

The Adventure of Living

John St. Loe Strachey

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THE ADVENTURE OF LIVING

A Subjective Autobiography (1860-1922)

By John St. Loe Strachey Editor of The Spectator

"We carry with us the wonders we seek without us; there is all Africa and her prodigies in us; we are that bold and adventurous piece of Nature, which he that studies wisely learns in a compendium what others labour at in a divided piece and endless volume."
SIR THOMAS BROWNE

TO MY WIFE

You who know something of the irony of life in general, and still more of it in the present particular, will not be surprised that, having made two strict rules for my guidance in the writing of this book, I break them both in the first page! Indeed, I can hear you say, though without any touch of the satirical, that it was only natural that I should do so.

The first of my two rules, heartily approved by you, let me add, is that I should not mention you in my autobiography.--We both deem it foolish as well as unseemly to violate in print the freemasonry of marriage.-- The second, not unlike the first, is not to write about living people. And here am I hard at it in both cases!

Yet, after all, I have kept to my resolve in the spirit, if not in the letter:--and this though it has cost me some very good "copy,"--copy, too, which would have afforded me the pleasantest of memories. There are things seen by us together which I much regret to leave unchronicled, but these must wait for another occasion. Many of them are quite suitable to be recorded in one's lifetime. For example, I should dearly like to set forth our ride from Jerusalem to Damascus, together with some circumstances, as an old-fashioned traveller might have said, concerning the Garden of the Jews at Jahoni, and the strange and beautiful creature we found therein.

I count myself happy indeed to have seen half the delightful and notable things I have seen during my life, in your company. Do you remember the turbulent magnificence of our winter passage of the Splügen, not in a snowstorm, but in something much more thrilling--a fierce windstorm in a great frost? The whirling, stinging, white dust darkened the air and coated our sledges, our horses, and our faces. We shall neither of us ever forget how just below the Hospice your sledge was actually blown over by the mere fury of the blizzard; how we tramped through the drifts, and how all ended in "the welcome of an inn" on the summit; the hot soup and the Côtelettes de Veau. It was together, too, that we watched the sunrise from the Citadel at Cairo and saw the Pyramids tipped with rose and saffron. Ours, too, was the desert mirage that, in spite of reason and experience, almost betrayed us in our ride to the Fayum. You shared with me what was certainly an adventure of the spirit, though not of the body, when for the first time we saw the fateful and

well-loved shores of America. The lights danced like fireflies in the great towers of New York, while behind them glowed in sombre splendour the fiery Bastions of a November sunset.

But, of course, none of all this affords the reason why I dedicate my book to you. That reason will perhaps be fully understood only by me and by our children. It can also be found in certain wise and cunning little hearts, inscrutable as those of kings, in a London nursery. Susan, Charlotte, and Christopher could tell if they would.

If that sounds inconsequent, or, at any rate, incomprehensible, may I not plead that so do the ineffable Mysteries of Life and Death.

J. ST. LOE STRACHEY.

PREFACE TO THE AMERICAN EDITION

It is with great pleasure that I accept Major Putnam's suggestion that I should write a special preface to the American edition of my autobiography. Major Putnam, I, and the *Spectator*, are a triumvirate of old friends, and I should not be likely to refuse a request made by him, even if its fulfilment was a much less agreeable task than that of addressing an American audience.

I was born with a mind which might well be described as *Anima naturaliter Americana*. I have always loved America and the Americans, and, though I cannot expect them to feel for me as I feel for them, I cherish the belief that, at any rate, they do not dislike me instinctively. That many of them regard me as somewhat wild and injudicious in my praise of their country I am well aware. They hold that I often praise America not only too much, but that I praise her for the wrong things,—praise, indeed, where I ought to censure, and so "spoil" their countrymen. Well, if that is a true bill, all I can say is that it is too late to expect me to mend my ways.

During my boyhood people here understood America much less than they do now. Though I should be exaggerating if I said that there was anything approaching dislike of America or Americans, there were certain intellectual people in England who were apt to parade a kind of conscious and supercilious patronage of the wilder products of American life and literature. I heard exaggerated stories about Americans, and especially about the Americans of the Far West,—heard them, that is, represented as semi-barbarians, coarse, rash, and boastful, with bad manners and no feeling for the reticences of life. Such legends exasperated me beyond words. I felt as did the author of *Ionica* on re-reading the play of Ajax.

The world may like, for all I care,
The gentler voice, the cooler head,
That bows a rival to despair,
And cheaply compliments the dead.

That smiles at all that's coarse and rash,
Yet wins the trophies of the fight,
Unscathed in honour's wreck and crash,

Heartless, but always in the right.

* * * * *

There were my superior persons drawn to the life!

When the complaisant judge would not acknowledge the rights of the noble Ajax, but gave to another what was due to him, the poet touched me even more nearly:--

Thanked, and self-pleased: ay, let him wear
What to that noble breast was due;
And I, dear passionate Teucer, dare
Go through the homeless world with you.

The poem I admit does not sound very apposite in the year 1922, but it well reflected my indignation some fifty years ago. The West might then be regarded as the Ajax of the Nations. Nowadays, not even the youngest of enthusiasts could think it necessary to show his devotion by wanting to "go through the homeless world" with the richest and the most powerful community on the face of the earth.

I am not going to make any show of false modesty by suggesting that Americans may not care to read about the intimate details of my life and opinions, or to follow "the adventure of living" of a journalist and a public writer whose life, judged superficially, has been quite uneventful. I read with pleasure the lives of American men and women when they were not people of action, and I daresay people across the Atlantic will pay me a similar compliment.

Yet--I should like to give a word or two of explanation as to the way in which I have treated my subject. At first sight I expect that my book will seem chaotic and bewildering, a mighty maze and quite without a plan. As a matter of fact, however, the work was very carefully planned. My sins of omission and of commission were deliberate and, as our forefathers would have said, matters of art.

My first object was a negative one; that is, to avoid the kind of autobiography in which the author waddles painfully, diligently, and conscientiously along an arid path, which he has strewn, not with flowers and fruits of joy, but with the cinders of the commonplace. My readers know such autobiographies only too well. They are usually based upon copious diaries and letters. The author, as soon as he gets to maturity, spares us nothing. We look down endless vistas of dinners and luncheon parties and of stories of how he met the celebrated Mr. Jones at the house of the hardly less celebrated Mr. Smith and how they talked about Mr. Robinson, the most celebrated of all of them. If I have done nothing else worthy of gratitude, I have, at any rate, avoided such predestinated dullness.

What I have made my prime object is the description of the influences that have affected my life and, for good or evil, made me what I am. The interesting thing about a human being is not only what he is, but how he came to be what he is.

The main influence of my life has been The Spectator, and, therefore, as will be seen, I have made The Spectator the pivot of my book, or, shall I say, the centre from which in telling my story I have worked backwards and forwards. But this is not all. Though I pay a

certain homage to chronology and let my chapters mainly follow the years, I am in this matter not too strict. Throughout, I obey the instinct of the journalist and take good copy wherever I can find it. I follow the scent while it is hot and do not say to myself or to my readers that this or that would be out-of-place here, and must be deferred to such and such a chapter, or to some portion of the book giving an account of later years, devoted to miscellaneous anecdotes! In a word, I am discursive not by accident, but by design.

If I am asked why I make this apologia, I shall have no difficulty in replying. I desire to leave nothing unsaid which may bring me into intimate touch with the greatest reading public that the world has ever seen-and, to my mind, a public as worthy as it is great.

J. ST. LOE STRACHEY.

May 5, 1922

POSTSCRIPT TO AMERICAN PREFACE

_While this book and preface is going through the press, I cannot resist adding a Postscript on a point suggested by my publisher. It is that I should say something which may inform the new generation as to "The Spectator's" position during the Civil War.

"The Spectator" was as strong a friend of America in past years as it is at present, and in those past years its friendship was the more useful because the need for a true understanding between all parts of the English-speaking race was not realised by nearly so many people as it is now. That there was ever any essential bitterness of feeling here or in America I will not admit for a moment, but that there was ignorance, pig-headedness, and want of vision, is beyond all doubt. This want of vision was specially illustrated during the Civil War. "The Spectator," however, I am proud to say, without being unjust to the South, or failing to note its gallantry, and its noble sacrifices even in a wrong cause, was consistently on the side of the North. Moreover, it realised that the North was going to win, and ought to win, and so would abolish slavery. There is a special tradition at the "Spectator" office of which we are very proud. It is that the military critic of "The Spectator," at that time Mr. Hooper, a civilian but with an extraordinary flair for strategy, divined exactly what Sherman was doing when he started on his famous march. Many years afterwards General Sherman, either in a speech or on the written page, for I cannot now verify the fact, though I am perfectly certain of it, said that when he started with the wires cut behind him, there were only two people in the world who knew what his objective was. One was himself and the other, as he said, "an anonymous writer in the London 'Spectator.'" My American readers will understand why I and all connected with "The Spectator" are intensely proud of this fact. The fate, not only of America but of the whole English-speaking race, hung upon the success of Sherman's feat of daring. In turn that success hung upon the fact that Sherman's objective was the sea. To have divined that was a notable achievement in the art of publicity._

J. ST. L. S.

CONTENTS

- I.--HOW I CAME TO _The Spectator_
- II.--HOW I CAME TO _The Spectator (Continued)_
- III.--MY PHYSICAL HOME, MY FAMILY, AND MY GOOD FORTUNE THEREIN
- IV.--MY FATHER
- V.--MY FATHER'S STORIES OF THE STRACHEY FAMILY
- VI.--MY CHILDHOOD AND SOME PSYCHOLOGICAL INCIDENTS
- VII.--MY CHILDHOOD (_Continued_)
- VIII.--THE FAMILY NURSE
- IX.--BOYHOOD: POETRY AND METRE
- X.--OXFORD
- XI.--A CLASSICAL EDUCATION
- XII.--AN OXFORD FRIENDSHIP
- XIII.--OXFORD MEMORIES
- XIV.--PRESS WORK IN LONDON
- XV.--THE "CORNHILL"
- XVI.--MEREDITH TOWNSEND
- XVII.--MEREDITH TOWNSEND (_Continued_)
- XVIII.--MY LIFE IN LONDON IN THE 'NINETIES
- XIX.--MY LIFE IN LONDON IN THE 'NINETIES (_Continued_)
- XX.--THE ETHICS OF JOURNALISM
- XXI.--THE PLACE OF THE JOURNALIST IN MODERN LIFE
- XXII.--A WAR EPISODE--MY AMERICAN TEA-PARTIES
- XXIII.--IDYLLS OF THE WAR
- XXIV.--FIVE GREAT MEN
- XXV.--FIVE GREAT MEN (Continued)
- XXVI.--MY POLITICAL OPINIONS
- XXVII.--MY POLITICAL OPINIONS (Continued)
- XXVIII.--UNWRITTEN CHAPTERS

INDEX

ILLUSTRATIONS

ST. LOE STRACHEY [Frontispiece] From a drawing by W. Rothenstein.

VIEW OF NORTH FRONT OF SUTTON COURT, IN THE COUNTY OF SOMERSET, THE FAMILY HOUSE OF THE STRACHEYS

SIR EDWARD STRACHEY IN THE HALL AT SUTTON COURT, WITH HIS FAVOURITE CAT
From a picture by his son Henry Strachey.

JOHN STRACHEY, THE FRIEND OF LOCKE

THE CLOSE, SUTTON COURT, SOMERSET

SUTTON COURT, SOMERSET

SUTTON COURT, SOMERSET

MRS. SALOME LEAKER,--"THE FAMILY NURSE"

J. ST. LOE STRACHEY,--ÆTAT 16 From a photograph done at Cannes, about 1876.

J. ST. LOE STRACHEY AS AN OXFORD FRESHMAN, ÆTAT 18 MEREDITH TOWNSEND, EDITOR OF THE "FRIEND OF INDIA," AND HIS MOONSHEE, THE PUNDIT OOMACANTO MUKAJI, DOCTOR OF LOGIC IN THE MUDDEH UNIVERSITY Taken at Serampore, Bengal, in 1849.

J. ST. LOE STRACHEY, ÆTAT. 32

J. ST. LOE STRACHEY AT NEWLANDS CORNER, ÆTAT. 45

THE ADVENTURE OF LIVING

CHAPTER I

HOW I CAME TO "THE SPECTATOR"

Sir Thomas Browne gave his son an admirable piece of literary advice. The young son had been travelling in Hungary and proposed to write an account of what he had seen. His father approved the project, but urged him strongly not to trouble himself about the methods of extracting iron and copper from the ores, or with a multitude of facts and statistics. These were matters in which there was no need to be particular. But, he added, his son must on no account forget to give a full description of

the "Roman alabaster tomb in the barber's shop at Pesth."

In writing my recollections I mean to keep always before me the alabaster tomb in the barber's shop rather than a view of life which is based on high politics, or even high literature. At first sight it may seem as if the life of an editor is not likely to contain very much of the alabaster tomb element. In truth, however, every life is an adventure, and if a sense of this adventure cannot be communicated to the reader, one may feel sure that it is the fault of the writer, not of the facts. A dull man might make a dull thing of his autobiography even if he had lived through the French Revolution; whereas a country curate might thrill the world with his story, provided that his mind were cast in the right mould and that he found a quickening interest in its delineation. Barbellion's *_Diary_* provides the proof. The interest of that supremely interesting book lies in the way of telling.

But how is one to know what will interest one's readers? That is a difficult question. Clearly it is no use to put up a man of straw, call him the Public, and then try to play down to him or up to him and his alleged and purely hypothetical opinions and tastes. Those who attempt to fawn upon the puppet of their own creation are as likely as not to end by interesting nobody. At any rate, try and please yourself, then at least one person's liking is engaged. That is the autobiographer's simple secret.

All the same there is a better reason than that. Pleasure is contagious. He who writes with zest will infect his readers. The man who argues, "This seems stupid and tedious to me, but I expect it is what the public likes," is certain to make shipwreck of his endeavour.

The pivot of my life has been *_The Spectator_*, and so *_The Spectator_* must be the pivot of my book--the point upon which it and I and all that is mine turn. I therefore make no apology for beginning this book with the story of how I came to *_The Spectator_*.

My father, a friend of both the joint editors, Mr. Hutton and Mr. Townsend, was a frequent contributor to the paper. In a sense, therefore, I was brought up in a "Spectator" atmosphere. Indeed, the first contributions ever made by me to the press were two sonnets which appeared in its pages, one in the year 1875 and the other in 1876. I did not, however, begin serious journalistic work in *_The Spectator_*, but, curiously enough, in its rival, *_The Saturday Review_*. While I was at Oxford I sent several middle articles to *_The Saturday_*, got them accepted, and later, to my great delight, received novels and poems for review. I also wrote occasionally in *_The Pall Mall_*, in the days in which it was edited by Lord Morley, and in *_The Academy_*. It was not until I settled down in London to read for the Bar, a year and a half after I had left Oxford, that I made any attempt to write for *_The Spectator_*. In the last few days of 1885 I got my father to give me a formal introduction to the editors, and went to see them in Wellington Street. They told me, as in my turn I have had to tell so many would-be reviewers, what no doubt was perfectly true, namely that they had already got more outside reviewers than they could possibly find work for, and that they were sorry to say I must not count upon their being able to give me books. All the same, they would like me to take away a couple of volumes to notice,--making it clear, however, that they did this out of friendship for my father.

I was given my choice of books, and the two I chose were a new edition

of *Gulliver's Travels*, well illustrated in colour by a French artist, and, if I remember rightly, the *Memoirs of Henry Greville*, the brother of the great Greville. I will not say that I departed from the old *Spectator* offices at 1 Wellington Street--a building destined to play so great a part in my life--in dudgeon or even in disappointment. I had not expected very much. Still, no man, young or old, cares to have it made quite clear that a door at which he wishes to enter is permanently shut against him.

However, I was not likely to be depressed for long at so small a matter as this; I was much too full of enjoyment in my new London life. The wide world affords nothing to equal one's first year in London--at least, that was my feeling. My first year at Oxford had been delightful, as were also the three following, but there was to me something in the throb of the great pulse of London which, as a stimulant, nay, an excitant, of the mind, even Oxford could not rival.

For once I had plenty of leisure to enjoy the thrilling drama of life--a drama too often dimmed by the cares, the business, or even the pleasures of the onlooker. A Bar student is not overworked, and if he is not rich, or socially sought after, he can find, as I did, plenty of time in which to look around him and enjoy the scene. That exhilaration, that luxury of leisurely circumspection may never return, or only, as happily in my own case, with the grand climacteric. Once more I see and enjoy the gorgeous drama by the Thames.

To walk every morning to the Temple or to Lincoln's Inn, where I was reading in Chambers, was a feast. Then there were theatres, balls, dances, dinners, and a thousand splendid sights to be enjoyed, for I was then, as I have always been and am now, an indefatigable sightseer. I would, I confess, to this day go miles to see the least promising of curiosities or antiquities. "Who knows? it may be one of the wonders of the world" has always been my order of the day.

I was aware of my good fortune. I remember thinking how much more delightful it must be to come fresh to London than to be like so many of my friends, Londoners born and bred. They could not be thrilled as I was by the sight of St. Paul's or Westminster Abbey, or by the scimitar curve of the Thames from Blackfriars to Westminster. Through the National Gallery or the British Museum I paced a king. The vista of the London River as I went to Greenwich intoxicated me like heady wine. And Hampton Court in the spring, *"Ut vidi ut perii"*--"How I saw, how I perished." It was all a pageant of pure pleasure, and I walked on air, eating the fruit of the Hesperides.

But though I was so fully convinced that the doors of *The Spectator* were shut against me, I was, of course, determined that my two reviews should, if possible, make the editors feel what a huge mistake they had made and what a loss they were incurring. But, alas! here I encountered a great disappointment. When I had written my reviews they appeared to me to be total failures! I was living at the time in an "upper part" in South Molton Street, in which I, my younger brother, Henry Strachey, and two of my greatest friends, the present Sir Bernard Mallet and his younger brother Stephen Mallet, had set up house. I remember to this day owing to my brother that though I had intended my review of *Gulliver's Travels* to be epoch-making, it had turned out a horrible fiasco. However, I somehow felt I should only flounder deeper into the quagmire of my own creation if I rewrote the two reviews. Accordingly, they were sent off in the usual way. Knowing my

father's experience in such matters, I did not expect to get them back in time for many weeks. As a matter of fact, they came back quite quickly. I corrected the proofs and returned them. To my astonishment the review of Swift appeared almost at once. I supposed, in the luxury of depression, that they wished to cast the rubbish out of the way as quickly as possible.

My first intention was not to go again to The Spectator office, the place where I was so obviously not wanted, but I remembered that my father had told me that it was always the custom to return books as soon as the proofs were corrected or the articles had appeared. I determined, therefore, that I would do the proper thing, though I felt rather shy, and feared I might be looked upon as "cadging" for work.

With my books under my arm I walked off to Wellington Street, on a Tuesday morning, and went up to Mr. Hutton's room, where on that day the two editors used to spend the greater part of the morning discussing the coming issue of the paper. I had prepared a nice little impromptu speech, which was to convey in unmistakable terms that I had not come to ask for more books; "I fully realise and fully acquiesce in your inability to use my work." When I went in I was most cordially received, and almost immediately Mr. Hutton asked me to look over a pile of new books and see if there was anything there I would like. This appeared to be my cue, and I accordingly proceeded to explain that I had not come to ask for more books but only to bring back the two books I had already reviewed and to thank the editors. I quite understood that there was no more work for me.

Then, to my amazement, Mr. Townsend, with that vividness of expression which was his, said something to the effect that they had only said that when they didn't know that I could write. The position, it appeared, had been entirely changed by the review of Gulliver's Travels and they hoped very much that I should be able to do regular work for The Spectator. Mr. Hutton chimed in with equally kind and appreciative words, and I can well remember the pleasant confusion caused in my mind by the evident satisfaction of my future chiefs. I was actually hailed as "a writer and critic of the first force."

To say that I returned home elated would not be exactly true. Bewildered would more accurately describe my state of mind. I had genuinely believed that my attempt to give the final word of criticism upon Gulliver's Travels--that is what a young man always thinks, and ought to think, he is doing in the matter of literary criticism--had been a total failure. Surely I couldn't be wrong about my own work. Yet The Spectator editors were evidently not mad or pulling my leg or even flattering me! It was a violent mystery.

Of course I was pleased at heart, but I tried to unload some of my liabilities to Nemesis by the thought that my new patrons would probably get tired of my manner of writing before very long. What had captured them for the moment was merely a certain novelty of style. They would very soon see through it, as I had done in my poignant self-criticism. But this prudent view was before long, in a couple of days, to be exact, knocked on the head by a delightful letter which Mr. Townsend wrote to my father. In it he expressed himself even more strongly in regard to the review than he had done in speaking to me.

I honestly think that what I liked best in the whole business was the element of adventure. There was something thrilling and, so, intensely

delightful to me in the thought, that I had walked down to Wellington Street, like a character in a novel, prepared for a setback, only to find that Fate was there, "hid in an auger-hole," ready to rush and seize me. Somehow or other I felt, though I would not admit it even to myself, that the incident had been written in the Book of Destiny, and that it was one which was going to affect my whole life. Of course, being, like other young men, a creature governed wholly by reason and good sense, I scouted the notion of a destined day as sentimental and ridiculous. Still, the facts were "as stated," and could not be altogether denied.

Looking back at the lucky accident which brought the right book, the right reviewer, and the properly-tuned editors together, I am bound to say that I think that the editors were right and that I had produced good copy. At any rate, their view being what it was, I have no sort of doubt that they were quite right to express it as plainly and as generously as they did to me. To have followed the conventional rule of not puffing up a young man with praise and to have guarded their true opinion as a kind of guilty secret would have been distinctly unfair to me, nay, prejudicial. There are, I suppose, a certain number of young people to whom it would be unsafe to give a full measure of eulogy. But these are a small minority. The ordinary young man or young woman is much more likely to be encouraged or sometimes even alarmed by unstinted praise. Generous encouragement is the necessary mental nourishment of youth, and those who withhold it from them are not only foolish but cruel. They are keeping food from the hungry.

If my editors had told me that they thought the review rather a poor piece of work, I should, by "the law of reversed effort," have been almost certain to have taken up a combative line and have convinced myself that it was epoch-making. When a man thinks himself overpraised, if he has anything in him at all, he begins to get anxious about his next step. He is put very much on his mettle not to lose what he has gained.

It may amuse my readers, if I quote a few sentences from the article, and allow them to see whether their judgment coincides with that of my chiefs at The Spectator on a matter which was for me fraught with the decrees of Destiny. This is how I began my review of Swift and his masterpiece:

"Never anyone living thought like you," said to Swift the woman who loved him with a passion that had caught some of his own fierceness and despair. The love which great natures inspire had endowed Vanessa with a rare inspiration. Half-consciously she has touched the notes that help us to resolve the discord in Swift's life. Truly, the mind of living man never worked as Swift's worked. That this is so is visible in every line, in every word he ever wrote. No phrase of his is like any other man's; no conception of his is ever cast in the common mould. It is this that lends something so dreadful and mysterious to all Swift's writings.

From this time I began to get books regularly from The Spectator and to pay periodical visits to the office, where I learned to understand and to appreciate my chiefs. But more of them later. The year 1886 was one of political convulsion, the year of the great split in the Liberal Party; the year in which Lord Hartington and Mr. Chamberlain finally severed themselves from Mr. Gladstone and began that co-operation with the Conservatives which resulted in the formation of the Unionist Party. I do not, however, want to deal here with the Unionist

crisis, except so far as it affected me and The Spectator. While my father and my elder brother remained Liberals and followed Mr. Gladstone, I followed Lord Hartington, Mr. Chamberlain, and Mr. Goschen. My conversion was not in any way sought by my new friends and chiefs at The Spectator office, though they at once took the Unionist side. I have no doubt, however, that my intercourse with Hutton and Townsend had its effect, though I also think that my mind was naturally Unionist in politics. I was already a Lincoln worshipper in American history and desired closer union with the Dominions, not separation. I was for concentration, not dispersion, in the Empire. In any case, I took the plunge, one which might have been painful if my father had not been the most just, the most fair-minded, and the most kind-hearted of men. Although he was an intense, nay, a fierce Gladstonian, I never had the slightest feeling of estrangement from him or he from me. It happened, however, that the break-up of the Liberal Party affected me greatly at The Spectator. When the election of 1886 took place, I was asked by a friend and Somersetshire neighbour, Mr. Henry Hobhouse, who had become, like me, a Liberal Unionist, to act as his election agent. This I did, though, as a matter of fact, he was unopposed. The moment he was declared elected I made out my return as election agent and went straight back to my work in London. Almost at once I received a letter which surprised me enormously. It was from Mr. Hutton, telling me that Mr. Townsend had gone away for his usual summer holiday, and that he wanted someone to come and help him by writing a couple of leaders a week and some of the notes. I, of course, was delighted at the prospect, for my mind was full of politics and I was longing to have my say. Here again, though it did not consciously occur to me that I was in for anything big, I seem to have had some sort of subconscious premonition. At any rate, I accepted with delight and well remember my talk at the office before taking up my duties. My editor explained to me that Mr. Asquith, who had been up till the end of 1885 the writer of a weekly leader in The Spectator and also a holiday writer, had now severed his connection with the paper, owing to his entry into active politics. It did not occur to me, however, that I was likely to get the post of regular leader-writer in his stead, though this was what actually happened.

I left the office, I remember, greatly pleased with the two subjects upon which I was to write. The first article was to be an exhortation to the Conservative side of the Unionist Party not to be led into thinking that they were necessarily a minority in the country and that they could not expect any but a minute fraction of working-men to be on their side. With all the daring of twenty-six I set out to teach the Conservative party their business. This is how I began my article which appeared on the 24th of July, 1886.

In their hearts the Conservatives cannot really believe that anyone with less than £100 a year willingly votes on their side. A victory in a popular constituency always astonishes them. They cannot restrain a feeling that by all the rules of reason and logic they ought to have lost. What inducement, they wonder, can the working-men have to vote for them? Lord Beaconsfield, of course, never shared such notions as these.... Yet his party never sincerely believed what he told them, and only followed him because they saw no other escape from their difficulties. The last extension of the franchise has again shown that he was right, and that in no conditions of life do Englishmen vote as a herd.

Here is how I ended it:

Conciliation or Coercion was the cry everywhere. And yet the majority of the new voters, to their eternal honour, proved their political infancy so full of sense and patriotism that they let go by unheeded the appeals to their class-prejudices and to their emotions, and chose, instead, the harder and seemingly less generous policy, based on reason rather than on sentiment, on conviction rather than on despair. As the trial was severe, so is the honour due to the new voters lasting and conspicuous.

The length of the quotation is justified by its effect on--my life. For me it has another interest. In re-reading it, I note that, right or wrong, it takes exactly the view of the English democracy which I have always taken and which I hold today as strongly as I did forty years ago.

The article had an instant reaction. It delighted Mr. Townsend, who, though he did not know it was by me, guessed that it was mine, and wrote at once to ask me whether, when Mr. Hutton went on his holiday, I could remain at work as his assistant. Very soon after, he suggested, with a swift generosity that still warms my heart, that if I liked to give up the Bar, for which I was still supposing myself to be reading, I could have a permanent place at The Spectator, and even, if I remember rightly, hinted that I might look forward to succeeding the first of the two partners who died or retired, and so to becoming joint editor or joint proprietor. That prospect I do admit took away my breath. With the solemn caution of youth, or at any rate with youth's delight in irony in action, I almost felt that I should have to go and make representations to my chief about his juvenile impetuosity and want of care and prudence. Surely he must see that he had not had enough experience of me yet to make so large a proposition, that it was absurd, and so forth. O sancta simplicitas!

CHAPTER II

HOW I CAME TO "THE SPECTATOR" (Continued)

Even the success chronicled in the preceding chapter did not exhaust the store of good luck destined for my first appearance as a political leader-writer. Fate again showed its determination to force me upon The Spectator. When I arrived at the office on the Tuesday morning following the publication of the number of the paper in which my first two leaders appeared, I found that the second leader had done even better than the first. Its title seemed appallingly dull, and, I remember, called forth a protest from Mr. Hutton when I suggested writing it. It was entitled "The Privy Council and the Colonies." I had always been an ardent Imperialist, and I had taken to Constitutional Law like a duck to the water, and felt strongly, like so many young men before me, the intellectual attraction of legal problems and still more the majesty and picturesqueness of our great Tribunals. Especially had I been fascinated by the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council and its world-wide jurisdiction. I had even helped to draw some pleadings in a Judicial Committee case when in Chambers. Accordingly, though with some difficulty, I persuaded Mr. Hutton to let me have my say and show what a potent bond of Empire was to be found therein. I also wanted to emphasise how further ties of Imperial unity might be developed on

similar lines--a fact, I may say, which was not discovered by the practical politicians till about the year 1912, or twenty-seven years later.

Now it happened that Mr. Gladstone's Ministry, though beaten at the elections, had not yet gone out of office. It also happened that Lord Granville, then Colonial Secretary, was to receive the Agents-General of the self-governing Colonies, as they were then called, on the Saturday; and finally, that Lord Granville had a fit of the gout. The result of the last fact was that he had to put off preparing his speech till the last possible moment. When he had been wheeled in a chair into the reception-room--his foot was too painful to allow him to walk--he began his address to the Deputation in these terms:

In a very remarkable article which appears in this week's Spectator it is pointed out "that people are apt to overlook the importance of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council as one of the bonds that unite the Colonies and the Mother Country."

He then went on to use the article as the foundation for his speech. I had talked about the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council being a body which "binds without friction and links without strain," and Lord Granville did the same.

But of this speech I knew nothing when I entered The Spectator office on my fateful second Tuesday. I was only intent to get instructions for new leaders. Besides, I had been away on a country-house visit from the Saturday to the Monday, and had missed Monday's Times. I was therefore immensely surprised when Mr. Hutton, from the depths of his beard, asked me in deep tones whether I had seen The Times of Monday, and what was said therein about my Privy Council article. I admit that for a moment I thought I had been guilty of some appalling blunder and that, as the soldiers say, I was "for it" However, I saw that I must face the music as best I could, and admitted that I had not seen the paper. "Then you ought to have," was Mr. Hutton's not very reassuring reply. He got up, went to a side-table, and, after much digging into a huge heap of papers, extracted Monday's Times and with his usual gruff good-temper read out the opening words of Lord Granville's speech. He was, in fact, greatly delighted, and almost said in so many words that it wasn't every day that the Editors of The Spectator could draw Cabinet Ministers to advertise their paper.

Certainly it was astonishingly good luck for a "commencing journalist" to bring down two birds with two articles, i.e., to hit one of his own editors with one article, and to bag a Cabinet Minister with the other.

No doubt the perfectly cautious man would have said, "This is an accident, a mere coincidence, it means nothing and will never happen again." Fortunately people do not argue in that rational and statistical spirit. All my chiefs knew or cared was that I had written good stuff and on a very technical subject, and that I had caught the ear of the man who, considering the subject, most mattered--the Secretary of State for the Colonies.

Anyway, my two first trial leaders had done the trick and I was from that moment free of The Spectator. Townsend's holiday succeeded to Hutton's, and when the holidays were over, including my own, which

not unnaturally took me to Venice,--" _Italiam petimus_" should always be the motto of an English youth,--I returned to take up the position of a weekly leader-writer and holiday-understudy, a mixed post which by the irony of fate, as I have already said, had just been vacated by Mr. Asquith. Here was an adventure indeed, and I can say again with perfect sincerity that for me the greatest delight of the whole thing was this element of the Romantic.

I was quite sensible that I had had the devil's own luck in my capture of a post on _The Spectator_. Indeed, I very much preferred that, to the thought that the good fortune that was mine was the reward of a grinding and ignoble perseverance. I was in no mood for the drab virtues. I hugged the thought that it was not through my merits but because I possessed a conquering star that I had got where I was.

Curiously enough, I had never dreamed of joining _The Spectator_ staff or even of becoming its Editor. I had imagined every other sort of strange and sudden preferment, of frantic proprietors asking me at a moment's notice to edit their papers, or of taking up some great and responsible position, but never of carrying by assault 1 Wellington Street. But that, of course, made it all the more delightful. No one could have prepared me a greater or a more grateful surprise.

It is strange to look back and see how at this moment that mystery which we barbarously call "the force of circumstances" seemed to have determined not merely to drive in my nail but to hammer it up to the head. It happened that both Mr. Hutton and Mr. Townsend had great belief in the literary judgment of Canon Ainger, a man, it is to be feared, now almost forgotten, but whose opinion was looked upon in the 'eighties and 'nineties with something approaching reverence.

In 1886--my "Spectator" year, as I may call it--when I was acting as election-agent to Mr. Henry Hobhouse, I happened to be searching in the old library at Hadspen House for something to read, something with which to occupy the time of waiting between the issue of the writ and nomination-day. If there was to be no opposition it did not seem worth while to get too busy over the electorate. We remained, therefore, in a kind of enchanter's circle until nomination-day was over. It was a time in which everybody whispered mysteriously that a very strong candidate, name unknown, would suddenly appear at Yeovil, Langport, or Chard--I forget which of these pleasant little towns was the place of nomination--and imperil our chances. As was natural to me then, and, I must confess, would be natural to me now, my search for a book took me straight to that part of the library in which the poets congregated. My eye wandered over the shelves, and lighted upon _Poems in the Dorsetshire Dialect_ by the Rev. William Barnes. Hadspen House was quite close to the Dorset border. I was interested and I took down the volume. I don't think I had ever heard of Barnes before, but being very fond of the Somersetshire dialect and proud of my ability to speak in it, my first impulse was rather to turn up my nose at the vernacular of a neighbouring county. It was, then, with a decided inclination to look a gift-horse in the mouth that I retired with Barnes to my den. Yet, as Hafiz says, "by this a world was affected." I opened the poems at the enchanting stanzas, "Lonesome woodlands! zunny woodlands!" and was transported. In a moment I realised that for me a new foot was on the earth, a new name come down from Heaven. I read and read, and can still remember how the exquisite rhythm of "Woak Hill" was swept into my mind, to make there an impression which will never be obliterated while life lives in my brain. I did not know, in that delirium of exaltation which

a poetic discovery always makes in the heart of a youth, whether most to admire the bold artifice of the man who had adapted an unrhymed Persian metre--the Pearl--to the needs of a poem in the broadest Dorsetshire dialect, or the deep intensity of the emotion with which he had clothed a glorious piece of prosodiac scholarship.

I recognised at once that the poem was fraught with a pathos as magnificent as anything in the whole range of classic literature--and also that this pathos had that touch of stableness in sorrow which we associate, and rightly associate, with the classics. Miserably bad scholar as I was, and am, I knew enough to see that the Dorsetshire schoolmaster and village parson had dared to challenge the deified Virgil himself. The depth of feeling in the lines--

An' took her wi' air-reachen arm
To my zide at Woak Hill

is not exceeded even by those which tell how Æneas filled his arms with the empty air when he stretched them to enfold the dead Creusa.

Upon the last two stanzas in "Woak Hill" I may as truly be said to have lived for a month as Charles Lamb lived upon "Rose Aylmer."

An' that's why folk thought, for a season,
My mind were a-wandren
Wi' sorrow, when I wer so sorely
A-trie'd at Woak Hill.

But no; that my Mary mid never
Behold herzelf slighted,
I wanted to think that I guided
My guide from Woak Hill.

Equally potent was the spell cast by what is hardly less great a poem than "Woak Hill," the enchanting "Evenen, an' Maids out at Door." There the Theocritus of the West dares to use not merely the words of common speech and primitive origin, but words drawn from Low Latin and of administrative connotation. Barnes achieves this triumph in words with perfect ease. He can use a word like "parish" not, as Crabbe did, for purposes of pure narration but in a passage of heightened rhetoric:

But when you be a-lost vrom the parish, zome more Will come on in your pleazen to bloom an' to die; An' the zummer will always have maidens avore Their doors, vor to chatty an' zee volk goo by.

For daughters ha' mornen when mothers ha' night, An' there's beauty alive when the fairest is dead; As when one sparklen wave do zink down from the light, Another do come up an' catch it instead.

Rightly did the Edinburgh reviewer of the 'thirties, in noticing Barnes's poems--the very edition from which I was reading, perfect, by the way, in its ribbed paper and clear print--declare "there has been no such art since Horace." And here I may interpolate that the reviewer in question was Mr. George Venables, who was within a year to become a friend of mine. He and his family were close friends of my wife's people, and when after my marriage I met him, a common love of Barnes brought together the ardent worshipper of the new schools of poetry, for such I was, and the old and distinguished lawyer who was Thackeray's contemporary at the Charterhouse. Barnes was for us both a sign of literary freemasonry

which at once made us recognise each other as fellow-craftsmen.

Bewildered readers will ask how my discovery of Barnes affected my position at *The Spectator*. It happened in this way. A couple of weeks after I had been established at *The Spectator* as a "*verus socius*" Barnes died, at a very great age. It was one of those cases in which death suddenly makes a man visible to the generation into which he has survived. Barnes had outlived not only his contemporaries but his renown, and most of the journalists detailed to write his obituary notice had evidently found it a hard task to say why he should be held in remembrance.

But by a pure accident here was I, in the high tide of my enthusiasm for my new poet. Needless to say I was only too glad to have a chance to let myself go on Barnes, and so was entrusted with the Barnes Obituary article for *The Spectator*.

The result was that the next week my chiefs showed me a letter one of them had received from Canon Ainger, asking for the name of the "evidently new hand" who had written on Barnes, and making some very complimentary remarks on his work. It was eminently characteristic of them that instead of being a little annoyed at being told that an article had appeared in *The Spectator* with an unexpected literary charm, they were as genuinely delighted as I was.

In any case, the incident served, as I have said, to drive the nail up to the head and to make Mr. Hutton and Mr. Townsend feel that they had not been rash in their choice, and had got a man who could do literature as well as politics.

Not being without a sense of superstition, at any rate where cats are concerned, and a devout lover of "the furred serpent," I may record the last, the complete rite of my initiation at *The Spectator* office. While I was one day during my novitiate talking over articles and waiting for instructions--or, rather, finding articles for my chiefs to write about, for that very soon became the routine--a large, consequential, not to say stout black Tom-cat slowly entered the room, walked round me, sniffed at my legs in a suspicious manner, and then, to my intense amazement and amusement, hurled himself from the floor with some difficulty and alighted upon my shoulder. Mr. Townsend, who loved anything dramatic, though he did not love animals as Mr. Hutton did, pointed to the cat and muttered dramatically, "Hutton, just look at that!"

He went on to declare that the cat very seldom honoured "upstairs" with his presence, but kept himself, as a rule, strictly to himself, in the basement. Apparently, however, the sagacious beast had realised that there was a new element in the office, and had come to inspect it and see whether he could give it his approval or not. When it was given, it was conceded by all concerned that the appointment had received its consecration. Like "the Senior Fellow" in Sir Frederick Pollock's poem on the College Cat, I was passed by the highest authority in the office.

One said, "The Senior Fellow's vote!"
The Senior Fellow, black of coat,
Save where his front was white,
Arose and sniffed the stranger's shoes
With critic nose, as ancients use
To judge mankind aright.

I--for 'twas I who tell the tale--
Conscious of fortune's trembling scale,
Awaited the decree;
But Tom had judged: "He loves our race,"
And, as to his ancestral place,
He leapt upon my knee.

Thenceforth, in common-room and hall,
A *verus socius* known to all,
I came and went and sat,
Far from cross fate's or envy's reach;
For none a title could impeach
Accepted by the cat.

It was at this time that Mr. Townsend wrote me, on behalf of himself and his partner, a letter stating definitely that if I would devote myself to *The Spectator*, he and Hutton would guarantee me at once a certain salary, though I might still take any work I liked outside. But this was not all. The letter went on to say that the first of the partners who died or retired would offer me a half-share of the paper. It was pointed out that, of course, that might conceivably mean a fairly long apprenticeship, but that it was far more likely to mean a short one. It proved to be neither the one nor the other, but what might be called a compromise period of some ten years.

And so in the course of a very few weeks my fate had been decided for me and the question I had so often put to myself: Should I stick to the Bar or throw in my lot with journalism? was answered. A great wave had seized me and cast me up upon the shore of 1 Wellington Street. I felt breathless but happy. Though I did not fully realise how deeply my life had been affected by the decision or how strange in some ways was the course that lay before me, I had an instinctive feeling that I must follow wholeheartedly the path of Destiny. I determined to free my mind from all thoughts of a return to the Bar. I shut my eyes for ever to the vision of myself as Lord Chancellor or Lord Chief Justice--a vision that has haunted every young man who has ever embarked upon the study of English Law;--the vision of which Dr. Johnson, even at the end of his life, could not speak without profound emotion.

I acted promptly. I at once gave up my nice little room in the Temple. It was about eight foot square, furnished with one table, one arm-chair, one cane chair, and a bookcase, and dignified by the name of Chambers. I sometimes wonder now whether, if I could have looked down the long avenue of the years and seen the crowded, turbulent series of events which, as Professor Einstein has taught us, was rushing upon me like a tiger on its prey, I should have been alarmed or not. I should have seen many things exciting, many things sad, many things difficult, but above all I should have seen what could only have been described as a veritable snowstorm of written and printed pages.

I have sometimes, as every man will, reversed the process, looked back and reviewed the past. On such occasions I have been half inclined to make the reflection, common to all journalists, when they survey the monumental works of our brethren in the superior ranks of the literary profession: "Have I not cast my life and energy away on things ephemeral and unworthy? Have not I preferred a kind of glorified pot-boiling to the service of the spirit?" In the end, however, like the painter with the journalist's heart in Robert Browning's poem, I console myself for

having enlisted among the tradesmen of literature rather than among the artists:

For I have done some service in my time,
And not been paid profusely.
Let some great soul write my six thousand leaders!

It is, I admit, an appalling thought to have covered so much paper and used so much ink. But, after all, an apology may be made for mere volume in journalism analogous to that made for it by Dr. Johnson when he said that poets must to some extent be judged by their quantity as well as their quality. Anyway, I am inclined to be proud of my output. When an occasion like th

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