

A BOOKSELLER OF THE LAST CENTURY.

CHAPTER I.

Ancestors—The Newberie Charity—John Newbery's Birth-place—Early Days in Waltham St. Lawrence—Reading—Death of Carnan—*The Reading Mercury*—Marriage—A Business Tour—Schemes for Future Work—The Business at Reading—B. Collins of Salisbury—Removal to London.

ALTHOUGH John Newbery was the son of a small farmer, living in an obscure and remote Berkshire village, it is noticeable that he came of a stock which had been intimately associated with books. Ralph or Rafe Newberie (*sic*), from whom, according to a pedigree in possession of the present family, he traced his descent, was one of the greatest publishers at the end of the sixteenth century, who had his printing house in Fleet Street, a little above the Conduit. He was Warden of the Stationers' Company in 1583, and Master in 1598 and in 1601; he gave a stock of books, and the privilege of printing, to be sold for the benefit of Christ's Hospital and Bridewell. His first book is dated 1560, and his name appears on many of the

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most important publications of his day, such as "Hakluyt's Voyages," "Holinshed's Chronicles," a handsome Latin Bible, in folio (by Junius, Tremellius, &c.), 1593, which he published in conjunction with George Bishop and R. Barker. Among the other productions of his press may be noted "Eclogues, Epitaphs," &c., 1563; "Stow's Annals," 1592 and 1601; "A Book of the Invention of the Art of Navigation," London, 1578, 4to; "An Ancient Historie and Curious Chronicle," London, 1578; "A Remonstrance, or plain detection of some of the faults and hideous Sores of such sillie Syllogismes and Impertinent allegations, out of Sundrie Pamphlets and Rhapsodies as are cobled vp into a Book, intituled, A Demonstration of Discipline, etc.," Lond., 1590, 8vo. In the same year he printed, in Greek types, "Joannis Chrysostomi," &c.

Ralph Newbery bequeathed, in 1633, a sum of £5 annually for the poor of the Parish of Waltham St Lawrence, Berkshire, which bequest is now known as the Bell Charity. This has been invested in a small cottage and a portion of waste land. The former has been converted into the village public house, the tenant of which is elected by the trustees of the Charity, the latter into an orchard; and the Charity now (1885) brings in about £50 per annum. It was to be distributed among "the poorest and the neediest" under certain stated conditions as to the occupier of the house and the apportionment of the money, and it has

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been for years given away in money at Christmas to the poorer parishioners selected at a meeting of the trustees, a small part of the income being retained for repairs.

It was in this same parish of Waltham St Lawrence that John Newbery first saw the light. He was the younger son of Robert Newbery, a small farmer in the village, and was born in the year 1713—the parish Registers containing the entry of his baptism on the 19th July in that year. The place is prettily situated five miles south-west of Maidenhead, and nine miles east of Reading. Lord Braybrooke, a descendant of the Sir Henry Neville upon whom the manor was bestowed by King Edward the Sixth, is the present proprietor. In 1801 the village was described as follows:—“Though now reduced to a few scattered houses, it is said to have been a place of remote antiquity and of much importance. Some of the buildings wear the appearance of having flourished in better times, and the ruins of many more are visible. The inhabitants assert that the houses were formerly very numerous; that they extended a considerable way on each side of the road, which, at the entrance of the village, passes under an arched gateway composed of large oak timbers. In a spacious field near was a Roman fortress, the site of which is still called Castle Acre, and it commands a delightful view over a very large extent of country.”

I paid it a visit in the summer of 1885, and found it quiet and quaint enough. It consists of a few

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old and scattered houses, and contains about 500 inhabitants. Approaching it from Twyford, one passes, not through the arched gateway of oak timbers which has long since disappeared, but through lanes flanked by rows of "immemorial elms," casting a deep and grateful shade; opposite the church, in the middle of the road, stands the village pound, all choked with weeds, guarded at each corner by massive old ivy-covered oaks. Close at hand is the village inn, the Bell, where, as we have said, the Ralph Newberie Charity is annually distributed. The ringing of the hammer on the anvil denoted the near presence of the village blacksmith and church bellringer, and this was the only sound that disturbed the drowsy quietude of this out of the way little nook.

Hard by is the rectory, and in the churchyard, I found the graves of the Newbery family, some of whom, to judge from the mural records, were evidently persons of distinction in the parish in times gone by.* Humphrey Newbery, "late an Utter Barrester of Lincolns Inn, who for his greate learning and knowledge in the Lawes of this Land was much esteemed by them that knew him and his worth," lies buried here. He died in 1638. Here also is the tomb of that "religious gentlewoman," his wife, "whose pious care

* The Parish Registers contain the name from 1559 onwards, and for about 200 years there is scarcely a page on which it does not appear.

in a religious education of her children was one among many fruites of her godly life. She deceased in 1640 . . . and on her right side sleeps her youngest daughter Dorothy, whose early wisdom and goodness was a presedent for riper yeares. . . . She left this world in 1634.”

It was in this quiet village that John Newbery, afterwards the active, bustling and energetic London publisher, passed his boyhood, and here he received the ordinary education of a farmer's son, which could not, we imagine, have been very extensive or complete. However, we learn from an autobiography of his son, Francis Newbery, that he, “by his talents and industry, and a great love of books, had rendered himself a very good English scholar. His mind was too excursive to allow him to devote his life to the occupation of agriculture. He was anxious to be in trade, and at about the age of sixteen, as he was a very good accountant, and wrote an excellent hand, he engaged himself as an assistant in the house of one of the principal merchants in Reading, where his diligence and integrity soon established his character, while his agreeable manners and conversation, and information (for he pursued his studies in all his leisure hours) raised him into notice and esteem.”

Reading at this period (about 1730) was not in the height of its prosperity, and there were few, if any, merchants there in those days. It must have been then as now, exceedingly pretty in its surround-

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ings, and being situated at the confluence of the Thames and the Kennet, and on the high road from London to Bristol, there would naturally be a considerable traffic by land and water. Its market was reported one of the best in England for all sorts of grain and other provisions, but the town had not developed its present mercantile importance, with its great Biscuit Factory, its Seed Stores and its Ironworks. Its fame at about that time seems to have been chiefly for the manufactures of cloth and of malt, both of which have long since ceased.

We are unable to ascertain who is the "Merchant" particularly referred to by Francis Newbery, but we conclude that it was Wm. Carnan the printer, proprietor and editor of one of the earliest provincial newspapers, *The Reading Mercury and Oxford Gazette*, for we find in the Records at Somerset House that Wm. Carnan, printer of Reading, died in 1737, leaving all his property and his business to his brother Charles and to Johr Newbery, appointing them his executors. The *Reading Mercury* first appeared on the 8th July 1723, and was said to have been started by Mr John Watts, one of the mayors of that city. Wm. Carnan in 1736 printed an edition in folio of Ashmole's 'History and Antiquities of Berkshire,' but we find no traces of his imprint elsewhere.

To return, however, to the future publisher, who was by this time about twenty-four years of age, and had no doubt become familiar with the routine of

the printing office. Not long after Carnan's death John Newbery began to pay his addresses to his widow, who was about six years older than himself, and was left with three young children. We must here again quote his son Francis, who says in the autobiography before cited: "His love of books and acquirements had peculiarly fitted him for conducting such a concern as the newspaper and printing business at Reading, and rendered him doubly acceptable to the object of his affections, who was indeed a most amiable and worthy woman. They were in due time united in wedlock, and what a field now opened to his active and expanded mind!"

Of this marriage there were three children; Mary, born in March 1740, who married in 1766 Mr Michael Power, a Spanish merchant, and left a numerous family, some of whom were afterwards connected with the business in St Paul's Churchyard; John, born in September 1741, who was, says Francis Newbery, a "boy of singular acuteness and sense, but he had the misfortune so to injure his spine by a fall down some stone steps when a child, that he died after a lingering illness, aged eleven years. Christopher Smart, the poet, celebrated his memory in the following very nervous and appropriate epitaph":—

" Henceforth be every tender fear suppress,
 Or let us weep for joy, that he is blest ;
 From grief to bliss, from earth to heav'n remov'd,
 His mem'ry honour'd, as his life below'd,

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That heart o'er which no evil e'er had pow'r,
 That disposition sickness could not sour ;
 That sense, so oft to riper years denied,
 That patience heroes might have own'd with pride !
 His painful race undauntedly he ran,
 And in the eleventh winter died a man." *

The youngest, Francis, was born on the 6th July 1743, and as we shall see, succeeded, with others, to the business of which his father was then so busy in laying the foundations.

"He speedily," continues Francis, "became thoroughly master of his business, which was carried on for three or four years longer, when he opened a house in London, for the more ready disposal of a variety of publications which were printed at Reading, and of which he was either the author or compiler."

Before removing to London, however, he went, in the year 1740, on a tour through England, apparently for the benefit of the business in Reading, which was rapidly becoming of a very miscellaneous character. An account of this trip is preserved in his Private Memorandum Book, in which is entered each day's journeyings, the miles he travelled, the Inns at which he lay, and all the notable sights that were seen. The manufactures, products and characteristics of the various towns are also briefly noted. He started from Reading on Wednesday, July 9, 1740, and went to London

* This was originally published in "The Midwife." See the Catalogue of Books published by the Newberys.

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A BUSINESS TOUR.

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by coach, alighting at "The White Horse," in Fleet Street. Thence on to St Albans, Bedford, Leicester, Melton Mowbray and Grantham to Lincoln. "Going from this place" (Grantham) "to Lincoln," he says, "you cross a delicious plain, in length about 22 miles, the breadth I know not: in the whole 22 miles there is but one village (called Ancaster), and that just at the entrance of the down. Here we were almost famished for want of liquour, being obliged to travel upwards of 20 miles on a sultry summer's day without a drop. The spirit moved my brother traveller to ask the Shepard (*sic*), but the inhospitable wretch would not spare one spoonful." Who the brother traveller was does not transpire; it was probably a chance acquaintance, as although the word "we" sometimes occurs, he seems to have been alone most of the time. At Hull he was much entertained by "the effigie of the Bonny Boatsman," in a boat made of fish skins, which was brought there by "a merchant of Hull in his voyage from Greenland near 100 years ago." From Hull he went to York, Lancaster, Doncaster (where he receives his first letter from his wife), Sheffield, Nottingham, &c.: to Darby (*sic*), where, says he, "there is another curious and very useful machine, viz., a Ducking Stool, for the benefit of schooling wives. A plan of this instrument I shall procure and transplant to Berkshire for the good of my native county."

He also notes that "At almost every parish in

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this county" (Lancashire), "there is a very useful instrument called a Ducking Stool, where the women are cured of scolding, &c." Chester, Liverpool, Birmingham, Manchester, where he is to receive letters from his wife, are visited and described. "At Leicester goal," he says, "we saw one John Clark who lay condem'd for robbing on the highway. He told us that the person hang'd at York was not Turpin, for that he had robbed with him (Turpin) between Colnbrook and Maidenhead and other places the last hard weather, that the person then hang'd was an accompish of his and Turpin's, and that they engaged that which ever were catched should take on him the name of Turpin, and that Turpin and he supported that man (viz., Palmer) in York Castle and was present at his execution; and that Turpin and he (John Clark) waited 8 weeks to shoot a man on Epping Forest; But that Turpin was now living and had taken on him the name of Smith, and he kept an alehouse in the North of England." Captain Twyford, in his records of York Castle,* tells us that Turpin was hanged on April 17, 1739. One account of his execution declares he was distinguished by the comeliness of his appearance. "But," says Captain Twyford, "he was not at all prepossessing, really having high broad cheekbones, a short visage, the face narrowed towards the chin and was much

* Records of York Castle, by A. W. Twyford and Major Arthur Griffiths: Griffith & Farran, London, 1880.