

***EDMUND
GOSSE***

***FATHER
AND
SON:
A STUDY
OF TWO
TEMPERAMENTS***

Edmund Gosse

Father and Son: A Study of Two Temperaments

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PREFACE

AT the present hour, when fiction takes forms so ingenious and so specious, it is perhaps necessary to say that the following narrative, in all its parts, and so far as the punctilious attention of the writer has been able to keep it so, is scrupulously true. If it were not true, in this strict sense, to publish it would be to trifle with all those who may be induced to read it. It is offered to them as a *document*, as a record of educational and religious conditions which, having passed away, will never return. In this respect, as the diagnosis of a dying Puritanism, it is hoped that the narrative will not be altogether without significance.

It offers, too, in a subsidiary sense, a study of the development of moral and intellectual ideas during the progress of infancy. These have been closely and conscientiously noted, and may have some value in consequence of the unusual conditions in which they were produced. The author has observed that those who have written about the facts of their own childhood have usually delayed to note them down until age has dimmed their recollections. Perhaps an even more common fault in such autobiographies is that they are sentimental, and are falsified by self-admiration and self-pity. The writer of these recollections has thought that if the examination of his earliest years was to be undertaken at all, it should be attempted while his memory is still perfectly vivid and while he is still unbiased by the forgetfulness or the sensibility of advancing years.

At one point only has there been any tampering with precise fact. It is believed that, with the exception of the Son, there is but one person mentioned in this book who is still alive. Nevertheless, it has been thought well, in order to avoid any appearance of offence, to alter the majority of the proper names of the private persons spoken of.

It is not usual, perhaps, that the narrative of a spiritual struggle should mingle merriment and humour with a discussion of the most solemn subjects. It has, however, been inevitable that they should be so mingled in this narrative. It is true that most funny books try to be funny throughout, while theology is scandalized if it awakens a single smile. But life is not constituted thus, and this book is nothing if it is not a genuine slice of life. There was an extraordinary mixture of comedy and tragedy in the situation which is here described, and those who are affected by the pathos of it will not need to have it explained to them that the comedy was superficial and the tragedy essential.

September 1907

CHAPTER I

THIS book is the record of a struggle between two temperaments, two consciences and almost two epochs. It ended, as was inevitable, in disruption. Of the two human beings here described, one was born to fly backward, the other could not help being carried forward. There came a time when neither spoke the same language as the other, or encompassed the same hopes, or was fortified by the same desires. But, at least, it is some consolation to the survivor,

that neither, to the very last hour, ceased to respect the other, or to regard him with a sad indulgence.

The affection of these two persons was assailed by forces in comparison with which the changes that health or fortune or place introduce are as nothing. It is a mournful satisfaction, but yet a satisfaction, that they were both of them able to obey the law which says that ties of close family relationship must be honoured and sustained. Had it not been so, this story would never have been told.

The struggle began soon, yet of course it did not begin in early infancy. But to familiarize my readers with the conditions of the two persons (which were unusual) and with the outlines of their temperaments (which were, perhaps innately, antagonistic), it is needful to open with some account of all that I can truly and independently recollect, as well as with some statements which are, as will be obvious, due to household tradition.

My parents were poor gentlefolks; not young; solitary, sensitive, and although they did not know it, proud. They both belonged to what is called the Middle Class, and there was this further resemblance between them that they each descended from families which had been more than well-to-do in the eighteenth century, and had gradually sunken in fortune. In both houses there had been a decay of energy which had led to decay in wealth. In the case of my Father's family it had been a slow decline; in that of my Mother's, it had been rapid. My maternal grandfather was born wealthy, and in the opening years of the nineteenth century, immediately after his marriage, he bought a little estate in North Wales, on the slopes of Snowdon. Here he seems to

have lived in a pretentious way, keeping a pack of hounds and entertaining on an extravagant scale. He had a wife who encouraged him in this vivid life, and three children, my Mother and her two brothers. His best trait was his devotion to the education of his children, in which he proclaimed himself a disciple of Rousseau. But he can hardly have followed the teaching of 'Emile' very closely, since he employed tutors to teach his daughter, at an extremely early age, the very subjects which Rousseau forbade, such as history, literature and foreign languages.

My Mother was his special favourite, and his vanity did its best to make a bluestocking of her. She read Greek, Latin and even a little Hebrew, and, what was more important, her mind was trained to be self-supporting. But she was diametrically opposed in essential matters to her easy-going, luxurious and self-indulgent parents. Reviewing her life in her thirtieth year, she remarked in some secret notes: 'I cannot recollect the time when I did not love religion.' She used a still more remarkable expression: 'If I must date my conversion from my first wish and trial to be holy, I may go back to infancy; if I am to postpone it till after my last wilful sin, it is scarcely yet begun.' The irregular pleasures of her parents' life were deeply distasteful to her, as such were to many young persons in those days of the wide revival of Conscience, and when my grandfather, by his reckless expenditure, which he never checked till ruin was upon him, was obliged to sell his estate, and live in penury, my Mother was the only member of the family who did not regret the change. For my own part, I believe I should have liked my reprobate maternal grandfather, but his conduct was

certainly very vexatious. He died, in his eightieth year, when I was nine months old.

It was a curious coincidence that life had brought both my parents along similar paths to an almost identical position in respect to religious belief. She had started from the Anglican standpoint, he from the Wesleyan, and each, almost without counsel from others, and after varied theological experiments, had come to take up precisely the same attitude towards all divisions of the Protestant Church—that, namely, of detached and unbiased contemplation. So far as the sects agreed with my Father and my Mother, the sects were walking in the light; wherever they differed from them, they had slipped more or less definitely into a penumbra of their own making, a darkness into which neither of my parents would follow them. Hence, by a process of selection, my Father and my Mother alike had gradually, without violence, found themselves shut outside all Protestant communions, and at last they met only with a few extreme Calvinists like themselves, on terms of what may almost be called negation—with no priest, no ritual, no festivals, no ornament of any kind, nothing but the Lord's Supper and the exposition of Holy Scripture drawing these austere spirits into any sort of cohesion. They called themselves 'the Brethren', simply; a title enlarged by the world outside into 'Plymouth Brethren'.

It was accident and similarity which brought my parents together at these meetings of the Brethren. Each was lonely, each was poor, each was accustomed to a strenuous intellectual self-support. He was nearly thirty-eight, she was past forty-two, when they married. From a suburban

lodging, he brought her home to his mother's little house in the northeast of London without a single day's honeymoon. My Father was a zoologist, and a writer of books on natural history; my Mother also was a writer, author already of two slender volumes of religious verse—the earlier of which, I know not how, must have enjoyed some slight success, since a second edition was printed—afterwards she devoted her pen to popular works of edification. But how infinitely removed in their aims, their habits, their ambitions from 'literary' people of the present day, words are scarcely adequate to describe. Neither knew nor cared about any manifestation of current literature. For each there had been no poet later than Byron, and neither had read a romance since, in childhood, they had dipped into the Waverley Novels as they appeared in succession. For each the various forms of imaginative and scientific literature were merely means of improvement and profit, which kept the student 'out of the world', gave him full employment, and enabled him to maintain himself. But pleasure was found nowhere but in the Word of God, and to the endless discussion of the Scriptures each hurried when the day's work was over.

In this strange household the advent of a child was not welcomed, but was borne with resignation. The event was thus recorded in my Father's diary:

'E. delivered of a son. Received green swallow from Jamaica.'

This entry has caused amusement, as showing that he was as much interested in the bird as in the boy. But this does not follow; what the wording exemplifies is my Father's extreme punctilio. The green swallow arrived later in the

day than the son, and the earlier visitor was therefore recorded first; my Father was scrupulous in every species of arrangement.

Long afterwards, my Father told me that my Mother suffered much in giving birth to me, and that, uttering no cry, I appeared to be dead. I was laid, with scant care, on another bed in the room, while all anxiety and attention were concentrated on my Mother. An old woman who happened to be there, and who was unemployed, turned her thoughts to me, and tried to awake in me a spark of vitality. She succeeded, and she was afterwards complimented by the doctor on her cleverness. My Father could not—when he told me the story—recollect the name of my preserver. I have often longed to know who she was. For all the rapture of life, for all its turmoils, its anxious desires, its manifold pleasures, and even for its sorrow and suffering, I bless and praise that anonymous old lady from the bottom of my heart.

It was six weeks before my Mother was able to leave her room. The occasion was made a solemn one, and was attended by a species of Churching. Mr. Balfour, a valued minister of the denomination, held a private service in the parlour, and 'prayed for our child, that he may be the Lord's'. This was the opening act of that 'dedication' which was never henceforward forgotten, and of which the following pages will endeavour to describe the results. Around my tender and unconscious spirit was flung the luminous web, the light and elastic but impermeable veil, which it was hoped would keep me 'unspotted from the world'.

Until this time my Father's mother had lived in the house and taken the domestic charges of it on her own shoulders. She now consented to leave us to ourselves. There is no question that her exodus was a relief to my Mother, since my paternal grandmother was a strong and masterful woman, buxom, choleric and practical, for whom the interests of the mind did not exist. Her daughter-in-law, gentle as she was, and ethereal in manner and appearance — strangely contrasted (no doubt), in her tinctures of gold hair and white skin, with my grandmother's bold carnations and black tresses—was yet possessed of a will like tempered steel. They were better friends apart, with my grandmother lodged hard by, in a bright room, her household gods and bits of excellent eighteenth-century furniture around her, her miniatures and sparkling china arranged on shelves.

Left to my Mother's sole care, I became the centre of her solicitude. But there mingled with those happy animal instincts which sustain the strength and patience of every human mother and were fully present with her—there mingled with these certain spiritual determinations which can be but rare. They are, in their outline, I suppose, vaguely common to many religious mothers, but there are few indeed who fill up the sketch with so firm a detail as she did. Once again I am indebted to her secret notes, in a little locked volume, seen until now, nearly sixty years later, by no eye save her own. Thus she wrote when I was two months old:

'We have given him to the Lord; and we trust that He will really manifest him to be His own, if he grow up; and if the Lord take him early, we will not doubt that he is taken to

Himself. Only, if it please the Lord to take him, I do trust we may be spared seeing him suffering in lingering illness and much pain. But in this as in all things His will is better than what we can choose. Whether his life be prolonged or not, it has already been a blessing to us, and to the saints, in leading us to much prayer, and bringing us into varied need and some trial.'

The last sentence is somewhat obscure to me. How, at that tender age, I contrived to be a blessing 'to the saints' may surprise others and puzzles myself. But 'the saints' was the habitual term by which were indicated the friends who met on Sunday mornings for Holy Communion, and at many other times in the week for prayer and discussion of the Scriptures, in the small hired hall at Hackney, which my parents attended. I suppose that the solemn dedication of me to the Lord, which was repeated in public in my Mother's arms, being by no means a usual or familiar ceremony even among the Brethren, created a certain curiosity and fervour in the immediate services, or was imagined so to do by the fond, partial heart of my Mother. She, however, who had been so much isolated, now made the care of her child an excuse for retiring still further into silence. With those religious persons who met at the Room, as the modest chapel was called, she had little spiritual, and no intellectual, sympathy. She noted:

'I do not think it would increase my happiness to be in the midst of the saints at Hackney. I have made up my mind to give myself up to Baby for the winter, and to accept no invitations. To go when I can to the Sunday morning meetings and to see my own Mother.'

The monotony of her existence now became extreme, but she seems to have been happy. Her days were spent in taking care of me, and in directing one young servant. My Father was forever in his study, writing, drawing, dissecting; sitting, no doubt, as I grew afterwards accustomed to see him, absolutely motionless, with his eye glued to the microscope, for twenty minutes at a time. So the greater part of every weekday was spent, and on Sunday he usually preached one, and sometimes two extempore sermons. His workday labours were rewarded by the praise of the learned world, to which he was indifferent, but by very little money, which he needed more. For over three years after their marriage, neither of my parents left London for a single day, not being able to afford to travel. They received scarcely any visitors, never ate a meal away from home, never spent an evening in social intercourse abroad. At night they discussed theology, read aloud to one another, or translated scientific brochures from French or German. It sounds a terrible life of pressure and deprivation, and that it was physically unwholesome there can be no shadow of a doubt. But their contentment was complete and unfeigned. In the midst of this, materially, the hardest moment of their lives, when I was one year old, and there was a question of our leaving London, my Mother recorded in her secret notes:

'We are happy and contented, having all things needful and pleasant, and our present habitation is hallowed by many sweet associations. We have our house to ourselves and enjoy each other's society. If we move we shall no longer be alone. The situation may be more favourable, however, for Baby, as being more in the country. I desire to

have no choice in the matter, but as I know not what would be for our good, and God knows, so I desire to leave it with Him, and if it is not His will we should move, He will raise objections and difficulties, and if it is His will He will make Henry [my Father] desirous and anxious to take the step, and then, whatever the result, let us leave all to Him and not regret it.'

No one who is acquainted with the human heart will mistake this attitude of resignation for weakness of purpose. It was not poverty of will, it was abnegation, it was a voluntary act. My Mother, underneath an exquisite amenity of manner, concealed a rigour of spirit which took the form of a constant self-denial. For it to dawn upon her consciousness that she wished for something, was definitely to renounce that wish, or, more exactly, to subject it in every thing to what she conceived to be the will of God.

This is perhaps the right moment for me to say that at this time, and indeed until the hour of her death, she exercised, without suspecting it, a magnetic power over the will and nature of my Father. Both were strong, but my Mother was unquestionably the stronger of the two; it was her mind which gradually drew his to take up a certain definite position, and this remained permanent although she, the cause of it, was early removed. Hence, while it was with my Father that the long struggle which I have to narrate took place, behind my Father stood the ethereal memory of my Mother's will, guiding him, pressing him, holding him to the unswerving purpose which she had formed and defined. And when the inevitable disruption came, what was unspeakably painful was to realize that it

was not from one, but from both parents that the purpose of the child was separated.

My Mother was a Puritan in grain, and never a word escaped her, not a phrase exists in her diary, to suggest that she had any privations to put up with. She seemed strong and well, and so did I; the one of us who broke down was my Father. With his attack of acute nervous dyspepsia came an unexpected small accession of money, and we were able, in my third year, to take a holiday of nearly ten months in Devonshire. The extreme seclusion, the unbroken strain, were never repeated, and when we returned to London, it was to conditions of greater amenity and to a less rigid practice of 'the world forgetting by the world forgot'. That this relaxation was more relative than positive, and that nothing ever really tempted either of my parents from their cavern in an intellectual Thebaid, my recollections will amply prove. But each of them was forced by circumstances into a more or less public position, and neither could any longer quite ignore the world around.

It is not my business here to re-write the biographies of my parents. Each of them became, in a certain measure, celebrated, and each was the subject of a good deal of contemporary discussion. Each was prominent before the eyes of a public of his or her own, half a century ago. It is because their minds were vigorous and their accomplishments distinguished that the contrast between their spiritual point of view and the aspect of a similar class of persons today is interesting and may, I hope, be instructive. But this is not another memoir of public

individuals, each of whom has had more than one biographer. My serious duty, as I venture to hold it, is other;

that's the world's side,

Thus men saw them, praised them, thought they knew them!

There, in turn, I stood aside and praised them!

Out of my own self, I dare to phrase it.

But this is a different inspection, this is a study of
the other side, the novel Silent
silver lights and darks undreamed of,

the record of a state of soul once not uncommon in Protestant Europe, of which my parents were perhaps the latest consistent exemplars among people of light and leading.

The peculiarities of a family life, founded upon such principles, are, in relation to a little child, obvious; but I may be permitted to recapitulate them. Here was perfect purity, perfect intrepidity, perfect abnegation; yet there was also narrowness, isolation, an absence of perspective, let it be boldly admitted, an absence of humanity. And there was a curious mixture of humbleness and arrogance; entire resignation to the will of God and not less entire disdain of the judgement and opinion of man. My parents founded every action, every attitude, upon their interpretation of the Scriptures, and upon the guidance of the Divine Will as revealed to them by direct answer to prayer. Their ejaculation in the face of any dilemma was, 'Let us cast it before the Lord!'

So confident were they of the reality of their intercourse with God, that they asked for no other guide. They

recognized no spiritual authority among men, they subjected themselves to no priest or minister, they troubled their consciences about no current manifestation of 'religious opinion'. They lived in an intellectual cell, bounded at its sides by the walls of their own house, but open above to the very heart of the uttermost heavens.

This, then, was the scene in which the soul of a little child was planted, not as in an ordinary open flower-border or carefully tended social *parterre*, but as on a ledge, split in the granite of some mountain. The ledge was hung between night and the snows on one hand, and the dizzy depths of the world upon the other; was furnished with just soil enough for a gentian to struggle skywards and open its stiff azure stars; and offered no lodgement, no hope of salvation, to any rootlet which should stray beyond its inexorable limits.

CHAPTER II

OUT of the darkness of my infancy there comes only one flash of memory. I am seated alone, in my baby-chair, at a dinner-table set for several people. Somebody brings in a leg of mutton, puts it down close to me, and goes out. I am again alone, gazing at two low windows, wide open upon a garden. Suddenly, noiselessly, a large, long animal (obviously a greyhound) appears at one window-sill, slips into the room, seizes the leg of mutton and slips out again. When this happened I could not yet talk. The accomplishment of speech came to me very late, doubtless because I never heard young voices. Many years later, when

I mentioned this recollection, there was a shout of laughter and surprise: 'That, then, was what became of the mutton! It was not you, who, as your Uncle A. pretended, ate it up, in the twinkling of an eye, bone and all!'

I suppose that it was the startling intensity of this incident which stamped it upon a memory from which all other impressions of this early date have vanished.

The adventure of the leg of mutton occurred, evidently, at the house of my Mother's brothers, for my parents, at this date, visited no other. My uncles were not religious men, but they had an almost filial respect for my Mother, who was several years senior to the elder of them. When the catastrophe of my grandfather's fortune had occurred, they had not yet left school. My Mother, in spite of an extreme dislike of teaching, which was native to her, immediately accepted the situation of a governess in the family of an Irish nobleman. The mansion was only to be approached, as Miss Edgeworth would have said, 'through eighteen sloughs, at the imminent peril of one's life', and when one had reached it, the mixture of opulence and squalor, of civility and savagery, was unspeakable. But my Mother was well paid, and she stayed in this distasteful environment, doing the work she hated most, while with the margin of her salary she helped first one of her brothers and then the other through his Cambridge course. They studied hard and did well at the university. At length their sister received, in her 'ultima Thule', news that her younger brother had taken his degree, and then and there, with a sigh of intense relief, she resigned her situation and came straight back to England.

It is not to be wondered at, then, that my uncles looked up to their sister with feelings of especial devotion. They were not inclined, they were hardly in a position, to criticize her modes of thought. They were easy-going, cultured and kindly gentlemen, rather limited in their views, without a trace of their sister's force of intellect or her strenuous temper. E. resembled her in person, he was tall, fair, with auburn curls; he cultivated a certain tendency to the Byronic type, fatal and melancholy. A. was short, brown and jocose, with a pretension to common sense; bluff and chatty. As a little child, I adored my Uncle E., who sat silent by the fireside holding me against his knee, saying nothing, but looking unutterably sad, and occasionally shaking his warm-coloured tresses. With great injustice, on the other hand, I detested my Uncle A., because he used to joke in a manner very displeasing to me, and because he would so far forget himself as to chase, and even, if it will be credited, to tickle me. My uncles, who remained bachelors to the end of their lives, earned a comfortable living; E. by teaching, A. as 'something in the City', and they rented an old rambling house in Clapton, that same in which I saw the greyhound. Their house had a strange, delicious smell, so unlike anything I smelt anywhere else, that it used to fill my eyes with tears of mysterious pleasure. I know now that this was the odour of cigars, tobacco being a species of incense tabooed at home on the highest religious grounds.

It has been recorded that I was slow in learning to speak. I used to be told that having met all invitations to repeat such words as 'Papa' and 'Mamma' with gravity and indifference, I one day drew towards me a volume, and said

'book' with startling distinctness. I was not at all precocious, but at a rather early age, I think towards the beginning of my fourth year, I learned to read. I cannot recollect a time when a printed page of English was closed to me. But perhaps earlier still my Mother used to repeat to me a poem which I have always taken for granted that she had herself composed, a poem which had a romantic place in my early mental history. It ran thus, I think:

O pretty Moon, you shine so bright!
I'll go to bid Mamma good-night,
And then I'll lie upon my bed
And watch you move above my head.

Ah! there, a cloud has hidden you!
But I can see your light shine thro';
It tries to hide you—quite in vain,
For—there you quickly come again!

It's God, I know, that makes you shine
Upon this little bed of mine;
But I shall all about you know
When I can read and older grow.

Long, long after the last line had become an anachronism, I used to shout this poem from my bed before I went to sleep, whether the night happened to be moonlit or no.

It must have been my Father who taught me my letters. To my Mother, as I have said, it was distasteful to teach, though she was so prompt and skillful to learn. My Father, on the contrary, taught cheerfully, by fits and starts. In particular, he had a scheme for rationalizing geography, which I think was admirable. I was to climb upon a chair,

while, standing at my side, with a pencil and a sheet of paper, he was to draw a chart of the markings on the carpet. Then, when I understood the system, another chart on a smaller scale of the furniture in the room, then of a floor of the house, then of the back-garden, then of a section of the street. The result of this was that geography came to me of itself, as a perfectly natural miniature arrangement of objects, and to this day has always been the science which gives me least difficulty. My father also taught me the simple rules of arithmetic, a little natural history, and the elements of drawing; and he laboured long and unsuccessfully to make me learn by heart hymns, psalms and chapters of Scripture, in which I always failed ignominiously and with tears. This puzzled and vexed him, for he himself had an extremely retentive textual memory. He could not help thinking that I was naughty, and would not learn the chapters, until at last he gave up the effort. All this sketch of an education began, I believe, in my fourth year, and was not advanced or modified during the rest of my Mother's life.

Meanwhile, capable as I was of reading, I found my greatest pleasure in the pages of books. The range of these was limited, for story-books of every description were sternly excluded. No fiction of any kind, religious or secular, was admitted into the house. In this it was to my Mother, not to my Father, that the prohibition was due. She had a remarkable, I confess to me still somewhat unaccountable impression that to 'tell a story', that is, to compose fictitious narrative of any kind, was a sin. She carried this conviction to extreme lengths. My Father, in later years, gave me some

interesting examples of her firmness. As a young man in America, he had been deeply impressed by 'Salathiel', a pious prose romance by that then popular writer, the Rev. George Croly. When he first met my Mother, he recommended it to her, but she would not consent to open it. Nor would she read the chivalrous tales in verse of Sir Walter Scott, obstinately alleging that they were not 'true'. She would read none but lyrical and subjective poetry. Her secret diary reveals the history of this singular aversion to the fictitious, although it cannot be said to explain the cause of it. As a child, however, she had possessed a passion for making up stories, and so considerable a skill in it that she was constantly being begged to indulge others with its exercise. But I will, on so curious a point, leave her to speak for herself:

'When I was a very little child, I used to amuse myself and my brothers with inventing stories, such as I read. Having, as I suppose, naturally a restless mind and busy imagination, this soon became the chief pleasure of my life. Unfortunately, my brothers were always fond of encouraging this propensity, and I found in Taylor, my maid, a still greater tempter. I had not known there was any harm in it, until Miss Shore [a Calvinist governess], finding it out, lectured me severely, and told me it was wicked. From that time forth I considered that to invent a story of any kind was a sin. But the desire to do so was too deeply rooted in my affections to be resisted in my own strength [she was at that time nine years of age], and unfortunately I knew neither my corruption nor my weakness, nor did I know where to gain strength. The longing to invent stories grew with

violence; everything I heard or read became food for my distemper. The simplicity of truth was not sufficient for me; I must needs embroider imagination upon it, and the folly, vanity and wickedness which disgraced my heart are more than I am able to express. Even now [at the age of twenty-nine], tho' watched, prayed and striven against, this is still the sin that most easily besets me. It has hindered my prayers and prevented my improvement, and therefore, has humbled me very much.'

This is, surely, a very painful instance of the repression of an instinct. There seems to have been, in this case, a vocation such as is rarely heard, and still less often wilfully disregarded and silenced. Was my Mother intended by nature to be a novelist? I have often thought so, and her talents and vigour of purpose, directed along the line which was ready to form 'the chief pleasure of her life', could hardly have failed to conduct her to great success. She was a little younger than Bulwer Lytton, a little older than Mrs. Gaskell—but these are vain and trivial speculations!

My own state, however, was, I should think, almost unique among the children of cultivated parents. In consequence of the stern ordinance which I have described, not a single fiction was read or told to me during my infancy. The rapture of the child who delays the process of going to bed by cajoling 'a story' out of his mother or his nurse, as he sits upon her knee, well tucked up, at the corner of the nursery fire—this was unknown to me. Never in all my early childhood did anyone address to me the affecting preamble, 'Once upon a time!' I was told about missionaries, but never about pirates; I was familiar with hummingbirds, but I had

never heard of fairies—Jack the Giant-Killer, Rumpelstiltskin and Robin Hood were not of my acquaintance; and though I understood about wolves, Little Red Ridinghood was a stranger even by name. So far as my 'dedication' was concerned, I can but think that my parents were in error thus to exclude the imaginary from my outlook upon facts. They desired to make me truthful; the tendency was to make me positive and sceptical. Had they wrapped me in the soft folds of supernatural fancy, my mind might have been longer content to follow their traditions in an unquestioning spirit.

Having easily said what, in those early years, I did not read, I have great difficulty in saying what I did read. But a queer variety of natural history, some of it quite indigestible by my undeveloped mind; many books of travels, mainly of a scientific character, among them voyages of discovery in the South Seas, by which my brain was dimly filled with splendour; some geography and astronomy, both of them sincerely enjoyed; much theology, which I desired to appreciate but could never get my teeth into (if I may venture to say so), and over which my eye and tongue learned to slip without penetrating, so that I would read, and read aloud, and with great propriety of emphasis, page after page without having formed an idea or retained an expression. There was, for instance, a writer on prophecy called Jukes, of whose works each of my parents was inordinately fond, and I was early set to read Jukes aloud to them. I did it glibly, like a machine, but the sight of Jukes' volumes became an abomination to me, and I never formed the outline of a notion what they were about. Later on, a

publication called *The Penny Cyclopaedia* became my daily, and for a long time almost my sole study; to the subject of this remarkable work I may presently return.

It is difficult to keep anything like chronological order in recording fragments of early recollection, and in speaking of my reading I have been led too far ahead. My memory does not, practically, begin till we returned from certain visits, made with a zoological purpose, to the shores of Devon and Dorset, and settled, early in my fifth year, in a house at Islington, in the north of London. Our circumstances were now more easy; my Father had regular and well-paid literary work; and the house was larger and more comfortable than ever before, though still very simple and restricted. My memories, some of which are exactly dated by certain facts, now become clear and almost abundant. What I do not remember, except from having it very often repeated to me, is what may be considered the only 'clever' thing that I said during an otherwise unillustrious childhood. It was not startlingly 'clever', but it may pass. A lady—when I was just four—rather injudiciously showed me a large print of a human skeleton, saying, 'There! you don't know what that is, do you?' Upon which, immediately and very archly, I replied, 'Isn't it a man with the meat off?' This was thought wonderful, and, as it is supposed that I had never had the phenomenon explained to me, it certainly displays some quickness in seizing an analogy. I had often watched my Father, while he soaked the flesh off the bones of fishes and small mammals. If I venture to repeat this trifle, it is only to point out that the system on which I was being educated deprived all things, human life among the rest, of their

mystery. The 'bare-grinning skeleton of death' was to me merely a prepared specimen of that featherless plantigrade vertebrate, 'homo sapiens'.

As I have said that this anecdote was thought worth repeating, I ought to proceed to say that there was, so far as I can recollect, none of that flattery of childhood which is so often merely a backhanded way of indulging the vanity of parents. My Mother, indeed, would hardly have been human if she had not occasionally entertained herself with the delusion that her solitary duckling was a cygnet. This my Father did not encourage, remarking, with great affection, and chucking me under the chin, that I was 'a nice little ordinary boy'. My Mother, stung by this want of appreciation, would proceed so far as to declare that she believed that in future times the F.R.S. would be chiefly known as his son's father! (This is a pleasantry frequent in professional families.)

To this my Father, whether convinced or not, would make no demur, and the couple would begin to discuss, in my presence, the direction which my shining talents would take. In consequence of my dedication to 'the Lord's Service', the range of possibilities was much restricted. My Father, who had lived long in the Tropics, and who nursed a perpetual nostalgia for 'the little lazy isles where the trumpet-orchids blow', leaned towards the field of missionary labour. My Mother, who was cold about foreign missions, preferred to believe that I should be the Charles Wesley of my age, 'or perhaps', she had the candour to admit, 'merely the George Whitefield'. I cannot recollect the time when I did not understand that I was going to be a minister of the Gospel.

It is so generally taken for granted that a life strictly dedicated to religion is stiff and dreary, that I may have some difficulty in persuading my readers that, as a matter of fact, in these early days of my childhood, before disease and death had penetrated to our slender society, we were always cheerful and often gay. My parents were playful with one another, and there were certain stock family jests which seldom failed to enliven the breakfast table. My Father and Mother lived so completely in the atmosphere of faith, and were so utterly convinced of their intercourse with God, that, so long as that intercourse was not clouded by sin, to which they were delicately sensitive, they could afford to take the passing hour very lightly. They would even, to a certain extent, treat the surroundings of their religion as a subject of jest, joking very mildly and gently about such things as an attitude at prayer or the nature of a supplication. They were absolutely indifferent to forms. They prayed, seated in their chairs, as willingly as, reversed, upon their knees; no ritual having any significance for them. My Mother was sometimes extremely gay, laughing with a soft, merry sound. What I have since been told of the guileless mirth of nuns in a convent has reminded me of the gaiety of my parents during my early childhood.

So long as I was a mere part of them, without individual existence, and swept on, a satellite, in their atmosphere, I was mirthful when they were mirthful, and grave when they were grave. The mere fact that I had no young companions, no storybooks, no outdoor amusements, none of the thousand and one employments provided for other children in more conventional surroundings, did not make me