

WHAT I REMEMBER.

CHAPTER I.

I HAVE no intention of writing an autobiography. There has been nothing in my life which could justify such a pretension. But I have lived a long time. I remember an aged porter at the monastery of the "Sagro Eremo," above Camaldoli, who had taken brevet rank as a saint solely on the score of his ninety years. His brethren called him and considered him as Saint Simon simply because he had been porter at that gate for more than sixty years. Now my credentials as a babbler of reminiscences are of a similar nature to those of the old porter. I have been here so many, many years. And then those years have comprised the best part of the nineteenth century—a century during which change has been more rapidly at work among all the surroundings of Englishmen than probably during any other century of which social history has to tell.

Of course middle-aged men know, as well as we ancients, the fact that social life in England—or

rather let me say in Europe—is very different from what it was in the days of their fathers, and are perfectly well acquainted with the great and oftentimes celebrated causes which have differentiated the Victorian era from all others. But only the small records of an unimportant individual life, only the memories which happen to linger in an old man's brain, like bits of drift-weed floating round and round in the eddies of a back-water, can bring vividly before the young of the present generation those ways and manners of acting and thinking and talking in the ordinary every-day affairs of life which indicate the differences between themselves and their grandfathers.

I was born in the year 1810 at No. 16, Keppel Street, Russell Square. The region was at that time inhabited by the professional classes, mainly lawyers. My father was a barrister of the Middle Temple to the best of my recollection, but having chambers in the Old Square, Lincoln's Inn. A quarter of a century or so later, all the district in question became rather deteriorated in social estimation, but has, I am told, recently recovered itself in this respect under the careful and judicious administration of the Duke of Bedford. The whole region appeared to me, when I was recently in London, about the least changed part of the London of my youthful days. As I walked up Store Street, which runs in a line from Keppel Street to Tottenham Court Road, I spied the name of "Pidding, Confectioner." I immediately entered the shop and

made a purchase at the counter. "I did not in the least want this tart," said I to the girl who was serving in the shop. "Why did you take it, then?" said she, with a little toss of her head. "Nobody asked you to buy it." "I bought it," rejoined I, "because I used to buy pastry of Mr. Pidding in this shop seventy years ago." "Lor', sir!" said the girl, "did you really?" She probably considered me to be the Wandering Jew.

I remember well that my father used to point out to me houses in Russell Square, Bedford Square, and Bloomsbury Square in which judges and other notable legal luminaries used to live. But even in those days the localities in question, especially the last named of them, were beginning to be deserted by such personages, who were already moving farther westward. The occasion of these walks with my father through the squares I have named—to which Red Lion Square might have been added—was one the painful nature of which has fixed it in my memory indelibly.

"Infandam *memoria* jubes renovare dolorem."

For the object of these walks was the rendering an account of the morning's studies. I was about six years old, when under my father's auspices I was first introduced to the *Eton Latin Grammar*. He was a Wykehamist, had been a fellow of New College, and had held a Vinerian Fellowship. And his great ambition was, that his eldest son, myself, should tread in his steps and pursue the same

career. *Dts aliter visum!*—as regards at least the latter stages of that career. For I did become, and am, a Wykehamist, as much as eight years at *Coll. B. M. Winton prope Winton* can make me.

Of which more anon.

For the present I see myself alone in the back drawing-room of No. 16, Keppel Street, in which room the family breakfast took place—probably to avoid the necessity of lighting another fire in the dining-room below—at 7 A.M., on my knees before the sofa, with my head in my hands and my eyes fixed on the *Eton Latin Grammar* laid on the sofa cushion before me. My parents had not yet come down to breakfast, nor had the tea urn been brought up by the footman. *Nota bene.*—My father was a poor man, and his establishment altogether on a modest footing. But it never would have occurred to him or to my mother that they could get on without a man-servant in livery. And though this liveried footman served a family in which two tallow candles with their snuffer dish supplied the whole illumination of the evening, had the livery been an *invented* one instead of that proper to the family, the circumstance would have been an absurdity exciting the ridicule of all the society in which my parents lived. *Tempora mutantur!* Certainly at the present day an equally unpretending household would be burthened by no footman. But on the morning which memory is recalling to me the footman was coming up with the urn, and my parents were coming down to breakfast, probably simultaneously; and the

question of the hour was whether I could get the due relationship of relative and antecedent into my little head before the two events arrived.

And that, as I remember it, was the almost unvaried routine for more than a year or two. I think, however, that the walks of which I was speaking when this retrospect presented itself to me must have belonged to a time a little, but not much later; for I had then advanced to the making of Latin verses. We used to begin in those days by making "nonsense verses." And many of us ended in the same way! The next step—*Gradus ad Parnassum*—consisted in turning into Latin verse certain English materials provided for the purpose, and so cunningly prepared as to fall easily and almost inevitably into the required form. And these were the studies which, as I specially remember, were the subject of rehearsal during those walks from Lincoln's Inn to Keppel Street.

My father was in the habit of returning from his chambers to a five o'clock dinner—rather a late hour, because he was an industrious and laborious man. Well! we, that is my next brother (not the one whose name became subsequently well known in the world, but my brother Henry, who died early) and myself, used to walk from Keppel Street to Lincoln's Inn, so as to arrive in time to walk back with my father. He was a fast walker; and as we trotted along one on each side of him, the repetition of our morning's poetical achievements did not tend, as I well remember, to facilitate the difficulty of "keeping our wind."

But what has probably fixed all this in my mind during nearly three quarters of a century was my father's pat application of one of our lines to the difficulties of those peripatetic poetizings. "*Muse and sound of wheel do not well agree,*" read the cunningly prepared original, which the *alumnus* with wonderful sagacity was to turn into, "*Non bene conveniunt Musa rotæque sonus.*" "That," said my father, as he turned sharp round the corner into the comparative quiet of Featherstone Buildings, "is exactly why I turned out of Holborn!"

I do not know whether children of eight years old, or thereabouts, would at the present day be allowed to range London so freely as we were. But our great amusement and delight was to take long exploring walks in as distant parts of the huge (though then comparatively small) city as could be compassed within the time at our disposition. One especially favourite excursion, I well remember, was to the White Horse Cellar in Piccadilly to see the coaches start or arrive. I knew all their names, and their supposed comparative speed. By this means, indeed, came my first introduction to English geography. Formal lessons on such a thoroughly "commercial academy" subject were not, of course, thought of for an aspiring Wykehamist. But for the due enjoyment of the White Horse Cellar spectacle it was necessary to know the whereabouts of the cities, their distance from London, and the routes by which they were reached. It thus came to pass that our geographical notions were of a

curiously partial description—tolerably copious and accurate as regards the south and west of England, far less so as regards the north. For the north country coaches did not start from Piccadilly. On the opposite side of the way to the White Horse Cellar there was another coaching inn, the White Bear, on which I remember we used to look with much contempt, from the belief, whether in any degree well founded I know not, that the coaches which stopped there on their way out of town, or arrived there, were mainly slow coaches.

One does not traverse well nigh four score years without having experienced longings for the unattainable on several occasions. But I have no remembrance of any such eager, craving longing as the chronic longing of those days to make one of the great-coated companies who were departing to their various destinations by those “Telegraphs,” “High-Flyers,” “Magnets,” and “Independents.” (The more suggestive names of the “Wonder,” and its rival the “No Wonder!” once celebrated on the north-western road, belonged to a later day.) Had I been offered a seat on any of these vehicles my choice would have been dictated solely by considerations of distance—Falmouth for choice, as the westward Ultima Thule of coaching experience. With what rapture should I have climbed, in my little round jacket as I was, and without a thought of any other protection, to the roof of the Falmouth mail—the mail for choice, the Devonport “Quick-silver” being then in the womb of the future—and

started to fetch a forgotten letter (say) of the utmost importance, with strict injunctions to bring it back by the returning coach! I don't think my imagination had yet soared to the supreme glories of the box seat. That came later. To have been a booked passenger, that that horn should have sounded *for me*, that I should have been included in the guard's final and cheery assurance, that at length all was "right"—would have been ample enough for an ecstasy of happiness. What an endless vista of ever-changing miles of country! What an infinite succession of "teams!" What a delicious sense of belonging to some select and specially important and adventurous section of humanity as we should clatter at midnight, or even at three or four o'clock in the morning, through the streets of quiet little country towns, ourselves the only souls awake in all the place! What speculations as to the immediate bestowal and occupation of the coachman, when he "left you here, sir!" in the small hours! What a delightful sense of the possible dangers of the undertaking as testified by many eagerly read narratives of the disasters of the road. Alas! I had no share in it all, save to stand on the curbstone amid the crowd of Jew boys selling oranges and cedar pencils sixpence a dozen, and hurrying passengers and guards and porters, and look on them all with envious longing.

Nota bene. On such an occasion at the present day—if it be possible to conceive such an anachronism—the Jew boys above referred to would be

probably Christian boys, and the object of their commerce, the evening papers. But I have no recollection of any such element in the scene at the White Horse Cellar some sixty-eight years since.

Occasionally when a holiday from lessons occurred—I am afraid most probably in consequence of my father being confined to his bed with headaches, which even at that early day, and increasingly, as years went on, afflicted him—we, my brother Henry and I, obtained permission for a longer ramble. I have no recollection that on these occasions either the parks (unless perhaps sometimes St. James's Park), or Kensington Gardens, or Hampstead, or Highgate, or any of the places that might be supposed to be attractive had any attractions for us. Our faces were ever turned eastward. The city with its narrow mysterious lanes, and still more mysterious wharves, its quaint secluded churches, its Guildhall, and its Gog and Magog, the queer localities of the halls of its Companies, and specially the abstruse mystery of that venerable Palladium, the London stone, excited in those days an irresistible influence on my imagination. But above all else the grand object of a much-planned eastern pilgrimage was the Docks!—with the out-going ships bearing, tied to their shrouds, boards indicating their destinations. Here again was unsatisfied longing! But it was a longing more tempered by awe and uncertainty. I am not sure that I would, if it had been offered to me, have stepped on board an East Indiaman bound for Bombay as eagerly as I

would have climbed a coach starting for the Land's End. But it was a great triumph to have seen with our own eyes the *Agra* (or some other) *Castle* majestically passing through the dock gates, while passengers on deck, men and women, whose feet would absolutely touch land no more till they stopped at far Bombay on the other side of the world, spoke last farewells to friends standing on the dock walls or even on the gates themselves.

But I can recall no less vividly certain expeditions of a kind which appeared to our imaginations to be—and which perhaps really were in some degree—fraught with a certain amount of peril. Stories had reached us of sundry mysteriously wicked regions, where the bandit bands of the great city consorted and lived outlaw lives under circumstances and conditions that powerfully excited our young imaginations. Especially accounts of a certain lane had reached us, where it was said all the pocket handkerchiefs stolen by all the pickpockets in London were to be seen exposed in a sort of unholy market. The name of this place was Saffron Hill. Whether any such place still exists, I know not. It has probably been swept away by the march of recent improvement. But it did in those days veritably exist. And to this extraordinary spot—as remote and strange to our fancy as the realms of Prester John—it was determined after protracted consideration by my brother and myself, that our next long ramble should be devoted. We had ascertained that the dingy land of our researches lay somewhat to the