Millicent Garrett Fawcett

What I Remember

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Published by Good Press, 2022

goodpress@okpublishing.info

EAN 4064066369378

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Chapter I

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THE ALDEBURGH OF LONG AGO

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IT WAS MY GOOD FORTUNE to be born a member of a large family, and, moreover, in the younger half of it. I was either the seventh or the eighth child of my parents. I could never quite settle in my own mind which, for my eldest brother, born in November 1837, died in the following May, so his brief existence had come to an end nearly nine years before I was born in 1847; my only knowledge of him came from occasional references by my mother, who told us sometimes how, when her first little boy died, she had kneeled down and prayed God to take her too. I could, therefore, never really claim the special good fortune which is said to attend a seventh child; but my sister Agnes and I were content to share this, and many other things, between us. Another piece of good fortune is that I have never known either poverty or riches, so that in my case the prayer of Agur was answered without my asking.

The year of my birth was the year of the Irish Famine and the repeal of the Corn Laws, and the following year saw the downfall of half the old autocratic Governments in Europe. Naturally, I cannot remember anything of these tremendous events; but they may possibly have had an electrifying effect upon the whole atmosphere in which I found myself as a little child. At any rate, I began to hear about public

events, and to think, in my childish way, about them at an early age; for instance, I remember walking along the crag path at Aldeburgh (we always resisted with vehemence any Cockney attempt to call it The Esplanade, The Parade, or any such name) when I was young enough to be holding my father's hand and hearing him and listening with all my ears to his arguments, while he was persuading some of the leaders among the beachmen to volunteer for the Navy at the beginning of the Crimean War. I think this must have been in 1853; one man, I can recall perfectly, reiterating again and again that he was as ready as any man to sacrifice himself for his country, "But wolunteer, sir, I will not." I also remember very distinctly the death of the Emperor Nicholas in March 1854, and thinking in my heart that, of course, now the war would cease. I could not picture war except as a struggle between individuals, and if the man we were fighting with was dead, there could be no reason to fight any more. It was one of the strange things about grown-ups, I thought, that they never seemed to see the things that were so obvious to a child. The next thing I remember about the Crimean War is my father coming in at breakfast-time with a newspaper in his hand, looking gay and handsome, and calling out to all his little brood, "Heads up and shoulders down; Sebastopol is taken." This was in September 1855.

There was a very cordial and friendly feeling between my father and the seafaring men at Aldeburgh. He was a merchant and owned a small fleet of trading vessels which plied between our little town and London, and also Newcastle and the North. Later he built vessels for himself

at his principal place of business, Snape, a few miles higher up the river than Aldeburgh. He had some official position which connected him with the beachmen. I remember on his business writing-paper the, to me, mysterious words, “Agent for Lloyds and Receiver of Droits of Admiralty.” The sound and look of the words *Droits of Admiralty* fascinated me. In the old days of sailing vessels the coast of Suffolk, and particularly the Aldeburgh bay, were very dangerous, and there was never a wreck without my father being present, and if there were lives to be saved he took an active part in the dangerous and difficult work. The rocket apparatus for sending a cord or rope over a distressed ship had not then been perfected, and lives were often lost in the vain attempt to reach and save mariners in ships which had been storm-driven on one of the shoals off Aldeburgh. The gun, three times fired, which summoned the lifeboat crew for active service was a familiar and none the less an intensely thrilling sound in our ears. Whenever the lifeboat was launched, even were it only for a practice, every man, woman, and child who heard the gun hurried to the beach, some to lend a hand, and all to see and wish and hope that the departing men would return in safety and bring their rescued comrades with them. It was a deep, angry sea where a tall man would be out of his depth three yards from the shore, and the great breakers in a storm beat with deadly weight upon men and ships alike. I remember one awful day, 2nd November 1855, when there were seventeen ships driven ashore or broken up on the shoals off Aldeburgh in my father’s district. Everything that possibly could be done was done, but there was a terrible loss of life.

My father received the official thanks of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, engrossed on vellum, for his services on this occasion. This document, which now belongs to my nephew Philip Cowell, runs thus: *That the special thanks of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution be presented to Newson Garrett, Esq., in testimony of his highly meritorious conduct in assisting to rescue through the surf nine out of the eleven of the crew of the Swedish brig "Vesta," which in a gale of wind was wrecked near Orford Low Lighthouse on the 2nd November 1855.*

There was a family of seamen for which we ever after felt a deep bond of gratitude and affection—the Cables. My father and George Cable were taking a leading part in making a human chain along a rope to reach a shipwrecked crew in urgent distress and fetching them off one by one. My father went first, Cable second, and a good number following; after doing this and bringing in his man several times, my father showed signs of exhaustion, and Cable said to him, "Look here, governor, you have done this often enough," and he took the leading place on the rope from my father and assumed it himself; he never came ashore again; the rope snapped between my father and Cable, as if it had been pack thread, and Cable was washed away and perished in sight of the gallant men who had undertaken the work of rescue. My father was again, and by his own choice, in the place of the greatest risk, which had just ended fatally before his eyes. We were always taught by my mother to remember that Cable had saved my father's life.

James Cable, the son of George just referred to, was only a boy when all this happened, but as he grew in years he

developed into a very fine seaman, much respected and well-known all along the coast and in the Lifeboat Society for combined courage and caution; for many years, indeed until old age compelled him to withdraw, he was coxswain of the Aldeburgh lifeboat. On one occasion this boat, under James Cable's command, had more than usually distinguished itself, so that newspaper men from London came down to learn and retail all the particulars of the brave work. They found Cable the very reverse of communicative; their only chance seemed to be to pump his narrative out of him in fragments, question by question. One of these, and Cable's reply to it, form a sort of epitome of his character.

Newspaper Reporter: "Now, Mr. Cable, you can tell me, I expect, how many lives you have saved at sea."

James Cable: "I don't know, I'm sure, sir; I don't keep no count on 'em."

This was the sort of thing that made everyone in Aldeburgh just love Cable, but he was not a bit spoiled—he was always the same simple, modest, upright man that his father had been before him.

Another incident of my childhood in connection with the lifeboat was an intense joy to me. The lifeboat gun had been fired, but only for a practice. The crew received three shillings a head for practice on a smooth day and five shillings on a rough day; this was a five-shilling day. We all ran off to the beach as usual, I, again, holding my father's hand. While the boat was still on the rollers one of her crew said to my father, "Come along with us, governor"; he replied, "I should like it, my lad, but you see I can't, I've got

the child with me." Looking down on me, the sailor rejoined, "Little missie would like to come too, sir." There was no need for me to say anything. I was too enchanted at this unexpected adventure. The smallest cork jacket in the collection was found and slipped over my head, and we embarked. The seas broke over the boat as we crossed the shoal, and drenched my hair and shoulders; one of the kind sailors produced a pink cotton handkerchief from his pocket and said, "Here, missie, wrop this round your neck." Of course, I did so, and, of course, the pink handkerchief was soon as wet as the rest of my clothing. I was intensely happy, and never dreamed of being sea-sick.

My father was a very good sailor himself, and he never quite succeeded in ridding himself of the notion that to be sea-sick was affectation. One day, however, a little party of us, headed by my father and completed by a dog, embarked in a small boat for a sail. Before long the dog was sea-sick. My father was immensely astonished; he said several times, "God bless my soul, look at that poor thing; then it is *not* affectation, after all."

The Aldeburgh of my earliest recollections was very different from the Aldeburgh of to-day. It is true that its two ancient buildings, the church and the Moot Hall, still remain unchanged in essentials, but its ancient corporation has been re-formed. The two Bailiffs have been converted into one Mayor; and the Council is elected by the vote of the ratepayers; the dignified robes of office are retained, and so are the old silver maces dating from the reign of Queen Elizabeth, decorated by a large "E" with a crown.

Crabbe’s house has entirely vanished, but in lieu of it a bust of our one poet has been put up in the church. He is still our one poet; but a poet of to-day, Mr. John Freeman, has found our river, which runs parallel with the sea for about twelve miles before it is finally merged into it, a fitting subject for a parable in verse. A Turner engraving of Aldeburgh still exists, and is full of interest to those who wish to see how the old town looked to one who had the poet’s vision.

At the time of my first visit to London, January 1858, the nearest railway station was at Ipswich, twenty-six miles away. I remember having felt in 1851, I being four years old, that the right thing had not been done by me in not taking me to see the famous exhibition of that year, but that I had been somewhat consoled for this slight by lovely bonnets of “drawn” blue velvet with pink baby ribbon and lace in the “caps” brought back from London for my sister Agnes and myself.

In 1858 the journey to London, the first I had ever taken, was one prolonged delight—first the drive of twenty-six miles in my father’s carriage, himself, I think, driving, and then the railway train and all its wonders. I remember an old gentleman who travelled in our carriage and took a great deal of notice of us children, but whom we suspected of not being quite right in his mind, as he vehemently protested against the guard locking the carriage door, shouting out that he was a free-born Englishman and would not submit to being locked up.

The wonder of the London streets, especially at night, when the shop windows were not shuttered as they are now,

but were brilliantly illuminated, made London seem to me a sort of fairyland. Our eldest sister, Louie, had married in the previous autumn; we were her guests and were petted and made much of, to our hearts' content. One of our evenings was spent at Albert Smith's entertainment; he was describing the journey of a party up the Rhine; there were the sentimental sister and the practical sister who lisped. The sentimental sister was reciting solemnly "Round about the prow she wrote 'The Lady of Shallot,' " and the practical sister comments, "I wonder what she wrote it with. Did she scratch it with a hair-pin?" At this point, when everyone was laughing, a sort of managerial person came on the platform with a very solemn face and announced the attempt of Orsini to blow up the Emperor and Empress of the French on their way to the opera that very evening. This was my first experience of anything approaching contact with the tragedy of revolutionary politics. This is also one of the points in my story to which I can affix an exact date: it was 14th January 1858.

But to return to Aldeburgh, as we did very soon after the unprecedented journey just recorded. Aldeburgh was a place very much without an aristocratic element in its population. It is true that there were three families, the Thellussons, the Rowleys, and the Wentworths, who belonged to the aristocracy; but they lived quite aloof from the people of the town, and did not make the smallest impression on our lives. Mr. Wentworth, the Lord of the Manor, and Lady Harriet were hardly ever resident, except for a week or two in the partridge-shooting season. Mr. Rowley, with a large family, was, so to speak, hibernating in

Aldeburgh, waiting to succeed to an estate and title then held by his unmarried elder brother in West Suffolk; and the Thellussons were likewise lying low under the shadow of the great Thellusson lawsuit. I remember hearing Mrs. Thellusson tell my mother in an awed voice, “If we lose this lawsuit, dear Mrs. Garrett, we shall be beggars, absolutely beggars, on £600 a year.” To me at ten years old £600 a year meant wealth beyond the dreams of avarice, and again I wondered at the strangeness of grown-up people. Old Peter Thellusson’s extraordinary will and the portentous lawsuit to which it gave rise may have suggested to Dickens the great suit “Jarndyce *v.* Jarndyce,” which forms the main theme of *Bleak House*.

Though not an aristocrat, there was a gentlewoman then living at Aldeburgh who had to the full the aristocratic instinct of service, of helping those less well off than herself to a fuller and better life. I think she belonged to what in the slang of the present day we should call the “New Poor.” Mrs. James was the widow of a West Indian planter, one of those who had suffered financially from the emancipation of the slaves. She lived with great simplicity in a large house, and for all the years of my childhood she set apart a portion of this house to be used as a public elementary school. It seems now almost incredible that so late as the ’fifties and well into the ’sixties of the last century no public provision was made for the housing of a school for the poorer classes in Aldeburgh, nor, as I suppose, in the greater number of small towns and villages throughout the country. Mrs. James had several sons; one a clergyman, the Rev. Herbert James, became the father of distinguished sons; one, Dr. Montagu

James, is now Provost of Eton, and well-known in the world of scholarship; another son, Captain James, was in the Indian Navy; and we keep up very friendly relations with his surviving daughter, often talking over our recollections of old Aldeburgh. She remembers quite well returning from India in the days when there was no Suez Canal, and passengers were taken across the isthmus on camels or in palanquins.

The main interest to us in our Aldeburgh neighbours did not centre in the small group of those I have called the aristocrats, but in the Barhams, Mary Reeder, Mr. Metcalf, Mr. Dowler, the Vicar, and Bob Wilson, the old sailor at the Look-out Station at the top of the steps.

Chapter II

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THE BARHAMS AND OTHER OLD ALDEBURGH FRIENDS

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The Barhams were in my parents' service long before I was born. He was groom and gardener: he drove the carriage when my father didn't; he looked after the pigs, killed them when the fatal moment came, turned them into bacon, and was the gentlest, kindest, dearest, and most modest man in the world. Whatever in the nature of outdoor things we wanted, our first idea was to go and ask Barham; he would look down on us with his rosy apple-cheeked face and smiling eyes, and say, as he put down his spade, "You are more trouble to me than all my money," and then proceed to do what we wanted. Years later, when most of us were grown up, my father had the idea, a suitable artist being handy, of having portraits painted of all the men who had been more than twenty years in his service. Barham, who was the senior and the most well-beloved, objected very much, and when the artist proposed to depict him with a pot of azaleas in his hand, downright refused to permit it. "If it had been a rake or a hoo," he said, he wouldn't have minded so much; so a rake it had to be. Barham was a devotedly religious man, and belonged to a small dissenting community which had no chapel in Aldeburgh; they had, however, a meeting-place on

Aldringham Common, about three miles away. Some expressed surprise at this, and especially that Barham chose this distant place of worship, involving a six-mile walk on Sundays after all his hard physical work on weekdays. But he was out-and-out an outdoor man, and I believe that the walk, the main part of which was over a lovely common covered with gorse and heather, with the sea shining in the near distance, was to Barham a real sanctuary of his soul.

Mrs. Barham was no less remarkable; a tall handsome woman with waving hair growing low on her forehead like the Clytie in the British Museum. She had charge of my mother's dairy as long as her health permitted. She was a most interesting conversationalist. We never went to see her without bringing away with us something worth remembering. She had two sons and a daughter. The elder son took service in London with Mr. T. Valentine Smith, with whom my father had business relations. This Barham became a first-rate wheelwright, and afterwards was placed in a responsible position on Mr. T. V. Smith's estate in Scotland. One of Mrs. Barham's epigrams related to the positions of trust occupied by her husband and elder son, the one in Aldeburgh and the other at Thames Bank, London. She said: "The sailors, they tell me that the last thing they hear when they leave Aldeburgh is someone hollering for Barham, and the first thing they hear when they reach Thames Bank is someone hollering for Barham."

The younger son, John, was an apprentice in a general shop in Aldeburgh. This did not suit Mrs. Barham's ambitions for him, and he was sent to London. Mrs. Barham's account of it was this: "John is a good lad, but I know my John wants

polish; so I am sending him to a situation in the Whitechapel Road.” This poor John, whether polished or unpolished, was certainly vaccinated, but he died of smallpox in London in one of the epidemics which swept through it in the early ’sixties. About her daughter, Mrs. Barham was reticent—but obviously very sad. She was thought to have married well: her husband was a tradesman with a good business, but he was a drunkard and often and often the poor daughter felt she must have left him if it had not been for the two children. However, for the sake of her boy and girl, she endured to the end, which came while the man was still young. The next time I called on Mrs. Barham after this, she said, “You hev heard, no doubt, m’m, that my daughter hev lost her dear husband.” A slight pause, in which I intimated assent, and Mrs. Barham continued: “You wonder, I expect, at my calling of him ‘dear'; but he *was* dear, he cost her a many tears and sighs.” And then she went on: “There was a great change come over William Marker before he died; sometimes he would ask my dear daughter to read a chapter or to sing him a hymn, and when I think of the pore dying thief I hev my strong hopes of William Marker. But you know, m’m, you should see how them millers come buzzing about round my dear daughter. ‘Mrs. Marker,’ says one of ’em, ‘I am desirous of becoming the purchaser of your business.’ ‘And so you will, sir,’ she say, ‘if you’re the highest bidder.’ Another come and say, ‘Mrs. Marker, you must remember you hev lost your pore husband.’ ‘I hev, sir,’ she say, 'but I hev not lost myself.’ ”

Once in our young days my sister Agnes and I went to a ball[1] at Saxmundham, Barham driving us in our old-

fashioned carriage. On our return journey, about 2 a.m., there had been a slight fall of snow, and on the place in the Aldeburgh road where it crosses the common there were no hedges to mark its course. The horses wandered from the road and went up a fairly steep bank, with the result that the carriage was overturned; my sister and I, in our satin slippers, found ourselves about two miles from home with no choice but to walk the rest of the way. Barham, of course, was on his feet even before we were on ours, seeing to the horses, who stood perfectly still. He remained guarding the carriage and its contents until he obtained help, while we walked home. The tragedy came next day. My father was furiously angry with Barham—said he must have been drunk, which was to us absurd. Everyone but Barham admitted that he might have been a bit sleepy. But Barham wouldn’t even admit this, and my father dismissed him. Barham went home very quietly; he maintained that he was not drunk and was not asleep, but that it was impossible in that place under a slight fall of snow to see the road. When Barham reappeared he was in his Sunday clothes; he did not take himself off in a temper, he merely said that he wasn’t going to leave; he knew when he had got a good master, and master ought to know when he had got a good servant. Then my father fumed and raged, and stuck to it that Barham should leave. Our one hope was Mrs. Barham, and she did not fail us. Her own account of it was that on the second morning after the dismissal it was cold and wet, and she persuaded Barham to have a cup of tea in bed. “Then I went down and made him a nice cup of tea and a slice of hot buttered toast, like I know he liked, and I set down by

his side till he had finished, and then I said to him, gentle like, ‘Now, Barham, you was asleep, wasn’t you?’ and Barham said he might ha’ been.” And thus ended our domestic tragedy. Some months after, James Smith, our eldest sister’s husband, being in Aldeburgh, Barham came in to his wife with a smile on his face, and she asked him what he was smiling at. Mrs. Barham must tell the rest. “ ‘Mr. Smith,’ he say, ‘hev been a joking o’ me about upsetting my young ladies.’ ‘Barham,’ I say, ‘*I wonder at you, jokin’ on that solemn occasion.*’ ”

I could really go on almost indefinitely reporting Mrs. Barham’s conversation. She was not only a very good talker, but was clever all round in many kinds of work. She made most elaborate patchwork quilts of geometrical design, of her own devising; and for us, her own young ladies, as she called us, she aimed at making them entirely of silk. When she was working at one of these quilts, made up by small octagons fitted together with minute nicety, my sister Alice (Mrs. Cowell) came in to see her and found that Mrs. Barham was running short of a pale cream-coloured silk, which was needed to finish one of the four corners of the design in a quilt to be presented either to Agnes or myself. “She see in a minute how I was sitivated and how short I was of that light; well, she went home and sent me two bodies of frocks dirackly—soo like a sister.” Each of the little octagons was tacked on to a paper of the exact shape required, and when the sewing together was accomplished the great work began of taking out all the paper framework on which the quilt had been built up. “I tell Barham,” she

would say, “that he mustn’t expect no hot victuals when I am taking out the papers.”

When quilts had been made for all the six daughters of my father’s house, the daughters-in-law began to think (one of them, at any rate) that their turn was coming. But Mrs. Barham quickly nipped this expectation in the bud. “Noo, Mrs. Edmund,” she replied to a rather pointed inquiry, “I shall niver make another; my husband say I am not to, and,” turning to me for confirmation, “we must always do what our husbands say, mustn’t we, ma'am?” I rejoined, “I wonder at you, Mrs. Barham, talking like that, when everybody knows that Barham does what you say a great deal more than you do what he says.” A smile and a knowing look came into her face, and she rejoined, slyly, “Well, m’m, I du say that if our oon way is a good way there’s nothing like hevin’ it.” (The “oth” in nothing should be pronounced like the “oth” in bother.) This became quite a familiar saying in our family.

When my husband became Postmaster-General in 1880 no one was more interested in his new official position than Mrs. Barham; it appeared that she had a great-nephew in the Post Office whose abilities she thought were worthy of a better kind of work than that entrusted to him. She did not fail to raise the subject when I was next in her company. She had had her great-niece with her not long before, a sister of the young man in the G.P.O. “Yes, m’m, Jennie was here, and I thought I would talk to her about her brother. I didn’t like to say to her straight out, ‘What is your brother Willie’s character?’ but I worked up to it kind of gradual; soo, when we was settin’ at our teas I say to her, ‘Jennie, dear girl, do

your brother Willie drink?’ ” This gradual approach to the subject had very satisfactory immediate results, for Jennie was able to give her brother a clean bill of character, but unfortunately for her there were so many young fellows in the G.P.O. with similar qualifications that it did not lead to his immediate promotion.

Of a somewhat important funeral in Aldeburgh, Mrs. Barham was pleased to express her approval of the arrangements made. “The family all following, husbands and wives walking together. Now some people make the eldest son walk first, along with the eldest daughter, and the second son along with the second daughter, right down to the ind—and then the pore 'laws’ all alone by themselves.” It was the first time any of us had heard sons- and daughters-in-law called “the pore laws,” and the expression took root. One of my nephews-in-law to this day always signs himself when writing to me “Your affectionate pore law.” One more story of Mrs. Barham shall be my last. It has a pathetic note. Her dear daughter, Mrs. Marker, had died not long after the death of her husband, and the two children, a boy and a girl, the former about four years junior to the latter, were left without either father or mother. The girl in this position developed a motherly and protective feeling towards the boy. When they both had holidays at their respective schools she would seek him out and take him for some little excursion. On one of these excursions she took him to Beccles, where there is an attractive river and a nice woman who let out boats to hire by the hour; the two children presented themselves at her house and said they wanted a boat. And now Mrs. Barham must finish the

story: “The woman, she looked ’em up and down, and then she say, ‘What could your father and mother be thinking of to let you two dear children come here all alone by y'rselves to goo out in a boat?’ And then the two pore children bursted out crying, and said their father and mother was both dead: and the woman, oh! she was so sorry you can’t think: she couldn’t do enough for ’em. She let ’em hev a boat without charging them nothin’ for it, and when they came back she say to them, 'Now, you two dear children, you go down into my garden and gather anything you like that grows there.' But what was the good o’ that? They didn’t want nothin' out of the woman’s garden.”

There was a remarkable old lady who had lived in Aldeburgh all her life, and remembered in minute detail the chief events of the Napoleonic Wars. Her name was Mary Reeder; she was often given brevet rank and called Mrs. Reeder. In middle life she had been a nurse in the Rowley family, and had specially devoted herself to a delicate child. She lived to be nearly one hundred, and directed in her will that the church bells should ring a merry peal at her funeral in lieu of the usual solemn tolling. She lived in her own cottage, bequeathed to her by her father. It had a pleasant little garden in front and at the back. Mary objected to chance acquaintance and indiscriminate greetings, and would say, “If I goes out in my front, one and another passing says, ‘Good day, Mrs. Reeder,’ or ‘Hope you are well, Mrs. Reeder.’ I don’t want none of that, so when I wants the air, I goes out in my back.” Her father had been in the Navy, and he and four other Aldeburgh men had been taken prisoners by the French about 1798. “When none of

the five came back, and nothing was heard of them by their wives, four on 'em thought their husbands was dead and put on black and widders' caps: but my mother, she say, 'Noo, I will niver put on black for Joo Reeder not till I *know* he's dead, not if I can afford it iver soo.' Soo she put me out to nurse and went into service again herself. Well, when five years after that they all came back,[2] alive and well, you should ha' seen how silly them other women looked as had made certain their husbands was dead. But my father, he bought this house, and my mother came back to live with him in it. Oh! it *was* a wretched place then, the roof all to pieces, earth floor in the kitchen, and no comfort anywhere: and my mother, she say, 'Joo Reeder, Joo Reeder, this *is* a place to bring a woman to!' But my father he was as merry as could be. Sailor-like, as soon as he had lighted a fire and put a kittle on to boil, he thought he'd got a home: and he worked away at it and got it all to rights in noo time." She used also to tell how on another occasion her father, having just been released on furlough from his ship and put ashore at Portsmouth, was proceeding to *walk* to Aldeburgh, a distance, I suppose, of some 150 miles, when he was taken by the Press Gang and sent back into active service again. When I contrast this with the treatment of our men in the late war, I cannot help feeling that, whatever may be its faults, a democratic Government is more humane and more intelligent than the old autocracies.

When Mary Reeder was about seventy, and very hard pressed to make ends meet, for she had very little besides her cottage, my father arranged to give her a pension of so many shillings a week as long as she lived on condition that

the cottage was to be his when she died. Well, she lived and lived and lived: and we were very glad she did: it was she who was disturbed by it. She used quite to worry us by harping on the subject every time we saw her. She constantly wanted to give my mother a pretty little set of silver spoons which she possessed, my mother as constantly declining them, saying she enjoyed very much more seeing them on Mary's table than she would if they were locked up in the plate chest at Alde House, but Mary had got the subject on her brain, and could not leave it alone. "I ha' lived out of the course of nature," she argued, "and I want to die an honest woman." My mother was equally determined, but Mary left her the spoons in her will. An honest woman she certainly was: some question arose as to her exact age: was she really one hundred or only ninety-eight or so? "It is very easy to settle that," said my mother, "ask the Vicar to give you a copy of the entry of your birth in the parish register." Mary agreed, and my mother added, "The charge for that, you know, Mary, is 3s. 6d." The reply came as quick as lightning, "And I have got it riddy for him, too." When in 1870 the municipal franchise was given to women ratepayers, Mary became a voter, and my father being keen on the return of a certain candidate, asked the daughters who were at home to canvass the women electors. When they came to Mary Reeder's house they found with her an old man named Taylor—Billy Taylor he was always called. My sisters did not canvass him, for he saved them the trouble by volunteering the following information: "When my pore dear sister lay a-dying, 'Willam,' she say to me, 'when there's any vooting' goin' forrard, du you always

voot same as Mr. Newson Garrett, be that blew, yaller, or rad': and so I du.” The point of this lay in my father lately having changed over from the Conservative to the Liberal side in politics. My father didn’t like this story about Billy Taylor at all.

Other friends came to live in Aldeburgh in the ’sixties: Mr. and Mrs. Percy Metcalf. He came from the Tyne, and was a shipbuilder by profession: he built some ships at Snape for my father, and made great friends with Sawyer, the head carpenter, and Felgate, the shipwright, who were already in my father’s service. But what made all the difference to the rest of our lives was his passion for music. It was he who introduced us to the great world of music—Bach, Mozart, and Handel. He was less enthusiastic about Beethoven; and Wagner, I think, he had never heard of. Mozart was the god of his idolatry, and Spohr. I can hear now my sister Agnes singing Spohr’s “Who calls the Hunter to the Wood?” with the piano accompaniment in Mrs. Metcalf’s rather inadequate hands, Mr. Metcalf playing the horn obligato, taking the horn from his lips from time to time to say to his wife quite good-naturedly, “What a fool you are, my dear.” He opened a new world of music to us, and gave us a perennial spring of consolation, hope, and endurance which has never failed us. The local concerts at Aldeburgh became quite a different thing after the arrival of the Metcalfs: he would sing songs out of *Figaro* and *Don Giovanni* in a way that made the audience hardly know whether they were standing on their head or their heels: and even Mrs. James, usually so reserved, would say it reminded her “of her naughty days,” when she used to go to the opera. After one

of his *Don Giovanni* songs there was a great roar of applause, and he flung himself back on his seat and exclaimed *sotto voce*, “I thought the fools would like it.”

In after-years my sister Agnes’s friendship with Sir Hubert and Lady Maud Parry gave us another great musical friend, of whom I shall have more to tell in a later chapter.

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[1] At this ball, and at several others, we used to meet members of the Cavell family, before the birth of Edith Cavell, the heroic nurse who was shot by the Germans in Brussels about fifty years later, on 15th October 1915.

[2] I think this must have been during the Peace of Amiens, when prisoners on each side were released.

Chapter III

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MY FATHER AND MOTHER

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What I have written already may, I hope, give some indication of my father's personality. I cannot pretend to write with any detachment either of him or of my mother. My father was a handsome man, of the straight-featured Scandinavian type. In appearance he was not unlike Garibaldi: but the portrait of Walt Whitman at the beginning of *Specimen Days* is so like him that it might have passed, even among his near relations, for a portrait of himself. I have tested this by showing it to nieces and nephews and, covering the name, have asked, "Who is this?" They have answered at once, "Uncle Newson."

There is another portrait of Walt Whitman in his old age, now in the Metropolitan Museum of New York, and here reproduced, which is also extraordinarily like my father when he was old. It is so like him that I can never see it without a thrill. The eldest of my great-nieces, Lesley, now Mrs. More, daughter of Sir George and Lady Gibb, writes to me of what she remembers of her great-grandfather: "My memory of him is bound up with a vast expanse of white beard ... and somewhere just above glowed two sapphires with a fire behind them."

We had been told by Mrs. Barham (an older contemporary of my father) that he was the most beautiful child she had ever seen; fair-haired, of a bright complexion, “ruddy and withal of a beautiful countenance and goodly to look upon,” like David. He was a great contrast in this respect to his sister and two brothers, who were dark even to the point of swarthiness. His temperament was sanguine, generous, daring, impulsive, and impatient, and I am afraid I must add, quarrelsome. There were very few in our little circle at Aldeburgh with whom from time to time he did not quarrel desperately. He quarrelled badly with his elder brother, Richard, of Leiston. Sometimes he quarrelled so fiercely with our clergyman, Mr. Dowler, that going to church on Sunday became a positive scandal; then we were all marched off to the little dissenting chapel in the High Street, and it entertained us very much to see with what deference we, even the little children of our party, were greeted by the usual habituées of the place. Once about the time of the birth of my dearest brother, Sam, the war between my father and the Vicarage waxed so hot that he swore that Mr. Dowler should not christen the new baby: Sam was therefore taken, suitably escorted, to be christened at Snape Church, a beautiful little fifteenth-century building with a font much more ancient.[3]

My father had built up a considerable malting business at Snape: it was conveniently situated on the Alde, so that malt and other things could be shipped thence: and when railways became a practical proposition in our part of Suffolk my father exerted himself successfully to get a branch line, for goods only, extended to Snape. The junction is between

Wickham Market and Saxmundham, and it is one of my joys to this day to look out of the railway carriage window at this point and see the masts of ships rising up apparently out of the trees and meadows of rural Suffolk.

Snape Bridge is of importance strategically, as we found out during the war, for it is the main place where heavy-wheeled traffic can cross the Alde. One of my Leiston cousins saw it marked very prominently in a German map circulated among German officers in the late war.

For many years, from the ’fifties and ’sixties of the last century, our family migrated from Aldeburgh to Snape during the winter months. My father’s main business was then at Snape. This was constantly growing, while his business in Aldeburgh, since the arrival of the railway, was as constantly diminishing. My father adapted himself with characteristic energy to the new situation. There was no house at Snape where we could live, so he at once built one, in the bungalow style: a one-storied house which could be extended at discretion. Its advantage from the business point of view was obvious, and, as its position shortened my father’s driving journeys to nearly all the markets at which he bought barley, it considerably lessened the fatigue and wear and tear of his life. Malting can only be carried on in the cool months of the year: it generally stops in May and is resumed in October or November. For many years, therefore, Snape was our winter, and Aldeburgh our summer, home. Often and often I remember my father returning from his more distant markets, having driven himself in an open dog-cart, his hair and beard fringed with icicles. He was fond of horses, and rode himself almost daily