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 The Reminiscences of Charles Santley  
 Excerpt  
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# STUDENT AND SINGER :

*THE REMINISCENCES OF*  
 CHARLES SANTLEY.



## CHAPTER I.

The Sea : its Charms and Drawbacks—An Old Salt's Opinion—Birth and Early Resolve to be a Sailor—Voyage to the Isle of Man—Later Voyages and their Discomforts—Early Surroundings and Antecedents—My Father's Contemporaries—Hatton and Sivori—Hatton at the 'Little Liver'—A Double Inheritance : Music and Nervousness—My first Song—The Tortures of School Recitation—A Quakeress's Practical Joke and its Results—Stage-struck at Five Years Old—Dramatic Aspirations—Dislike for Music only Superficial—First Public Appearance in the Choir of the Baptist Chapel—Profound Effect of an Orchestra in Church—My Awakening to the Power of Music—My Debt to Haydn—A Clumsy Conductor.

I'm on the sea! I'm on the sea!' Though there I would not ever be, spite of its wonderful attractions, so graphically depicted by Barry Cornwall. What a powerful imagination he must have possessed, for he was one of the sickest of sailors, and detested the sea! I had it from Mrs. Proctor, who told me she used to tease him, humming a strain of his jovial sea-song as he lay, a very log, huddled in shawls and a tarpaulin, crossing the Channel, with barely sufficient animation left to utter, 'For God's sake, my dear, don't!'

I am on the sea, on the way from Auckland to

Wellington, New Zealand. Since my arrival in the Colonies I have travelled a great deal on the sea. I always had an affection for it, and love it—to be on it (not at a seaside resort, but with the blue above, and the blue below, and sunshine wheresoe'er I go!). Though I am never troubled with sea-sickness, I am not one of those enthusiastic mariners who are always longing for a storm. I feel bored in rough weather; I cannot take any exercise; I cannot repose, even in my berth, propped in with pillows and other devices; I cannot settle myself to read much, and writing is out of the question—consequently time hangs somewhat heavily. I have many times resolved never to put my foot on shipboard again unless compelled, and as often, after a long spell of railway travelling north, south, east, and west, I am attacked by a longing to be again on the sea, which I am bound to satisfy.

During the time I was engaged at Her Majesty's Theatre, an old salt named Thomas Downes used to be a frequent visitor behind the scenes. He had been a boatswain in the navy, and afterwards became a petty officer in one of the Irish mail-boats, where I first made his acquaintance, and where he was very attentive to Mapleson and our company when we happened to cross to or from Dublin in his packet, and so he obtained the run of the house in the Haymarket. He was one of my ardent admirers, always loud in my praises whenever we met, but he invariably ended his eulogy with, 'But, Charlie, you're a good sailor spoiled! You ought to be ordering your men on board ship, instead of bawling and squalling your voice away in that stuffy theatre!'

I was born in Liverpool on February 28, 1834. At an early age my greatest pleasure consisted in reading the adventures of great travellers (I do not suppose I was at all singular, for most boys delight in adventures), such as Bruce's 'Travels in Abyssinia,' Captain Cook's 'Voyages,' Franklin's 'Expedition to the North Pole,' and Ross's in search of him. At school—the Mechanics' Institution, Mount Street—there was a large sprinkling of sons of seafaring men and of men whose business was connected with shipping; ship-store dealers, ship-chandlers, ropers, ship-carpenters, ship-bread bakers, etc., who could all relate 'tales of the sea.' For some time I was determined to be a sailor, but I never divulged my determination. Strolling about amongst the shipping, I discovered many unpleasant vicissitudes attendant on a seaman's life, which entirely obliterated the poetical conception I had formed of it. Yet, although my illusion with regard to the life of a sailor vanished, I still preserve a great attachment to the sailor. I like those loose, baggy trousers, the wide open collar and loose neckerchief; besides, I think sea life (on a sailing-ship, not on a steamer) has a tendency to make men more open-hearted. As a rule, sailors are frank and good-natured, and in my experience I have seldom found one sullen or unwilling to do a good turn. Even the passengers on board ship become imbued with the spirit of freedom, and many who on land would scarcely deign to notice a stranger, on the sea dispense with ceremony, and make themselves most agreeable and attentive companions.

I made my first voyage when I was seven years of age. I had gained a prize at school, and as a reward

I was allowed to accompany my grandmother to the Isle of Man. The steamer was an old tub called the *Mona's Isle*. We must have had a rough time of it, as, to the best of my recollection, we were nine or ten hours crossing from Liverpool. We were steerage passengers, and I was very sick ; and as I lay half-dazed in a bunk below, a sailor came down and brought out a cold sole and some potatoes, which he devoured. I thought he must be a hard-hearted wretch to commit such a barbarous action with a lot of sick people lying about ; but I changed my opinion when, at my grandmother's request, he carried me in his arms on deck to pay a necessary visit, and behaved as tenderly to me as though he had been my nurse. We had to land in a small boat. No sooner was I seated therein than the sickness left me, and I was seized with such an appetite that I could have demolished the sailor, with the sole and potatoes for seasoning.

I do not profess to be a great traveller. In these days, when you may meet shopkeepers from provincial towns 'doing' the Pyramids of Egypt, the mosques and bazaars of Cairo, the catacombs of Rome, the wonders of Jerusalem, and the ruins of Baalbec, I can scarcely lay claim to be more than a Margate excursionist. I may say that all my travelling by sea has been for pleasure ; the voyage was my chief inducement to accept engagements in America and the Colonies. As I have before said, I have at times a longing to be on the sea ; but I should like, if time permitted, to try the real thing in a sailing-ship ; for on board a steamer I do not find the perfect repose I expected. True, there is no post, no telegraph, but there is hurry, scurry,

and bustle of one sort or another night and day ; the least annoying of the noises which disturb the rest being that of the machinery, which, after a day or two, is only noticeable when it stops. In the night belated roisterers bawl to each other along the corridors, throw their boots out, slam the doors, or leave them unfastened, so that every roll of the ship causes them to clatter. In the early morning stewards indulge in untimely hilarity over boot-cleaning, or rush about in answer to emphatic appeals for tea and coffee. During the day meals are rushed through as though everybody had to catch an express train! Importunate agitators, who have no taste for quiet themselves, insist upon everybody joining in ridiculous uninteresting games. It is difficult to take exercise, for no sooner do one or two persons start for a walk than everyone else seems to be seized with the same impulse, so that between the crowd of people, the crowd of chairs—which take up half the deck—and children pushing about go-carts, there is nothing for it but to submit to be hustled and jostled about, or relinquish all idea of exercise. There is an attempt at a band, which I, for one, would willingly pay extra fare to be rid of. To pass the evenings, dramatic entertainments, recitals, and concerts are instituted, and, of course, I was pestered to take part in them. I excused myself on the ground that I required rest after a very fatiguing season ; however, I sang twice during my voyage to Australia, as a small return for the kindness and attention I received from our captain, a perfect gentleman, professionally and privately. On my passage returning from Townsville to Rockhampton, Queensland, I was

pressed to sing, and declined. I had then the satisfaction of hearing several of the songs I had been singing during my tour murdered by audacious amateurs.

At the time I was born my father was a journeyman bookbinder employed in his father's workshop ; shortly after he obtained a clerkship in the municipal offices, and subsequently became a collector of rates. He was always a very persevering man ; he had a great love for music, and any spare time he could command he devoted to studying the piano, without the aid of a master, until by exercising strict economy he saved enough to enable him to pay for lessons. He then became a pupil of Michael Maybrick, an uncle of the singer and composer of that name, known in the latter capacity as Stephen Adams. One of his fellow-pupils was John Liptrot Hatton, the composer of 'To Anthea.' Hatton was a merry wag ; he and Sivori, the violinist, were one Sunday at St. Peter's Catholic Church, Seal Street ; Sivori, who was one of the shortest of men, was standing on tip-toe looking through the curtain which hid the singers from view in the organ-gallery, when Hatton, spying a good opportunity for a practical joke, seized him by the heels and jerked him three parts over the reading-desk and back again breathless, before he knew where he was. When 'Jack Sheppard' was first produced in London with the inimitable Mrs. Keeley, Paul Bedford, etc., it made such a sensation that the manager of the 'Little Liver' in Church Street\* determined upon producing it with his own company rather than

\* A pet name for the Liver Theatre ; it was very small, and a great favourite with the Liverpudlians.

wait until the London company visited the provinces. There was only one difficulty about casting the parts. The company included some very good actors ; but they had nobody who could play Blueskin and sing the song, and Blueskin without ' Jolly Nose ' would never do. Hatton was always about the theatre. I think he played in the orchestra, and went on the stage occasionally among the crowd. He had a fairly sonorous voice, plenty of humour, and his capabilities were well-known to all connected with the theatres, so in their dilemma he was applied to to play Joe Blueskin ; his diffidence, which was not armour-plated, was soon disposed of, and he consented. The drama had a run of several weeks, and was received with uproarious applause, Hatton having to sing the song three times every night. When the London company came down to Liverpool and played it at the Theatre Royal it fell flat, spite of the ' only Jack.' It had been performed ever so many times better at the ' Liver.' As to Paul Bedford, he was nowhere, after Jack Hatton !

My mother possessed, as did several members of her family, a peculiarly sympathetic voice, so I presume I inherited from my parents a musical nature. Both were of very nervous temperament, which I inherited also. The first song I ever learned was ' When I was a little boy scarce thirty years ago,' which I was often called on to sing for the amusement of visitors. I was so nervous that I would have run miles away to escape the dreadful ordeal ; but my nervousness was set down to obstinacy and ill-will, and many a bitter moment I endured in consequence.

I could not have been more than eight when my

father commenced teaching my elder sister and me our notes. I loved music, but my dread of singing before anyone held me back, and I was constantly reprimanded for obstinacy and indifference when no such feelings influenced me; so that what otherwise might have been a source of amusement and delight became an intolerably irksome task. I began to loathe the sound of the piano, and tried by every means in my power to escape music in any form.

At school, at times, I was accused of idleness and lack of zeal, when in reality nervousness prevented me from putting myself forward. At examinations I never could do myself justice. An hour each week was devoted to recitations; my first was Bishop Heber's hymn, 'From Greenland's icy mountains.' Each week, after it had been given me to learn, I sat shuddering, cold as the 'icy mountains,' my heart beating so loudly that I fancied my neighbour could hear it, such was my dread of being called on to recite before the boys. I avoided the master's eye in the hope of escaping his notice, but at length the fatal moment arrived, and I had to go to execution. I tottered on to the platform, my teeth chattering and the nerves of my mouth twitching as though I had been seized with St. Vitus's dance. I knew the piece perfectly, but I had barely uttered the first line when I broke out into a violent fit of sobbing. The professor, though a strict disciplinarian, was very kind-hearted, and evidently comprehending the cause of my distress, allowed me to return to my place. When the class was dismissed he called me to him and spoke so kindly and encouragingly that I determined to do my best to over-



come my weakness. To a great extent I succeeded. I gained sufficient command over myself to be able to repeat the words, but rarely with the force and expression I felt.

At the breaking-up for the Midsummer vacation the recitations were given in the lecture hall of the institution, in the presence of the pupils and their parents and friends. On one occasion I had to take the part of Miss Lucretia Mac Tabb in a scene from 'The Poor Gentleman.' I performed it very badly, for besides my nervousness I felt I was an object of ridicule to my schoolfellows in my attempt to portray the vagaries of an ancient coquette. The summer I left school I took the part of Hamlet in the scene with the Gravedigger. I believe I did that fairly well, but I was in great trepidation lest the skull should roll out of my hand whilst I was delivering the lines, 'Alas! poor Yorick,' so violently did I tremble.

My natural nervousness was increased by a fright I had when about ten years of age. I was out one evening playing with my companions on some waste ground near our house, when the maid came out and informed me that my father wished to see me immediately. I was loath to leave my play, but I knew I must obey, so ran off in great haste, and knocked at the door, which was opened by an awful-looking figure. I uttered a fearful shriek and dropped almost insensible on the steps. When I recovered I crawled back to join my playfellows, but all my spirit was gone. I remained out of doors until very late, and not until I had been positively assured there was nothing to fear would I venture home. A young Quakeress, a friend

of my sister's, had coloured her face with Spanish juice and clothed herself in some outlandish garments, intending to create a bit of fun at my expense. For some time I never entered the house without a shudder. A year after, when the effect of the shock had nearly worn off, the joke was repeated, with a similar result, a hideous mask being substituted for the paint.

Although nervousness at times has prevented my doing all I wished and felt I was capable of doing, I could always command myself to such an extent that it was only apparent to those intimately acquainted with me. I suffered from it when I took part with others. The first few times I played in an orchestra I could scarcely keep the bow steady on the strings of my fiddle, and when I began to sing in the chorus I had difficulty in keeping my breath and my voice under control.

The intimate desire of my heart was to be an actor, but of this I never breathed a word to anyone. My family had been brought up with the Puritanical notion that all stage-players, singers, and such-like were no better than they ought to be, and in general much worse. I seldom saw the inside of a theatre before I was seventeen or eighteen; on rare occasions I was taken, and more rarely still allowed to accompany a friend to see a play. When I was about four or five my aunt took my sister and me to see Ducrow's circus. The first part of the performance was the drama of 'St. George and the Dragon,' and I suppose I was stage-struck. In spite of the nervousness I suffered from when called upon to recite at school, I tried all in