

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-62610-2 - After Many Years: A Tale: Of Experiences & Impressions  
Gathered in the Course of an Obscure Life

W E Heitland

Frontmatter

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# AFTER MANY YEARS

## *A TALE*

OF EXPERIENCES & IMPRESSIONS

GATHERED IN THE COURSE

OF AN

OBSCURE LIFE

by

W E HEITLAND

MA

*‘Reaching forth unto those things which are before.’*

Phil 3 § 13

CAMBRIDGE

AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS

1926

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**CAMBRIDGE**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781107626102](http://www.cambridge.org/9781107626102)

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First published 1926

First paperback edition 2013

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

ISBN 978-1-107-62610-2 Paperback

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## PREFACE

It has become an ordinary thing for men who have lived beyond the traditional span of life to set down on paper a record of their experiences and to note the changes that have come under their observation in the course of time. In the case of those whose lot it has been to bear a part in great public movements, or to fill a distinguished place in some profession of general interest, their recollections find many readers. The same may be said of numerous records of travel and adventure. I have no such claim to a hearing, for I can only speak of small events in a narrow sphere of experience. From childhood to old age circumstances have gripped me fast. The ambitions of a professional career, the longing to go round the world, have been dreams now vanished for ever. Yet in my humble course I have seen changes in several parts of the country so striking and significant that I venture to record them in the form of narrative, keeping mere personal details as far as possible in the background. Narrative carries with it a certain amount of criticism. I have striven hard to observe truth in the one and fairness in the other.

Happy are those whose theme is redeemed by circumstances from the reproach of flat triviality. When Dorothy Wordsworth (14 May 1802) records ‘William tired himself with seeking an epithet for

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the cuckoo,' and 'After dinner, I worked bread, then came and mended stockings beside William; he fell asleep,' the glory of a great poet's development gives to these simple touches a value that later students thankfully recognize. One whose experiences of life have been gained on a much lower level can only hope at best for the patience of an idle reader in a leisure hour. Of Cambridge in particular it is not easy to write with freedom and at the same time to avoid fulsome praise or partisan malignity. To be 'spicy' is not difficult; but, the more a man cherishes opinions of his own, the more likely he is to escape vain regret by expressing them with reserve. For the same reason I have avoided reference to a personal wrong, admitting no excuse, received many years ago. Reference would only serve to relieve my own feelings, and would now be as unwise as Gunning's lengthy narrative of his affair with Dr Browne. But reticence and indifference are not the same thing.

My reminiscences of Cambridge begin just about the time when Leslie Stephen's *Sketches* leave off. It was that eminent man's fortune to illustrate the state of things while the residents were awaiting with mixed feelings the approach of Academic Reform. Much of what he says was more or less literally true of Cambridge life in my earlier years. Some of his remarks, e g those on Heads and Professors, are still deserving of careful considera-

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tion, in spite of all the changes that time has brought. I am not presuming to class myself with him. But I wish to record my sympathy with most of the criticisms implied in his pictures, and to profess my belief that I have been an observer of a very different scene from much the same point of view. With the opinions expressed in his *Early Impressions* I agree in almost every detail. I only wish I had had the good fortune to know him.

There is one subject, very interesting to me, to which I have made no reference in the following pages. The changes in the position of women during the last seventy years are so far-reaching that they must receive marked attention from future historians of England. When we reflect that they include the Married Women's Property Act of 1882, and the steps by which women have found their way into the House of Commons and Municipal Corporations, the Profession of Medicine and the Magistracy, not to mention their steady advance in other callings, we old people have food for thought. The helpless woman of the mid-nineteenth century has passed away. Men who can look back threescore years and ten have good reason to be thankful for a change of type that has made even the Anti-suffragist sister more of a human being. Nor need they fear that mercy and self-sacrifice are extinguished in the present generation through the coming of the New Woman. Those who remember the deeds of Florence

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## P R E F A C E

Nightingale have lived to be contemporary with Edith Cavell and Lilian Starr. Woman has not said her last word, or done her last deed of heroism. At Cambridge it would be natural to dwell on her patient and fruitful achievements in the field of study, and on the spectacle of wise mothers bringing up their children to walk worthily. But Cambridge is perhaps the one place in the civilized world where the topic of the Student Woman is for the present best avoided.

W E H

*February 1925*



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