to the South Seas (where I find everything to interest me and more health than I am <sup>to have</sup> used) for some time; and I must do that by letter which I had rather do by word of mouth. "By the Gates of the Sea" was my first introduction to you. well; since then I have had a great deal of pleasure from



your pages; and this last  
week, I have been making  
up lee-way with Cunt Rachel,  
Hunts, The Weather Vessel, and  
First Person Singular, which  
I lay down to write to you.  
I wish to thank you, and  
to congratulate you ~~more~~; setting  
aside George Meredith, our elder  
and better, I read none of my  
contemporaries with the same  
delight; and whatever you may  
think of my own productions, I  
think you will be like me  
in this, that you will set a  
value on the admiration of ours.

fellow craftsman. I should not say what I meant if I did not add my thanks for the tone of your writing; several times, you have encouraged me — and several times rebuked.

Take this very stupid account from a walked-out man, who is reduced to the level of writing blank verse when he tries to write prose — (do you know the stage?) — and take it for a little more than it is worth; for had I been any other man, and could I express adequately what I feel at this moment, you should have had a charming letter. Mrs Stevenson sends her compliments

to Mrs Murray, which I do more humbly; for the result of a prolonged course of your novels is to make us inclined to set only to little yourself, but your wife: a man's wife gets into his fiction, for better, for worse. Some day, I hope we may meet, and our news

Yours truly obliged reader

Robert Louis Stevenson

For Keenan's sake, don't answer this: I know what a business it is; only, when you hear I am back, and have a chance, be so kindly as to write and come to see me  
R.L.S.

## CHAPTER XVII

### *Sixtieth Birthday*

Yesterday I attained my sixtieth birthday. It is not yet old age, but the posting-stations between old age and myself grow fewer with what looks like a bewildering rapidity. The years are shorter than they used to be. What a length lay between the anniversaries of childhood and even those of young manhood! How little tedious was the road! And now how brief and tiresome has the journey from one point to another grown to seem! One turns and glances back on the traversed road, "looking over Time's crupper and over his tail," as the elder Hood put it, and it looks like a ribboned path through a cemetery. The little child-wife and the baby lie yonder far away. Nearer, and yet afar off, the grey old father is asleep. There, between them, is the lad with whom I shared all my early joy in books. Oh! the raptured miles we walked, seeing each other home by turns, till long after midnight, each exposing to the other's view the jewels gathered in the past few days. The memorial stones are everywhere, and they grow thicker as the road winds on. And saddest of all are the places where one sees the tokens, not of lost friends but of dead ideals. Here a faith laid itself down, tired out, and went to sleep for good and all. A cypress marks the place, to my fancy, Here a hope made up its mind that it was not worth while to hope any longer, and foundered in its tracks. There is an ambition, unburied, to be sure, but as dead as Cheops. "Old wishes, ghosts of broken plans, and phantom hopes."

"It's a sair sicht," as Carlyle said, looking up at the skies on a starry night; and one asks, in a mood of some

despondency, what one has got to show for it all?—the loss, the pain, the disappointment, the disillusion. But, come now, let us look the thing fairly and squarely in the face. Is not Despondency disposed to state her case somewhat too emphatically? Am I, or am I not, flatly exaggerating in this summary of losses? Would I have the little child-wife back again if I could? Can her loss after this lapse of well nigh two score years have left anything, at most, but a humanising tenderness in my memory? She is a pretty and engaging recollection, and has been no more at any time for whole decades, and to pretend that she is a grief is frankly to import humbug into sentiment. And what had I but a sense of pious thanksgiving when my grey old father laid down the weary burden of many years and the crushing pains of hernia, and the breathless agonies of a dreadful asthma? If I pretend that I would willingly have stretched him out longer on the rack of this tough world, I am no better than a sentimental liar to myself. I know in my heart of hearts that I was glad to let him go. And the lost faith? I believe with all my soul that I have found a better. And the lost ambitions? What were they but a baby's crying for the moon? There was a time when I could say with Will Waterproof, in the *Lyrical Monologue made at the Cock*:

*"For I had hoped by something rare  
To prove myself a poet:  
But while I plan and plan, my hair  
Is grey before I know it"*

But to one's own plain commonsense it is the poorest kind of business at the present time of life to sit down and grizzle because one proved in the long run *not* to be a poet. I will not deny a certain inevitable melancholy in the retrospect, taking it all round. Yet even whilst I feel this, there is an inward protest. The loss is not all loss. The game of life is one in which we gain by losing, and lose by gaining. In *The Ghost's Bargain with the Haunted Man* it was a part of the agreement that the man should forget all the sorrows he had ever known. In that atrophy of the heart which followed in that frozen seal which bound down every rill of human sympathy and pity, I know that there is the presentment of a great and lasting truth. No man's nature is ripened until he has known many griefs and losses, nor will it ripen until they have bitten into him as frost bites into the fallow earth to fertilise it, and opens it to the uses of sun and air and rain.

There are, of course, things quite apart from loss and the destruction of old ideals which encumber the path of coming of age with troubles of one sort or another. The air is thick with the shadows of regret. It is seventeen years since I shot my first wild boar, and more than fifteen since the last deer; a stag of twelve tines, as I am a christened man, fell to my gun. It is thirteen years since I rode into the central pah of the King's Country in New Zealand, and I have never crossed a horse since then. It is a quarter of a century since I saw the heights of Tashkesen, and heard the Turkish and Russian guns roaring defiance at each other; and the sporting days, and the exploring days, and the fighting days are all over. I shall never again stand knee-deep in snow through the patient hours waiting for the forest quarry to break cover. Think of the ensuing lumbago! I shall hear the thrilling boom of the big guns no more. I shall never again penetrate into the freshness of a virgin land. I shall see no more the hammer of the midday sun beat its great splashes of light from the snow-clad summits of the Rockies and the Selkirks. The long and the short of it is that I am transformed from my old estate of globe-trotter and observer of events and nature into the land of suburban old fogeydom, and the point to touch, so far as I am personally engaged, is whether really and truly I do very much and deeply regret the change. Not very deeply, after all, I am disposed to think. His workshop bounds all to the old fogey who has lived out a great many of his friendships, but within its limits what sights may he not see? Calais, first seen of Continental towns, is still a possession of my own. The Paris of 1872 is mine, the Rhine and the Rhine fall, Vienna, Berlin, the Alps—the Austrian Alps, the Australian and New Zealand Alps—they are all mine. Kicking Horse River is mine, and the steely whirl of the lower rapids of Niagara before they reach the fall. And, in clear view of the ideals which would shake me from my seat, I have but one answer to offer them. My shabby study armchair is the seat from which I look compassion on a struggling world, as a man fairly drowned and accepting his fate might look on fellow mariners yet only in process of drowning. Fill the mind with memories of things whole-heartedly attempted! You have failed or half-failed. Everybody has failed or half-failed who ever tried to do anything worth doing. You are not more unblest than the average of your kind.

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