

A Tale of One City: the New Birmingham eBook

A Tale of One City: the New Birmingham by Thomas Anderton

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I.

Prologue.

The present century has seen the rise and development of many towns in various parts of the country, and among them Birmingham is entitled to take a front place. If Thomas Attwood or George Frederick Muntz could now revisit the town they once represented in Parliament they would probably stare with amazement at the changes that have taken place in Birmingham, and would require a guide to show them their way about the town—now a city—they once knew so well. The material history of Birmingham was for a series of years a story of steady progress and prosperity, but of late years the city has in a political, social, and municipal sense advanced by leaps and bounds. It is no longer “Brummagem” or the “Hardware Village,” it is now recognised as the centre of activity and influence in Mid-England; it is the Mecca of surrounding populous districts, that attracts an increasing number of pilgrims who love life, pleasure, and shopping.

Birmingham, indeed, has recently been styled “the best governed city in the world”—a title that is, perhaps, a trifle too full and panegyric to find ready and general acceptance. If, however, by this very lofty and eulogistic description is meant a city that has been exceptionally prosperous, is well looked after, that has among its inhabitants many energetic, public-spirited men, that has a good solid debt on its books, also that has municipal officials of high capabilities with fairly high salaries to match—then Birmingham is not altogether undeserving of the high-sounding appellation. Many of those who only know Birmingham from an outside point of view, and who have only lately begun to notice its external developments, doubtless attribute all the improvements to Mr. Chamberlain’s great scheme, and the adoption of the Artisans’ Dwellings Act in 1878. The utilisation of this Act has certainly resulted in the making of one fine street, a fine large debt, and the erection of a handful of artisans’ dwellings. The changes, however, that culminated in Mr. Chamberlain’s great project began years before the Artisans’ Dwellings Act became law.

The construction of the London and North Western Railway station—which, with the Midland Railway adjunct, now covers some thirteen acres of land—cleared away a large area of slums that were scarcely fit for those who lived in them—which is saying very much. A region sacred to squalor and low drinking shops, a paradise of marine store dealers, a hotbed of filthy courts tenanted by a low and degraded class, was swept away to make room for the large station now used by the London and North Western and Midland Railway Companies.



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The Great Western Railway station, too, in its making also disposed of some shabby, narrow streets and dirty, pestiferous houses inhabited by people who were not creditable to the locality or the community, and by so doing contributed to the improvement of the town. Further, the erection of two large railway stations in a central district naturally tended to increase the number of visitors to the growing Midland capital, and this, of course, brought into existence a better class of shops and more extended trading. Then the suburbs of Birmingham, which for some years had been stretching out north, south, east, and west, have lately become to a considerable extent gathered into the arms of the city, and the residents in some of the outskirts, at least, may now pride themselves, if so inclined, upon being a part of the so-called “best governed city in the world,” sharing its honours, importance, and debts, and contributing to its not altogether inconsiderable rates.

I do not purpose in these pages to go into the ancient history of Birmingham. Other pens have told us how one Leland, in the sixteenth century, visited the place, and what he said about the “toyshop of the world.” Also how he saw a “brooke,” which was doubtless in his time a pretty little river, but which is now a sewery looking stream that tries to atone for its shallowness and narrowness by its thickness. They have likewise told us about the old lords of Bermingham—whose monuments still adorn the parish church—who have died out leaving no successors to bear for their proud title the name of the “best governed city in the world.”

These other pens have also mentioned the little attentions Birmingham received from Cromwell’s troops; how the Roundheads fired at Aston Hall (which had given hospitality to Charles I.) making a breakage—still unrepaired!—in the great staircase of that grand old Elizabethan mansion. My purpose, however, is not to deal with past records of Birmingham, but rather with its modern growth and appearance.

Municipal stagnation.

After the sweeping alterations effected by the construction of the new railway stations in Birmingham, further improvements were for a time of a slow, jog-trot order, although the town, in a commercial sense, was moving ahead, and its wealth and population were rapidly increasing. Small improvements were made, but anything like big schemes, even if desirable, were postponed or rejected. Birmingham, indeed, some thirty years ago, was considerably under the influence of men of the unprogressive tradesmen class—many of them worthy men in their way but of limited ideas. In their private businesses they were not accustomed to deal with big transactions and high figures, so that spending large sums of money, if proposed, filled the brewer, the baker, and candlestick maker with alarm. They were careful and economical, but their care in finance was apt at times to be impolitic, and their economy has in several cases proved to have been somewhat costly.

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Indeed, until recent years, the leading authorities of the town were anything but enterprising, and their view of future possibilities very limited. Could they have seen a little farther ahead they might have laid out money to the great profit and future advantage of the community. They could have erected new corporation offices and municipal buildings before land in the centre of the town became so very costly; the gas and water interests might have been purchased, probably at a price that would have saved the town thousands of pounds. It is also understood that they might have purchased Aston Hall, with its 170 acres close to the town, on terms which would have made the land (now nearly all built upon) a veritable Tom Tidler's ground for the town and corporation. But our shopkeeper senators would have nothing to do with such bold and far-reaching schemes, and were given to opposing them when suggested by men more courageous and far-seeing than themselves.

Between twenty-five and thirty years ago it was felt by the more advanced and intelligent portion of the community that the time had come for the town to arouse itself, and that certain reforms should no longer be delayed. It was beginning to be felt that the Town Council did not fairly represent the advancing aspirations and the growing needs, importance, and wealth of the town. Sanitary reforms were required, the growing traffic in the principal streets called for better and more durable roadways, and Macadamised and granite paved streets no longer answered the purposes required. The latter were heavy, noisy, and lumbering; the former were not sufficiently durable. Moreover, "Macadam" consisted of sharply-cut pieces of metal put upon the streets, which were left for cart and carriage wheels to break up and press down into something like a level surface. When this was done it made objectionable dust in dry weather, and in wet weather it converted the streets into avenues of mud and puddle to be scraped up, or to be swept off, by some curiously-devised machine carts constructed for the purpose. Carriage people, I fear, often cursed the stone stuff they had to grind into the roads, and pedestrians anathematized the mud and the dust.

As many people will remember, in some of the less important streets the footways were paved with what were called "petrified kidneys"—stones about as big as a good-sized potato, very durable but extremely unpleasant to walk upon. Little or nothing was done to improve the slummy and dirty parts of the town, or to remove some of those foul courts and alleys which were not only disgraceful in appearance but were a menace to the health of the inhabitants.

In fact, for one reason or another, the authorities left undone the things they ought to have done, and possibly they did some things they ought not to have done, and if allowed to go on it is probable there would soon have been no health in us. It may, however, be admitted that Birmingham was no worse governed than many other large towns in the comparatively unprogressive days of which I speak, but a new race of more advanced and energetic men were dissatisfied with the sluggish, stagnant state of local government, and they felt that the hour had struck for the inauguration of some large and important improvements. Such was the state of affairs about the year 1868.



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II.

Enter Mr. Chamberlain.

The present position of Birmingham and its improved appearance in these later years are largely attributed to the work and influence of Mr. Chamberlain. To him, certainly, the credit is largely due. At the same time it is only fair to say that he was not the first man who had discovered that Birmingham, some thirty years ago, was, compared with what it should be, in many respects lagging behind. Other persons had been impressed with the idea that the town, in a municipal, sanitary, and social sense, was not advancing at a pace commensurate with its commercial and material progress.

To go just a little farther back for a moment, it must be recorded that Birmingham, in a political sense, made a great step forward when it elected Mr. Bright as one of its members of Parliament in the year 1857. This served to focus the eyes of the country on the midland capital, and from this date the town became a new centre of political activity. The great meetings addressed by Mr. Bright were not regarded as mere provincial gatherings, but they attracted the attention of the whole nation. The proceedings were no longer chronicled merely by the local press, but the London daily newspapers sent representatives to furnish special reports of our new member's speeches. Indeed, the interest and excitement at these political gatherings was often feverish in its intensity, and for many years Mr. Bright's visits to Birmingham were red-letter days in the history of the town.

Mr. Bright, however, not being a resident in Birmingham, took no part in its local and municipal affairs, and the man was wanting who would come forward and energetically take town matters in hand. Mr. Joseph Chamberlain was the man, and the time was ripe for him. He was known to be smart, able, and energetic, and also to be imbued with decidedly progressive ideas. Further, he was justly credited with having a lofty conception of the real importance and dignity of municipal life and the value of municipal institutions.

In the year 1869 Mr. Chamberlain was elected a member of the Birmingham Town Council, and he began to make things spin and hum at a pace which literally soon reached a pretty high rate. His example, and possibly his persuasion, induced several of his friends and associates to become candidates for Town Council membership, and in a very short time he had a strong and influential following, made up of men of energy, substance, and good social position, who soon began to overpower and make things more lively perhaps than pleasant for the anti-progressives in the Corporation. In Israelitish story we are told that a new king arose who knew not Joseph, but in Birmingham a new municipal kingdom arose that knew Joseph and trusted him.



The changes that soon began to take place were enough to take away the breath of some of the nice, complacent, arm-chair, "Woodman" members of the Town Council. If the preceding rulers of the Corporation had been a trifle too parsimonious in the matter of expenditure, Mr. Chamberlain and his party soon began to make amends for any trifling mistakes or past errors in the way of economy. In a very few years the town had a debt, I don't say of which it might be proud, but of which it very soon felt the weight.



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When Mr. Chamberlain entered the Town Council the municipal debt stood at some L588,000. When he left it, after about ten years' service, the debt had mounted up to the neat and imposing sum of L6,212,000. Of course, there were very valuable assets to place against this heavy indebtedness, assets which are likely to improve considerably in value as time goes on—that is, if the city continues to progress and prosper. Still, a good many people were not a little alarmed at the big figures that grew on the debtor side of the Corporation accounts, but more persons applauded the spirit, courage, and enterprise of those who had taken the reins of the town into their hands.

When Mr. Chamberlain and his friends had fairly got hold of the Town Council ropes, they set to work in strong earnest. Sanitary improvements were promoted. The principal streets and their lighting and paving were improved, and the general appearance of the town quickly presented a change for the better. Trees were planted in some of the chief thoroughfares. They did not it is true show much disposition to grow and thrive, but they were planted and replanted, though we may still have to lament that our Birmingham boulevards will not compare favourably with those in some other cities. Mr. Chamberlain, however, was not the man to be content with such trifling reforms as these. He had large and spacious ideas in his mind, and he quickly brought them out to air and grow.

In the year 1873 Mr. Chamberlain was elected Mayor, and in the following year he brought forward his schemes for the purchase by the municipality of the gas and water supplies. His proposals encountered very formidable opposition, principally from those interested in the gas and water companies, whose undertakings he proposed compulsorily to purchase. Some of the shareholders in these prosperous companies were fierce in their denunciations of his schemes. They regarded Mr. Chamberlain's proposals as nothing short of confiscation. For years they had supplied the town with gas and water. They had found the necessary money in the "sure and certain hope" of having a good and secure investment for their capital, and lo! when they had fairly established their undertakings, it was proposed to blow out their profitable light and dash the refreshingly remunerative water from their lips. It was hard—I don't mean the water, but the situation! Of course the shareholders were to receive a fair price for their properties, the gas companies practically L1,900,000, the waterworks company L1,350,000. But still they were not happy. They resisted the proposed purchases.

Mr. Chamberlain, however, was not the man to be daunted by the opposition of the gas and water company proprietors. He had made up his mind that it would be for the good of the town for these undertakings to be in the hands of the municipality, and in spite of the Town Council "old gang" and outraged gas and water shareholders, who felt they were being fraudulently despoiled of certain prospective advantages, he carried his point.



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There are still those among us who, for various reasons, murmur at these extensive purchases. They maintain, for one thing, that the possession of the gas influenced the Corporation to turn a discouraging eye upon the electric light. Certainly Birmingham has been rather lax in taking up electric illumination, and possibly more enterprise would have been evinced in this direction if the Corporation had not become dealers in gas and water on their own terms, *viz.*, no competition allowed. Some self-constituted prophets shook their heads and said that before the gas debt was paid off gas would literally have “gone out” as a general illuminant. Before the eighty-five years allowed for the redemption of the capital invested in the gas have elapsed a good many things may certainly happen. So far, however, gas is not extinguished, but is in increased demand, and even water is believed to have a future.

With regard to the water purchase, however, a good deal of opposition was offered on special grounds. Having purchased the waterworks undertaking the Corporation were, of course, desirous to make it pay. To buy the thing was a blunder in the eyes of some, to let it be a source of loss would have been a crime. Consequently, it became necessary to force the water supply business, and the municipal authorities went about it in a way that pressed hardly sometimes and provoked not a little hostility and resentment.

“Waterologists” and analysts are somewhat divided in opinion as to what is pure water, or at least good wholesome water. Some authorities take one standard, some another. The Corporation, with an eye to business, selected a very high standard, for this brought grist to the mill, or, I should say, trade to the tap. It meant the closing of a large number of wells yielding water which, under a less rigorous standard than that adopted, would have been considered wholesome. But in this matter again, Mr. Chamberlain and the “new gang” paid no heed to the growls of the disaffected, and pumps were disestablished in all directions, chiefly, it was maintained, to swell the returns of the water department. “O ye wells, bless ye the Lord”—but few were suffered to remain.

Mr. Chamberlain, however, was not long content with having municipalized the gas and water. In accordance with the strong impetus of his nature he sighed for more worlds to conquer. Consequently he was soon ready with a gigantic Improvement Scheme, to be carried out under the adoption of the somewhat misused and delusive Artisans’ Dwellings Act. His proposal was to make a grand street and a more direct way to Aston, and in doing so to demolish some dirty back thoroughfares and a large number of foul and filthy unsanitary dwellings.

The scheme was a big one. It affected many interests, and before it was carried out it caused a fierce amount of strife, ill-feeling, and hostility. The discontent and disaffection which Mr. Chamberlain’s previous schemes aroused were but as morning breezes compared with the storm and tempest his new proposals raised. His daring and dash almost dazed his fellow townfolk, for, like Napoleon, he rushed on from one exploit to

another with a rapidity that astounded his friends and confused and overwhelmed his foes.



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III.

The act and the dwellings.

Considering how many interests were affected by the Birmingham Improvement Scheme and the adoption of the Artisans' Dwellings Act, it may be doubted if the scheme would have passed as it did had its full purport and meaning been fully considered and understood. Some persons saw that they would be grievously injured, and they offered strenuous opposition, but there were many others who only found out when it was too late what extreme and arbitrary power was conferred upon the authorities who put the Act into operation.

Of course the scheme was laid before the rate-payers in the usual manner, but few realised the importance of studying it well, or grasped the far-reaching character of its operations till too late.

Let me explain more especially what is meant by this. When it was decided to adopt Mr. Chamberlain's scheme and make the new fine street, land was cleared and was let on leases by the Corporation. In letting this land, agreements were made that the new buildings, when consisting of shops, offices, &c., should be so many storeys high, the object, of course, being to make the properties, which would in due course revert to the city, the more valuable. When, however, these tall buildings were erected, adjacent premises were robbed of light and air, and when the owners or tenants of these injured premises asked for compensation they found out, at least in some cases, that the authorities were not liable. I believe I am right in saying that the powers conferred by the Act absolved them from indictments on the part of those whose property was damaged by diminished air or light. The result was that certain sufferers found to their mortification that they had no redress, but must raise their chimneys at their own cost, if necessary, and in other cases endure the inconvenience of a decreased supply of light. This was an unpleasant revelation that caused much gnashing of teeth among the owners of, and the dwellers in, the properties surrounding the tall buildings erected by the leaseholders of the Corporation.

As for those whose property was required and taken under the Act, it was all very well for owners and for those who had leases: they could not be molested without fair and proper payment. Shopkeepers and others, however, who were only annual tenants, had, I fear in many cases, to go empty away. Some of these had good, old-established businesses that had for years become identified with certain premises. It was nothing short of ruin to them to move, but they had to take up their goods and walk. This is the way that authorities often have to deal with the more or less helpless in view of what they consider to be the greatest good of the greatest number.

It will, of course, be said that some of these traders were extremely short-sighted not to have had leases of premises that were so all-important to them. In many cases, however, they were unable to obtain such agreements, the landlords being unwilling or unable to grant them. The result was that many a prosperous tradesman had his successful career cut short and passed into a retirement he did not desire, probably with a few warm curses upon the Town Council, the Improvement Scheme, and the schemers.

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It is not very easy to understand the just laws that should govern compensation. When there is talk of disestablishing public-houses, certain statesmen approve of compensation. The argument is that as public-houses are licensed by law, their owners have been given a sort of status and sanction, which should be properly and considerably dealt with in case their businesses are taken away from them. But other people also take out licences, such as tobacconists, pawnbrokers, grocers, and wine sellers, yet when these traders are disturbed or disestablished, compensation is never suggested.

Let us see what has happened in Birmingham. When the grand new street was made the traffic to the northern part of the town was largely diverted from other thoroughfares, and the consequence was that streets and passages that were once busy highways and byways were soon comparatively deserted. Shops became tenantless, or had to be let at greatly reduced rents. Indeed, the depreciation of property in the localities referred to is said to have been at least thirty per cent. Yet the owners had no redress.

Of course it usually happens that when large reforms are effected the noble work is done at somebody's inconvenience or cost. It is the inevitable result, and people who are not sufferers shrug their shoulders and complacently remark that the few must be sacrificed for the benefit of the many. It is delightfully easy to be philosophical and even philanthropic when our own pockets, feelings, and interests are not concerned. The last new great Improvement Scheme would, of course, be a great thing for Birmingham; it would also shed a considerable amount of glory on its authors; it would likewise put a good deal of power into the hands of its administrators, and not a little money into the pockets of professional men. If some few persons had to suffer in order to bring about such splendid results they must try to be patriotic, noble citizens, or else grin and bear their discomfiture! Those, however, who were despoiled of their businesses, or who found their property seriously depreciated, were not likely to be consoled by such buttered comfort. They raised their voices in impotent protest, and denounced Mr. Chamberlain and all his works.

We do not hear very much of the Artisans' Dwellings Act now, but any towns that contemplate adopting it should profit by the experience of Birmingham, consider its full scope and meaning, and count the cost. The city of Birmingham has applied the Act in connection with its last great Improvement Scheme, and it now remains to be seen what the results, in a commercial sense, will be. The present and succeeding generation, at least, will have to pay off some heavy obligations in the next sixty or seventy years, and then the city should be immensely the richer for its enterprising policy. I say it should be, and probably it will be, but there is a fair-sized "if" to be considered.

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It seems to be taken as a matter of course that Birmingham will go on developing and prospering in the future as it has in the past. And it may be fairly presumed that it will do so. This, however, must not be taken exactly as a matter of positive certainty. There are some indications that there may be a pause in the material prosperity of the city by and by—a limit to its progressiveness. If so, the enterprises of our authorities may not prove so advantageous as has been reckoned upon. Partly owing to high rates and the cost of carriage, manufacturers are removing factories outside the city, and in some cases, where they have a large foreign trade, nearer to the seaboard. If this exodus continues and increases it is easy to see that the effect will be to diminish the population, and this in time will affect the value of property. The manufactures of Birmingham are, however, so numerous and so varied there is reason for hope that any circumstances that may apparently show a standstill condition will only be temporary, and that in all general revivals of trade the city will participate.

Whatever may happen, we know the city in the middle of the next century will come in for a fine heritage of reversions, and it is fair to presume that posterity will greatly benefit by the Improvement Scheme fathered by Mr. Chamberlain. In the meantime the citizens—at least, those who bestow much thought upon such matters—shake their heads at the load of debt Birmingham bears upon its shoulders, and chafe at the high rates. It is, however, pointed out to the malcontents that they live in a healthier place than Birmingham used to be, and, further, that the city, owing to its improved character and appearance, attracts more visitors, and this increases local trade.

Of this latter fact there can be little dispute. The new order of things has led to a new and, in some cases, better class of shops being established, and these attract a better class of customers. At one time residents in the adjoining counties looked down upon Birmingham shopkeepers, and would say rather contemptuously that they never “shopped” in this city, but went to Leamington, Cheltenham, or London to make their purchases. But we do not hear so much of this now. On the contrary, I have heard of people—even aristocratic people—who actually say that they now, for many reasons, prefer to “shop” in Birmingham rather than go to London. Of course this is not an ordinary circumstance—for Birmingham has not yet a Bond Street or Regent Street; still, exceptional though it may be, it indicates a change of feeling and shows that, in one sense at all events, Birmingham is on the rise.

The increased number of large and important shops in central Birmingham has led to the formation of trading establishments and Stores of the latest order of development. There are now large shops of the “universal provider” type, where they sell everything from blacking to port wine, and where you see silk mantles in one window and sausages in another.

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Some of us rather preferred the old order of things. We liked and still like to go to shops kept by tradesmen who have been brought up to certain lines of business, and who know from actual knowledge and experience what they are buying and selling. But in these large new shops and Stores people sell you almost everything without having any special knowledge of anything. They recommend this, that, and the other, but you have often good reason to know that it is not from any experience of the commodities they offer, but only the tradesman's instinct and desire to dispose of what he wants most to sell rather than what his customers may most wish to buy.

Such is the new style of large shopkeeping, and it is not, of course, peculiar to Birmingham. It must be owned, however, that it means cheapness, and also that it has been largely developed by the new order of things brought about by the recent street improvements in the city.

IV.

Ecce Mr. Chamberlain.

Having said so much of what Mr. Chamberlain has done in, and for, Birmingham, perhaps I may be permitted to say a few words, "mostly all" my own, respecting a much biographed man. Although Mr. Chamberlain is so prominently identified with Birmingham and Birmingham with him, it is well known that he is not a native of the place. He was born in London in 1836, and came to Birmingham in 1854. We took him in and he did for us. His father joined the well-known firm of Nettlefold, the wood screw makers, and in the course of time his eldest son, Joseph, succeeded him. Mr. Joseph Chamberlain soon found his feet in trade, and by his business acumen, his foresight, capacity, and shrewdness he advanced the business, which had already been highly successful, to a rare pitch of prosperity.

At one time I saw and heard much of Mr. Chamberlain, especially in the earlier part of his Birmingham public career. He was always what he is now—a sharp, smart, and ready man. A man to inspire admiration and confidence. There was always a promptness and "all thereness" in his nature, with a decided touch of self-reliance, and I may even say audacity. In fact, without intending any reflection upon him, I might perhaps suggest that he could appropriately take as his motto "De l'audace, encore de l'audace, et toujours de l'audace." In proof of this I may cite one or two incidents that came under my notice.

Some thirty years or more ago Mr. Chamberlain was a prominent member of a local debating society. Now, this society used to have every year two social gatherings, and it was observed that many members who rarely or never came to the debates were not conspicuous by their absence when the summer "outings" and other little feasts took place. The committee thought it would be rather good sport to give these knife and fork

debaters a little mild and gentle rub. Consequently they made them the subject of a toast at one of their social meetings, held at the Lyttelton Arms, Hagley. A word was coined for the occasion, and they were toasted as the “Artopsareocoluthic Members” (signifying the lovers of the loaves and fishes), and to Mr. Chamberlain was entrusted the task of proposing the toast.

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In a smart and brilliant speech he poked rare fun at the dinner-debating members who were so ready to participate in the festivities of the society and so lax in attending the discussions. He not only did this with delicious banter and pointed sarcasm; but, with an audacious touch all his own, he coupled the toast with the name of one member present. This brought the ruffled gentleman up on to his legs, and, smarting under Mr. Chamberlain's ironical philippics, he tried to pay back "our young friend" for what he considered his unwarrantable impertinence.

But Mr. Chamberlain was not in the least disconcerted by the hotly expressed resentment of the offended member. With his cigar in his mouth and his eye-glass in his eye he smiled with amused complacency, while his irate friend tried to pay him back, though hardly in his own sharp, ringing coin.

The other incident to which I have referred took place when the Birmingham Corporation Gas Bill was under consideration. A town's meeting was held to discuss and decide whether the gas undertakings should be purchased by the municipal authorities. As there was considerable difference of opinion upon the question there was a large gathering in the Town Hall, and the opponents of the scheme were in strong force.

Mr. Chamberlain, in the course of his speech advocating the purchase, pointed out with characteristic force all the advantages of the proposed scheme, and when he mentioned the satisfactory sum for which the gas undertaking could be bought a prominent opponent called out, "Will you give that for it?" "Yes, I will," was the prompt reply, which rather surprised and silenced his antagonist.

And no doubt he meant what he said. He regarded the amount named as an advantageous price for the purchase—as it has proved to be—and he would have been willing, and would doubtless, with the aid of his friends, have been able, to find the money to secure such a valuable monopoly. It was, however, the decisive and ready manner in which he answered his interrogator that was so characteristic of the man, and which so appealed to the meeting as to elicit a hearty volley of cheers.

Mr. Chamberlain was never easily disconcerted, nor was he ever a touchy, over-sensitive man. In fact, he has been heard to say, I believe, that a man who takes to public life must not be thin-skinned. If he is to give blows, he must be prepared to take blows in return, and whether he takes his punishment fighting or lying down, he must take it smiling, or at least with complacency. This he does himself, as a rule, and whatever he may feel under the blows of his adversaries, he does not wince nor whine, but always appears more or less imperturbable, good-humoured, and unscathed. We see him demonstrative, combative, even saucy sometimes on the platform, but rarely or never ruffled, sour, or out of temper.

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As I have hinted, I heard a good deal of Mr. Chamberlain's public speaking when he first came to the front as a public man, and it was impossible not to be interested, edified, and oftentimes amused by the intelligence, point, and smartness of his speech. At the same time there was—especially in the earlier days of his public career—a certain setness and formality of style that suggested the idea that his speeches were anything but the inspiration of the moment, but had been made beforehand, and were being reeled off. Indeed, many of those who knew him well maintained that his speeches were at this time the result of painstaking study, care, and elaboration, and that those who had a nose for oratory might detect in them a strong smell of the lamp.

One incident that came under my notice certainly went far to corroborate this view. I refer to the occasion of a little semi-public dinner at which Mr. Chamberlain was put down to propose a certain toast. He proceeded for a time in his usually happy, characteristic manner, when all at once in the middle of a sentence he came to a full stop! We all looked up, and he looked down embarrassed and confused. He apparently had lost the thread of the discourse he had so carefully woven; he could not pick up the dropped stitches; and, if I remember rightly, he sat down, his speech not safely delivered.

It seems difficult now to fancy Mr. Chamberlain making such a fiasco. He is at the present time probably one of the most ready and fluent speakers we have, and although many strange things might happen in the House of Commons, one of the most astonishing would be to see Mr. Chamberlain break down in a speech. It would create a sensation in that unserene assembly which would almost be enough to make a seasoned pressman swoon, and before the incident had been completely realised the unexpected and startling fact would probably be known at the Antipodes. Mr. Chamberlain can now make his speeches as he goes on—although the material may be prepared beforehand—and, as we know, he can turn from the course of his argument to answer quickly and effectively some pertinent or impertinent question or interruption.

Since Mr. Chamberlain has become such a leading light in Parliament, his speeches have taken a much more solid, sedate, and serious tone than they had in his early Birmingham days. They have become considerably more weighty—perhaps some of his unfriendly critics would say more heavy—than they were in bygone times. Without being open to the charge of levity or flippancy, Mr. Chamberlain's speeches used to be remarkable for a certain amount of humour, banter, touch-and-go smartness, as well as terse argumentative force.



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At one time he was an appreciative student of the American humorists, and he was very fond of spicing his remarks with apt and amusing quotations from Hosea Biglow, Mark Twain, Artemus Ward, and other comic classics. Indeed, at one time, no speech of his would have been complete without some little sallies of this kind. Now, however, he rarely indulges in such pleasantries. Mr. Chamberlain's speeches in the House of Commons though never dull are never funny. He soon learned his lesson. He very quickly discovered that members of the House may not object to be amused, and are often, it must be admitted, easily moved to mirth. At the same time the members of that assembly do not place a high value upon the words of funny or would-be funny speakers.

Unless he has changed very much, Mr. Chamberlain has a very keen sense and appreciation of humour. Probably he would like sometimes to indulge himself and amuse the House by firing off some humorous hits and quotations, but he knows the importance of suppressing such instincts and tendencies if he is to be taken seriously and regarded as a statesman. Blue books and Biglow, Bills and Sam Slick, do not make the sort of political punch that an influential leader can afford to ladle out at St. Stephen's. At the same time, if he cared to indulge his own ready wit, or to make use of the amusing extracts he has stored away in his memory, he could doubtless make some lively and diverting speeches.

I remember when Mr. Chamberlain was Mayor of Birmingham, the late Mr. George Dawson at a little dinner proposed his health, and in doing so indulged in some characteristic banter and chaff. Mr. Chamberlain, then as now, was not a man of Aldermanic girth, and Mr. Dawson in the course of his humorous remarks took occasion to allude to his slight and slender proportions, and said he wished there was more of the Mayor to look at, and that he should like to see him "go to scale better."

When he rose to reply Mr. Chamberlain, in a quiet, dry manner, and without a smile on his face, remarked, "Mr. Dawson has been good enough to refer to me as a Mayor without a Corporation." This was so neat and smart that I need hardly say the company laughed most amusedly. Probably, if I had kept a notebook, or were now to search well my memory, I might give other instances of Mr. Chamberlain's smart, ready wit.

Now, however, as most people know, his speeches are remarkable for their point, force, logical reasoning, incisive language, and straight, hard hitting, but, as I have observed, he rarely if ever essays to be funny. By his sharp remarks and his adept turns of speech he often, however, creates much laughter—as, for instance, when he once spoke of an ex-Premier's opportunism and readiness to make promises which, when they ought to be fulfilled, "snap went the Gladstone bag"—but he never degenerates into anything approaching buffoonery.



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Mr. Chamberlain is always prompt and straightforward in action, and is pleasant and agreeable in manner and speech. Moreover, he is a man of consummate tact. I remember in 1874, when he was Mayor, and the Prince and Princess of Wales paid a visit to Birmingham, there was much wondering and questioning as to how he would comport himself on the occasion. At that time he was credited with cherishing rather strong Republican sentiments. It was even said that he had been known to go so far as to remain seated when the loyal toasts were drunk. I certainly cannot say that I was ever witness of such a proceeding, nor have I been able to trace the statement to any authentic source. Still, there was a widespread idea that he was not overburdened with feelings of loyalty, and many people naturally wondered how he would manage decorously to entertain his Royal guests.

Mr. Chamberlain was quite equal to the occasion. In speech and manner his conduct was irreproachable, and he won golden opinions from all sorts of people. I remember that very curious stories were in circulation at the time as to the etiquette which, it had been laid down, should be observed on the occasion. It was, indeed, said that, in consequence of Mr. Chamberlain's supposed Republican sentiments, special regulations were enjoined, and that the formalities to be observed in receiving and entertaining the Prince were to be of an extra rigid character. I, for one, never believed there was any foundation for these silly reports, but, if any special formalities were prescribed, Mr. Chamberlain brushed them aside, and simply conducted himself with quiet, easy grace, always calm and self-possessed, and never fussy or needlessly obsequious.

Mr. Chamberlain entertained the Royal visitors and others at luncheon at the Society of Artists' rooms, and it struck me that if he had been a born courtier, and had been bred in the atmosphere of palaces, he could hardly have been more "at home" in the position in which he found himself. His speech, in which he proposed the health of the Prince and Princess of Wales, was a model of adroitness and good taste. Without giving himself away by indulging in effusiveness, or being carried away by the glamour of the occasion, he managed to make a very circumspect, clever, and appropriate speech, which, though closely scrutinised, brought no reproaches or even adverse criticisms from Republicans or Royalists. No doubt it was a somewhat scorching ordeal for Mr. Chamberlain to pass through, but he came out of it unsinged and triumphant, and was afterwards more popular than ever.

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I have some hesitation in speaking of Mr. Chamberlain in his private and “at home” character, though in these days I hardly know that I need be very timid or scrupulous. The public has a ready, I might almost say a greedy, ear for personal details concerning the lives and habits of public men, and there are plenty of writers willing to gratify its desires in this respect, and that, too, with the knowledge and consent of the eminent personages themselves. Many people like to hear all about the characteristics of prominent men, and have a keen appetite for all particulars concerning their personal habits and peculiarities. They love to hear what a celebrated man eats, drinks, and avoids, what time he rises and at what hour he usually goes to bed; and even a little thimbleful of scandal touching his shortcomings, delinquencies, and, possibly, his small vices, is as nectar to the gossip-loving taste. To tell some people what they have no right to know is often to delight them.

Without at all professing to be in any sense an intimate friend of Mr. Chamberlain’s, I may, perhaps, say that I have many times had the pleasure of sitting at his table, and a more genial and interesting host it would be difficult to describe. He is bland and gentle to a degree that might surprise those who only know him as a vigorous, fighting politician.

I remember that once when Sir William Harcourt was a guest of Mr. Chamberlain’s at Highbury, he said that he went to stay with his honourable friend with feelings almost amounting to trepidation, but he soon found that Mr. Chamberlain was by no means the ogre he had been represented. Mr. Chamberlain eat his meals with an ordinary knife and fork; and he rose up in the morning and went to bed regularly like any other sane and well-conducted person. Indeed, he found him quite a tame and inoffensive creature compared with the rampant, rampageous autocratic being he had so often heard him described.

I do not pretend to quote Sir William Harcourt’s words literally. I am repeating entirely from memory, but I give the gist of some of his amusing, characteristic remarks when speaking in the Birmingham Town Hall at the time he was Mr. Chamberlain’s friend and guest. Certainly, I have always found Mr. Chamberlain a delightfully pleasant host. He is not given to monopolizing the talk. He does not dogmatize or lay down the law; in fact, when acting as host he is so mild, docile, and pleasant that a fossilized Tory, or even a fiery Nationalist, might play with him.

Sometimes I have been among a favoured few who have been asked to stay after most of his guests have left, and have a cigar with Mr. Chamberlain in his library. On such occasions there has been some rare good talk. I remember on one occasion the conversation did become warmly political, and there was quite a smart little tussle between our host and Mr. Jesse Collings. At that time Mr. Collings had a trifle more sympathy



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with Irish patriots than I fancy he has now, and with his naturally warm sympathetic feeling he was for liberating Mr. Parnell, who was then a prisoner at Kilmainham. But Mr. Chamberlain would have none of it. He maintained that Mr. Parnell and his friends had broken the law and must pay the penalty. He was quite willing to consider their demands, and what they considered to be their wrongs, but they must not defy the law. Yes, there was some pretty sparring between these two friends on that occasion, very earnest but, of course, perfectly good-tempered on both sides.

I have before remarked upon Mr. Chamberlain's self-command and imperturbability. Some persons are, perhaps, inclined to think that because he keeps himself so well in hand and so rarely indulges in sentiment that he is devoid of feeling and emotion. Not so. I recollect that on the death of Mr. John Henry Chamberlain—no relation of his, but a gentleman whose personal character, artistic skill, and intellectual gifts he, and many others, held in high esteem—a meeting was held to consider the desirability of having some memorial of one whose loss was so deeply deplored. Mr. Chamberlain took a prominent part in the proceedings, and I well remember how deeply affected he was when, in the course of his touching references to his deceased friend, he said, "I feel that his death, then, is the crowning of a noble life. He has been called from us in the moment of victory, and we who remain behind are to be pitied, for we have lost a great leader, and there are none to take his place."

"The task which is imposed upon us is certainly a very melancholy one. One by one our leaders are removed from us. The gaps in our ranks are becoming painfully apparent. Still, there is much work to be done, and we shall best honour those who are gone by endeavouring, as best we may, to continue and complete the work which they have so well commenced. In this spirit we may be content to bide our turn, hoping that when we, too, are called away our record may not shame the bright example of those who have gone before us."

When making these touching remarks Mr. Chamberlain's voice became tremulous with emotion. He evidently experienced the greatest difficulty in commanding his feelings, and when he sat down I saw tear-drops in his eyes. Never have I seen him so overcome, and it is only justice to him to cite this incident as showing that sentiment and feeling, though rarely manifested, are not foreign to his real nature.

With respect to Mr. Chamberlain's personal appearance his form and features are now well known, but for a time he was a somewhat troublesome subject to caricaturists. When he was first budding out into national importance the clever artist of *Vanity Fair* at that time came down to Birmingham to draw him. He succeeded in making a good caricature, but it was said that he found his task by no means an easy one. It was the nose, I believe, that puzzled the artist.



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Mr. Chamberlain has a pointed, slightly upturned nose, and some cynical people may be disposed to say that it has become more pointed and sharp the more he has poked it into political business. Anyway, it is a characteristic, perhaps *the* characteristic, of Mr. Chamberlain's face, and the skilful *Vanity Fair* artist caught it after a time, and just sufficiently exaggerated it to make a genuine caricature. Seeing, however, that Mr. Chamberlain was born to be a much-pictured man, one thing has stood him in fine stead—his eye-glass. When "Mr. Punch" first took him in hand he could make little or nothing of him, but the eye-glass saved the Fleet Street artists from failure. They found nothing they could lay hold of at first, not even his nose. They saw a man with a pleasant, good-looking, closely-shaven face, some dark hair brushed back from his forehead, but there was nothing they could hit off with success, and the only way they could secure identity was by the eye-glass. "Mr. Punch" used at one time to represent Mr. Bright as wearing an eye-glass, but I don't think he ever used one. Certainly I never saw Mr. Bright with an eye-glass, and never saw Mr. Chamberlain without one. Great and prominent men should have some characteristic peculiarity that should be their own special personal brand, and if they have it not, it must be made for them—as in the case of Lord Palmerston and the wisp of straw that "Mr. Punch" always put in his mouth. Mr. Chamberlain, however, has kindly obliged, and given caricaturists and others something by which he can be unmistakably "featured."

V.

Exit Mr. Chamberlain.

In 1876 Mr. Chamberlain was elected a member of Parliament for Birmingham, and his municipal career shortly came to an end. It may be remembered that he made an unsuccessful attempt to represent Sheffield some little time before he aspired to become a candidate for Birmingham. He made a very plucky fight in the cutler constituency, and the Sheffield blades were hardly so sharp as they might have been in rejecting such an able and rising politician. Probably, if they could have peered a little into the future, Mr. Chamberlain's first seat in Parliament would not have been as a representative of Birmingham.

Mr. Chamberlain, however, was elected as one of the members of his adopted town in the year mentioned, and, as I have said, he retired more or less from municipal life. It may further be said that he relinquished his local position at the right moment. He was lucky as to the time in which he took up public life in Birmingham, and he was equally fortunate in regard to the period at which he quitted it. He had set afloat great local schemes, he had laboured assiduously for the good of the town, he had attained the acme of his local popularity, he was admired even by his opponents, and an imposing memorial was erected in his honour. After this, anything that might have happened

would have been in the nature of an anti-climax so far as his local career was concerned.

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When at some future day Mr. Chamberlain's life comes to be fully written, it will probably be noted as something remarkable that he should have done so much, and achieved such a position, while yet only a young man. For be it remembered, that after he had been for three successive years Mayor of Birmingham, had carried out the large and important schemes associated with his name, and had become one of the representatives of the town in Parliament, he was only forty years of age. It will also be noted that very soon after making his appearance in the House of Commons he quickly got his foot on the ladder and rapidly mounted the rungs that lead to pre-eminence, and in a very few years attained the position of Cabinet Minister.

What more he might have done for Birmingham it is impossible to conjecture had he remained longer our local leader. But he was called up higher. Perhaps this was lucky for him. The great enterprises, or at least some of them, were only fairly started when he relinquished his grasp of them, and it remained to be seen whether they were to prove all they had been painted. If they succeeded, nothing could deprive him of the honour and glory of having inaugurated them. If they failed, it was in his power to say that had he remained to carry them out the results would have been altogether different.

The working-out of some of his larger schemes and undertakings created, as I have already intimated, considerable soreness and friction in various quarters. They brought hardship on many persons and produced, at any rate for a time, considerable ill-feeling and discontent. The piper had to be paid for the great enterprises he had set afloat. With regard to the gas and water purchases, the former has returned a profit to the tune of L35,000 to L40,000 a year, and is now (in 1899) realising about L50,000 per annum. The profits of the water scheme are still more or less prospective, whilst the gains to be realised by his great Improvement Scheme are in the dim and distant future.

Any adverse criticisms on these undertakings do not now directly affect their author. He has taken up national in place of local work, and he has left others in Birmingham to carry out more or less ably what he so successfully began. Some of us are occasionally inclined to think that his brilliant example and career have inflamed some of our remaining public men with a desire to do heroics, and to follow his lofty lead in the way of promoting large schemes.

For instance, the city is now committed to a huge expenditure for the purpose of bringing a supply of water from Mid-Wales. There was considerable opposition to this very costly project, but it was at last carried, though only the future can decide whether it will prove to be an altogether wise and prudent, not to say profitable, undertaking. Experts and some far-seeing men are confident as to its future benefits. We are to have a good supply of excellent water, and we are to save a great many

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thousands a year in soap. Further, we shall be independent of merely local supplies, which, we are told, will be quite inadequate for our needs in future days. I am not in a position to controvert what has been said in favour of the project, nor have I reason to doubt that the scheme—especially under certain conditions—will be of great benefit and value to the community in the coming by and by.

At the same time it may, perhaps, be doubted whether the undertaking, like the Improvement Scheme, was fully comprehended in all its bearings when it was decided to apply for an Act of Parliament to carry out the Welsh water project. But its promoters having made up their minds upon the question hustled, I won't say rushed, the proposal along, and before many of the inhabitants were fairly awakened to what was being done, the initial part of the business was accomplished.

When, however, the matter was brought out more into the open in the Parliamentary Committee Rooms many of our townsmen opened their eyes and their mouths and pressed for a little time for the further consideration of this gigantic scheme. But the opposition was not strong enough to procure any delay; the advocates of the proposal had our most influential public men on their side, so the bill passed through Parliament.

Occasionally now mutterings of doubt and dissatisfaction are heard, and there are still those who prophesy evil in the future in consequence of the enormous outlay to which the city is committed. If, however, Birmingham grows and prospers all will be well. If otherwise—and the last census did seem to indicate that our progress, as measured by increasing population, was inclined to steady down—Birmingham will have a huge debt in the future which even a large supply of good wholesome water will not altogether liquidate.

Returning, however, to make a few further observations respecting Mr. Chamberlain, it may be said now that the voices of those who had any grudge against him for the daring innovations he made, and the bold undertakings he promoted, have become nearly mute. There are, however, some who speak disparagingly of him, partly, perhaps, because they are envious of him, and cannot complacently realise his rapid rise to the position of eminence he has attained.

Some of his former Radical friends and associates especially denounce in no measured terms his unpardonable heresy in departing from what they consider was his old political path. Vituperation is almost too mild a term to describe their expressed disgust when they see one who was, they believed, a man of the people consorting with royal dukes, belted earls, and even with the Sovereign herself. This is too much for some of the old full-blooded Radicals who are still found in our midst.

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Very possibly some of these would do the same if they had the chance, for your thorough-going Radical is often a curious creature. I remember once being at a London theatre with a friend of mine who was a desperate and despotic democrat, and who has been a leading light for years among our advanced Radicals. Now it so happened that on the evening of our visit the Prince of Wales was at the theatre we attended, and I was greatly amused to notice how interested my democratic friend was in watching the royal box. When the performance was nearing the end he amused me still more by suggesting that we should hurry out and watch the Prince drive off. "I do so like to see that sort of thing," he added.

Mr. Chamberlain, however, is not the man to care what his foes or his old political friends think or say about him. Water on a duck's back is, I fancy, an oppressive agony compared with the right honourable gentleman's feelings when he hears or reads the condemnatory and abusive remarks of some of his former allies. If at any time he does perchance feel at all stung by any of the adverse criticisms he hears or reads, he takes care not to show that he is hurt.

Sparks will fly upwards, and Mr. Chamberlain has had his troubles, but he does not wear his heart on his sleeve, or carry his woes into the market place. I remember many years ago, under the stress of severe domestic affliction, he retired into private life for a considerable period, and it was said that during his self-imposed obscurity he sought occupation and solace in the study of Blue Books. Anyway, when he emerged into public life again he appeared as the author of a magazine article of an advanced political character, which seemed to shew that he had spent his solitude in studying and trying to solve some of the large political problems of the day.

In contemplating Mr. Chamberlain's remarkable career and his high rise in the political world, I am tempted to wonder whether he would have built his large mansion near Birmingham if he could have foreseen the immediate future. When he made up his mind to erect his house at a great cost he perhaps scarcely dreamed he would so soon become a Cabinet Minister. Possibly he looked forward to being little more than a local member of Parliament—for he is not, I fancy, a dreamer of dreams—and felt he should like to pitch his tent near to his constituency.

Anyway he built his house at Moor Green, which he called "Highbury" after the name of the district in London where he was born. The house is well situated, though in some respects hardly built upon a site worthy of such a costly residence. It stands on a piece of rising ground, and commands a good prospect. In the front of it are the Lickey and Clent Hills some eight or ten miles away, but in the mid-distance is a manufacturing suburb with several tall chimneys which are obtrusively conspicuous, and which behave as factory chimneys generally do, scarcely improving the prospect or the atmosphere. These disadvantages were, I believe, pointed out to him before a brick was laid, but he had made up his mind, and when it is made up I fancy it is made up very much.



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The day may come when he may be able to spend but little of his time at his Highbury home, but he has children who will keep the house inhabited and well aired if he himself does not. His eldest son, Mr. Austen Chamberlain, M.P. for one of the Worcestershire divisions, is in training to walk in his father's footsteps, and to see eye to eye—or I might say eye-glass to eye-glass—with him in matters political. What the future of this eldest son may be it is not for me to forecast. He has made an exceptionally good start, but he will have his work cut out to follow successfully in the tread of such an able and distinguished father.

When people see Mr. Chamberlain *pere* in such prosperity, flourishing like a green bay tree, with a country house that has cost a fortune, a town house to maintain, and plenty of money to do a fair amount of globe-trotting, they wonder and ask how did he get such a lot of money? Well, I cannot say, because I do not know, and if I did know I should not tell. Doubtless he had something considerable from his father, who must have been well off, but as there were some seven children to share what was left by the late Mr. Chamberlain it may be assumed it was not simply what he inherited that made him rich.

Doubtless his wealth was chiefly acquired by his shrewdness, business capacity, and enterprise when he was a member of the firm of Nettlefold and Chamberlain, and probably when he retired from that prosperous business it was with a sum of money which would, perhaps, make some of us blink with envious surprise if we knew the figure.

It is no secret that when he was engaged in business Mr. Chamberlain adopted a policy which created much comment at one time, and was, indeed, rather severely criticised. It was understood that he had set his heart upon making the trade of his firm as much of a monopoly as possible, and to this end he made it known to his local competitors that they must sell their businesses to him or be prepared for certain consequences if they did not.

Such a course of action was regarded as somewhat tyrannical, especially by those directly concerned, and it made bad blood for a time between Mr. Chamberlain and some of those with whom he was associated in public work. After a while his trade opponents came to the idea that it would be better to surrender at discretion than to enter into conflict with a firm that was in such a strong position, and had such a big war chest at its disposal.

It is hardly necessary to go into the merits of this trade question, or, indeed, to say anything about it now, as it is all a matter of ancient history. Indeed, I only refer to the matter because it formed an incident in Mr. Chamberlain's Birmingham career and left its mark upon the business that went up and the businesses that went down. Moreover, it is a little instructive and edifying, as showing how Mr. Chamberlain's combative nature manifested itself in his everyday life. He recognised, as other men have done, that business is not a matter to be played with, and that trade is in fact a commercial conflict



in which one must whip and the other be whipped, and as he felt himself in a strong position, was on the box and had the whip in his hand, he was resolved to drive and to choose the pace and the road.



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Live and let live is, of course, a very good and proper maxim, but it finds no place in the copy-book of sharp, smart, successful men of business. It is their aim and purpose to get money—without harm to others, if they can, if not, others must look out for themselves—that is all. In one sense at all events Mr. Chamberlain's tactics were justified. They were successful.

VI.

And his brethren.

Mr. Chamberlain having obtained such distinction in public life, it was perhaps only natural that some of his brothers should be tempted or induced to follow his shining star. Possibly they had no strong inclination to distinguish themselves in public, and were rather pressed to come forward on account of the influential name they bore. Anyway, some of them did appear in various offices and capacities, but without meaning any disrespect to them or any reflection upon their abilities, it may perhaps be said that they found their fires so pale and ineffectual compared with the brilliant light of their eldest brother—or it may be that they found public work comparatively uncongenial to them—that, most of them soon preferred to efface themselves and leave one of their family and his son to take all the honours and have all the court cards.

Mr. Richard Chamberlain took the most prominent position, and made the highest mark of all Mr. Chamberlain's brothers. He was Mayor of Birmingham in the years 1879 and 1880. During his years of office he was public-spirited and popular, and in the way of civic hospitality he made things lively and gay. He kept the Council House warm with his entertainments, and lavished so much money in hospitalities of one kind or another that he made it difficult for his immediate successors to follow in his wake, and none of them tried to do so. So far as I could judge of his character, Mr. Richard Chamberlain did not spend his money so freely for the sake of purchasing popularity, and certainly not for the sake of making ostentatious displays of his wealth. He was naturally generous and genial, and as Mayor of a large and important town he found many ways of humouring his bent, and he did not mind paying the piper pretty handsomely for his pleasure. As is well known, he was afterwards M.P. for one of the Islington divisions for some years. Ill-health however overtook him, and he died much regretted on the 2nd of April, 1899.

Another brother, Mr. Arthur Chamberlain, was a town councillor of Birmingham for a limited period, and owing to his business capacity he became a useful member of the Corporation. He did not apparently go into the Council to make a long stay, or if he did he changed his mind, and soon retired from municipal work. He has since spent his time in minding his own business; in strengthening, mending, and making certain public companies; in giving fatherly advice to company shareholders; and in dispensing justice, sometimes with pertinent observations, on the local magisterial bench.



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Two other brothers, Mr. Herbert and Mr. Walter Chamberlain, have at times been induced to take a little hand in public work, but their efforts have been of a mild, modest, innocent character. Now, however, they have retired into that privacy from which they so timidly emerged. For many reasons Mr. Chamberlain's brothers were, perhaps, wise not to bid high for public place and position in Birmingham. People are apt to be needlessly suspicious of too much family influence in public concerns. There is always a tendency and a readiness to inveigh against cliques, especially family cliques. And at one time there was certainly a disposition in some quarters to keep a jealous eye upon Joseph and his brethren, lest they should acquire an undue amount of influence and power. One blunt, outspoken Scotchman, I remember, expressed this feeling in his own characteristic way by saying, "If we don't mind we shall be having too much dom'd Chamberlain."

The Chamberlain family, however, being more or less smart, spry men, were doubtless sharp enough to detect some inkling of this sort of feeling, and consequently they thought it better to silence any such cavillings by eschewing as far as they could public life, and contenting themselves with being brothers of a big man and sharing a little reflected glory.

Whilst mentioning Mr. Chamberlain's family I must say a word of his brother-in-law, Mr. William Kenrick, for some years M.P. for the Northern Division of Birmingham. Mr. Kenrick was Mayor of Birmingham in 1877, and a worthy and modest chief magistrate he made. A generous, intelligent, public-spirited man, he has always been liberal with his purse and his time, and has done much to further educational and philanthropic schemes. Mr. Kenrick belongs to a class some cynical people consider very "cliquey." It is, however, to be wished there were more such "cliquey" people in our midst, for they are always conspicuously at the fore in supporting by their influence and their money every good cause which has for its object the alleviation of suffering and the improvement of the people.

It is true that there was one important project inaugurated some few years ago that did not enlist their sympathy. This was the Birmingham Bishopric Scheme. But, seeing that most of the "clique" are Unitarians, they could hardly be expected to support a proposal for the benefit of the Established Church. It was a misfortune for that Church that the Chamberlain party and their friends were aliens in religious matters. Had it been otherwise the results of the proposed scheme might have been very different. The "clique," when they do support a cause, do it with no niggardly hand, and if it had so chanced that they had been Churchmen instead of Unitarians, the probabilities are that by this time Birmingham would have been in possession of a full-sized Bishop all its own, and possibly a fine, bran-new, costly cathedral to boot.



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Owing to the lack of monetary support the Birmingham Bishopric Scheme is dead, or in such a very sound trance that it is hardly likely to revive. At its birth it was not very strong, and its early existence was jeopardised by conflicting ideas among its sponsors, chiefly caused by the difficulties in the way of raising all the money required. Birmingham, therefore, had to settle itself down and be content with a Suffragan Bishop, at least for a time, and this, it is thought, may prove to be a good long time.

In connection with the Birmingham Unitarians I may here, perhaps, appropriately allude to a matter connected with the growth of our modern city. The New Meeting House of the Unitarians in which Dr. Priestley ministered was situated on the east side of the town, and as the congregation was migrating westward they desired to have their place—I won't say of worship, but their place of meeting, nearer to their homes. Moreover, moved by the advancing spirit of the age, they wished for a more important and ornamental looking edifice than the extremely plain, I might say ugly, structure which their fathers had attended. Unitarians may appear to be rather rigid and frigid, but they have an intelligent appreciation of art and beauty.

Accordingly some forty years ago they selected a site on the west side of the town, and erected what was then considered a handsome place of meeting, which they called the Church of the Messiah, and which was opened in 1862. The architect of this Church did not seem to be unduly weighed down with Unitarian ideas. By accident or design he marked the edifice with emblems of the Trinity, for at the very entrance there is a large opening encircling three arches, which are suggestively emblematical of the Three in One.

The building of this somewhat florid structure, and the move of the Unitarian church from east to west, provoked a considerable amount of caustic comment and humorous criticism at the time. These advanced Unitarians were scoffed and sneered at for deserting the simple tabernacle of their ancestors, and one which was associated with the revered name of Dr. Priestley. They were also mocked for their greater iniquity in selling their tabernacle to the Papists. Yes, the New Meeting House of the Unitarians became a chapel of the Roman Catholics. They rendered to the priests the things that were Priestley's, as they were reminded by a facetious paper published at the time. But, however much the Unitarians may have been chaffed and sneered at for abandoning their old conventicle, they have lived it all down, and, if I mistake not, Joseph and his brethren, the Kenricks, the Oslers, the Beales, and others, now congregate in peace in their un-Unitarian-looking Church of the Messiah.

VII.

Mr. Chamberlain's associates.



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Having spoken of his brethren, I may now refer to one or two of Mr. Chamberlain's friends and associates. Among these I will specially mention Mr. Jesse Collings, Mr. Schnadhorst, and Mr. Powell Williams. Mr. Collings, like Mr. Chamberlain, is a stranger within our gates. He is a Devon man by birth, but as a comparatively young man he came to Birmingham, and he not only came but he saw and he prospered. He entered local public life about the same time as Mr. Chamberlain, and they soon became kindred spirits. From the first Mr. Chamberlain seemed to take a special fancy to Mr. Collings—in American phrase, he “froze to him.” They became a sort of David and Jonathan company limited, and although each of the partners may have preserved a certain amount of independence and individuality, in many things they pulled together in their work and policy like one man.

When Mr. Chamberlain took leave of local municipal life and went up higher, Mr. Collings was not long in following him, and now both have been for some years very familiar figures in Parliament. Since they first entered public life both men have in some ways mellowed down. Compared with what they once were, their foes at any rate say, they have both lost colour. They were once ripe, full-bodied Radicals, and now they are tawny Liberals, who have been bottled late—but bottled.

Although time and experience may have taught Mr. Collings many things, he probably retains more of the old Radical Adam than does Mr. Chamberlain. At one time he was regarded by some of his opponents as a political fire-eater—a democratic despot who would have decapitated kings and queens without a tinge of remorse, and slain wicked Tories with the sword. He was, however, never the ungenial, self-seeking, aggressive person some of his foes may have fancied him. He was always an affable, pleasant, agreeable man, who could be civil and even polite to his adversaries, especially when political fighting was not going on in front. But, as I have said, he has toned down during late years and has learned, as many other men have done, that there are large lessons to be learnt by experience, and that there is some virtue in expediency.

Of course a good deal of mud has been flung at Mr. Collings by some of his local friends in consequence of what they consider his political perversion, but I don't know that much of it has stuck to him. With some of his former allies it is not so much that he may have become more temperate in his views, or that he did actually abandon his absolute freedom and take a Government office. They might have forgiven these little backslidings, but in their eyes he sinned past redemption when he consorted with titled people, broke the bread of kings, and even suffered himself to be entertained at Sandringham. These were offences outside forgiveness in the eyes of some few of his former associates. With Mr. Chamberlain, however, as his friend and prototype, he probably feels that he can afford to smile at the sneers and jeers of those who, not being able to make much way up the political ladder themselves, take their revenge by pelting those who are climbing their way towards the top.



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Among Mr. Chamberlain's working associates, Mr. Powell Williams has been a sort of "surprise packet." Poets, we are told, are born, and not made, but Mr. Powell Williams seems to have been made, and not born. At least, no one seems to know anything much about his early career. He appeared to burst upon the municipal horizon all at once, like a meteor emerging from outer space, but when he came in contact with the Corporation atmosphere he soon became ignited and fired by municipal enthusiasm, and, encouraged by those who perceived his capacity, he rapidly began to be a conspicuous luminary in our local Forum. He quickly distinguished himself in the matter of local finance, and indeed soon became Birmingham's Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Without being a brilliant or learned orator, Mr. Powell Williams had the gift of fluency, and he could generally be reckoned upon to get up at a moment's notice and make an effective speech. He could also do a little fighting if it came in his way, and in the course of his Town Council career he had one or two pretty bouts with some of his opponents. When he is not on the war horse he is a pleasant, intelligent, un-sour man, with a touch of smartness and humour which give point to his words. As is now well known, Mr. Williams was returned to Parliament for one of the Birmingham divisions. He became the successful helmsman in London of the central organization of the Liberal Unionist party. On the formation of the Government in 1895, to the surprise of many of his friends and acquaintances, he became a member of the administration. It was believed that he was well taken in tow by Mr. Chamberlain, but it may with truth, perhaps, be added that by his own energy and ability he placed himself in a prominent position where he could hardly be overlooked.

With respect to Mr. Schnadhorst, there can be no question as to Mr. Chamberlain's prescience in judging of the capabilities of men, and his quick appreciation of Mr. Schnadhorst's attributes is a case in point. The pre-eminence this latter-named gentleman attained in the political world was somewhat of a surprise to many of his old friends, and probably not least of all to himself. Doubtless at the beginning of his career he little dreamt that owing to his being taken in hand by men of influence; to unforeseen circumstances in the evolution of political affairs; and also, it must be admitted, to certain capabilities of his own, he would attain to the position of importance he somewhat quickly reached, and his name become a synonym for systematic political organization.

I knew Mr. Schnadhorst long before he blossomed out into fame. He struck me, and doubtless others, as being an intelligent, good, easy-mannered man, with a touch of "Sunday schoolism" in his character and manner. He was not brilliant, and he did not appear to be burdened with much originality. He seemed to be a pointless sort of man, apparently destitute of any keen sense of humour; a spectacled, sallow, sombre man, who would have been an ornament to a first-class undertaker's business. Certainly he was not one who, by his smartness, wit, cleverness, and courage would have tempted anyone to say, "There is the great political organizer of the future."



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In his earlier life and in his own particular line of business he was not a conspicuous success. His heart was not in it or his hand either. Speaking from my own experience, he made me about the worst fitting coat I ever wore. Mr. Chamberlain, however, took his measure more successfully than he himself took other people's, in a sartorial sense, and soon saw that he would make up into something useful if the cutting out was done for him.

Mr. Schnadhorst as a young man began by taking a keen and intelligent interest in local public life. He came under the eye of Mr. Chamberlain, who quickly perceived that he possessed certain qualities which would prove useful and valuable if properly employed. He saw in him a man of aptitude and capacity, who had the *suaviter in modo*, even if he had not much of the *fortiter in re*—a man of method, persuasiveness, and industry, with a cool head, a safe temper, and a calm mind.

Of Mr. Schnadhorst's possession of the last-named qualities I once had a striking proof. It was on the occasion of one of Mr. Gladstone's visits to Birmingham. A great political meeting was held in Bingley Hall, and the immense gathering was in a fever of excitement. I remember speaking with Mr. Schnadhorst in the course of the evening, and was greatly struck by his self-possessed, quiet, easy manner. So far from being affected by the intense enthusiasm and feverish excitement that prevailed, he was just as cool and collected as though the occasion was some little tea party affair or a ward meeting, instead of the greatest indoor political demonstration ever held in Birmingham.

As already stated Mr. Chamberlain quickly perceived and plumbed to the bottom Mr. Schnadhorst's capabilities, and as he was bent on solidifying and systematising, or, in other words, "caucusing" the Liberal party in Birmingham, he thought he saw in Mr. Schnadhorst the organising mind and methodical skill that would be eminently useful in carrying out the work. Nor was he wrong. Mr. Schnadhorst proved to be all that was expected of him, and the political world knows the rest. How he became the great political machinist of his day, and how, by his zeal, ability, and method, he elevated "caucusing" or party "wire pulling" into a recognised system—I had almost said a political science.

Circumstances have changed since that period. Mr. Chamberlain made Mr. Schnadhorst, but Mr. Schnadhorst turned his back upon his maker. He was probably actuated by conscientious motives and convictions, although professional politicians may not, as a rule, be credited with being greatly overburdened with conscientious scruples. Still, Mr. Schnadhorst was, I think, generally credited by those who knew him with being an upright, earnest, honest man, so he may well be allowed the benefit of the doubt.



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It must, I think, have cost him a struggle to part company with such a man as Mr. Chamberlain—with one who had put him in the way he should go, and which led him to such a commanding position of influence and importance. Anyway, from whatever motive, he was induced to forsake the rising star in the political firmament, and to worship Mr. Gladstone, the setting sun. The sun went down below the horizon, but we saw how Mr. Schnadhorst continued to work his political orrery with the major and minor planets, the shooting stars and comets, that shone at Westminster with such varied lustre, or wished to shine there if they could.

VIII.

The Birmingham Belgravia.

Seeing how Birmingham has grown and prospered, it is interesting to consider what might have been the result if the town and its outskirts had not been fairly pleasant for well-to-do people to reside in. Fortunately, there is one extensive west-end suburb—Edgbaston—which forms a suitable, healthy, and desirable residential locality for the Birmingham upper classes. But for the existence of this well laid out—I was going to say genteel, but Heaven forbid—neighbourhood, a very large number of its wealthiest manufacturers and professional men would doubtless now reside some distance from the city. An increasing number of those who work in Birmingham now live—at least have their houses—outside its limits, owing to facilities afforded by the railways; but Edgbaston is still a rich, well-populated suburb within a very easy distance of the centre of the city. Mr. Schnadhorst, when he pulled political strings in Birmingham, regarded Edgbaston as a fine, good piece of vantage ground from an electoral point of view, since it kept so many rich residents within the pale of the town, and added so much to its influential voting power.

Edgbaston is chiefly, I might almost say entirely, the property of the Calthorpes, and the late Lord Calthorpe, also his predecessor, were wise in their day and generation, and they had agents who were shrewd and far-seeing. They saw the importance of reserving Edgbaston and laying it out as an attractive, quiet suburb, and the late lord at least lived to see it covered with leasehold residences, many of them—indeed a very large number of them—of considerable value and importance. When these leases expire, as some of them will now before many years are over, and the noble ground landlord begins to draw in his net, what a big haul he will make in the way of reversions of the properties that have been built upon his land!

Some of these Edgbaston houses are not only large and commodious, but are architecturally handsome and artistic. Birmingham has been fortunate during the last thirty or forty years in having two or three local architects who have not only possessed professional skill but also taste. The old square, solid, “money box” houses, so much

esteemed by our fathers, are rarely erected now, but in their place residences of a more attractive design and artistic type.

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The Gothic revival has spread to domestic architecture, and the old, dreadfully-symmetrical brick and stuccoed house, and the hybrid Italian villa, make way for residential structures with gabled roofs, pointed arch windows, red tiles instead of dull-coloured slates, and attractive detail and ornamentation. In looking at such houses, one can hardly fail to be struck by the difference that may be effected by using the simplest materials—but using them with discrimination and taste. One architect may plan a house which will be plain to ugliness, the bricks laid in the most severe and commonplace fashion, and the outlines of the design—if design it can be called—devoid of any grace or variety. No projections to break up the dull flatness and give light and shade; no attempt to relieve the unmitigated square, hut-like appearance of the building. Another puts a pointed roof to his house, pierces it with pretty windows that have form without diminishing the light. He runs some courses of brick work round his building laid in diagonal or otherwise diversified lines. He places a porch at the entrance which has a touch of picturesqueness, and the result is a house that is pleasing to look upon, has at all events a suggestion of form and appearance, and all without any corresponding expense, because he has used his material with skill and taste.

In Birmingham we have seen how much may be done in this direction in various ways, especially in the matter of the Board Schools. When the building of these schools was commenced the firm of Martin and Chamberlain were selected as architects. They had to design comparatively cheap buildings, for anything like extravagance in the way of ornamentation would probably have provoked much hostility. Brick and wood had to be the chief materials employed, but by using these with device and taste good schools were produced from an art point of view, and which, in their way, are a little education to those who attend them.

Possibly there are still not a few among us who think that because there is an element of design and attractiveness in the appearance of these schools money has been needlessly expended. Such persons insist upon it that only ugliness can be really economical, and that the simplest ornamentation or beauty of form must mean superfluous cost. The number of those who take this narrow view is happily limited, and is becoming less owing to the improved and growing taste for art that has been unmistakably manifest of late years.

I have been led into this trifling digression by speaking of the houses now built in that suburb of Birmingham inhabited by the wealthier classes. These residents are, as I have said, better educated than their fathers, and they have different notions as to how they should live and what sort of houses they should live in. They are not merely people who are beginning to prosper and have only just emerged from the chrysalis state of modern civilization, but are citizens who have been

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prospering for some time, or are the children of men who have been prosperous, and they “live up” accordingly. They like their residences to be convenient and comfortable inside; but they also feel a little pride if they look attractive from without. Nor are tastefully-designed dwellings confined to Edgbaston. The example of our “Birmingham Belgravia” has spread to other suburbs, and if we go to Moseley, Handsworth, Harborne, and other places in the vicinity of our city we find houses of a very much improved pattern from an ornamental point of view compared with those of a bygone generation. Edgbaston, however, set the example in the way of Gothic house architecture, and the first specimen, I believe, was a house in Carpenter Road, designed by the late Mr. J.H. Chamberlain, and which was built for Mr. Eld, a partner in the firm of Eld and Chamberlain, now Chamberlain, King, and Jones.

I remember that the erection of this Gothic house created quite a little stir. To some eyes it was a very startling innovation. Pointed arch windows for an ordinary dwelling house, who ever heard of such a thing? What next? asked some square-toed, uncompromising, old-fashioned folks. The idea was indeed so novel that it did not take people by storm, and there was no immediate rush for Gothic houses. Gradually, however, people began to like the style, or their architects told them they must like it, and after some time residences of the new order began to be seen in many directions.

There are now a number of large, costly, handsome Gothic houses in Edgbaston, which will be, indeed, a goodly heritage for the ground landlord when the present leases expire—a fact that often gives rise to some serious thoughts and reflections. Many people feel very sore upon this matter, and wax strong and vehement upon what is known as the “unearned increment” question. I do not propose to lash this horse, which is every now and then trotted out and properly thrashed by reforming economists and others. “Unearned increment” is one of those accidental incidents of life which can hardly be controlled or reckoned with. Why should some men be sound and healthy and six feet high, and others weak and feeble and only four feet ten? Most unequal and unjust! If I have a field, and a town grows up to it of its own accord, and somebody offers me four times as much as I gave for it, I hardly see why I should be reckoned a thief and a robber if I pocket the proffered cash. To take another illustration. I may have on my house-walls a picture for which I gave twenty pounds. The artist has “gone up” since I made my purchase, and I am now offered a hundred and twenty pounds for my painting. “Unearned increment!”



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But away with this question! I find I am getting the whip out, although I promised not to thrash this wretched old economic hack. Only just one little parting crack of the lash. Dealing with “unearned increment” being an impracticability, perhaps it would be well for landlords who benefit immensely by the accident of circumstances to recognise the fact that they *do* pocket a great “unearned increment,” and be ungrudgingly generous in return for benefits received. If this were done the names of suburban landlords would not be received with such derision and contempt as they are sometimes now, and “unearned increment” would become all but an obsolete phrase.

IX.

Then and now.

Great indeed are the changes that have taken place in Birmingham during the past forty or fifty years. I do not speak merely in regard to the growth, appearance, and the commercial progress of the town and city, but in respect to the life and habits of the people—especially the better class of the inhabitants.

Half a century ago many of the well-to-do prosperous manufacturers were practical men—men who had worked at the bench and the lathe, and, from being workmen, had become masters. There were not so many manufactories then as now, and the leading manufacturers found themselves in the happy position of men who were “getting on” and becoming rich. Men as a rule are, perhaps, more happy when they find they are making money than when they have made it, and have nothing to do but to spend it, or to puzzle their brains as to how they shall do so. “Oh! Jem,” piteously said a man I knew, to his nephew, “what am I to do with that ten thousand pounds a-lying at the bank?”

When “getting on,” men go to their various businesses day after day and find orders rolling in and goods going out, and themselves prospering and becoming better and better off, they are disposed to be contented, well pleased with their neighbours, and well satisfied with themselves. So with these old Birmingham manufacturers. They were well content, genial, and hospitable. They did not give themselves any fine airs or pretensions; indeed, they were often proud of their success and prosperity, and would sometimes delight in openly boasting of their humble beginnings, not always to the joy and delight of their children who might hear them. They were sociable, hospitable, generous-hearted, open-handed men. They gave bountiful entertainments, not of a mere formal give-and-take character in which the feast largely consists of plate, fine linen, and flowers, the eatables on the side table, and too much remaining there. They delighted in welcoming their friends; they liked to put a good spread on the board, and to see their guests eat, drink, and be merry.

In my younger days I knew what it was to enjoy the hospitalities of some of these wealthy manufacturers, and I can call to mind some little—I should say large—dinners, in which I have participated, the like of which are, I fancy, rarely seen now. Let me briefly describe one of these informal, old-fashioned, friendly feasts.



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My host would invite members of his family and some friends to dinner at two o'clock, say. The dinner proper—which was a good, substantial, and even luxurious meal—being over, we adjourned to the drawing room. There the dessert would be laid out on a large round table around which we gathered. Then would mine host call for his wine book—for he had a well-stocked cellar of fine vintages. Turning over the leaves of this book he would propose to begin with a bottle of '47 port, which was then a comparatively young and fruity wine. This would be followed probably by a bottle of 1840, and then we should come to the great 1834 wine, of which mine host had a rare stock.

Sometimes we should hark back to 1820 port, a wine which I remember to have had a rich colour and a full refined flavour, and once I tasted the famous comet wine, 1811, which, however, had lost something of its nucleus, and only retained a certain tawny, nebulous tone. On one occasion I remember my host said he had some seventeen-ninety something wine in his cellar, which he proposed we should taste, but for some reason, now forgotten, it was not produced, and I sometimes rather regret that I so narrowly missed the opportunity of tasting a last century wine. Perhaps it may be thought from the procession of ports produced on such occasions as I have described that we indulged in a sustained and severe wine-bibbing bout. But it was not so. In reality we only just tasted each vintage, so that we had the maximum of variety with the minimum of quantity.

The wine ended, we betook ourselves into another room, there to enjoy a cigar. Then would come tea and coffee, and a little music. Supper—yes, my reader, a good supper would be announced about nine o'clock; after that another little smoke, and about ten o'clock or soon after we should take our departure.

Of course all this made up the sum total of a pretty good snack—I mean a good, well-sustained feast—but whether it was owing to the excellence of the viands, or to the fact that we took our pleasures not sadly but deliberately, I for one cannot remember ever feeling the worse for my little-indulgences. Perhaps something was owing to the glorious continuity of our feasting and pleasure.

I also remember once being at an unfrugal, old-fashioned, festive dinner at a friend's house, when one of the guests proposed our host's health, and finished up by saying, "I shall be glad to see everyone at this table to dinner at my house this day week." Considering there were about thirty persons sitting round the mahogany this was a fair-sized order. But it was no empty compliment. The dinner came off, and a fine good spread it was, and as for the wine I seem to sniff its "bouquet" now.

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Some of the old Birmingham men whose characteristic hospitalities I have just described had, as is pretty well known, certain habits which, looked at by modern light, would seem somewhat plebeian. For instance, there were men of wealth and importance who made it their custom often to go and spend an hour or two in the evening at some of the old respectable hotels and inns of the town. They had been in the habit of meeting together at these hostelries in their earlier days to talk over the news, at a period when daily local newspapers were not published, and they adhered to the custom in their advanced years and wealthier position, and rejoiced in visiting their old haunts and smoking their long clay pipes, and having a chat with old friends and kindred spirits.

All this has died out now. For one thing, most of these old inns and hostelries have disappeared with the march of modern times. We have clubs now and restaurants, also hotels, where visitors “put up,” but the old-fashioned inns and taverns have mostly gone. The present generation of prosperous well-to-do men, too, are of a different stamp from their predecessors. They do not take their ease at their inns after the manner of their fathers. They have been educated differently, and take their pleasures in a more refined way, as is the fashion of the time.

Some of them have been to public schools and to the university, and they naturally live their lives on a more elevated level. As a rule, they are good, practical, straightforward, worthy men, though there are, of course, some who are rather amusing in their little pretentious ways—as there are in all large communities. Many of these, finding themselves well off, begin to discover they had ancestors. They name their houses after places where their grandfathers lived or should have lived. They put crests upon their carriages; they embellish their stationery with a motto, and otherwise put on a little of what is called “side.” But Birmingham people are not worse than others in this respect. In fact, I think there is less affectation, pretence, and snobbishness, or at any rate as little as will be found in most places of the standing, wealth, and importance of Birmingham.

Sometimes when I am visiting a newly-risen manufacturing town which has lately blossomed out into a state of thriving progress, I am forcibly reminded of what Birmingham was some years ago, and think of the changes that have come over our city during the past thirty or forty years. The everyday social life is in many respects different from what it was. Young people, with a higher education and more advanced ideas than their sires, keep their parents up to date, and it is the young people who rule the roost in many houses. The hearty but comparatively simple hospitalities of a generation or so ago are regarded as quite too ancient.



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Young men who have been to Harrow and Oxford are not likely to look with favour upon suppers of tripe or Welsh rarebits. They must, of course, dine in a proper, decent manner in the evening, and there must be a good experienced cook to give them a fair variety of dainties; or, at least, of well-prepared dishes. Under such circumstances social functions have naturally a tendency to become more formal, ornamental, and refined. Many of the older-fashioned school mourn the decay of the very thorough and hearty hospitality of times back, and have often complained that they saw too many flowers and too little food at modern dinner parties. Still, the knock-down entertainments of our fathers were often a trifle too formidable perhaps, and did not always bring the pleasant reflections that follow the more gentle hospitalities of the present day.

Before I close this chapter, in which I am comparing the present with the past, I cannot help calling to mind features of Birmingham nearly fifty years ago, when I began to look about me with my boyish eyes. I made some general reference to these in the opening chapter of these sketches. I will now just indulge in a few brief details. To go no further than quite the centre of the town, I call to mind some important places that disappeared when the New Street railway station was made.

I remember Lady Huntingdon's chapel—a place of worship that was popular in its day—and seem to have a hazy recollection of the King Street theatre (or the remains of it), in which was held the first evening concert of the Birmingham Musical Festival in the year 1768. Cannon Street chapel has been too recently removed not to be remembered by many people, but I can recollect going to this place of worship when it was a real old-type Baptist chapel, and where special disciples or devotees were deeply immersed in religion and water.

Most of us can also remember when some unostentatious private houses occupied the side of New Street opposite the Society of Artists' rooms, and not a few of us can call to mind the dirty, slummy buildings that so closely blocked up the back of the Town Hall. It was, indeed, an improvement when these wretched houses were removed and the back of the Hall was finished and opened out. It is, I believe, true that what became the back of the Town Hall was really intended by the architect to be its front. However this may be, the proportions of the north side of the Town Hall are, I think, more symmetrical and imposing in appearance than the south side fronting Paradise Street.

It is but yesterday, so to speak, since the Old Square, with its sedate looking houses disappeared, including that of Edmund Hector, the friend of Dr. Johnson, and many of us can readily recall to mind the old-fashioned Birmingham Workhouse standing in Lichfield Street—that poor, dirty thoroughfare which doubtless furnished a fair number of occupants for the afore-mentioned institution. Looking forward as I do—at least in my sombre moments—to the “Union” as being my ultimate home, I feel a sense of satisfaction that the Birmingham workhouse has been removed to a more salubrious and pleasant locality than its unlovely quarters in Lichfield Street.



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These are just a few of the more important changes that have taken place, with one exception, namely, the disappearance of Christ Church. I almost shed tears to see the demolition of this church and landmark that had so many old associations. Some of these were not always of a pleasant and joyous character, for in days past the Sunday services were very long, and the sermons anything but short.

I hope my memory has not “berayed” me in making these little reminiscent remarks. I did not make notes in my early days, and now in my later years I may make little mistakes; but I do not think I have tripped very much.

X.

The city fringe.

It is my constant habit to take little runs into the outskirts of our city, and when doing so I often stare with all my eyes as I note what has taken place in a limited number of years. Districts hardly more than a mile or so from the centre of the city, which in my boyhood were fields and meadows, are now laid out into streets and covered with houses and shops. Indeed, I sometimes feel very aged when I look upon places where as a boy I went fishing for small fry, and now find the river that afforded me such juvenile sport is, owing to the enhanced value of land, compressed into the dimensions of a fair-sized gutter, with houses and small factories closely packed on its margin covering every foot of ground.

I go in another direction, and scarcely farther than the distance just named, and I come to a spot where once stood the fine large park (Aston) which I remember was enclosed by a brick wall on every side. Scarcely a trace of this extensive old wall can I now see, and the site of the old park, or nearly the whole of it, is now covered with streets and buildings. Aston Hall, the grand old Elizabethan house built by the Holtes in the time of Charles I., still stands in a state of good preservation, and is fortunately now the property of the city, together with some forty acres of surrounding land, which is, as is well known, used as a public recreation ground.

To speak a little more in detail, I am not the only person living who remembers “Pudding Brook” and “Vaughton’s Hole.” The name of “Padding Brook” was, in my boyish days, given to a swampy area of fields now covered by Gooch Street and surrounding thoroughfares. Pudding Brook proper was, however, a little muddy stream that flowed or oozed along the district named and finally emptied itself into the old moat not far from St. Martin’s Church. Vaughton’s Hole, to my juvenile mind, was represented by a deep pool in the River Rea, where something direful took place, in which a Mr. Vaughton was tragically concerned. The real facts are—at least, so I read—that there was a clay pit, sixty feet deep of water, situated near the Rea, and in this pit at least one man was

drowned. The place was named after an old local family named Vaughton, who owned considerable property in the neighbourhood of the present Gooch Street.



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Where Gooch Street now crosses the Rea, I remember there was a footbridge, and beyond that the river was a pretty, purling, sylvan stream, with bushes and rushes growing on its green banks. A field walk past an old farm house led on to Moseley Hall, which was looked upon as being quite away in the country. As for Moseley itself, it was a pretty little village in those days. The old village green, the rustic country inns (of which the "Fighting Cocks" was the chief), and some low-roofed, old-fashioned houses, backed by the parish church tower, made up a picture which still remains in my mind's eye. The railway tunnel which is now looked upon as only a long bridge, was then regarded as something large in its way, and, perhaps, slightly dangerous, almost justifying a little something strong to sustain courage when travelling through it.

Beyond Moseley Church was a pretty road to Moseley Wake Green, in which were, if I remember rightly, one or two timbered houses and some old-fashioned residences, surrounded by high trees. Many of these have now disappeared. In another direction from the church was a country road running to Sparkbrook, and near which were an important house and lands belonging to the wealthy Misses Anderton, whose possessions have been heard of in more recent days.

I now often visit Moseley, and change, but not decay, in all around I see. The prevailing colour of the old village green is now red brick, and the modern colour does not agree so well with my vision as the more rustic tones of a bygone day; whilst the noise and bustle of tram cars, the swarms of suburban residents that emerge from the railway station (especially at certain times in the day), are fast wiping out the peaceful, pretty Moseley of my youthful days.

These new old villages often present some curious anachronisms. A grey old church, partly buried by a hoary fat churchyard, is surrounded by the most modern of shops and stores; and a primitive little bow-windowed cottage, with a few flower pots in the window, has, perchance, a glaring gin shop next door. This is more or less the case at Moseley, and it is pretty much the same at Handsworth.

I remember when old Handsworth Church stood surrounded by fields, and now it is built up to with villas on nearly every side, and has a neighbouring liquor vault instead of the old-fashioned inn such as often keeps old parish churches in countenance and affords a place of refuge and refreshment for rustic churchwardens, bell-ringers, parish clerks, and the like.

Old Handsworth—how well I remember it—also Soho, and the remains of the old mint, associated with the honoured names of Boulton and Watt. Then there was that long straight stretch of road from the old pike at the top of Soho Hill, along which were some large and important residences, occupied by business men of Birmingham, who doubtless regarded this Handsworth and Soho district as being quite out in the country. The stretch of road to which I have just referred is now one long street, or soon will be,

reaching from the once Soho toll-gate to the New Inns, and farther on, indeed, to the park wall of Sandwell.



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Sandwell Park—ah, yes, I have a pretty distinct recollection of what that was, also the Hall, in my boyhood days. The park, or portions of it, still shews some signs of its past picturesque glories; at any rate, it is not built over after the manner of Aston. The Hall, however, scarcely now conveys an idea of the place it once was. I remember its interior when it was the residence of its noble owner and his family, and I recall the splendidly furnished rooms, the riding school, and the gardens. I remember, too, that the Lord Dartmouth of the time of which I speak was, like Mr. Gladstone, an amateur woodman. He used to like to go about with axe and saw, and do a little tree felling and branch lopping to please his fancy, and exercise his limbs and muscles. Sandwell Park, as most people know, has now been deserted for many years by its titled owner, and Sandwell Park Colliery, Limited, reigns in its stead.

But recollections of the past are making me “talky,” and, I fear, tedious. I could scribble and chatter about bygone Birmingham from now till about the end of the century, which, however, as I write, is not very far off. But, my gentle reader, you shall be spared. Most people know that Birmingham is swallowing up its immediate suburbs, and the process of deglutition is still going on. The city has had its rise, and will have its decline some day probably, but not while people want pins, pens, electro-plate, guns, dear and cheap jewellery, and while Birmingham can make these things better or sell them cheaper than other folks.

As for the centre of the city, I have already made some references to the transformations that have recently taken place. A few words may, however, be said about our modern street and shop architecture. In the important new thoroughfare, Corporation Street—the outcome of Mr. Chamberlain’s great improvement scheme—there is a curious series of shops and public buildings. Some are of one style, some of another, and many of no style at all. The architecture in this thoroughfare certainly presents plenty of variety—more variety perhaps than beauty. There are the new Assize Courts—the foundation-stone of which was laid by the Queen in 1887; they are built of brick and terra-cotta, redundant with detailed ornament, some of it perhaps of a too florid character. Near to our local Palace of Justice is the County Court, which is severe in its simplicity, quasi-classic in style, and decidedly plain in design. There are shops that have a certain suggestion and imitation of old-fashioned quaintness, and there are other buildings that have a tinge of the Scotch baronial hall style of architecture. Then there is the coffee-house Gothic, the pie-shop Perpendicular, the commercial Classic, the fender and fire-grate Transitional, the milk and cream Decorated, and various hybrid architectural styles.



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The buildings in this street have, as I have said, the charm of diversity, and that, I suppose, is something to the good. Regent Street, London, is a fine thoroughfare, but it will probably be admitted that it is anything but unmonotonous in appearance or lovely to look upon from an architectural point of view. The buildings in our grand new street may not be beyond criticism, but there are no long lines of buildings of the same heavy dull pattern from end to end. This arises from the fact that the land has not been let in big patches to capitalists or builders who might have erected a series of shops of one uniform pattern, but has been leased to tradesmen and others who have taken a few yards of land, on which they have built premises suited to their requirements, and in accordance with their aim, tastes, or the bent and ability of their architects. Hence the variety, charming or otherwise according to the taste and eye of the spectator. Anyway, we have in Birmingham a fine broad street which will, perhaps, compare favourably with any thoroughfare in any other British city, with the exception of Princes Street, Edinburgh. In the way of splendid streets the Scotch capital must be allowed to take the plum.

XI.

The fourth estate.

I cannot say how it may have been in other large cities and towns, but certainly the newspaper mortality in Birmingham during the past half century has been quite distressing. I think that without difficulty I could reckon up from twenty-five to thirty papers and journals that have been first published and last published in the period named. I do not propose to say much or to give a list of the dear departed. They were born, they struggled for existence, and they died in the effort. That is all that need be said of most of them.

There is, however, one defunct paper to which I must make a short reference, partly because I remember something about its birth and death. I refer to the *Birmingham Daily Press*, which first appeared in May, 1855. If my memory serves me, the Act of Parliament repealing the newspaper duty had not passed and become law when the *Birmingham Daily Press* appeared. Its first issues were, I believe, marked "specimen" copies, which would seem to show that the new penny paper was really published in anticipation of the passing of the Act.

Anyway, the *Birmingham Daily Press* appeared in the year mentioned, and considering that it was altogether a new venture, and that much had to be learned by experience, it was a highly creditable production. It soon made its mark, too, and became popular and largely read. And no wonder. It supplied a real want. Its contents were readable and useful, and its pages contained smart and attractive articles and papers that excited notice and were much appreciated. Mr. George Dawson was connected with the

paper. Mr. William Harris was editor, or co-editor, of it, and on its staff and among its contributors were some sharp and able writers.



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With all these merits and recommendations it will be asked, why did not the *Birmingham Daily Press* succeed? Well, I do not think I can quite answer the question. I can only say that judging by what I have observed and heard literary excellence, good reporting, and able editing will not make a paper commercially successful. If a newspaper is to succeed in paying its way and making a profit, its business management must be in experienced and competent hands. A daily newspaper is apt to be a deadly drain if its expenditure exceeds its receipts—as the daily loss has to be multiplied by six every week—and this tells up large in the course of a year.

There can be no question that the *Birmingham Daily Press* had a fine start, and a splendid chance. But the chance was not turned to the best account, and the promising start ended in a lamentable finish. This, too, in spite of the fact that the paper became really well established. Indeed, Mr. (now Sir John) Jaffray was heard to say that for a long; time the *Birmingham Daily Post*, which was started some two years or more after the *Birmingham Daily Press*, could make no impression, so firm a footing had the latter paper obtained in the town. But Messrs. Feeney and Jaffray had put their hands to the plough; they pegged away with the *Birmingham Daily Post* till it did make an impression, and the proprietors being able and experienced in the matter of newspaper business management, they stood very firm when they did begin to feel their feet. They drove the town—not from pillar to post, but from *Daily Press* to *Daily Post*. They established their position, and that position they have gone on improving unto this day.

As for the unfortunate *Daily Press*, it fell into a very serious decline, and finally expired somewhat suddenly in November, 1858. Its successful rival remarked in a not over sympathetic paragraph that “it went out like the snuff of a candle leaving behind it something of the flavour of that domestic nuisance.” I remember poor George Dawson, who had lost a good deal of money through the failure of the *Birmingham Daily Press*, thought the *Post*'s spiteful little obituary notice the unkindest cut of all. For victors to crow over the vanquished in such language he thought was worse than ungenerous, it was mean.

I will not now pause to say anything in detail concerning the *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, started in 1862, the *Daily Mail* in 1870, the *Globe* in 1879, the *Echo* in 1883, the *Times* in 1885, and the *Argus* in 1891. I must, however, just note that the most important new journalistic venture in recent years was the production of the *Birmingham Morning News*, which was started in 1871. This daily morning paper was established on lines which should have led to a permanent success. There was plenty of capital at its back.

Mr. George Dawson—whose name it was thought would be a tower of strength—took an active part in its editorial work. It had an excellent staff, and, in a journalistic sense and as a newspaper production, it was a credit to itself and to the town.



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The *Birmingham Morning News* was carried on for some four years at a very considerable loss, and just when it seemed to be about to turn the corner and get into a more profitable groove, its capitalist proprietor gave it up in disappointment and disgust. For one thing, he found it difficult to get all the influential help he wanted in the news department, and he was probably getting a little weary of putting money into a basket that seemed to have no bottom to it. Yet it was believed by those well experienced in newspaper management that another year would have seen a favourable turn in the fortunes of the paper. The costly ground baiting which is necessary in a newspaper establishment had been done, and the expensive seed which has to be sown was about to come up when the proprietor resolved to plough the paper up and so add another to the formidable list of local newspaper failures.

In the grave of the *Birmingham Morning News* were buried many hopes. The proprietor hoped to make a fortune. Mr. Dawson hoped to make an income and secure a still wider influence through its medium. Its rivals hoped it would not succeed, and by its death and burial their hopes were realised.

One little incident in connection with local journalism I must record here as being something almost unique. I refer to the astounding sketch Mr. H.J. Jennings—for many years editor of the *Birmingham Daily Mail*—wrote of himself in 1889, and the circumstances that led to its publication. After many years' connection with the *Daily Mail*, Mr. Jennings went over to another local evening paper, the *Daily Times*, and by way of giving it a fillip he published in its columns a series of papers on "Our Public Men."

That these sketches were not entirely flattering to the subjects of them will be readily understood. Mr. Jennings always was a smart, spicy, and sometimes even brilliant writer, but he could not help being more or less cynical. He rather liked to stick the toasting fork into his subjects, and then hold them pretty close to the bars of a decidedly hot fire. The result was that many of them burned and smarted under the ordeal. One of the victims went so far as to propose that this self-appointed censor of public characters should be fought with his own weapons, and have a taste of his own nasty physic. In a word it was suggested that someone should draw Mr. H.J. Jennings' portrait on his own lines after his own manner.

Mr. Jennings promptly took up the gauntlet that was thrown down and immediately proceeded to write a sketch of himself, which appeared in the *Birmingham Daily Times* of May 29th, 1889, and was, perhaps, one of the most daring and audacious feats of contemporary journalism on record. If he had entrusted his task to his most bitter enemy it could hardly have been more scathing than it was.

Mr. Jennings certainly did not blunt his steel when he proceeded to operate upon himself. He did not spare himself, but dug the knife in and turned it round. It was, indeed, a singularly curious piece of biography, written with all the pungency and point

its writer could command, and it need hardly be said that such a sketch silenced the guns of some of his foes and made something of a sensation in the town.



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This clever and amazing article was a sort of dying swan's song so far as Mr. Jennings and Birmingham were concerned. If I remember rightly, soon after its appearance he severed his professional connection with the town. He went to London and joined the staff of a financial journal. Whether he has made his own fortune or the fortunes of others by his London work I do not know and need not enquire. I will be content to record the remarkable achievement I have mentioned in connection with his Birmingham journalistic career.

One special reason why I am devoting some consideration and space to the Birmingham press is because I wish to refer to one local publication which had something to do, indirectly at least, with the making of Modern Birmingham. I allude to the *Birmingham Town Crier*. This serio-comic, satirical little paper was started in the year 1861, and was for many years a monthly publication. On its first appearance it created some stir by its original and, in some respects, unique character, also by the general smartness and humour of its contents.

When it first appeared many were the guesses made as to its promoters and contributors, and, so far as these came to my knowledge, not one proved correct. Certain quite innocent men were credited with being contributors to the new paper, and some of these did not deny the soft impeachment. The general guessing, however, ranged very wide, and included all sorts and conditions of men, from the Rev. Dr. Miller, then rector of St. Martin's, to the bellman in the Market Hall. Considering that the *Town Crier* was started with a purpose, as I shall presently show, and that it exerted some influence in its own way upon the progress of the town, it is, I think, fitting that the story of its early beginnings should be told, and I am in a position to tell the tale.

As all the first contributors of the *Town Crier* have ceased—most of them long since ceased—to have any connection with the paper, there can be no harm now in referring to its original staff, if only as a little matter of local history. I may, therefore, place it on record that the contributors to the first number of the *Town Crier*, which was published in January, 1861, were Mr. Sam Timmins, Mr. J. Thackray Bunce, Mr. G.J. Johnson, Dr. (then Mr.) Sebastian Evans, and the present writer, Thomas Anderton.

Some two or three months after its first appearance the late Mr. John Henry Chamberlain joined the staff, and a little later still Mr. William Harris became one of the "table round." With this staff the paper was carried on for many years, and with more or less success, according to the point of view from which it was considered. Being of a satirical character it, of course, often rapped certain people over the knuckles in a way they did not appreciate. They naturally resented being chaffed and held up to ridicule, but as there was nothing of a malicious or private character in the sarcasms published any little soreness they created soon died away.

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One reason why the *Town Crier* came into existence was because it was felt that there were certain things, and perhaps certain people, who could be best assailed and suppressed by ridicule. They could be laughed and chaffed rather than reasoned out of existence. Certainly the paper was not established with any idea of profit, nor for the gratification of indulging in scurrilous personal attacks. It only dealt with public affairs and with men in their public capacity. Indeed, I may say that all the men connected with the *Town Crier* at its starting were interested in the good government and progress of the town, and they used the influence of the paper for the purpose of removing stumbling blocks, and putting incompetent and pretentious persons out of the way.

As so much interest has lately been created by the descriptions given of the *Punch* dinners and the doings of the *Punch* staff, I may state that the promoters of our local *Charivari* also combined pleasant social intercourse with their journalistic functions. The monthly dinners of the *Town Crier* staff remain in my memory as being among the most delightful and genial evenings I have ever spent in my life. We met at each other's houses, and after a nice satisfying dinner we proceeded to pipes and paths of pleasantness, and to planning the contents for the next number of our paper.

Large and hearty was the hilarity at these monthly meetings, and I think I may say that the talk was interesting and smart. Mr. J.H. Chamberlain was often positively brilliant in his little sallies of speech, whilst Mr. J.T. Bunce would put in dry, sententious words of wit and wisdom. Mr. G.J. Johnson laid down the law with pungent perspicuity, and Mr. William Harris was amusingly epigrammatic. Mr. Sam Timmins on these occasions was ever ready with an apt remark, very often containing an apt quotation, and Mr. Sebastian Evans smoked and laughed much, made incisive little observations, and drew sketches on blotting paper.

As we were all more or less interested in or concerned with the most important matters that were then going on in the town, there was much to be said that was worth saying and hearing. Even in the wheels that were within wheels some of the *Town Crier* men had spokes. A bank could not break without some of us being concerned in the smash, and I remember to my sorrow that when the Birmingham Banking Company came to grief I was an unfortunate shareholder.

I do not think it necessary to say much more concerning the early days of the publication in question. Its first promoters became busy, and, in some cases, important men as time went on, and gradually they had to give up their connection with a periodical whose pages for some years they had done so much to enliven and adorn. The *Town Crier*, I think it will be admitted, did good work in its own peculiar way, and those who remain of its early promoters (and the small number has been thinned by the death of Mr. J.H. Chamberlain and Mr. J.T. Bunce) need not be ashamed to speak with the enemy at the gate—I mean, to own their former connection with a publication which was not regarded as being discreditable to its contributors, or to the town.



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One matter in connection with the publication of the *Town Crier* may be mentioned as being curious, and perhaps a little surprising. It is this: that during the many years that the paper was conducted by its original promoters it steered clear of libel actions. In only one case was an action even threatened, and this was disposed of by an accepted little explanation and apology. We often used to hear rumours that Alderman, Councillor, or Mr. Somebody intended wreaking vengeance upon writers who had belaboured or ridiculed him; but these threats ended in nothing, and the first proprietors of the *Town Crier* never had to pay even a farthing damages as the result of law proceedings. This is something to record, because papers of a satirical character necessarily sail pretty close to the wind in the way of provoking touchy people to fly to law to soothe their wounded feelings and pay out their supposed persecutors.

I confess I often used to shiver slightly in my shoes when I considered the possible consequences of what I myself and others had written in the *Town Crier*. The law of libel is a wide-spreading net, anything that brings a man into ridicule or contempt or damages him in his trade or profession being libellous. To criticize adversely a painter, actor, or singer is necessarily damaging, and is really a libel, but to sustain an action real damage must be proved, or it must be shown that malice and ill-will have prompted the objectionable adverse opinions. But, as we know, there are certain pettifogging men of law who are ever ready to encourage people to bring actions for libel for the mere sake of getting damages. I believe I have thus stated the case correctly, but I am not a "limb of the law," not even an amputated limb, or a law student. I speak from what I have seen in the Libel Acts and in the judgments I have read. Having been one of the Press gang for many years, I have never thought my liberties quite safe, and have often felt that any day I might be brought up to the bar for judgment. But I escaped, even when I was writing for the *Town Crier*, and have escaped since. But let me not boast. Before these lines are read my ordinary clothes may be required of me.

On the shelves of my small library are some bound volumes of the early numbers of the *Birmingham Town Crier*, in which are some pencil marks. If I should sooner or later have to retire to live *en pension* at Winson Green, or at the Bromsgrove or other Union, I hope to be able to take these cherished books with me to look at from time to time, and to keep green my memory of past pleasant days.

XII.

ITS VARIED AND ODD TRADES.



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If some outside people were asked to name in three lines the three chief trades of Birmingham they would probably answer by saying "Guns," "Hardware," and then, perhaps rather puzzled, might add "more guns." This, however, would be a very bald and incomplete reply, and would denote a somewhat benighted idea of the productive resources of Birmingham. Gun and pistol making form a very important industry in the city, and one ward—St. Mary's—is the happy hunting ground of small firearm makers. All the same, gunmaking is not the be-all and end-all of our manufacturing activity, and is, indeed, only one of the many and increasing trades that thrive and progress in the midland hardware capital.

It is, indeed, a distinct advantage for Birmingham that it has many different trades, and if some are depressed and slack others may be active and prosperous. Hence, there is generally business doing somewhere. It is the misfortune of some towns and districts to be devoted entirely to one or two industries. For instance, take Manchester. If the cotton trade becomes depressed or paralysed Cottonopolis soon becomes a starved-out city. Then there are textile towns, boot and shoe boroughs, pottery districts, &c., &c. Birmingham, however, is pretty smart at taking up new ideas, and does not let new manufacturing industries go begging for a home. A certain number of trades languish and die out owing to change of fashion and to certain articles becoming obsolete. Snuffers and powder flasks, for instance, are not in large demand in the present day. A limited number are still made for travellers and for remote countries that have not cartridges, the electric light, or even incandescent gas, within their reach.

Brass and pearl button making used to be important industries, and tons of such wares used to be made in Birmingham in the course of a month. Comparatively few are made now. Yet we are not exactly "buttonless black-guards," as Cobbett—at least, I think it was Cobbett—once disrespectfully called the Quakers, and buttons of various kinds other than pearl and brass are turned out in barrow loads. I remember some years ago going over the button factory of Messrs. Dain, Watts, and Manton, an old-established business now carried on by Mr. J.S. Manton, and was then shown a curious composition or kind of paste that could be made into buttons useful for all sorts of purposes. On my asking what the "button dough" was made of, Mr. Manton, I remember, gave me the comprehensive reply, "anything."

All sorts of stuff having any substance in it was indeed thrown into a kind of mortar, ground up, mixed with something that gave the mass cohesion and plasticity, then moulded into buttons as clay is moulded by the potter, and burned, dried, and hardened. Therefore, if brass and pearl buttons are in limited demand, there are other materials from which a new useful and cheap article can be made—the "very button" for the time—and this is produced in much larger quantities than the more costly articles of a few generations ago.



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In spite, then, of changes in fashion, Birmingham is still—I will not say a button hole, but a city where billions of buttons are made. Witness, for instance, the turn-out of such a manufactory as that of Thomas Carlyle, Limited. Here is a great and extended concern grafted upon an old-established business, and which at the present time gives employment, regularly, to over 1,000 hands. Buttons are made to go to all people, save the rude and nude races, and a few odd millions produced for home use. And speaking of all this reminds me how in the days of my boyhood I sometimes saw a queer character known as “Billy Button.” He was a sight to behold, for he was decorated with buttons, mostly brass, from top to toe, and presented a sight that was enough to make a thoroughbred quaker swoon.

Birmingham, as I have remarked, is sufficiently enterprising not to let opportunities slip through its fingers. Its trades are still increasing, and increasing in number and variety, and though there is a tendency in some of the big industries that do a large foreign trade to get nearer to the sea-board, there are those who are sanguine enough to believe that the number of our works and our workpeople will increase and multiply till the large supplies of water that are to be conducted to us from Mid-Wales will be none too copious for the great unwashed and other inhabitants of our city a few years hence.

Referring again to outsiders and their ideas of Birmingham trades, when visitors—distinguished or otherwise—come to see our factories there are two that they generally begin and often end with—namely, Mr. Joseph Gillott’s pen manufactory and the electro-plate works of Messrs. Elkington. Of late years the Birmingham Small Arms establishment at Small Heath has gained attention and made a good third to our show industries.

Visitors to Messrs. Elkington’s are, of course, largely attracted by the artistic contents and triumphs of the famous Newhall Street show rooms. The name of the Elkington firm has a world-wide fame, and their splendid artistic achievements may almost be said to be epoch-making in the way of combining utility with beautiful design to the highest degree. Those, however, who fancy that Messrs. Elkington’s great and extending manufactory is kept going by designing and producing splendid vases, shields, cups, and sumptuous gold and silver services, are, of course, hugely mistaken. The ordinary spoons, forks, &c., that are to be seen—I won’t say on every table, but on the tables of millions of people, are the staple productions of such firms as that of which I speak. Indeed, if I could probe into the secret chambers of Messrs. Elkington’s back safe, I should probably find that the production of those exquisite artistic articles of theirs has not been the department of their business that has brought the greatest grist to the mill and made a commercial success of their trade.



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Those visitors to Elkington's who penetrate beyond the show rooms will find much to interest, and in some cases to mystify them. Electro-plating is indeed almost a magical sort of craft. How it is that dirty looking metal spoons can be put into a dirty looking bath and come out white and silvered must amaze and bewilder many strange eyes. Impassive as Asiatics can be, I should much like for once just to watch the eyes of an eastern conjuror and magician when he saw the electro bath trick, and especially when done in the way and on the scale that may be witnessed at the Birmingham Newhall Street works.

With regard to Mr. Joseph Gillott's pen manufactory it is a very interesting show place, but is practical and prosaic compared with the art electro-plate establishment I have just now referred to. Those, however, who like to see processes, and something going on quickly from stage to stage, find Mr. Gillott's factory a place of almost fascinating interest. They can, indeed, observe the steel pen emerge from its native metal, see it pressed and stamped, and again pressed and stamped, slitted, annealed, coloured, and finally boxed and packed. They can also see the penholders produced and inhale the sweet and pungent fragrance of cedar wood, and they can look on the production of the pen boxes which are made in so many attractively coloured varieties.

All this is to be seen in the course of a little march through Mr. Gillott's factory, which is, indeed, a pattern of order and cleanliness, and so well conducted as to be almost like a real adult school of industry. Female labour is largely employed—as is customary in the pen trade—the nimble fingers and deft hands of many girls finding useful employment, without fatiguing labour, in the various processes of the pen-making business.

Pen-making is, of course, a great industry, but there are pens and pens, and for some of the lower qualities the trade price is of incredible cheapness. I sometimes think that if an enterprising merchant were to try and place an order for a million gross of steel pens at 1d. per gross, and 75 per cent. discount for cash, he would succeed in doing it. The quantity it is that pays.

The pleasure and interest of going over Mr. Gillott's establishment is enhanced by the fact that visitors see the popular pens of commerce and the aristocratic pens of what Jeames calls the "upper suckles" made, so to speak, side by side. The Graham Street works could not be kept going by merely making dainty gold pens, fine long barrelled goose quills, and other such superior productions. The everyday person must be considered and supplied with everyday pens, and the everyday person, although he buys cheap pens, is a more profitable customer than he looks.

A well-known mustard maker has been known to say that he makes his profit out of what people leave on their plates. In other words, the everyday waste of people vastly increases mustard consumption. In the same way the everyday pen is so cheap that it is not used with care and economy. It is lightly thrown aside often before it is half worn,

and is often objurgated and wasted because it is dipped into bad ink. But what does it matter when you can get a gross of pens for just a few pence.

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One more little remark about the Graham Street works and I have done. I take leave to doubt if Mr. Joseph Gillott turns out any of the very cheapest and commonest pens, but I feel pretty certain that he makes the best and most costly productions of their kind. There are still very many people at home and abroad—especially Americans—who do not like to put a little common, “vulgar” pen on their writing tables. They prefer to see something more superior in style and finish. On such pens as these will generally be seen the name of Mr. Joseph Gillott. There are, of course, other makers of good steel pens in Birmingham, but their places are not so much visited or their productions so widely known as the pens of Graham Street works.

A few years ago Birmingham penmakers, as well as others, were disposed to be rather terrified at the advent of the typewriter, and fancied in their sable moments that the steel pen would sooner or later be superseded. They are not now so dismayed as they were, and I hardly think they need be. The electric light has not put out gas; in spite of railway engines I still see a few horses about sometimes; and even motor cars and the like will not at present run locomotive engines off the line. I, therefore, think that makers of fine points, broad points, medium points, &c., may rest securely in their pens, notwithstanding a Yost of typewriters, Remington, or what not.

Few people outside our own borders quite realise, perhaps, what a large and important industry the jewellery trade is in Birmingham. Yet one quarter of the city—the Hockley district—is chiefly devoted to what cynical people call the production of baubles. If anyone doubts the extent to which the jewellery trade is carried on, and the number of hands engaged in it, let him station himself somewhere Hockley way at the hour of one o’clock in the day, and he will see for himself.

No sooner has the welcome sound of the tocsin been heard—almost indeed before it has time to sound—hundreds, aye thousands of men emerge from their workshops, and for a time quite throng streets that just before the magic hour of one p.m. were comparatively quiet and empty.

Curiously enough these working jewellers seem to come from hidden and obscure regions, and appear in the open from their industrial cells through many small doors and entries, rather than through large gateways which are opened at certain regulation hours.

The jewellery trade is not carried out in large factories with tall, towering stacks, powerful steam engines, &c. Machinery may be used in certain branches of the trade for all I know, but, speaking generally, working jewellers sit at their bench, play their blow-pipe, and with delicate appliances and deft hands put together the precious articles of fancy they make.

Handsome locketts are not turned in a lathe. Diamond and ruby rings are not productions that are run through a machine and sold by the gross, “subject.” Nor are



jewelled pendants made in presses, nor beautiful bracelets banged into shape by the mechanical thump of a stamping machine. The consequence is that jewellery work of the finest fashion is made in small establishments, but as I have said there are so many of these that the “turn-out” in the way of “hands” is a formidable element in our local population.

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It is, we know, an ancient saw that tells us that two of a trade cannot agree, but it has always struck me that jewellers belie this generally accepted maxim. I came to this conclusion from knowing and visiting a colony of goldfinches—I mean master jewellers, who are quite civil to each other, will sit at meat and drink together, go to the same place of worship, and generally behave as friends, neighbours, and Christians.

How it was that these employer blow-pipers could maintain and assume such a benign and almost brotherly attitude towards each other was a little puzzling to me till I thought the matter out. Jewellers they might all be, but they did not all jewel alike. They rowed in the same boat, but not with the same sculls—to use Jerrold's old joke, They blew the same pipe, but played different tunes. In a word they produced different varieties of jewellery, and consequently did not cut each other's throats in competition. One would chiefly make chains, another lockets and pendants, a third studs and sleeve links, a fourth rings, a fifth bracelets and brooches, and another miscellaneous high-class productions, including mayoral chains, &c., &c. Under these circumstances the two or three of a trade to whom I have referred have been able to agree, and will be able to maintain good fellowship till such times as some largely enterprising bold blow-piper forms himself into a large syndicate, resolves to make everything himself, and crush down all competition. But that time is not yet.

In speaking of the jewellery trade in Birmingham, I think I am safe in saying that at any rate until recently the town, now a city, has not enjoyed full credit for the high-class work it produces. For a long time it was regarded as the workshop of cheap "sham" jewellery, and that if you wanted really good things you must go to London and buy in the marts of New Bond Street.

If any such heathen now exist, and I suspect they do, they would be rather surprised if they knew how much London sold jewellery is made in Birmingham. Purchasers have the pleasure of buying in Bond Street, and of having bracelets, bangles, rings and lockets put in cases with a well-known West-end firm's name on it, and that is something of which they are proud, and for which they are willing to pay. And they do have to pay. In proof of which I will tell a true story. Some years ago I knew a Birmingham manufacturing jeweller whose line was gold and silver pencil cases. I was looking over his show cases one day when he picked up a small good pencil case suitable to put on a lady's chain. My friend told me that his trade price for this article was 3s. 6d., and he had seen it marked—his own make—18s. in Regent Street shops. I have known of others in the fancy trades tell a similar story.

For instance, a manufacturer once told me that he had made gold ware for the Royal table, but not directly. His order came from a West-end house and his name was to be altogether suppressed.

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In some preceding remarks I referred to cheap sham jewellery. There is a very considerable amount of it made in Birmingham, and “gilt jewellery” is the name by which it is known. Respecting this trade and its productions I can, perhaps, tell a few of my readers something that may rather surprise them. Not many years ago I wished to see and purchase some of this gilt jewellery in order to make gay and glorious a Christmas tree—Heaven forbid, of course, that my friends or myself should adorn ourselves with such baubles.

I went to a manufacturer of these wares to make my purchases, and hoped to buy cheaply. And I did; at a price indeed that rather astonished me. For instance, I was shown some brilliant looking brooches of good design and finish, and sparkling with diamonds, emeralds, sapphires, rubies, of rich lustre—or, I should say, imitations of these precious stones. I looked at these handsome productions and thought a good price would be asked for them. I was, as I have hinted however, rather more than astonished to find that I could make a very good selection at from 15s. to 18s. per dozen.

Just fancy, these brilliant brooches adorned with gems of purest ray serene—that is, to the naked, unexpert eye—well-fashioned in the matter of workmanship, and looking of, at least, eighteen carat gold, and yet they could be purchased at the rate of from fifteen to eighteen pence each. What, however, staggered me still more was to find that there was a lower deep still in the matter of price. On my venturing to remark to the warehouse-man who showed me the articles mentioned, that I supposed they were the very cheapest things in the trade, he remarked, “Oh dear no, we don’t do anything in the cheap stuff line. If you want that you must go to Messrs. So-and-So, in Blank Street.”

I went to the cheap firm he named in Blank Street, and there sure enough found cheap stuff and no mistake. Brooches and locketts at 12s. a dozen and even less, and handsome watch chains at the rate of about 10d. each. I must add, however, that the makers would not dispose of less than a dozen of each article shewn. Perhaps they could hardly be expected to sell retail at such prices as I have named.

Having obtained the “Open Sesame” to the jewelled caves or warehouses of the gilt jewellers I came away loaded with gems, and my purse but very little lighter. So well indeed did some of my purchases look when I got them home that I could not see much difference between them and the real articles. Consequently, when I now see fair ladies gaily bedecked with a superfluity of handsome lustrous trinkets I think of the gilt jewellery trade, and brooches at 15s. per dozen, less a discount doubtless to the trade.



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Leaving, now, the gold and gilt jewellery trades, which, as I have said, form a large industry in our midst, let me just briefly refer to some of the odd trades that are carried on in Birmingham. Among these I will first of all mention the manufacture of ship Logs, because it seems somewhat curious that an insular place like Birmingham, whose only suggestion of maritime operations is the canal, should produce Logs—that is, cunningly devised instruments for ascertaining the speed of ships. Yet if I go to north country ports, such as Leith, and if I go south to Dover, or west to Cardiff, I see the “Cherub,” the “Harpoon,” and other Logs made by the firm of T. Walker and Sons, Oxford Street, Birmingham. As I have said, it seems a little strange, if not funny, that Birmingham should produce ship appliances. Nevertheless, the present Mr. T.F. Walker, and his father before him, have been making and improving ship Logs till their trade name is known and their productions seen in every port of significance here in Britain and abroad as well.

A city, however, that produces Artificial Human Eyes may see its way to make anything; consequently, all sorts of diverse things are produced in Birmingham, from coffin furniture to custard powder, vices to vinegar, candles to cocoa, blue bricks to bird cages, handcuffs to horse collars, anvils to hat bands, soap to sardine openers, &c., &c., &c.

There are also in Birmingham certain trades that without being large industries have taken fixed root in the locality. For instance, there is the glass trade, which employs a good few men, and, perhaps, it used to employ more. On this point I am not certain, but I do know that one large glass manufactory that existed in my younger days—namely, that of Rice Harris, which stood near where now stands the Children’s Hospital, Broad Street—was disestablished many years ago.

If I remember rightly Rice Harris’s glass works had one of those large old-fashioned brick domes that I fancy are not constructed nowadays. One or two, however, still remain, and I for one feel glad that Messrs. Walsh and Co., of Soho, allow their dome to stand where it did, just as a landmark and to remind me of pleasant bygone days.

I confess, too, that I like to go into one of these big glass hives, or rather glass-making hives, and see the workmen at their “chairs” blowing and moulding the hot ductile glass into its appointed form and patterns; and I like also to see the curling wreaths of smoke ascend and disappear through the orifice at the top of the dome. And when I look at this I wonder how that huge chimney is cleaned, and where the Titanic sweep is that could undertake such a gigantic job. Well, I can hardly say I wonder, because I think I have been told that the way the soot is cleaned from these well-smoked domes is by firing shot at the roof, which brings down the dirt.



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When in the winter season I see skates prominently exposed for sale in our shop windows I am reminded of another of the odd or rather side industries of Birmingham. I refer to the steel toy trade. The word toy seems appropriate enough when applied to skates and quoits, but seems a curious word to designate such articles of distinct utility as hammers, pincers, turnscrews, pliers, saws, and chisels, yet these articles and many others of a similar kind are included in the words "steel toys." This steel toy trade, if not a great industry in Birmingham, is an old-established one, and has been carried on for years by good well-known local names, such as Richard Timmins and Sons, Messrs. Wynn and Co., and others.

XIII.

NEW AND OLD STYLE TRADING.

In an earlier part of these chapters I referred to the new style of shopkeeping that has developed in Birmingham with the growing size and importance of the town and city. I now return to the subject again for the purpose of showing that although Birmingham seems to be much to the fore in the matter of up-to-time shopkeeping, there are still a limited number of traders and shopkeepers who keep pretty much to the old lines, and evidently desire to carry on their businesses in the way that their fathers did before them.

And in touching this question it is worth while considering for a moment how differently two men or two firms in the same trade will carry on their businesses, and yet both succeed. To put it more plainly, one firm will bombard the public with "fetching" advertisements, and get business, so to speak, at the bayonet's point. Another firm in the same line of trade lays siege to its customers in a quiet, systematic way, does its best to prevent any sorties in the direction of rival camps, and is content to keep its connection well guarded and do business in a quiet, undemonstrative way.

Of course the man who goes in for publicity—wide publicity—and assaults the public with "loud" advertisements in all directions, drives the roaring trade, or the trade that roars loudest. He gets larger returns, and if his business is well managed he should secure larger profits. Beside these trade Dives's the humble, quiet, unostentatious Lazarus seems quite out in the cold. Not so, however. The latter picks up some good crumbs, if not some pretty substantial crusts, which he puts into his wallet with a gentle, unostentatious satisfaction which quite contents him.

I could give chapter and verse for what I am now saying, and without hesitation or difficulty could name two firms in Birmingham that are carrying on the same trade, making the same everyday articles of consumption; yet, while the name of one firm is in everybody's mouth and is known to the ends of the earth, the name of the other is hardly ever seen save upon the productions they turn out. Yet I know for a fact that this

latter firm make some nice solid profits out of their quiet business, though nothing perhaps at all comparable with their more enterprising rival. It is a case of thousands in one case and tens of thousands probably in the other. But enterprise should, of course, bring its own reward.



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I fear I have indulged in a rather full-blown parenthesis, but it was somewhat necessary before going into certain details concerning the two utterly opposed modes of trading and their exemplifications in Birmingham. As I have mentioned before, we have in recent years seen the rise and development of huge establishments and trading concerns that deal in anything and everything. Cutting and competition have gone on till there is nothing left to cut, or no weapon left that is sharp enough to cut finer. The results of all this has been the whittling away of a good many old-fashioned shops and traders; but they are not all gone, and some long—established businesses still survive and prosper in our midst.

I will just mention one or two. If the reader of these lines will walk down the Lower Priory, which leads out of the Old Square—or what was the Old Square—he will see at the bottom of the said Lower Priory, on the right hand side, a sedate and solid brick building. He will see a brass knocker on the door and a brass plate bearing the name of Smallwood and Sons—“only this, and nothing more.” This is the business house of the oldest firm of wine merchants in Birmingham, and I believe that these premises in the Lower Priory have been in the possession of the Smallwood family since the days of the Commonwealth; and, further, that the present active members of the firm are the fifth and sixth generation of Smallwood and Sons, wine merchants. There is no big shop window full of bottles of cheap heterogeneous wines and spirits. It might be the house of some good old doctor, or the office and home of some ripe old lawyer. If you step inside the office, you see few signs of Bacchus or his bowl, but you do see some antiquated rooms, some quaint furniture, and a nice dry, well-seasoned appearance that denotes age. There are full and capacious cellars on the premises of course—cellars containing a sort of well in which the books of the firm were buried at the time of the Birmingham riots; but, so far as outward appearance is concerned, Sir Wilfrid Lawson or the top Major-Domo of the Band of Hope might pass by the lintels of the doorway in Lower Priory without a sigh. With regard to Messrs. Smallwood’s cellars, their subterranean premises are honeycombed with catacombs containing the remains of some grand old spirits and big bins of choice vintage and various other wines.

It might be thought that such a very unbusiness-looking place would be quietly draining away, especially in face of the flaring competition in the wine and spirit trade. I am, however, glad to think and know that such old-established houses as Smallwood and Sons can bear up against the levelling down processes that characterise the more pushing branches of the wine and spirit trade. There are still a fair number of people who like to buy their wine from dealers who seem to have inherited certain trade instincts and experiences, and who can be relied upon to supply what they know to be good wines and spirits, such as can be consumed with pleasure and taken without risk. We do not all yet care for Chancellor claret, Hamburg sherry, petroleum champagne, and Dudley port, sometimes called “Bilston pit drink.”



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Bottled red ink and cider champagne does not suit the taste of those who have a taste worth owning. They prefer to pay a fair price to have a good article, and they consequently go to old firms who are experts in their business.

The most serious form of competition that knocks the legitimate liquor trader on the head is the grocer wine and spirit selling. It may be very convenient to the public to be able to buy a bottle of wine or whisky when they are buying their groceries, but this convenience has been purchased, I fear, at a cost that is not pleasant to consider. I fear it would not be difficult to prove that female home-drinking has been fostered by the grocers' wine and spirit licences. This is a serious matter to contemplate, and if I were a zealous temperance advocate I should strive to get those grocers' licences wiped out.

Besides offering facilities that are calculated to encourage secret home-drinking the grocers' licences operate in another way that is not exactly conducive to morality or integrity. I will explain what I mean. At Cambridge I knew an undergraduate who had a somewhat parsimonious pater. The latter limited his son's allowance, and scrutinized his bills pretty closely. But my Verdant Green circumvented the supervision of his male parent by the opportunities offered by the grocers' shops. Although my undergraduate friend was, I knew, kept pretty "short" in the matter of cash supplies, I noticed that he never seemed short of strong drink. He let the cat out of the bag—or let me say the cork out of the bottle—when one day he innocently remarked to me, "I get all my liquor from the grocer's; the governor never looks much at the grocer's account."

Leaving the question of wines and spirits, I can illustrate my preference for dealing with men who "know you know" what they are selling, and are, indeed, experts in their trades. Although I am not a good or bad Templar, nor yet a small brass Band of Hope, I confess to a large weakness for tea—good, nice, well-flavoured tea. I have, however, found it somewhat difficult to obtain. Occasionally I taste it at the houses of friends who buy their tea in chests at a time; but as for getting such tea at the usual grocers' shops I have found it difficult, if not impossible. Yet I have been willing to pay up to get some real prime Souchong, Assam, Orange Pekoe, or what not. I do not expect to get a one and twopenny tea with a fine two and ninepenny flavour. Bather recently I have paid 3s. 6d. a pound to get my little luxury; moreover, I tried many and various shops, but all more or less in vain. At last, however, I found salvation by going to a house—a retail shop indeed—that dealt in scarcely anything else but tea. And I now get tea full of delicious fragrance and flavour. It breathes such a splendid aroma before it is tasted that it almost seems a sin to drink it. When, however, I do taste a well-made cup of this infusion I am so happy and benign that (to paraphrase some words of the late Bishop of Oxford) my own wife might play with me.



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I fear, however, I am getting rather rhapsodical on this question of tea. There are other —what I will call specialist old-style—traders besides those in the teetotal and unteetotal line to which I wish to refer. But these must be reserved for another chapter.

XIV.

OLD-ESTABLISHED SHOPS.

Considering the pace at which Birmingham moved forward during the latter half of the nineteenth century, it is not, perhaps, surprising that few shops and houses of old date are now to be seen in the chief centre streets of the city. A few, however, remain to remind us that Birmingham was not built yesterday, and that it has a respectable past, and is not a place of that mushroom growth which comes into existence in a night.

Chief among the old order of retail trading establishments still flourishing in our midst I may particularly mention the shop of Mr. William Pearsall, silversmith, &c. As many of my readers are aware, it is situated in High Street, opposite the end of New Street, and is conspicuous for its pretty—I had almost said petite—quaintness and its genuine old-time appearance and origin. There are the small bow windows, the little panes of glass, that are so suggestive of the architecture of a century ago, and outside the shop everything bespeaks a past which was not exactly of yesterday.

This great-grandfather shop, so to speak, has, indeed, been established for more than a century, and when the present proprietor first went to the business the trade done was chiefly in silver and silver made goods, whereas now it is largely in electro plate, in jewellery, cutlery, &c. The proprietor, indeed, like others in his position, has found himself obliged to keep in step with the times or go under. He has preferred the former course, but without abandoning what I may call the antique department of his business.

It is, indeed, a most attractive kind of shop, especially for ladies of a matured taste and mind who like to see pretty things, some of which have a quaint charm which is often especially dear to the feminine soul. I can fancy ladies going there and spending a right down happy time in looking at the dainty specimens of antique silver, and also the modern reproductions of old patterns in electro plate. I can, indeed, by a stretch of the imagination picture in my mind ladies who will go and look at many things at such a shop, admire all, and buy none.

Indeed, I do not know that I should mind indulging in this little luxury myself, but, being of the masculine order of creation, I, perhaps, hardly like to spend hours in a shop and leave the shopkeeper with the cold comfort of a promise that I will “think about it.” Quaint and inviting shops, however, stocked with articles that form a little exhibition in themselves must pay the penalty of their attractiveness, and possibly the proprietors have no objection.



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It goes, of course, without saying that a business that has been carried on for over a century has seen great changes in regard to custom and customers. Consequently, it is not surprising to learn that wealthy iron-masters, the country gentry, and prosperous farmers no longer make the purchases of silver and fancy wares they did in the days that are no more. Black country magnates have discovered they can now do without many solid silver services, and even fairly well-to-do rural people find they can at a pinch put up with electro plate.

I confess I like to look at the bijou shop in High Street and think what it must have seen and heard in its time. It must have heard the bells of St. Martin's toll for the death of Nelson and ring out joyous peals after Waterloo. It must have seen disorderly crowds march past its doors at the time of the Birmingham riots; more than this, it felt something of the lawlessness that prevailed, since the shop was looted and some of its contents carried off by the rioters.

Yes, as I have said, it must have heard some pealing and tolling of the St. Martin's Church bells—and what charmingly mellifluous and melodious bells they are! I do not profess to be a campanologist or a bell hunter, but I have a loving ear for a sweet-toned church bell, and can think of few belfries whose contents surpass St. Martin's, Birmingham. Although I have not heard the "Bells of Shandon" immortalised by Father Prout, I have, however, heard Great Tom of Lincoln. I have listened to the "bonny Christ Church bells" of Oxford, and my ears have dwelt upon the sweet jinglings of the Carrillion at Antwerp and in other Flemish cities. I have also heard the dulcet chimings of many village church bells in various parts of the land, and I have listened with undelight to the unmusical tones of Big Ben of Westminster, but so far as mellow tone is concerned, I rarely hear any ordinary church bells that are more dulcet and harmonious than the bells of St. Martin's, Birmingham.

Few people heed their beauties I am afraid; indeed, some singularly insensible residents and traders in the neighbourhood have been known to protest against the charming chimings of the bells of St. Martin's. Those, however, who want to hear the true musical quality and tone of these bells must select a quiet time, as the Bull Ring is not a particularly peaceful spot in the busy hours of day. Midnight is the witching hour that should be chosen to listen to the music of St. Martin's belfry. It may be a late and inconvenient hour for the experiment, but it is worth it—if the bells still chime at that "ghostly" hour.

I am afraid I have indulged in a somewhat extensive parenthesis, but my pen has run away with me, and now it must come back to the old-fashioned High Street shop where I lingered a few paragraphs back. The adjoining premises to Mr. Pearsall's, on the east side, are also old and well in years. They have been altered and provided with a modern "dickey"—I should say, front—which rather hides their antiquity. There is, however, still conspicuous a quaint and curious spout-head which bears the date 1687, showing that these premises have more than passed their bicentenary.



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The only little old-date shop in the heart of Birmingham that, till recently, rivalled the "silver-smithy" I have described in High Street, was a saddler's at the top of New Street, which nestled under the shadow of Christ Church. It had the old-style small bow windows, the low roof, and the circumscribed area of old-fashioned shops. The ancient saddler who formerly tenanted it had not enough space to crack a whip, let alone swing a cat in. In past days, however, business was carried on under "limited" principles, but chiefly limited as to extent and space.

When walking about Birmingham, archaeological observers should look up if they wish to see and note any traces of age and antiquity. The lower portions of old premises have often been so enlarged and modernized that they give no sign of the real date of the buildings. In Bull Street, for instance, there are narrow old style windows that are very suggestive of a bygone day. But these are becoming few and far between, and will doubtless soon be seen no more.

Old-fashioned shops naturally suggest new and old-style shopkeeping. In a recent chapter I alluded to some long-established trading houses in Birmingham that within certain limits carry on their trade in a manner that differs from the very modern and obtrusively pressing fashion which is so much the custom of the day. Something of the same kind may be said of shops, as I generally remarked in my earlier observations. But to descend more into detail, there are still among its at any rate a limited number of shopkeepers who like to do their business on good, safe, and steady lines, and keep together a nice respectable connection by upholding the dependable quality of their wares. Some of these shopkeepers do not make much of an outward show, but I have reason to know that many of them in a quiet undemonstrative manner do a snug and prosperous trade without fuss or display.

I will just briefly particularize. Opposite King Edward's School in New Street is a quiet, unostentatious-looking tobacconist's shop. The window plate bears the name of Evans, and in the window is a modest show of smoking wares and materials. If you step inside the shop, it is comparatively calm and quiet. You do not see young men sitting about smoking, chatting, and joking with girls across the counter. There is no constant succession of customers coming in and out and buying their ounces and half ounces of "Returns," "Bird's Eye," "Shag," and "Old Virginia." Yet an evident perfume of tobacco and prosperity seems to pervade the shop, but no sign of the Tom, Dick, and Henry sort of trade that is done by more ostentatious modern traders. It is, I believe, a case of half a century's trading in good tobacco stuffs having established a connection among those who like good tobacco, will pay a proper price for it, and deal where they can get it.



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These remarks apply more or less to a jewellery, watch and clock shop next door, kept for many years by Mr. L.N. Hobday. Here again there is a look of quality rather than mere quantity. There is no ticketed crowded display of wares, but the look of the shop inspires a feeling of confidence and an assurance that the quality of what you purchase may be relied upon. I am not in the secrets of the proprietor of this establishment, and have no interest in it beyond being an occasional small customer, yet I should not wonder if he does not do a nice, steady, quiet trade among those who have found out the advantages of dealing with a trader who personally understands his business, and will give them good value for their money.

There are, as I have hinted, other shops that prefer adhering to well-established lines of business, rather than up-to-dating their trade past all recognition. There are a few drapers still left, who, like Turner, Son, and Nephew, do not go in for a general all round-my-hat sort of business, but who restrict themselves within certain limited lines and on them keep up a well-established connection. There are, however, others who prefer a more pushing, store-competing, Whiteley-emulating style of trade. They follow their bent and probably make it pay. It is, of course, well that we should have traders of all kinds to minister to the requirements of a large and varied community. For myself, however, I am glad that there are still some shopkeeper specialists left who limit themselves to dealing in such things as they understand, and know what they buy, and sell that they know.

XV.

SOME PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS.

Though reminiscences and recollections are rather overdone in these days, I may, perhaps, be permitted a few personal reflections in bringing my chapters to a close. And I shall not write a long, tedious tale, and why? Because, like the needy knife-grinder, I have no story to tell. Happy, we are told, is the country that has no history, and, if this is so, happy should be the man who is not burdened with too many reminiscences.

Still, there are just a few memories that I should like to jot down, which may, or may not, be of interest to my readers. Authors, I fancy, often write as much to gratify themselves as to please other people. I cannot boast that I have been personally intimate with many distinguished people. I have never been to Court, and, consequently, I am, according to Shakspeare's clown, emphatically "damned." I have known some few titled people, and have even sat at meat with a Duke in his palatial home, and did not fail to notice that his Grace was very easy and human in his tastes and manners, and was not above taking a glass of port wine with his cheese. I have just occasionally shaken hands with a lord of high degree, and even with a belted earl, but I am not of the Upper Ten, and am quite outside the gilded gate that encloses the noble of the land. I have

seen few people that were particularly worth seeing, that is, for book-writing purposes, but I will take leave to reconnoitre in my memory those I have beheld in Birmingham during the course of my uneventful career.



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I may, perhaps, preface my observations with the paradoxical remark that the first great celebrity I ever saw I just missed seeing. This was Louis Kossuth. I was only a small boy when the great Hungarian patriot visited Birmingham in the year 1851. Hearing so much talk about Kossuth I naturally burned with a desire to see him. When the eventful day of his visit came I secured a very good position at the top of Paradise Street, and fancied I was going to have a fine view of the distinguished Hungarian and the procession that accompanied him. I waited patiently for some hours, then I heard the sound of music in the distance, and then the roar and cheers of many voices. They grew louder and louder; then came the surging wave of a great crowd of people. For a brief time I was quite submerged, and when I recovered my position the procession and the patriot were past and gone.

I remember the visit to Birmingham of the Prince Consort in 1855 to lay the foundation stone of the Birmingham and Midland Institute.

I saw his Royal Highness well and truly lay the said stone, and I afterwards saw him in the Town Hall, where he was entertained at luncheon. I have a very distinct recollection of the occasion even now, and I call to mind in particular that the Prince wore a pair of light grey trousers and a swallow-tail, that is, a dress-coat. We should think this a strange costume for a gentleman at a morning function in these days, but times have changed, and the dress coat is now never seen in the morning, and not so much at night as it used to be.

Of course I remember the Queen's visit to Birmingham in 1858, for the purpose of opening Aston Park, the "People's Park," as it was proudly called. There was a deal of effervescent talk about this noble project. The People, with a capital P, were going to buy the park for the People, with the money of the People. The scheme succeeded save in the matter of getting the funds. The People approved of the project, the People shouted themselves hoarse when her Majesty came to put the finishing touch to the noble undertaking, but, unfortunately, the great People failed to find the money necessary to carry out the grand undertaking, and the Municipality had to pay up to complete the purchase.

It is still going back a long time, but I distinctly recall the visit of Lord Brougham to Birmingham in 1857, when as president he delivered the inaugural address at the opening meeting of the newly-born Association for the Promotion of Social Science. I remember the Town Hall was completely filled, and much interest was felt in the appearance of Lord Brougham on the occasion. When he took his place on the platform there was some little disturbance and confusion among the audience. This promptly brought to his feet Lord Brougham, who said in very emphatic tones, "Allow me to say—and I have had some experience of public meetings—that if any persons attempt to disturb the proceedings of this meeting, measures shall be taken to expel them."



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I am quoting from memory, but I believe my words are pretty correct. When Lord Brougham had delivered this emphatic utterance, he proceeded with his address, which was a dull affair and did not inspire the least enthusiasm. It was, indeed, a somewhat somnolent discourse, and his audience hardly seemed to wake up till he reached his peroration, which closed with a telling quotation from Oliver Goldsmith.

If I recollect rightly there were many notabilities present on this occasion. I remember the interest I felt in seeing Lord John Russell for the first and only time in my life. There was not much of him to look at, but what there was looked pleasant. I saw, indeed, a small man, with a big head, and a large smile. There was, of course, a good deal of eloquence on the evening to which I refer, and at this distance of time I remember that one distinguished visitor made a rather amusing blunder. Speaking of some obvious fact and carried away by the enthusiasm of the moment, he said, "Gentlemen, the matter is as clear as the rising sun at noon-day."

I remember seeing Thackeray in Birmingham, and heard him deliver his lecture on George III. at the Music Hall, Broad Street, now the Prince of Wales Theatre. I was, of course, interested to see the great novelist, but I thought his lecture a prosaic performance. In a literary sense the address was characteristic and interesting—as can be seen in its printed form—but it gained nothing by its author's delivery. It was a well-composed piece of work, and it had a composing effect upon those who heard it. At least I know I found it dull, and half dozed during its monotonous delivery. Indeed, it was not till Thackeray reached his concluding words—which, by the way, were Shakespeare's, being an effective quotation from "King Lear"—that I was roused from my dreamy reverie.

I recollect seeing Charles Kingsley when he was President of the Birmingham and Midland Institute, and noticed that though in speaking he stammered perceptibly, when he delivered his presidential address he adopted a sort of sing-song tone which more or less concealed his impediment of speech. In fact he half intoned his discourse. I remember, too, meeting Professor Tyndall at Mr. Chamberlain's table, and was struck by the simple modesty of the eminent savant. I sat next to Mrs. Tyndall, who was very unaffected, pleasant, and conversational. I have often thought of this occasion, and did so especially when the sad and tragic mistake occurred which ended in Professor Tyndall's premature death. Mrs. Tyndall, it may be remembered, gave her husband a wrong dose of medicine, which brought his illness to a sudden and fatal termination. What an awful mistake. To live after this was pathetic.



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Of course I remember a good deal about the late Mr. John Bright and his visits to Birmingham. So do other people, and as many of these others are scribes and quasi-historians who have published their records, there is really not much for me to tell. I may say that I heard nearly every speech our distinguished member delivered in Birmingham, for I hardly ever missed a meeting at which Mr. Bright was a spokesman. Even now I distinctly recall the first occasion on which he spoke after he became M.P. for Birmingham. The Town Hall was more than crowded, it was packed; indeed, I might almost say that herrings in a tub have elbow room compared with the very compressed gathering that welcomed Mr. Bright on the occasion.

In order to make more space the benches were removed from nearly all parts of the Town Hall, and the curious sight of the sea of faces when Mr. Bright appeared lingers in my memory still. One curious thing I observed at this gathering was that so long as our member was speaking the vast assembly was held spellbound. But when he paused for a moment to turn over his notes or take a sip of water, the tightly squeezed audience swayed for a little bodily relief and expansion, and this resulted in big surging waves of humanity, which rolled from one end of the body of the hall to the other, and often lasted for some little time.

At this moment I can recollect almost word for word the stirring and eloquent peroration with which Mr. Bright closed his first address to his Birmingham constituents. It roused his hearers to a pitch of demonstrative enthusiasm such as I have never seen equalled.

I could quote from memory many striking passages from the principal speeches I heard our distinguished member deliver. But why? Are they not recorded in a hundred books, or at least in many books and hundreds of newspapers? I will, therefore, now content myself with just one or two personal reminiscences connected with our great Parliamentary representative.

One little story I have to tell is connected with Mr. Bright's speech on the occasion of unveiling the statue of Mr. Joseph Sturge, erected at the Five Ways, Birmingham. There was an immense gathering on that occasion, and of course I was there. I secured a good position for hearing, but, unfortunately, there was a woman near me with a crying baby in her arms. This prevented me hearing much that the speaker said, and at last I got quite out of patience, and turning to the woman I remarked, "Why don't you take that noisy child home?" "Oh," said the woman in reply, "her's just as bad at home." I felt I had my answer, and that there was no more to be said.

On another occasion I remember Mr. Bright walking down New Street, just after delivering one of his grandest speeches, when a working-man, one of the real "horny-handed," stepped up to him and patted him on the back in the most familiar and approving manner. I will also just note one other little incident in connection with Mr. Bright and Birmingham and then I have done. I have to give this second-hand, but I believe what I say may be accepted.



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When Mr. Bright was offered a seat in Mr. Gladstone's administration in the year 1868 it caused him some severe searching of heart. He did not like giving up his freedom in the House of Commons. When this question was before him he was staying with Mr. —now Sir John Jaffray, Bart., and in discussing the matter with his host he walked up and down the room talking and talking till the hours flew by and it became late. Mr. Jaffray—who was rather an early man—became weary before Mr. Bright had finished his talk. The latter probably perceived this, for with a fine touch of humour he made for the chandelier, and said, "I see, Jaffray, that you will never go to bed till I turn off the gas."

In searching the files of memory it is rather surprising to find how one thought leads to another, and the long-hidden past reveals itself with almost as much clearness as the events of yesterday. When I began to write down these personal recollections I thought I should find little or nothing to tell. As I proceed, however, occurrences of past years crop up and crowd upon memory, and that to such an extent that it becomes a question of what I shall not write rather than what I shall.

Lest, however, I become tiresome and tedious I will for the most part "let the dead past bury its dead," and content myself with a little chapter of history which is especially interesting to me, and may not be without some amount of interest to others, especially those concerned in our educational and industrial progress.

One important change that has recently taken place in what I will call business Birmingham has brought back to my mind a throng of mixed memories. I allude to the vicissitudes that have taken place in local trading concerns, and I may especially mention the disestablishment or dismemberment of the manufactory of R.W. Winfield and Co., Cambridge Street. To see the break-up of this once large, important, and successful concern has been a matter of some sorrow to me. And why? Because it was at this establishment that I began my working career. Yes, at an early age I was a junior clerk at Cambridge Street Works, when it was the private business of the late Mr. R.W. Winfield.

At that time the manufactory was one of the largest if not *the* largest in Birmingham. It employed about 1,000 hands, and its operations were carried on in several separate departments. These were the tube and metal, the gas-fitting, the metallic bedstead, the stamped brassfoundry, the general brassfoundry, and other departments and divisions. To my youthful eyes it seemed to be a huge place, and, indeed, it was a big manufactory, and had a very extensive home and foreign trade.

I do not propose now to go into details concerning the manufacturing work done at Cambridge Street at the period of which I speak. This would be a matter of small interest to general readers. The once large establishment has had its day and has now ceased to be, though why it should have fallen to pieces so completely is not readily to be explained.



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There are, however, matters concerning the earlier days of Cambridge Street Works that well deserve to be recognised and recorded. I think, indeed, I may say that Mr. R.W. Winfield was the local pioneer of compulsory education. There were, of course, a large number of boys employed at the works, and Mr. Winfield not only provided an evening school for these young hands but compelled them to attend and be educated whether they liked it or not.

At the time mentioned, I remember, Mr. James Atkins—then a manager of one of the departments—had a large hand in the educational operations carried on in connection with the Cambridge Street manufactory. He had the happy knack of attracting boys to him, and could interest those he taught and teach those he interested. Mr. Atkins, as is well known, afterwards became the principal of the firm, but more of this anon.

In the work of these evening schools, Mr. John Fawkener Winfield, son of Mr. R.W. Winfield, took a very active interest. He used to give some excellent lectures, and constantly taught in the classes. Much money was spent upon these schools; indeed, a large room was specially built, at very considerable cost, in order that the educational work might have elbow room and be carried on effectually.

Mr. Winfield was a stiff, unbending man in some matters—especially in politics—but he was in many respects broad-minded and large-hearted. He was thoughtful for those in his employ, especially the young people, and his son was like unto him.

When I was engaged at Cambridge Street Works Mr. R.W. Winfield lived at the Hawthorns, Ladywood Lane. The house seemed by comparison to be a large and important mansion, and was quite in the country then. Yes, I remember now, at this distance of time, how often our employer used to give us treats at his house, and what pleasant jinks we had in playing and rollicking about the fields and grounds surrounding his residence.

In many respects Mr. R.W. Winfield was one of the real old school. He was not a high or broad so much as a good, thick, consistent churchman of the Evangelical school. He “wore his beaver stiffly up,” his neck-tie was a starched white cravat, his clothes were black broadcloth, with the dress coat worn by gentlemen in the early and middle years of last century. All the same, he had some modern ideas, especially, as I have said, in the matter of education. If it came to be totalled up how much he spent on the education of the boys in his employ, the aggregate sum would run to large figures.

Time, we know, smooths the surface or rounds off the corners of past events that seemed rather arbitrary at the time of their occurrence. But, after making allowance for all this, my experience of Mr. Winfield’s evening schools is occasionally wafted back to me with many pleasant memories and associations. Compulsory education was the iron hand that directed the young ideas how to shoot, though it was enveloped in a soft velvet glove. Mr. Winfield did good far-reaching work by the establishment and

maintenance of his evening schools, and his thoughtfulness and generosity in this direction should be counted unto him for righteousness.

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Why Cambridge Street Works, which once employed so many hands, should have so completely collapsed is, as I have hinted, a bit of a mystery. I can only guess, and as tracking conundrums is not my purpose in these chapters, I will leave others to unravel the riddle if they can. It is, however, a matter of local business history that some thirty years or more ago the Cambridge Street concern shewed signs of tottering to its fall, and when Mr. Atkins went into the business as a proprietor, he had to make some sweeping reforms that naturally created some resentment and criticism. Possibly the business was "eating its head off," and the process of deglutition had to be rigorously curtailed. This having been done, the business thrived and prospered once more, and continued to do so for some years. I will not follow its fortunes to its ultimate fall. It became a public company, and now it is no more.

Winfields' is not the only important local business that has gone under during the past fifty years, yet it is satisfactory to find that many of our old-established manufactories and businesses have survived, and still exist in some form or other. Elkington's, Gillott's, and Hardman's still flourish, and among the brassfounders Pemberton and Son's, Tonks and Son's, Cartland's, and others, go on their way rejoicing, casting, stamping, lacquering, and polishing, and pushing brassfoundry into more ornamental and utilitarian use.

Some of our old-established merchants and factors are still with us. The trade of Messrs. Keep and Hinckley, whose place of business was for years near St. Mary's Square, is now carried on by Keep Bros., in Broad Street. The establishment of Rabone Bros., merchants, also in Broad Street, still stands where it did. The businesses of Rock and Blakemore, Moilett and Gem, and others, are still carried on by survivors of the old firms.

As for the new industries, the new firms and companies that have been created in our midst during the past half-century, their enumeration and description would be a big story, and would require a large volume to tell it. That volume I do not propose to begin. I desire to close my present little chapter, and perhaps I shall not be the only one who will be glad to come to the end of it.

XVI.

THE MUSICAL FESTIVALS.

Though it can hardly be said that the Birmingham Musical Festivals have had any direct bearing upon the progress and development of town and city, the world-renowned musical gatherings associated with the name of Birmingham have had something to do with the fame and fortunes of the Midland capital. Established more than a century and a quarter ago, they attained a pitch of musical excellence and importance that attracted the attention of the civilised world. Birmingham, indeed, was for a time, and is still to

some extent, the Mecca of musicians, and the Birmingham Musical Festival is generally regarded as the premier musical meeting of the country.

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One specially fortuitous event has stamped the Birmingham “music meeting” with a glory and prestige all its own. I refer to the production of Mendelssohn’s “Elijah” in 1846. This was, indeed, a piece of great good fortune, for Mendelssohn’s oratorio aroused an interest and enthusiasm throughout the musical world that has not yet died down. The occasion certainly gave the Birmingham Festivals a new lease of life, and attracted more musical pilgrims to our town than ever.

I am not old enough myself to recollect the first performance of the “Elijah,” and as I only propose to write down now what I have myself seen and heard, I refer those who desire to learn the history of the Festivals to the records written by other more or less accurate writers.

The first Festival at which I was present was that of 1852, and I have been at every Festival and at nearly every performance since that date. In the year mentioned I sang as a boy in the chorus, and experienced a great and novel joy that I have never known since. I revelled in the rehearsals, and when the week’s performances came I seemed to be up in the clouds amid cherubim and seraphim. Indeed, when at the last performance the National Anthem was sung and the meeting came to an end I could have sat down and wept.

Of course I recollect the stir made by the production of Costa’s “Eli” in 1855, and especially do I seem to remember Mr. Sims Beeves—then in his prime—and his thrilling declamation of the “War Song.” At the end of this stirring solo I recall how the voice of the great tenor rang out above the combined power of the full band and chorus.

In this connection I may mention that it was at the Festival of 1855 that I heard Mario for the first time. I had of course heard much of the great Italian tenor, but till the year mentioned had never heard the sound of his voice. Curiously enough, too, I heard him sing in juxtaposition with Mr. Sims Reeves. It was, indeed, a little bit of a contest between the two great tenors, and I am bound to say the English singer did not come off second best.

The fact is Mario was then past his prime, whilst Mr. Sims Reeves was in his fullest strength. The opportunities for comparison on the occasion referred to were irresistible, since the two tenors sang together in a trio in which they both had to sing the same notes. The result was as I have hinted, but I wondered, however, that comparisons should have been challenged in such a direct way, and I marvelled much that Mario should have submitted to such a trial.

It was at the Festival of 1858 that I heard the *great* Lablache for the first and only time. His appearance excited as much interest, perhaps more, than his singing—he was so very large. His ruddy countenance, his white hair, and his great girth, combined to make him something to see as well as hear. When he sang his notes were as the tones emitted from a sort of human tun.



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Then, how I remember hearing Adelina Patti at the Festival of 1861. Oh! how the sweet girl singer charmed, indeed fascinated, her audience with her delightfully fresh voice, and by her attractive appearance and winning manner. How fatherly, and even tenderly, Costa seemed to watch over the little maiden, and his usual autocratic manner—for he was an autocrat at the conductor's desk—seemed to soften when he came in contact with the pretty young Italian vocalist. Even the stern unbending general of the orchestra was once so touched with her delightful rendering of an air in one of his oratorios, that he was actually seen to imprint a paternal kiss upon her cheek.

It was also at the Festival of 1861 that I remember hearing Giuglini—the “golden-throated Giuglini,” as he was called. Was there ever such sweet, luscious tenor voice, or a more charming and graceful style of vocalization? He literally sang like a bird. He opened his mouth and the notes were warbled forth with exquisite volubility and ease. Giuglini's voice had not the power and breadth which Sims Reeves could command, nor was his style so impassioned and fervent as Mario's, but his tones and vocalization were something to hear once and remember always.

But I am pausing too long over details. Let me hurry on. I remember the disappointment with which Sullivan's cantata “Kenilworth” was received at the Festival of 1867. The then young composer had made such a very “palpable hit” by his “Tempest” music that great things were expected from the new cantata he composed for Birmingham. But “Kenilworth” fell very flat, and nothing afterwards happened to stir it up into a success. Indeed, the work may almost be said to have died “still-born.”

I fancy Sullivan himself had some premonition as to the fate of his new composition. At least I know that I saw him in the Society of Artists' Rooms on the day when his work was to be performed in the evening, and on my asking him how he was he smiled “a kind of sickly smile,” and told me he felt very squeamish.

How different was the fate of Mr. J.F. Barnett's “Ancient Mariner.” Though the composer was a well-known musician no great things were expected from his new cantata, but it took the musical world by storm. It achieved instant success, and although it was regarded by many as being nice innocent “bread and butter” music it is still alive and popular, and will be while there is an ear left for spontaneous flowing melody.

Of course I recollect Sullivan's second venture at the Birmingham Musical Festival of 1873, when he produced his oratorio “The Light of the World.” Contrary to what should have been, the work was at best only a *succes d'estime*. Yet it contains some of the best music its composer has written. Parts of it are magnificent and masterly, whilst others are strikingly impressive inspirations. That the oratorio is unequal may be admitted, and it is decidedly heavy in places; moreover, it is too long.

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Still, looking at its merits as a whole, it deserved better fortune. It is enough to dishearten a composer when he finds his best work comparatively unappreciated, and it is hardly surprising if it was in consequence of disgust and disappointment that Sullivan turned his thoughts to lighter things. By doing so he has filled his purse, he has delighted a large public that cannot appreciate serious music, and he has raised comic opera to a level far above the thin and trivial emanations of foreign “opera bouffists.”

When some of us recall past Birmingham Musical Festivals, and scan the schemes of bygone years, we cannot fail to be struck by the change that has taken place in musical taste and fashion. Especially do we note this in looking at the programmes of the festival evening concerts. In these programmes quantity as well as quality was an element not forgotten in the consideration and arrangement of the miscellaneous selections.

Twenty or thirty years ago we used to have—in addition to some one or more important works—a long string of scraps and snatches, chiefly from well-known operas, which protracted the concerts to a late hour. The liberal introduction of these excerpts was attractive to a large section of the public who did not care for fine works of musical art or “too much fiddling.” Moreover, it was in accordance with the taste and proclivities of the conductor, who gave, perhaps, an inkling of his real mind in a jocular remark made under the following circumstances.

It used to be the custom, after the morning performances, to ask the band and principal singers to stay and run through some of the operatic selections, &c., to be given in the evening. On one of these occasions, after a morning performance of “The Messiah,” Costa quietly and cynically remarked, “Now, ladies and gentlemen, let us have a little music.”

To come now to speak of more personal associations with the Birmingham Musical Festivals, it was in the year 1873 that I experienced the novel sensation of standing at the conductor’s desk. A trio of my composition—a setting of Tennyson’s “Break, break,”—was included in the programme of one of the evening concerts, and I had to conduct its performance. I tell you, my reader, it was a trying ordeal, and I hardly know how I got through it, but I did in some sort of fashion. Costa, I may explain, made it a rigid rule never to conduct a living composer’s music; consequently, he would have nothing to do with the performance even of my small trio. I found, however, a good friend in M. Sainton, the leader of the band. He took a kindly pity on me in my trying situation, and he did more to make my trio go well with his violin than I did with the conductor’s baton.

But it certainly was a sensation to face that immense orchestra, and I had something to do to make my sinews bear me stiffly up. My trio, however, was splendidly sung by



Mdlle. Titieus, Madame Trebelli, and Mr. Vernon Rigby—*pace* Mr. Sims Reeves, indisposed—and if it did not make a sensation, and was not received with deafening plaudits, I fancy it went smoothly and satisfactorily, and I retired from the field—I mean from the conductor’s desk—not exactly with glory, but I think I may say without a stain upon my character as a local musical composer.



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At the Musical Festival of 1876 Madame Patey sang a song of mine, "The Felling of the Trees," and I repeated my little experience as a conductor; but in 1885, when my cantata "Yule Tide" was included in the festival scheme, Mr. W.C. Stockley kindly undertook the task of directing the work. I was determined it should not be a personally conducted cantata; consequently, I was spared what would have severely taxed my capacity and nerve.

With regard to my work it will not become me to say much. I frankly own that it did not set the Thames ablaze; it passed muster, and perhaps that is as much as I could expect at a Birmingham Musical Festival. It was somewhat unfortunate that in 1885 there were too many new works. No less than seven original compositions were included in the scheme, and they killed each other. The musical public will not swallow and cannot digest too much new music, consequently they would not make a good, fair musical meal off any of the new dishes so liberally provided, with the result that most of them went into the larder after just; being tasted and no more. Some of them—even mine—are at times brought out, smelt, turned over, and looked at, but as I have hinted, none, not even those by Gounod, Dvorak, and Cowen, have become standing dishes in constant request at musical feasts.

Speaking generally, many splendid compositions seem to have missed fire through sheer bad luck. To go no further than Sir Arthur Sullivan, some of his finest and most important works have had an ill-starred existence, and even several of his best songs, though introduced to the public under the most favourable auspices, have not "taken on." Sullivan's splendid ditty "Love laid his sleepless head," though sung by Mr. Edward Lloyd all over the country, did not make a hit, whilst the more trivial ballad "Sweet-hearts" became a boom and a property. At least, I remember being told that after Sullivan had been receiving good royalties from this song for years, the publishers offered him L1,000 for his rights.

I am afraid I have been guilty of a digression, but I will recall my wandering steps. I have mentioned the Birmingham Festival of 1885, which marked a new order—I might almost say a new epoch—in the history of the Birmingham Musical Festivals. For the first time for very many years Costa was no longer seen at the conductor's desk, and his place was taken by Richter. Costa conducted the Birmingham triennial performances for about half a century, and although it was sad to miss his face in 1885, he had done his work.

In 1882—the last Festival in which he took part—it was painful to witness his efforts to conduct the performances. He was partly paralysed, and his baton, I believe, had to be fastened to his hand because he could not grasp it. Further, he was becoming deaf, and the result was that the loud brass instruments were allowed to become too blatant and obtrusive. Costa was a good man in his day, and he did good work. He was very autocratic, even despotic, but he introduced two good things into the orchestra—order and punctuality. With all his ability, tact, and nerve, it must, however, be admitted that

his style of conducting was rough and ready compared with the art, care, and skill that mark musical conductorship of the present day.

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With Richter's appearance as conductor, some important changes and reforms were effected in the orchestral arrangements of the Festival. For one thing, the band was cut down in number. This, it was said, was in consequence of Richter's opinion that the balance of power was disturbed by too great a preponderance of string tone, but it is just possible that economy was considered when the change was made. Anyway, in 1885 there were over twenty stringed instruments less than in Costa's last year, 1882.

This alteration was a notable one, and regrettable in some ways. The extra large string band that Costa would have made the Birmingham Festival orchestra something very special, and the result was some striking effects not heard elsewhere. Nowhere now do we hear that *tour de force* which was almost electrical in the rush of violins at the end of the chorus "Thanks be to God" in the "Elijah," in Beethoven's "Leonora" overture, and in the last movement of the overture to "William Tell." The effect of the violins—between fifty and sixty in number—was something magical in the works just named. To put the matter in brief detail, under Costa's conductorship the string band numbered 108 players, when Richter took the orchestra in hand, it was reduced to eighty-six. I will not discuss the expediency of the change. Suffice it to say that the Festival band is now as good, perhaps better, than it ever was, save in the matter of numbers.

To sum up very briefly the Festivals since 1885—the year that Richter succeeded Costa—the meeting of 1888 was remarkable for nothing that made any permanent notch in the record of the Festivals. Parry's oratorio "Judith" was the chief novelty, but, in spite of its masterly merit as a work of musical art, it was hardly received with the favour it deserved.

The Festival of 1891 saw the production of two important new works, namely, Stanford's dramatic oratorio "Eden" and Dvorak's "Requiem Mass." With respect to these compositions, they have scarcely been heard, I think, since their initial performances. Stanford's "Eden" contains some fine writing, but there was, perhaps, too much of it. Dvorak's "Requiem" was something of a disappointment, and its first rendering anything but satisfactory; indeed, some of the numbers, I remember, narrowly escaped coming to utter grief.

In 1894 three new productions were heard. These were Parry's "King Saul"—a very recondite, musicianly composition—but too long; "The Swan and the Skylark," a fanciful little cantata by Goring Thomas; and a "Stabat Mater" by G. Henschel.

Nothing at the Festival of 1897 made any mark. There was a new "Requiem" by Stanford, but like many other Requiems, it rather celebrated its own death. A new work by Arthur Somervell was heard, and, though favourably received at first, like some other Festival compositions it seems now to have vanished into the *ewigkeit*.



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With regard to the Festival of 1900—just closed as these lines are being written—I will say little. It has been financially successful, and perhaps that is the best that can be said of it. The programme, speaking generally, was a somewhat heavy and dull one, and the special new work, namely, Elgar's "Dream of Gerontius," was disappointing, in spite of its skilful construction, its splendid orchestration, and its conspicuous touches of character and originality. Mr. Coleridge Taylor's "Song of Hiawatha" was the hit of the Festival, and its performance at Birmingham has hall—marked the young composer's fresh, picturesque, and melodic music.

I might write a great deal more about the Birmingham Musical Festivals, but time and space forbid. I could, for instance, point out that it is becoming more and more difficult to maintain the prestige of our Festivals as time goes on. There is more competition now-a-days; there are more provincial musical gatherings; and there are now more high-class concerts than formerly. I think I could also show that some mistakes, of more or less importance, have been made, and are still perhaps being made in the management. Nevertheless, those who have most to do with the arrangements are not lacking in energy and enterprise, and in earnest endeavour to uphold the character and reputation of the Birmingham Musical Festivals.

XVII.

CONCLUSION.

There is now little or nothing further for me to say, save to put a tag to my small story, and make my little bow to my readers. Birmingham, like other modern enterprising centres, goes moving on "down the ringing grooves of change." The city means to forge ahead, and will not permit anything to impede its progress. Scaffolding seems more conspicuous than ever, and before the ink is dry upon my page, more old buildings will be down and more new buildings will be up. Since I began these chapters (which have appeared in *The Midland Counties Herald* during the past months) some important, notable changes have taken place. For instance, the Birmingham Old Library in Union Street, associated with the names of many Birmingham worthies, has disappeared, and its site is occupied by the new City Arcades. That conspicuous landmark, Christ Church, with all its memories and curious belongings and characteristics, is now no longer to be seen. Old narrow streets are being widened, old buildings are bulging out, and large new buildings are being erected in all directions. The municipality have taken in hand some important housing schemes which may be advantageous to the working classes, and result in the erection of some of those new artisans' dwellings which, so far, have not been conspicuously numerous. In the meantime local debts go on merrily, or I should say seriously, swelling. Ratepayers have to be squeezed to find the necessary funds for the increasing outgoings; but best-governed cities in the world must pay a price for their advantages and pre-eminence, and the citizens thank the gods that

they have men who will devote thought and energy to laying out public money, and fervently hope that this may be done wisely and well.

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Some of our public men who are so ardent in forwarding new schemes and improvements can, of course, say that if these developments mean higher rates and growing assessments, they themselves have to bear their share of the burdens. This, of course, is so, but it must be owned that when we have a hand in spending large sums of money with the influence and importance that accompany the process, we pay our quota of the financial imposts if not cheerfully, at least without the grudging feeling of those who merely have to pay, pay, pay.

Gentle, and I trust forbearing, reader I have written my story, and have added to my iniquity by publishing it in book form, but I indulge a small hope that it may possibly interest a limited number of those who, like myself, have watched with their own eyes the rapid growth and almost amazing development of Birmingham during the last forty or fifty years. Writing almost entirely from my own observation and memory, I may have made some slips and mistakes, but I have tried to be careful and accurate, and have endeavoured to verify my facts and figures from authentic sources when possible. I therefore venture to hope that my errors are not very many, and not of any serious moment.

Writers, we know, are often prone to say that if their readers experience as much pleasure in reading their pages as the writers have had in writing them, the said readers will be rewarded for their time and pains. I am not going to repeat this pretty formula, I am rather inclined to say that if my readers experience my feeling that I have said enough, they will not be sorry to see these last words of my final page.

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