# A WRITER'S RECOLLECTIONS

(1856-1900)

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BY

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## CHAPTER I

### Early Days

Do we all become garrulous and confidential as we approach the gates of old age? Is it that we instinctively feel, and cannot help asserting our one advantage over the younger generation, which has so many over us?—the one advantage of *time*!

After all, it is not disputable that we have lived longer than they. When they talk of past poets, or politicians, or novelists, whom the young still deign to remember, of whom for once their estimate agrees with ours, we can sometimes put in a quiet—'I saw him'—or 'I talked with him'—which for the moment wins the conversational race. And as we elders fall back before the brilliance and glitter of the New Age, advancing 'like an army with banners,' this mere prerogative of years becomes in itself a precious possession. After all, we cannot divest ourselves of it, if we would. It is better to make friends with it—to turn it into a kind of *panache*—to wear it with an air, since wear it we must.

So as the years draw on towards the Biblical limit, the inclination to look back, and to tell some sort of

story of what one has seen, grows upon most of us. I cannot hope that what I have to say will be very interesting to many. A life spent largely among books, and in the exercise of a literary profession, has very obvious drawbacks, as a subject matter, when one comes to write about it. I can only attempt it with any success, if my readers will allow me a large psychological element. The thoughts and opinions of one human being, if they are sincere, must always have an interest for some other human beings. The world is there to think about; and if we have lived, or are living, with any sort of energy, we *must* have thought about it, and about ourselves in relation to it—thought 'furiously' often. And it is out of the many 'thinkings' of many folk, strong or weak, dull or far-ranging, that thought itself grows. For progress surely, whether in men or nations, means only a richer knowledge; the more impressions therefore on the human intelligence that we can seize and record, the more sensitive becomes that intelligence itself.

But of course the difficulty lies in the seizing and recording—in the choice, that is, of what to say, and how to say it. In this choice, as I look back over more than half a century, I can only follow—and trust—the same sort of instinct that one follows in the art of fiction. I shall be telling what is primarily true, or as true as I can make it; as distinguished from what is primarily imagination, built on truth. But the truth one uses in fiction must be interesting! Milton expresses that in the words 'sensuous' and 'passionate,' which he applies to poetry in the *Areopagitica*. And the same thing applies to autobiography, where selection is even more necessary than in fiction. Nothing ought to be

told, I think, that does not interest or kindle one's own mind in looking back; it is the only condition on which one can hope to interest or kindle other minds. And this means that one ought to handle things broadly, taking only the salient points in the landscape of the past, and of course with as much detachment as possible. Though probably in the end one will have to admit—egotists that we all are!—that not much detachment *is* possible.

For me, the first point that stands out is the arrival of a little girl of five, in the year 1856, at a grey stone house in a Westmorland valley, where fourteen years earlier, the children of Arnold of Rugby, the 'Doctor' of 'Tom Brown's Schooldays,' had waited on a June day, to greet their father expected from the South, only to hear, as the summer day died away, that two hours' sharp illness, that very morning, had taken him from them. Of what preceded my arrival as a black-haired, dark-eyed child, with my father, mother, and two brothers, at Fox How, the holiday house among the mountains which the famous headmaster had built for himself in 1834, I have but little recollection. I see dimly another house in wide fields, where dwarf lilies grew, and I know that it was a house in Tasmania, where at the time of my birth my father, Thomas Arnold, the Doctor's second son, was organising education in the young colony. I can just recall too, the deck of a ship which to my childish feet seemed vast—but the *William Brown* was a sailing ship of only 400 tons!—in which we made the voyage home in 1856. Three months and a half we took about it, going round the Horn in bitter weather, much run over by rats at night, and expected to take our baths by day in two huge barrels full of

sea water on the deck, into which we children were plunged shivering by our nurse, two or three times a week. My father and mother, their three children, and some small cousins, who were going to England under my mother's care, were the only passengers.

I can remember too being lifted—weak and miserable with toothache—in my father's arms to catch the first sight of English shores as we neared the mouth of the Thames; and then the dismal inn by the docks where we first took shelter. The dreary room where we children slept the first night, its dingy ugliness and its barred windows, still come back to me as a vision of horror. Next day, like angels of rescue, came an aunt and uncle, who took us away to other and cheerful quarters, and presently saw us off to Westmorland. The aunt was my godmother, Dr. Arnold's eldest daughter—then the young wife of William Edward Forster, a Quaker manufacturer, who afterwards became the well-known Education Minister of 1870, and was Chief Secretary for Ireland in the terrible years 1880–82.

To my mother and her children, Fox How and its inmates represented much that was new and strange. My mother was the grand-daughter of one of the first Governors of Tasmania, Governor Sorell, and had been brought up in the colony, except for a brief schooling at Brussels. Of her personal beauty in youth we children heard much, as we grew up, from her old Tasmanian friends and kinsfolk who would occasionally drift across us; and I see as though I had been there, a scene often described to me—my mother playing Hermione in the 'Winter's Tale,' at Government House when Sir William Denison was Governor—a vision,

lovely and motionless, on her pedestal, till at the words 'Music! awake her! Strike!' she kindled into life. Her family were probably French in origin. Governor Sorell had been a man of promise in his youth. His father, General William Alexander Sorell, of the Coldstream Guards, was a soldier of some eminence, whose two sons William and Thomas both served under Sir John Moore, and at the Cape. But my great-grandfather ruined his military career, while he was Deputy Adjutant General at the Cape, by a love-affair with a brother officer's wife, and was banished or promoted—whichever one pleases to call it—to the new colony of Tasmania, of which he became Governor in 1816. His eldest son, by the wife he had left behind him in England, went out as a youth of twenty-one or so, to join his father the Governor, in Tasmania, and I possess a little calf-bound diary of my grandfather written in a very delicate and refined hand, about the year 1823. The faint entries in it show him to have been a devoted son. But when in 1830 or so, the Governor left the colony, and retired to Brussels, my grandfather remained in Van Diemen's Land, as it was then generally called, became very much attached to the colony, and filled the post of Registrar of Deeds for many years under its successive Governors. I just remember him, as a gentle, affectionate, upright being, a gentleman of an old punctilious school, strictly honourable and exact, content with a small sphere, and much loved within it. He would sometimes talk to his children of early days in Bath, of his father's young successes and promotions, and of his grandfather, General Sorell, who as Adjutant of the Coldstream

Guards, from 1744 to 1758, and associated with all the home and foreign service of that famous regiment during those years, through the Seven Years' War, and up to the opening of the American War of Independence, played a vaguely brilliant part in his grandson's recollections. But he himself was quite content with the modest affairs of an infant colony, which even in its earliest days achieved, whether in its landscape or its life, a curiously English effect; as though an English midland county had somehow got loose, and drifting to the Southern seas, had there set up—barring a few black aborigines, a few convicts, its mimosas, and its tree-ferns—another quiet version of the quiet English life it had left behind.

But the Sorells all the same had some foreign and excitable blood in them. Their story of themselves was that they were French Huguenots, expelled in 1685, who had settled in England, and coming of a military stock, had naturally sought careers in the English army. There are points in this story which are puzzling; but the foreign touch in my mother, and in the Governor—to judge from the only picture of him which remains—was unmistakable. Delicate features, small, beautifully shaped hands and feet, were accompanied in my mother by a French vivacity and quickness, an overflowing energy, which never forsook her through all her trials and misfortunes. In the Governor, the same physical characteristics make a rather decadent and foppish impression—as of an old stock run to seed. The stock had been re-invigorated in my mother, and one of its original elements which certainly survived in her temperament and tradition was of great importance both for her own life and for

her children's. This was the Protestant—the *French* Protestant element; which no doubt represented in the family from which she came, a history of long suffering at the hands of Catholicism. Looking back upon her Protestantism, I see that it was not the least like English Evangelicalism, whether of the Anglican or dissenting type. There was nothing emotional or 'enthusiastic' in it—no breath of Wesley or Wilberforce; but rather something drawn from deep wells of history, instinctive and invincible. Had some direct Calvinist ancestor of hers, with a soul on fire, fought the tyranny of Bossuet and Madame de Maintenon, before—eternally hating and resenting 'Papistry'—he abandoned his country and kinsfolk, in the search for religious liberty? That is the impression which—looking back upon her life—it often makes upon me. All the more strange that to her it fell, unwittingly, imagining, indeed, that by her marriage with a son of Arnold of Rugby, she was taking a step precisely in the opposite direction, to be, by a kind of tragic surprise, which yet was no one's fault, the wife of a Catholic.

And that brings me to my father, whose character and story were so important to all his children that I must try and draw them, though I cannot pretend to any impartiality in doing so—only to the insight that affection gives; its one abiding advantage over the critic and the stranger.

He was the second son of Dr. Arnold of Rugby, and the younger brother—by only eleven months—of Matthew Arnold. On that morning of June 12, 1842, when the Headmaster who in fourteen years' rule at Rugby had made himself so conspicuous a place, not

merely in the public school world, but in English life generally,[1] arose, in the words of his poet son—to tread—

> In the summer morning, the road—
> Of death, at a call unforeseen—
> Sudden—

—my father, a boy of eighteen, was in the house, and witnessed the fatal attack of *angina pectoris* which, in two hours, cut short a memorable career, and left those who till then, under a great man's shelter and keeping, had—

> Rested as under the boughs
> Of a mighty oak. . . .
> Bare, unshaded, alone.

He had been his father's special favourite among the elder children, as shown by some verses in my keeping addressed to him as a small boy, at different times, by 'the Doctor.' Those who know their 'Tom Brown's Schooldays' will perhaps remember the various passages in the book where the softer qualities of the man whom 'three hundred reckless childish boys' feared with all their hearts, 'and very little besides in heaven or earth,' are made plain in the language of that date. Arthur's illness, for instance, when the little fellow, who has been at death's door, tells Tom

[1] At the moment of correcting these proofs, my attention has been called to a foolish essay on my grandfather by Mr. Lytton Strachey, none the less foolish because it is the work of an extremely clever man. If Mr. Strachey imagines that the effect of my grandfather's life and character upon men like Stanley and Clough, or a score of others who could be named, can be accounted for by the eidôlon he presents to his readers in place of the real human being, one can only regard it as one proof the more of the ease with which a certain kind of ability outwits itself.

Brown, who is at last allowed to see him—'You can't think what the Doctor's like when one's ill. He said such brave and tender and gentle things to me—I felt quite light and strong after it, and never had any more fear.' Or East's talk with the Doctor, when the lively boy of many scrapes has a moral return upon himself—and says to his best friend—'You can't think how kind and gentle he was, the great grim man, whom I've feared more than anybody on earth. When I stuck, he lifted me, just as if I'd been a little child. And he seemed to know all I'd felt, and to have gone through it all.' This tenderness and charm of a strong man, which in Stanley's biography is specially mentioned as growing more and more visible in the last months of his life, was always there for his children. In a letter written in 1828 to his sister, when my father as a small child not yet five was supposed to be dying, Arnold says, trying to steel himself against the bitterness of coming loss—'I might have loved him, had he lived, too dearly—you know how deeply I do love him now.' And three years later, when 'little Tom,' on his eighth birthday, had just said wistfully—with a curious foreboding instinct—'I think that the eight years I have now lived will be the happiest of my life'—Arnold, painfully struck by the words, wrote some verses upon them which I still possess. 'The Doctor' was no poet, though the best of his historical prose—the well-known passage in the Roman History, for instance, on the death of Marcellus—has some of the essential notes of poetry—passion, strength, music. But the gentle Wordsworthian quality of his few essays in verse will be perhaps interesting to those who are aware of him chiefly as the great Liberal

fighter of eighty years ago. He replies to his little son :—

> Is it that aught prophetic stirred
> Thy spirit to that ominous word,
> Foredating in thy childish mind
> The fortune of thy Life's career—
> That nought of brighter bliss shall cheer
> What still remains behind ?
>
> Or is thy Life so full of bliss
> That come what may, more blessed than this
> Thou canst not be again ?
> And fear'st thou, standing on the shore,
> What storms disturb with wild uproar
> The years of older men ?
>
> . . . . . .
>
> At once to enjoy, at once to hope—
> That fills indeed the largest scope
> Of good our thoughts can reach.
> Where can we learn so blest a rule,
> What wisest sage, what happiest school,
> Art so divine can teach ?

The answer, of course, in the mouth of a Christian teacher is that in Christianity alone is there both present joy and future hope. The passages in Arnold's most intimate diary, discovered after his death, and published by Dean Stanley, show what the Christian faith was to my grandfather, how closely bound up with every action and feeling of his life. The impression made by his conception of that faith, as interpreted by his own daily life, upon a great school, and, through the many strong and able men who went out from it, upon English thought and feeling, is a part of English religious history.

But curiously enough the impression upon his own

sons *appeared*, at any rate, to be less strong and lasting than in the case of others. I mean, of course, in the matter of opinion. The famous father died, and his children had to face the world without his guiding hand. Matthew and Tom, William and Edward, the four eldest sons, went in due time to Oxford, and the youngest boy into the Navy. My grandmother made her home at Fox How under the shelter of the fells, with her four daughters, the youngest of whom was only eight when their father died. The devotion of all the nine children to their mother, to each other, and to the common home was never weakened for a moment by the varieties of opinion that life was sure to bring out in the strong brood of strong parents. But the development of the two elder sons at the University was probably very different from what it would have been had their father lived. Neither of them, indeed, ever showed, while there, the smallest tendency to the 'Newmanism' which Arnold of Rugby had fought with all his powers; which he had denounced with such vehemence in the Edinburgh article on 'The Oxford Malignants.' My father was at Oxford all through the agitated years which preceded Newman's secession from the Anglican communion. He had rooms in University College in the High Street, nearly opposite St. Mary's, in which John Henry Newman, then its Vicar, delivered Sunday after Sunday those sermons which will never be forgotten by the Anglican church. But my father only once crossed the street to hear him, and was then repelled by the mannerism of the preacher. Matthew Arnold occasionally went, out of admiration, my father used to say, for that strange Newmanic power of words, which in itself fascinated the young Balliol poet, who

was to produce his first volume of poems two years after Newman's secession to the Church of Rome. But he was never touched in the smallest degree by Newman's opinions. He and my father and Arthur Clough, and a few other kindred spirits, lived indeed in quite another world of thought. They discovered George Sand, Emerson and Carlyle, and orthodox Christianity no longer seemed to them the sure refuge that it had always been to the strong teacher who trained them as boys. There are many allusions of many dates in the letters of my father and uncle to each other, as to their common Oxford passion for George Sand. *Consuelo*, in particular, was a revelation to the two young men brought up under the 'earnest' influence of Rugby. It seemed to open to them a world of artistic beauty and joy of which they had never dreamed; and to loosen the bands of an austere conception of life, which began to appear to them too narrow for the facts of life. *Wilhelm Meister*, read in Carlyle's translation at the same time, exercised a similar liberating and enchanting power upon my father. The social enthusiasms of George Sand also affected him greatly, strengthening whatever he had inherited of his father's discontent with an iron world, where the poor suffer too much and work too hard. And this discontent, when the time came for him to leave Oxford, assumed a form which startled his friends.

He had done very well at Oxford, taking his two Firsts with ease, and was offered a post in the Colonial Office immediately on leaving the University. But the time was full of schemes for a new heaven and a new earth, wherein should dwell equality and righteousness. The storm of '48 was preparing in Europe; the Corn

Laws had fallen; the Chartists were gathering in England. To settle down to the old humdrum round of Civil Service promotion seemed to my father impossible. This revolt of his, and its effect upon his friends, of whom the most intimate was Arthur Clough, has left its mark on Clough's poem, the 'Vacation Pastoral,' which he called 'The Bothie of Tober-na-Vuolich,' or, as it runs in my father's old battered copy which lies before me—'Tober-na-Fuosich.' The Philip of the poem, the dreamer and democrat, who says to Adam the Tutor—

> Alas, the noted phrase of the prayer-book
> Doing our duty in that state of life to which God has called us,
> Seems to me always to mean, when the little rich boys say it,
> Standing in velvet frock by Mama's brocaded flounces,
> Eying her gold-fastened book, and the chain and watch at her bosom,
> Seems to me always to mean, Eat, drink, and never mind others,

—was in broad outline drawn from my father, and the impression made by his idealist, enthusiastic youth upon his comrades. And Philip's migration to the Antipodes at the end—when he

> rounded the sphere to New Zealand,
> There he hewed and dug; subdued the earth and his spirit—

—was certainly suggested by my father's similar step in 1847, the year before the poem appeared. Only in my father's life there had been as yet no parallel to the charming love-story of 'The Bothie.' His love-story awaited him on the other side of the world.

At that moment, New Zealand, the land of beautiful mountain and sea, with its even temperate climate, and its natives whom English enthusiasm hoped not only to govern but to civilise and assimilate, was in the