



George Sturt

Memoirs of a Surrey Labourer: A Record of the Last Years of Frederick Bettesworth

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Contact: <u>DigiCat@okpublishing.info</u>



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INTRODUCTION

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Bettesworth, the old labouring man, who in the decline of his strength found employment in my garden and entertained me with his talk, never knew that he had been made the subject of a book. To know it would have pleased him vastly, and there is something tragical in the reflection that he had to wear through his last weary months without the consolation of the little fame he had justly earned; and yet it would have been a mistake to tell him of it. His upbringing had not fitted him for publicity. On the contrary, there was so much danger that self-consciousness would send him boastfully drinking about the parish, and make him intolerable to his familiars and useless to any employer, that, instead of confessing to him what I had done, I took every precaution to keep him in ignorance of it, and sought by leaving him in obscurity to preserve him from ruin.

Obscure and unsuspicious he continued his work, and his pleasant garrulity went on in its accustomed way. Queer anecdotes came from him as plentifully as ever, and shrewd observations. Now it would be of his harvesting in Sussex that he told; now, of an adventure with a troublesome horse, or an experience on the scaffolding of a building; and again he would gossip of his garden, or of his neighbours, or of the old village life, or would discuss some scrap of news picked up at the public-house. And as this went on month after month, although I had no intention of adding to the first book or writing a second on the same lines, still it happened frequently that some fragment or other of

Bettesworth's conversation took my fancy and was jotted down in my note-book. But almost until the end no definite purpose informed me what to preserve and what to leave. The notes were made, for the most part, under the influence of whim only.

Towards the end, however, a sort of progression seemed to reveal itself in these haphazard jottings. His age was telling heavily upon Bettesworth, and symptoms of the have been creeping change appeared to inevitable unawares into my careless memoranda of his talk. I do not know when I first noticed this: it probably dawned upon me very slowly; but that it did dawn is certain, and in that perception I had the first crude vision of the present volume. I might not aim to make another book after the pattern of the first, grouping the materials as it pleased me for an artistic end; but by reproducing the notes in their proper order, and leaving them to tell their own tale, it should be possible to engage as it were the co-operation of Nature herself, my own part being merely that of a scribe, recording at the dictation of events the process of Bettesworth's decay.

To this idea, formed a year or so before Bettesworth's death, I have now tried to give shape. Unfortunately, the scribe's work was not well done. Things that should have been written down prove to have been overlooked; and although in the first few chapters I have gone back to a much earlier period than was originally intended, and have preserved the chronological order all through, the hoped-for sense of progression is too often wanting. It existed in my mind, in the memories which the notes called up for me,

rather than in Bettesworth's recorded conversations. Much explanatory comment, therefore, which I should have preferred to omit, has been introduced in order to give continuity to the narrative.

Bettesworth is spoken of throughout the book as an old man; and that is what he appeared to be. But in fact he was aged more by wear and tear than by years. When he died, a nephew who arranged the funeral caused the age of seventy-three to be marked on his coffin, but I think this was an exaggeration. The nephew's mother assured me at the time that Bettesworth could have been no more than sixtysix. She was his sister-in-law, having married his elder brother, and so had some right to an opinion; and yet probably he was a little older than she supposed. It is true that sixty-six is also the age one gets for him, computing it from evidence given in one chapter of this book; but then there is another chapter which, if it is correct, would make sixty-seven. Against these estimates a definite statement is to be placed. On the second of October, 1901, Bettesworth told me that it was his birthday, and that he was sixty-four; according to which, at his death, nearly four years later, he must have been close upon sixty-eight. And this, I am inclined to think, was his true age; at any rate I cannot believe that he was younger.

At the same time, it must be allowed that his own evidence was not quite to be trusted. A man in his position, with the workhouse waiting for him, will not make the most of his years to an employer, and I sometimes fancied that Bettesworth wished me to think him younger than he was. But it is quite possible that he was not himself certain of his

own age. I have it from his sister-in-law that both his parents died while he was still a child, and that he, with his brothers and sisters, was taken, destitute, to the workhouse. Thence, I suppose, he was rescued by that uncle, who kept a travelling van; and the man who carried the boy to fairs and racecourses, and thrashed him so savagely that at last he ran away to become Farmer Barnes's plough-boy, was not a person likely to instruct him very carefully about his age.

The point, however, is of no real importance. A labourer who has at least the look of being old: thin, grey-eyed, quiet, with bent shoulders and patient though determined expression of face—such is the Bettesworth whose last years are recorded in these chapters; and it does not much matter that we should know exactly how many years it took to reduce him to this state.

MEMOIRS OF A SURREY LABOURER

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December 7, 1892.—The ground in the upper part of the garden being too hard frozen for Bettesworth to continue this morning the work he was doing there yesterday, I found him some digging to do in a more sheltered corner, where the fork would enter the soil. With snow threatening to come and stop all outdoor work, it was not well that he should stand idle too soon.

"Oh dear!" he said one day, "we don't want no snow! We had enough o' that two winters ago. That was a fair

scorcher, that was.—There! I couldn't tell anybody how we did git through. Still, we got through, somehow. But there was some about here as was purty near starved. That poor woman as died over here t'other day...."

Here he broke off, to tell of a labourer's wife who had died in giving birth to twins, one of whom was also dead. Including the other twin, there were seven children living. Bettesworth talked of the husband, too; but presently working round again to the bad winter of 1889-1890, he proceeded:

"I knows they" (this woman and her family) "was purty near starvin'. I give her two or three half-bushels o' taters. I can't bear to see 'em like that, 'specially if there's little childern about. I give away bushels o' taters that winter, 'cause them as had got any had got 'em buried away—couldn't git at 'em (in the frozen ground). Mine was stowed away where I could git 'em."

Accordingly, anticipating hard times, I set Bettesworth to work in the sheltered spot where digging was still possible, and left him. The day proved sunny on the whole, with a soft winter sunshine, dimmed now and then by grey fog close down to the earth, and now and then by large drifts of foggy cloud passing over from the north. By mid-day the roads were sticky, where the sunshine had thawed the surface, but in shady places the ground was still hard. Here and there was ice, and odd corners remained white with the sprinkling of snow which had fallen two nights previously.

Towards sunset I went to see what Bettesworth had done. He had done very little, and, moreover, he had disappeared. The air glowed with the yellow sunset; the soft dim blue of the upper sky was changing to hazy grey in the south-east; in the west, veiling the sunset, lay a bank of clouds, crimson shaded to lilac. I turned to enjoy this as I climbed the garden to find Bettesworth, where he was busy at his yesterday's task.

"Well, Bettesworth, how are you getting on?" "Oh. cold. sir."

Overhead, one or two wisps of smoky-looking cloud were floating southwards. In the sunlight they showed amber against the soft blue, but from their movement and their indistinct and changing form it was plain that they belonged to the system of those larger clouds which had all day been crossing ominously out of the north. I glanced up at them, and remarked that I feared the snow was not far off now.

Bettesworth straightened up from his work.

"Ah, that's what everybody bin sayin'."

"Well, it looks uncommonly like coming."

"Ah, it do. Didn't it look black there, along about nine or ten o'clock this mornin'? I thought then we was goin' to have some snow, an' no mistake." He chuckled grimly and continued, "I dunno how we shall git on if it comes to that. But there, we've had it before an' got through somehow, and I dessay we shall git through again."

"It's to be hoped so. Anyhow, there seems to be no way of altering it."

"No, sir; there don't. I 'xpect we shall have to put up with it. Bear it an' grumble—that's what we shall have to do. We've had to do that before now."

It was a blessing, I laughed, that we had the right to grumble; but we hardly learnt to like the winter the better for being used to it.

"No; that don't make it none the sweeter, do it? Still, we can't help that. As my old neighbour, Jack Tower, used to say, 'Puverty en't no *crime*, but 'tis a great ill-convenience.'" The touch of epigram in Tower's saying seemed to please Bettesworth, and his speech flowed out with a smooth undulating balance as he repeated slowly, tasting the syllables: "No, cert'nly, puverty en't no crime; but it is a very ill-convenient thing, an' no mistake."

To the same period as the foregoing piece belongs an undated fragment, which tells how news came to Bettesworth of a certain boy's being bitten by a dog. "Have he bit'n *much*?" was the first eager exclamation, followed by, "These here messin' dawgs! There's too many of 'em, snappin' and yappin' about. I don't *like* 'em!"

Then he went on, "I don't see what anybody wants to keep dogs for, interferin' with anybody. Why, there's Kesty's dog up there—look at that dog of he's! Why, that dog of he's, he've bit three or four of 'em. He bit the postman two or three times, till they sent to 'n from the Post Office to tell 'n 'less he mind to keep his dog tied up he'd have to send an' fetch his letters hisself.... Nasty sly sort o' dog he is, no mistake. He goes slinkin' an' prowlin' about up there; he's never tied up. And he don't make no sound, ye know. No, you'll never hear 'n make no noise; but he'll have ye. And he en't partic'lar, neither, about lettin' of ye go by, even if it's on the highroad, onless he've a mind to. He'll come slinkin' round, an goo for ye, 's likely as not."

"Odd," I suggested, "that a man should care to keep a dog like that."

Bettesworth shook his head.

"There's too many of 'em about, by half. And I en't partic'lar fond o' dogs, nowhen." He looked up, and a knowing look came into his grey eyes as he continued, "I was workin' one time for Malcolms up here, and they had a dog, and one day he stole a shoulder o' mutton, indoors. Sort of collie, he was. And he took this 'ere shoulder o' mutton and run upstairs into one o' the rooms, and he wouldn't come out for nobody. I was at work out in the garden, and the servant she come runnin' out to me, to ast me if I'd come an' get 'n out. 'I dunno s'much about that,' I says; "ten't a job as I cares about.' I can tell ye, I wa'n't partic'lar about doin' of it. 'Oh,' she says, 'do come an' get 'n out. We be all afraid. And you can have a stick,' she says. 'No,' I says, 'I won't have no stick'—'cause, what good's a stick, ye know? He'd ha' come for me all the one for that. So I catches up a 'and-saw...."

"A hand-saw?"

"I did. I took this 'ere 'and-saw, and I went upstairs to 'n, and he come for me sure enough. But I give 'n two or three 'cross the nose with this saw, and he didn't like that. He went off downstairs quick sticks."

"H'm! I shouldn't have relished the job."

"No, sir; I didn't *like* it. I was afraid of 'n. I drove 'n out, but I was afraid of 'n all the one for that."

January 7, 1896.—A task reserved for this winter's leisure was the making of an arched way of larchpoles and wire to cover a short flight of steps in the

garden. Two briars at the top of the steps, one on each side, had overgrown them, and these were now to be trained to the new framework, which was to slant down at the same slope as the steps.

Until we began the work, it seemed simple enough; but almost immediately we plunged into bewilderment, owing to the various slopes and slants to be considered. The steps go askew between two parts of a zigzag path, and our archway, therefore, needed to be several feet longer on one side than on the other. The consequence was that the horizontal ties at the top not only clashed with all the gradients of the garden, but converged towards one another, so that, seen from above, they were horrid to behold. And then the slanting side-rails! They agreed with nothing else in all the landscape save the steps below them. Of course, when the briars covered these discrepancies, all would be well; but just while Bettesworth and myself were at work upon this thing, the farther we progressed with it the more distracted it looked, as though we had gathered into one spot all the conflicting angles of this most uneven of gardens, and were tying them up into one hideous knot. The work became a nightmare, and for an hour or two we lost our good spirits, and found it all we could do to keep our temper.

However, we got the framework together somehow, after which the straining of wires over it, being, as we fondly imagined, an easier task, released our thoughts a little. Bettesworth paid out and held the wire while I fastened it.

"Is that tight enough?" said he.

[&]quot;That'll do," said I.

[&]quot;Because," said he, "I can easy tighten it more yet."

"No," said I, "that'll do."

"Well, of course, if that'll do," he conceded; and then, not finishing his sentence, he chattered on. "Only, I don't want to be like ol' Sam Cook. He was 'long o' we chaps at work for Putticks when they was a-buildin' Coswell Church. I was there scaffoldin', an' this here Cook was s'posed to be helpin' of us. But we see as he never pulled, an' so one day we got two ropes and fastened the ends of 'em with jest black cotton. We made it look all like a knot, and he never see what we was up to. An' when it come to pullin', there was he makin' out to be pullin', leanin' back with his arms stretched out a-gruntin' 'Ugh!... Ugh!' and all the time never pullin' a pound. Why, if he'd on'y pulled half a dozen pounds, he'd ha' broke that cotton; but it never broke. Mr. John Puttick hisself was there, and he says, 'Well, I never see the like o' that in all my time! Why,' he says, 'you wouldn't pull enough to pull a sausage asunder,' he says. Ye see, he (Cook) always went by the name o' Sausage, 'cause his wife used to make sausages, so Mr. Puttick says to 'n, 'Why, you wouldn't pull a sausage asunder!' he says."

Too soon, unlooked-for difficulties presented themselves in our wire-straining. We began to agree that we hardly felt as if we had been apprenticed to the work, and Bettesworth muttered.

"I dunno as I should care much about goin' out to take a job puttin' up wire."

To get the first wire tightly fixed between two posts was easy enough, but, to our dismay, the tightening of a second wire invariably slackened the first. Bettesworth was jubilating over his second wire.

"There, he's tight, an' no mistake!"

"Ah, but look at the first one!"

"What! He en't got loose, is he, sir? Oh dear, oh dear! That do look bad! Never can let 'n go like that, can us, sir?" Gradually his memory began harking back to earlier instances of our difficulty. "'Tis like when I helped Mr. Franks puttin' wires up for he's ras'berries. We had just such a bother as this. Fast 's we got one tight we loosened another. We did git in a pucker over 'm, an' no mistake. I remember I told Bill Harris down 'ere what a bother we'd bin 'avin', and he says, 'Ah, I knows you must 've had a job.' He'd had just such a bother hisself, on'y he had all the proper tools an' everything. He borried Mr. Mills's wire-strainers, and when he got the fust wire up—oh, he thought he was gettin' on capital. He seemed like makin' a reg'lar good job of it. But when he come to put up t'other wire—oh dear, oh dear!—he got in such a hobble. 'There,' he says, 'I was ashamed for anybody to see it, and I come away an' left it.'"

I was in the humour to be glad of other people's perplexities, and I laughed.

"Oh, he came away and left it, did he?"

"Yes. Don't ye see, 'twas a reg'lar fence, 'tween his garden an' the next. An' he thought for to have it all jest right an' proper. But everybody as come by could see, and he was that put out about it that he come away an' left it."

"Bother the stuff! I hope we shan't have to go and leave this."

"I dunno how we be to do it. There, 'tis to be done, we knows that, 'cause I've seen it.... No, I en't never see 'em a puttin' of it up; but I've seen the fences after it bin put up,

an' very nice they looks wi' the wire all as straight.... But how they doos it, I'm sure I don't know."

We finished at last, after a fashion, and Bettesworth went on to train and tie the briars. If work had not been scarce, it would have been cruel to let him undertake such a job. To make up for his defective sight, it was his way to grope out blindly for a thing just before him, and find it by touch; and in dealing so with this briar, with its terrible thorns, his hands got into a pitiable state. He showed me them on resuming his work the next morning, saying,

"I shan't be sorry when I done wi' this customer. His nails is too sharp for my likin'. When I went 'ome yesterday and washed my hands, goo! didn't they smart wherever the cold water touched one o' they scratches! My ol' gal says to me, 'What be ye hushin' about?' 'So 'd you *hush*,' I says, 'if you'd bin handlin' they roses all the aft'noon, same as me.' I tried with gloves, but they wa'n't no good. You can't git to tie, with gloves on."

March 26, 1896, 10.30 a.m.—There are deep cloudshadows, and rapid sun-glints lighting up the shadows like daffodils shining against grass. And there is the roar of a big wind in the air, and majestic clouds are sailing across, and beyond these the sky is a dazzling blue.

All growing things seem busy. Everywhere on the land men are at work; the swift sunshine glistens on the white of their shirts, and shows them up against the darkness of the new plough-furrows or the freshly dug garden-ground.

Bettesworth was sowing peas. Blustered by the wind, I went to him and complained of the coldness of it. "A good

touch of north in it," was a phrase I used.

"Yes, sir; she (the wind) have shifted there since the mornin'. She was due west when I got up—when that little rain come. She've gone round since then, but she'll git back again to the south, you'll see. I've noticed it many's a time. Right south she was at twelve o'clock when the sun crossed the line o' Saturday (March 21), and that's where she'll keep tackin' back to all through the quarter—till midsummer, that is."

"Well, I don't know that she could do much better."

"No, sir. Strikes me we be goin' to have a very nice, kind spring. I don't say she'll bide there all the time; but if she gits away, that's where she'll come back to."

Again I expressed my dislike of this strong north wind. It would soon make me sleepy, I said.

"Would it, sir? Oh, I do like to hear the wind! To lay and listen to it when I be in bed—it makes me feel so comfortable. No matter what 'tis like outside, I feels that I be in the warm aw-right."

March 31, 1897.—At six minutes to five this morning Bettesworth was lacing up his boots. The day is the last of March, which, for gardeners in this village, is the middle of the busiest time of the year. The early seeds have been in the ground long ago; the beans are up two inches; the first sowing of peas shows well in the rows; others were put in last week. Shallots are sending up their green spikes; there are a few potatoes already planted; and now every effort must be made, and advantage be taken of every opportunity, to get the remainder of

the ground ready and the main crops planted at the earliest possible time; for in this soil, as Bettesworth says, "you can't be much too for'ard."

Late last night he and his old wife planted their potatoes in a few rods of ground he has at the end of my garden. It was seven o'clock, and dark, by the time they had finished; then they went home and had supper—or, at least, the wife had, whose work had not been arduous until the evening. She scolded her husband.

"There you goes slavin' about, and gets so tired you can't eat."

"It's true," Bettesworth confesses. "The more I works the less I eats.... No, nor I don't sleep, neither. If I got anythink on my mind, I can't sleep. I seems to want to be up and at it."

Supper over, he lit his pipe, had one smoke, then kicked off his boots and said,

"Well, I be off to bed. 'Ten't no good settin' here, lookin' at the fireplace."

The wife grumbled again in the morning, urging him to rest.

"But what's the use?" he said. "It got to be done, and I can't rest ontil *'tis* done."

So he got up at the time already mentioned, and came to rake over the potato-ground.

It slopes down to the lane, this ground. Presently the man from the cottage just across the lane came out for his day's work.

"Why, you be for'arder than ever this year, ben't ye, Fred?"

"No, I dunno as I be. I wants to git it done, though, anyhow."

Then the Vicar's gardener passed. He laughed. "Be you determined on gettin' all your ground planted in March, then, Fred?"

Bettesworth laughed back. "I don't care whether 'tis March or April. When I be ready it got to go in."

Others, going by, chaffed him. "You bin there all night, then?"

About a quarter past six he went back home, and met his neighbour Noah.

"Hullo!" says Noah. "What? You bin at work?"

"Ah, and so you ought to ha' bin."

But Noah, who has lived in London, "sits up till eleven or twelve at night readin' the paper. He can't git into the habit of gettin' up early."

Gardening talk is now the staple conversation in the village, and the public-house is the club-room where the discussions take place, the times being Saturday night and Sunday.

"You don't find many there any other time," says Bettesworth. "Cert'nly, after a man bin to work all day, when he gits home he's tired, and wants to go to bed. But Saturday night and Sunday—well, you can't bide indoors solitary, lookin' at the fire. If you do, you never learns nothin'. But to go and have a glass and a pipe where there's others—that sims to enlighten your mind."

The men compare notes, and give and take sage advice. "Where I had that crop o' dwarf peas last year I be goin' to have carrots this," says one. Another answers, "Well, then, if

I was you, I should dig that ground up now—rake off the stones" (carrots being "a very tender herbage"). "Then, if it comes rain, that'll settle it a bit. After that, let it bide an' settle for about another fortnight, and then as soon as you gets a shower shove 'em in as fast as you mind."

"Or else," Bettesworth explains in telling me this, "if you don't let it settle the drill sows 'em too deep; it sinks in. Carrots is a thing you wants to sow as shallow as ever you can."

Somebody informs the company that he had "quarter of a acre o' carrots last year, and he made five pound of 'em." Or was it that he had five tons, and sold them for thirty shillings a ton? This was it, as Bettesworth at last remembers.

"I 'spose you'll soon be puttin' in some taters, Fred?"

"I got most o' mine in a'ready."

"Have ye? I en't sowed none yet, but...."

So says Tom Durrant, the landlord.

"But cert'nly," as Bettesworth observes, "down there where he is it do take the frost so—right over there in Moorway's Bottom. Up here, though, we no call to wait. I likes to git taters in. You see, where they lays about they spears so, and then the spears gits knocked off—you can't help it; or, if not, still, where you sees a tater speared so, that must weaken that tater? About two foot two one way and fifteen inches t'other—that's the distance I gen'ly plants taters. Ten't no good leavin' 'em wider 'tween the rows. But old Steve Blackman, up there by the Forest, I knowed he once plant some three foot both ways. And law, what a crop he did git! 'Twas a piece o' ground his landlord let 'n have

for the breakin' of it up. And he trenched in a lot o' fuzz—old fuzz-bushes as high as you be—and so on. Everything went in. And such a crop o' taters as he had—no, no dressin'. Only this old fuzz-stuff. Regents, they was. Oh, that was a splendid tater, too! But you never hears of 'em now. They sims to be reg'lar gone out. I got some o' these here Dunbars, down here. I should like to see half a bushel o' they in this bit o' ground o' yourn. Splendid croppin' tater they be. I ast Tom Durrant if he could spare you half a bushel. He said he didn't hardly know. There's so many bin after 'em-purty near half the parish. They be a splendid croppin' tater, no mistake. He got 'em of some gentleman's gardener to begin with, I reckon. Reg'lar one he is, you know, for gettin' taters an' things, and markin' 'em and keepin' the sorts separate. He had four to start with, an' they produced a peck. Then he got three bushel out o' that peck. And last year he sowed 'em again—three bushel—and he got thirty-nine bushel."

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May 13, 1896.—The Tom Durrant just mentioned was frequently spoken of by Bettesworth, and always in a tone of warm approval. "A wonderful quiet sort o' man," steadily "putting together the pieces," but not assuming any airs, he managed his public-house well, and with especial attention to the comfort of his older neighbours. "If any of the young uns come in hollerin' about, 'twas very soon 'Outside!' with Tom. 'There is the door!' he'd say. 'I don't keep my 'ouse open for such as you.'"

So Bettesworth has told me, more than once—perhaps not exactly in those words.

But sometimes Bettesworth's talk was too thick with detail to be remembered and written down as he said it in the time at my disposal; whence it happens that I am able only to summarize an anecdote about Durrant, which Bettesworth told with considerable relish. The publican was the owner of two cottages which were supplied with water from a good well—a precious thing in this village. These cottages had lately been overhauled and enlarged— Bettesworth detailed to me all the improvements, praising the new sculleries and sheds that had been added—and then the tenants, as if stricken with madness, found fault with the water-supply, and lodged a complaint with the sanitary inspector. The inspector insisted that the well should be cleaned out. Durrant thereupon examined the water, found it "clear as crystal," cleaned out the well as he was ordered to do, and—gave the tenants notice to pay sixpence a week more for their cottages, or to quit. "So they didn't get much by that," said Bettesworth approvingly.

After all, this was but a kind of parenthesis in a talk which, not hurried, but quietly oozing out as we worked side by side in the garden, fairly overwhelmed my memory with variety of subject and vividness of expression. At one time it dealt with a certain road which was to be widened—"all they beautiful trees to be cut down, right from so-and-so to so-and-so"; at another, it discussed three parcels of building land for sale in the vicinity, estimated their acreage, and related the offers which had been already made for them. From that, working all the while, Bettesworth would wander

off to the drought, and I would hear how long this or that neighbour had been without water; how a third (whose new horse, by the way, "was turnin' out well—but there, so do all they that comes from" a certain source, where, however, "they works 'em too hard")—how a third neighbour was obliged to keep his old horse almost constantly at work fetching water, since he had twenty-two little pigs, besides other live animals whose numbers goodness knows, and so did Bettesworth. At the new schools, again, the water was failing; and how, and why, and what the caretaker thought, and all about it, Bettesworth was able to explain.

The receptivity of the man's brain was what struck me. One pictured it pinked and patterned over with thousands of unsorted facts—legions of them jostling one another without apparent arrangement. Yet all were available to him; at will he could summon any one of them into his consciousness. A modern man would have had to stop and sift and compare them, and build theories and systems out of all that wealth of material. Not being modern, Bettesworth did not theorize; his thoughts were like the dust-atoms seen in a sunbeam. But though he did not "think," still a vast common-sense somehow or other flourished in him, and these manifold facts were its food.

September 26, 1896.—Nor was it only of current topics that he could talk with such fullness of detail. Getting shortly afterwards into the reminiscent vein, he succeeded in paralyzing my memory with the tale of things he had observed many years before in just the same unsystematic yet thorough fashion. My hasty jottings, made

afterwards, preserve only a few points, and do not tell how any of them were suggested. The talk was at one time of Basingstoke Fair, "where they goes to hire theirselves for the year." Of "shepherds with a bit o' wool in their hats, carters with a bit o' whipcord, and servant gals," and so on. "I went once," said Bettesworth, "when I was a nipper—went away from Penstead; but I never got hired.... There's the place for games, though! They carters, when they've jest took their year's money, and be changin' 'racks,' as they calls it. 'You bin an' changed your rack, Bill?' 'What rack be you got on to?' 'You got on for old Farmer So-and-so?'... There they be, hollerin' about. And then they all got their shillin', what bin hired...."

I did not stop then to consider whether this hiring shilling, and the token in the hat, might have any relationship, in the world of old customs, to the "King's shilling" and the bunch of ribbons of the recruit for the army. Bettesworth was talking; and presently it was about a certain Jack Worthington, of a neighbouring village, who was known as "Cunnin' Jack," and played the concertina at fairs, clubs, and so on: "Newbury Fair, Reading Fair, Basingstoke Fair"—Bettesworth essayed to catalogue them. Cunnin' Jack "learnt it all by hisself, but I've heared a good many—travellin' folk and the like—say as they never heared anybody play the concertina like him. He's the on'y one 's ever I heared play the church bells—chimes, an' fire 'em, and all—wonderful! Blue Bells of Scotland, too—to hear him play that, an' the chimes, jest exact! No trouble to make out what 'tis. Oh,

he's a reg'lar musician! He've trained all his sons to same thing. One of 'em plays the fiddle; another of 'em got a thing what he scratches along wi' wires, sounds purty near like a fiddle.... 'Ten't no good for 'n in a town, 'less 'tis a fair or summat o' that; but in any out-o'-the-way place. 'Relse, if he gets to a fair, there'll be three or four landlords about tryin' to get hold of 'n; and they'll give 'n five shillin's and supper, and his drink an' a bed, an' what he can pick up besides. Very often he'll make as much as five-an'-twenty shillin's in a night(?). And when he comes 'ome, he bring p'r'aps a gallon o' ha'pence along with 'n. Never no silver, o' course. Often, when his wife thought he hadn't got nothing but a pound or so, he'd chuck her five or six pound. Then in the winter he'd go gravel-diggin', onless there come a fair, or anything o' the likes o' that. At these pubs where they dances, too, he'd put round the hat after every dance, an' if there was a good many stood up, p'r'aps he'd pull in half-acrown or so."

Cunnin' Jack had a contrivance of musical dancing-dolls, about which I did not clearly understand. And I have quite forgotten how Bettesworth spoke of the man's brother, a deaf-mute, who refused to work, and "lived about at Aldershot, along o' the soldiers."

Afterwards another "dummy" was mentioned: "terrible big strong feller.... Spiteful.... Goes gravel-cartin' with his father." At a difficult place in the gravel-pit the father reached out and struck his son's horse. The "dummy" springs on him, throws him on his back, making a noise "'bu-bu,' like a calf.... Sure way to upset 'n—if you was in the gravel pit, touch his hoss...."

Bettesworth had once seen "a dummy, talkin' with a friend of his," in the finger alphabet. "Can't you understand it?" said the friend to Bettesworth. "'No,' I says; 'how should I?' But, law! to see him! And then write, too! Purty near as fast as you can talk. And all the time his eye 'd be on ye, watchin' ye. But to see him write on his slate—wonderful fast! and then" (here Bettesworth breaks into dramatic action, licking his hand and smudging out slate-writing) —"and then, when he'd rubbed it out, to see him write again! Spiteful, though, he was. So they all be, I s'pose." There was another dumb man, for instance, who had been apprenticed to a shoemaker....

Unfortunately, I cannot reconstruct this instance. I only remember that the man had become "a wonderful good shoemaker, but didn't sim to care about follerin' it," and had "took to gardenin' now," instead.

May 5, 1898.—On a morning early in May it was raining, quietly, luxuriously, with a continuous soothing shattering-down of warm drops. In the doorway of the little tool-shed I stood listening—listening to the gentle murmur on the roof, on the long fresh grass of a small orchard plot, and on the young leaves of the plum and the blossoming apple which made the daylight greener by half veiling the sky.

Beside and beyond these trees were lilacs, purpling for bloom, small hazels, young elms in a hedgerow—all fair with new greenness; and farther on, glimpses of cottage roof against the newly dug garden-ground of the steep hillside. Above the half-diaphanous green tracery of the trees, cool