

TALKS ABOUT LIFE.

BY ROBERT COLLYER.

II.

REFERRING BACK.

I WANT in this paper to tell what one of my children used to call "a truly story."

It came to me one day when I went on a pilgrimage to a huge old factory in the valley of the Washburne, in Yorkshire, in the summer of 1865. I wandered about the place in a kind of dream. The handful of people left there then were at work among the wheels and spindles, watching me between whites—for strangers seldom come to that remote place, and I was clearly a stranger; and then my dress was not what they were used to, especially my American "wide-awake." They were as strange to me as I was to them. There was not a face that I knew—not one. And yet this was where I was once as well known to everybody as the child is to its own mother, and where I knew everybody as I knew my own kinsfolk. For it was here that I began my life and lived it for a space that now seems a life-time all to itself. And *that* brings me to my dream.

I saw, in one of the great dusty rooms of the factory, a little fellow about eight years old, but big enough to pass for ten, working away from six o'clock in the morning till eight at night,—tired sometimes almost to death, and then again not tired at all,—rushing out when work was over, and, if it was winter, home to some treasure of a book. There were "Robinson Crusoe," and Bunyan's "Pilgrim," and Goldsmith's Histories of England and of Rome, the first volume of Sandford and Merton, and one or two more that had something to do with theology,—but

it must have been meat for strong men, for not one of the brood of children that read the stories, and the Goldsmith that was just as good as stories, would ever touch these others after one or two trials.

One of these books that used to lead all boys captive in those good old days, this boy I saw in my dream would hug up close to his bowl of porridge, and eat and read; and then he would read after he had done eating, while ever the careful housemother would allow a candle or a coal. But if it was summer, the books would be neglected, and the rush would be out into the fields and lanes,—hunting in the early summer for bird's-nests that the tender and holy home canon would never permit to be robbed, and it was always obeyed; or in the later summer, seeing whether the sloes were turning ever so little from green to black, or whether the crabs—of the wood, not the water—were vulnerable to a boy's sharp and resolute teeth, and when the hazel-nuts would be out of that milky state at which it would be of any use to pluck them, and what was the prospect for hips and haws.

The men who profess to know just how we are made, as a watchmaker knows a watch, tell us that once in seven years we get a brand-new body—that the old things pass away in that time, and all things become new. I wonder sometimes whether it is not so with our life. Is not *that* new, as well as the frame? There I was that day—a gray-haired minister from a city that had been born and had come to its great place since that small lad began to work in the old mill, as I

saw him at the end of a vista of four and thirty years.

I watched him with a most pathetic interest. "Dear little chap," I said, "you had a hard time; but then it was a good time, too,—was n't it, now? How good bread-and-butter did taste, to be sure, when half a pound of butter a week had to be divided among eight of us, and the white wheaten bread saved for Sunday! Did ever a flower in this world beside smell as good as the primrose, or *prima donna* sing like the skylark and throstle? Money cannot buy such a Christmas pudding, or tears or prayers such a Christmas tide, as the Mother made and the Lord gave when you and the world were young! Seven years you stuck to the old mill—and then you were only fifteen; and then, just as they were crowning the Queen, you know you had to give it up, and to give the home up with it, to go out and never return to stay. And so I lost you out of that bad but blessed old life in and out of the factory, and have never set eyes on you until to-day,—you dear little other me, that was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found!"

That was how I came to think of my story, and that I might tell it as a word of encouragement to many that may need such a word—about that way of life which I have travelled many miles, since I set out, not knowing whither I went, to the pulpit and pastorate of Unity Church.

But I cannot tell the story I want to tell, if I let myself drift away just here from that boy in the mill on the Washburne, and say no more about him. I like him well enough, after all these years, to stay beside him a little longer; and, besides that, he had a good deal to do with the making of as much of a man as is now at the other end of this pen.

I notice in Bunyan's "Pilgrim," that all the characters that great dreamer creates are so far hardened in the mould before he lets us

see them, that we feel all the time it is a foregone conclusion. Obstinate, Pliable, Ignorance, and the rest on that side, are bound to come to grief; while Christian, Hopeful, and Faithful, are sure to reach the Shining City, no matter what may befall. Something like this is true of our common life. Before we begin to live to much purpose either way, the things are gathered and laid up that are to make or mar us. We are not aware of it, any more than the young birds, as they flutter out of the nest to do for themselves, are aware how they will be sure to find out when to go north or south, and how to build and line their own nests, and where and what to seek for *their* callow brood. But it is all there. Nature has taken care of that; and Nature and Providence do together for the fledgling child what Nature alone does for the bird. I have heard that the nuns who teach in convent schools say, "Let us have the Protestant child until it is seven years old, and then we have no fear for the future; it is sure to come at last into the Church." I imagine that as a rule this is true; and usually when Protestant parents pay for the education of their children in those schools, they pay for an item that is not in the bill—their conversion to Romanism. It has been noticed, too, that when German children come here from the Fatherland, and eagerly turn to the English tongue, giving up their native speech, it is no matter how long they live in that habit, if the old man who has not spoken a word of German since he was a child loses himself in his last moments, he then goes back to that other self—the fellow of the one I saw in the old mill—and talks German again. So the poor old knight, whose life as a man had been one great gluttonous sin, forgot for a moment on his death-bed his own awful remorse and the blasting of his hopes by the breath of the King, and babbled of green fields where he had wandered, no doubt, as an unfallen

child, to gather kingcups and daisies, and chase the rabbit to his burrow.

That grand and hearty Englishman, Sydney Smith, used to laugh at ancestral pride, and to say that the Smith crest, with which all their letters were sealed, was the Smith thumb. I cannot laugh with that lord of laughter there. I would be glad to know that I came of a great line, if it had been God's will.

About a year ago there was a paragraph in the papers, of a murder in San Francisco, that I read, and read again, with a wonderful interest. Colonel Fairfax, so the papers said, had been stabbed in the streets of that city, by some wretch, for a fancied injury. The murdered man had strength enough left to draw his revolver and cover his assassin, who then begged abjectly for mercy; when the dying victim said, quietly: "You have killed me, and I can kill you; but I spare you, villain and coward as you are, for the sake of your wife and little children."

If I were not myself, I would love to be the Fairfax that should succeed that noble fellow, — not alone for that splendid piece of chivalry of which there was never more need in this land than there is now, the grace I mean of forbearance unto death in the face of the worst injury one man can inflict on another; — not for that alone, but because that man was the last of a mighty line whose name was the pride of all the boys of my companionship, and whose great mansion once nestled on the southern and sunny side of the high land that gave us only its northern shoulder. We were proud of that Fairfax line. It had disappeared from the country many a year before I was born; but the tradition was strong still of the great Sir Thomas, who fought with Cromwell for the people against the King. And we preserved one tradition of him that has never appeared in print; — how his arm was so long that when he stood stretched to his

full height the palm of the hand rested on the cap of the knee; and in some skirmish, also unrecorded, when our hero was met alone in one of our narrow lanes by eight or ten of the enemy, and it was one down and another come on, Sir Thomas, by favor of his long arm and stout heart, cut down about half the number, and the rest galloped away. That Fairfax was a great figure in our juvenile Valhalla. He was one of a line of noble men, with a few exceptions, that had housed itself there at Denton for many hundreds of years. It saw good reason finally for settling in Virginia, gave a great friend to Washington, but not to the infant Republic; and so came down to that man murdered the other day on the Pacific coast.

Pride in an ancestry like that, it must be good to feel. I think that man remembered he was a Fairfax and must not stain his name with murder for murder, and that had something to do with his noble forbearance. He must *die* like a Fairfax. Such persons bring with them into the world a vast advantage over the common run of us. Their organism is like the organ of a great maker — something unique for its sweetness or strength; and their soul, like a great organist, makes a music that is all his own. I think we would all, please God, belong to a line like that. It is something still in our life, like the separate line of David, by which should be born in the fulness of time the greatest of all the figures in human history.

But when that cannot be, what we may all be glad and proud of is a line that is good as far as it goes. That is the way I feel about that little man who was to worry out of that factory somehow into a pulpit. The line began with the father and mother. There was a grandfather who fought under Nelson and went overboard one black night in a storm; he was on the father's side. And then on the mother's side there was another sailor who went

down the sea in a ship that never came up again. Then there were two widows who fought the wolf while they were able, and died presently of the fight. Then, as the century was coming in, Yorkshire, with its great mills, began to be to the South of England what the West has been to the East here in our day—the land of promise to all who wanted to better themselves. So a bright orphan lad in London and a lass in Norwich heard of it, and were caught by that impulse to get out of the land of their kindred which caught their son many a year after and swept him over the Atlantic; and I have no doubt, from what I have heard them say, they were after that quite of the mind of the old ballad:

“York, York, for my monie;
Of all the places I ever did see
This is the best for good companie
Except the City of London.”

So what the boy saw when he began to notice was a woman, tall and deep-chested, with shining flaxen hair and laughing blue eyes, a damask rose-bloom on her cheek—as is the way with the women of her nation;—a laugh that was music, too, and a contagion of laughter you could not escape was at the heart of it;—a step like a deer for lightness, and an activity that could carry its possessor twenty miles a day over the rough northern hills, and land her safe home in the evening, no more tired than one of our fashionable ladies in Chicago would be in going from cellar to garret in their own house. Woman's rights, as a natural truth, must have come to me by that mother. I believe, as I sit and think of her wonderful genius for doing whatever she took in hand, that if she had been told to do it by her sense of duty, and then the way had opened, she would have led an army like the old queens, or governed a kingdom. What she did govern was a houseful of great, growing, hungry, outbreaking bairns,—keeping us all well in hand, smiting all hinderance

out of our way, keeping us fed and clad bravely, and paying for school, as long as we could be spared to go, out of the eighteen shillings a week the quiet manful father made at his anvil. The kindest heart that ever beat in a man's breast, I think, was his. It stopped beating in a moment, one hot July day; and before any hand could touch him he was in “the rest that remains.”

But in those brave old days, while the first fifteen years were passing that do so much for us all, there we were, altogether, in one of the sweetest cottage homes that ever nestled under green leaves in a green valley. There was a plum tree and a rose tree and wealth of ivy and a bit of greensward outside; and inside, one room on the floor and two above; a floor of flags scoured white so that you might eat your dinner on it and no harm be done except to the floor; walls, white-washed to look like driven snow, with pictures of great Bible figures hung where there was room, and in their own places kept so bright as to be so many dusky mirrors; the great mahogany chest of drawers and high-cased clock; polished elm chairs, and corner cupboard for the china that was only got out at high festivals; a bright open sea-coal fire always alight, winter and summer; with all sorts of common things for common use stowed snug and tight in their own corners, like the goods and chattels of Ed'ard Cuttle, mariner. That was the home in the day of small things; matched then and still by ten thousand cottages in the good old shire, but never surpassed there or anywhere, when you count what was done and what there was to do on.

This must be about all THE WESTERN MONTHLY will print in this number, with wealth of better things at her command; so I must stop now, and leave the reader inside that cottage. If I have a feeling that I have got to go on and make a clean breast of it,

in some such way as Hugh Miller has done in "My Schools and Schoolmasters," I shall have to linger about the cottage I know not how long; for feeling, as I have said, how much is done by the time the boyhood is over and the youth begins—if such a distinction can be made—I can see now how

many things must have been intimately at work beside that sweet, good home, and what was there. Manners and customs, traditions, stories, religion, superstition, scene, and incident, all had their place in the lad's life, and must have their place in the man's story—if it is ever told.

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LEGEND OF THE CASTLE OF NUREMBERG.

(From the German.)

BY MRS. E. E. EVANS.

AMONGST the many legends and historical traditions attached to the old castle of Nuremberg, is a curious story of an event which took place about the middle of the thirteenth century. The castle was at that time governed by Count Frederic III. of Hohenzollern, who lived there in princely state with his wife, the Countess Elizabeth, and their six children. It was a happy family. The wedded pair loved each other tenderly, and took pride in the strength and bravery of their sons and the modest beauty of their daughters. Their retainers were faithful, the citizens of the already famous city of Nuremberg held them in honor, the land was no longer disturbed by war, and through the vigilance and courage of the Nurembergers the once dreaded invasions of banded robbers had been brought to an end.

Thus peaceful and prosperous was the existence of this noble family in the year 1264. At that period, John, the elder son, was eighteen and his brother Sigmund sixteen years old. They were skilled in every knightly accomplishment, and had already won distinction by their exertions in certain fierce encounters with the robbers.

In the autumn of that year the villages in the vicinity of Nuremberg

suffered terribly from the ravages of wolves, until, in desperation, the inhabitants assembled in force and drove them out of their haunts, killing meantime as many as possible. Those that escaped, to the number of several hundred, retreated to the mountains, and from thence made frequent descents upon the scattered farms in the valleys, so that scarcely a day elapsed without some person having been destroyed.

The most horrible event of this kind occurred three days before Michaelmas, In the forests of St. Sebald and St. Lawrence (so named from the two cathedrals of Nuremberg) lived a class of peasants who made it their sole business to raise bees and collect honey, which was in great demand, as foreign sugars had not yet begun to be imported. To such an extent was the pursuit carried, that the great forest tract was spoken of in the legal instruments of that period as "the imperial bee-garden," and the bee-farmers were allowed to pay their government taxes in honey. For some reason, the magistrate having charge of such matters issued an order for the tax to be paid three days before Michaelmas, instead of on the day itself, when it would really become due; and in obedience to the command, a certain bee-farmer, living on the northern