Reflections on a Victorian Boyhood

I was born in the year 1873, Queen Victoria's reign had yet another 27 years to run. People talk of those spacious days of peace. War was the business of the professional soldier. It did not touch the civilian population, in the terrible way it did in the last two wars, and yet in its own fashion such a war as the Crimean, with its shortages, its high prices and its heavy taxation meant great suffering for the poor. I have heard my father tell how fortunate it was for him that at that time he had his knees under a rich man's table.

My birth took place in a tiny cottage. There were four rooms. There was no talk of a dining-room, a parlour or drawing-room, we spoke of a front room and a back room, downstairs and upstairs, the door of the front room opened out to the road and that of the back room to a communal yard.

Lest dirty boots should leave their mark in the front room, we must always enter by the back door; that meant if we were coming down the street we passed our own cottage and six others, then went through an alley, past those six houses again, and so made our entry by the back door. The front room, was kept sacred for Sundays or High Days; that room, after dark, would be crawling with black beetles, which hid themselves in a cupboard while it was light. An appetising mixture, placed in a specially prepared basin, lured scores of beetles to their death. The back room was our living room. It had a brick floor, the ceiling was so low that in my early youth I could reach up and touch it with my fingers. Once in preaching I made reference to the smallness of the room, and said, " there was not space to swing a cat round, though why anyone should want to swing a cat round was beyond my understanding." A kind friend told me after the service, that the origin of that saying had nothing to do with a cat, but to the difficulty, when flogging a man, in getting a good swing to the cat-o'-nine-tails in a confined space.

There were eight of us in family and at mealtimes the two youngest stood, because there was not room enough for each to have a chair. On wet days clothes would be hung on lines in that back room to dry. We rented the cottage next-door, retaining two

rooms and sub-letting the other two. The first tenant of those two rooms that I remember was a Mrs. Kennings, she used to give me three halfpence to buy for her a quarter of an ounce of plain muff. This cost a 1¼d. the other farthing was my reward for running the errand.

The back room of the second cottage contained a large copper. This was used for washing clothes. Each Christmas nine plum puddings were boiled in it. Also my step-mother, who was an adept at making wine, would use it in preparing elderberry, rhubarb, dandelion, cowslip, parsnip and other kinds of wine. These wines if kept for a year or two would have a powerful "kick" in them. On one occasion I had gone with an older friend to the village of Wigginton, to assist him in conducting the service in the village chapel. At the close we went into the house of a widow who gave us each a large glass of wine. It was very old and very strong and when I stepped out into the open, to my alarm, I found I could not walk straight, and my alarm was increased by the fact that I had a two mile walk before me and would most certainly meet some very devout friends on the way home!

My father was poor but the extent of it was our own secret. Every Sunday would find him preaching, chiefly in near-by villages but sometimes far enough away to require departure on the Saturday and return on the Monday mornings. The villagers treated him as though he were their bishop and he carried himself like one. He always wore, when dressed to go preaching, and indeed whenever he walked into the town, a broad cloth frock coat and a soft wide-awake felt hat—a semi-clerical mode of dress.

Preaching, he felt to be the business of his life, but there was no money in that and there was a family of eight to be fed and clothed, so forsooth the notice must go up over our front door: "W. Humphreys, Boot and Shoe Maker and Repairer."

His small work-shop was the further side of the yard. Over the seat where he sat there was reference to the fact that he mended soles on weekdays and sought to save souls on Sundays.

But how came it about that we were so poor, for poor we were without a doubt? So poor that I remember a time when I was allowed at mealtime two slices and a half of bread—no more, though I could easily have eaten six or eight. The trouble for us arose from the failure of the hand-made straw plait industry, which was the town's main source of a livelihood. My father allowed customers to pay off the cost of new boots or shoes at the rate of 1/- or 6d. a week. And now there was no money to pay off debts and my father would never dream of trying any sort of compulsion. He would say "What is use of pressure? They have no money and you cannot get blood out of a stone."

I am laying bare the social conditions as they were eighty years

ago. The rent for our cottage was 2/- a week. There was no gas or water laid on. For light a paraffin lamp was used which was never lit so long as work could be carried on without its aid. Often I would lie flat on the floor and hold my book so as to catch what light I could from the fire and so go on with my reading. For water we were dependent upon a well and a tank. The tank was for rain water that was called soft water and was much better than the well water for washing purposes, but it must be well water for drinking purposes. Buckets containing water were placed just outside the back door, and close at hand there was a wooden stand with a bowl and it was there we washed ourselves, all weathers, winter and summer.

In my eleventh year I went to work in a weaving factory as a half-timer— one day at school and the next to work—about a year later having reached the seventh standard I became a whole-timer The wages for a half-timer were 1/6d a week, for a whole-timer three shillings, but when you became a skein winder it was piece work—1d. for every eleven skeins—but we must not earn more than 4/-. If the skeins were not good for winding we earned less. Winding skeins that had been soaked in size, a sort of gluey substance, caused the fingers to become chapped, covered with open wounds, and the cold and draughty shop meant chilblains in the winter. I wore corduroy trousers which often became so stiffened by the gluey stuff falling upon them while winding skeins that when I took them off at night they could be almost stood upright. I wore no pants and no vest beneath my cotton shirt. No fuss must be made over minor ailments. I used to go faint in winter weather. Pains in my thighs made it difficult to obey orders at school to step over the form—shy reference to this at home was met with, " Just growing pains, do not fuss." I remember how when the first time toothache became unbearable, I set off to the doctor's surgery. There was no dentist in the town and when I told the doctor my trouble he pointed to a chair. " Sit down and hold to the bottom!" And more by muscular strength than by skill the tooth was extracted. There were no trained nurses in the town. One or two untrained women were depended upon to help in child birth, or lay out and wash the dead. The nearest hospital was seven miles away.

I was speaking not long ago to a very up-to-date doctor about the amazing advances of medical science in recent years and spoke of conditions as they were in my childhood and he remarked " there was no medical science in those days, the doctors depended upon the power of their own personality." I thought that he overstated the contrast. Yet there was truth in what he said. I myself have suffered from two ailments and my wife was afflicted by another, for which in my childhood there was no known remedy. I refer to diphtheria, pernicious anæmia and diabetes.

Now as a rest from a story at least not pleasant I must tell of something that still pictures how life was lived by the poor in those days but has the virtue of being amusing.

In the living room of our cottage there was a small fire grate raised a few feet from the floor. By its side was a tiny oven. Pies or a rice pudding large enough for a family of eight must be taken round to the bakehouse where they were cooked in the large baker's oven at the cost of 1d. each. There came a Saturday when I was told to go and fetch three pies from the bakehouse. Three journeys that would require three-quarters of an hour and I was expected to be at the recreation ground a mile away to captain a boys' cricket team in less than that time—those pies and that cricket match!! "Necessity is the mother of invention." Three journeys would be impossible but there was our wheelbarrow. One pie could be placed in the bottom and two must be at a slant, with the assured result of spilling some of the juice. The barrow was used, the journey was taken and I arrived back again with the barrow in the yard next to our own. But the greatest difficulty in getting those pies past our cottage window. They were to be placed in the second cottage. I should most surely be seen passing by my stepmother. To be seen once was in order, but to pass with the second and third in quick succession would create questioning. So with the second and third pie I passed the window with my body bent double. My plot worked. I turned the barrow upside down to drain off the spilt juice and arrived in time for my cricket match.

In those days employment for girls of the poor class was almost entirely limited to going out to service. For such service, especially in middle-class homes, the wages were small, the food poor and the attic or a sub-basement room good enough for the maid's bedroom. Conditions were different in the homes of the wealthy. I served a Church in the West of London in my early ministry. We were in the midst of large mansions and in these sometimes as many as twenty servants would be employed. There would be every grade of maidservant, kitchen maid, parlour maid, ladies' maid, cook and so forth, and at the head of all, responsible for ordering the tasks and for the dismissal or engagements of servants, would be the housekeeper. Though unmarried, in that household she would always be referred to as "Mrs."

All that tells of a day that is past. Instead of going out to service being a girl's one and only chance of earning a living, it is the one kind of employment that she now seeks to avoid. Stand to-day at any great London terminus and watch the girls pouring out of the trains. Think of the variety of tasks before them, of doors of opportunity open. I have watched these doors opening through the years and to-day the exception is to find any door closed. Women have an entry into the professions, legal, medical indeed

all of them, and also an entry into all our governing bodies whether they be urban, or county councils or both Houses of Parliament.

One of the mightiest revolutions, the later stages of which were seen in my boyhood, was that of the status of nurses. Their status, as revealed by Dickens, found them near the bottom of the social scale, but Florence Nightingale, first by her amazing skill, devotion and courage in the treatment of the wounded in the Crimean war and afterwards by the exercise of almost super-human ability and determination in the face of what seemed to be invincible opposition and insurmountable difficulties, she raised the standard of the nursing profession to such a high level that we may well regard it today as affording one of the noblest and most rewarding vocations to which any woman can devote her life.

As to modes of dress in my boyhood—how unthinkable today is the style of clothing that was common then. When I was about seventeen years old I conducted my first wedding service. I can see myself now as I set off from my home to the village of Aston Clinton. I was tall for my age and very slim, so imagine what I must have looked like with my long frocked coat and with a high hat, the weight of which I could not endure, save by tilting it toward the back of my head. With young women it was a day of high collars, stiffened with whale bones, projecting at the back of the ears, long dresses that must cover the ankles and, because the custom of the day required it, waists as small as possible. To keep them so tightly laced stays were worn, often so tight as to be prejudicial to health. These also were the days of crinolines and huge bustles.

A picture has held a place in my mind for over 70 years. I can see the Sunday School scholars, of whom I was one, assembled in the large front gallery of our Chapel, where we always assembled for the opening service preceding going to our classes. The boys are seated to the right and the girls to the left. All are assembled with the exception of one girl who came in late—it may be she did so for stage effect. She was always over-dressed and her bustle was very large indeed. To get to her seat, she must press her way past about eight girls. The space open for her passage was very limited and I recall with what eagerness I watched her progress and then manœuvring of herself and her bustle into her seat.

In those days, at the seaside, bathing huts were invariably used by those wishing to bathe. These huts were on huge wheels so as to be easily moved to the water's edge. There was, of course, no mixed bathing. The huts for men and those for women were at a respectable distance from each other. The bathing costume worn by women was the very last thing in ugliness and the idea that seemed to control action was that even when bathing the least possible part of the naked body should be visible.

As to the literature of that Victorian period I should very much like to hear an informed discussion as to how the literature of our own times compares with that popular seventy years. ago.

Some of the books of that day were of a sort over which a sentimental reader could have a good cry—just sob stuff. Others were escapist, they had no value beyond helping the reader to forget himself and his problems for a time. These were books that had an enormous circulation for a brief space and then were forgotten; but in that Victorian period there were authors and books that were to have a reputation that would abide through many generations.

I began my reading with books such as *Christy's Old Organ, Jessica's First Prayer, Ministering Children,* then on to books eagerly read by most of us such as *Swiss Family Robinson, Robinson Crusoe, Uncle Tom's Cabin,* books by Captain Marryat and Mayne Reid. E. P. Roe's writings such as *From Jest to Earnest, Barriers Burned Away, The Opening of a Chesnut Burr,* had hosts of enthusiastic readers. *John Halifax, Gentleman* was a great favourite and there came a day when George Macdonald's books, *David Elginbrod, Sir Gibbie, Robert Falconer Malcom* and the *Marquis of Lossie* held me spell-bound. Mrs. Henry Wood's *East Lynne* and Wilkie Collins *The White Lady* and *The Moonstone* excited me to an almost frightening degree. One book, not of the fiction class, held me in its thrall and I kept reading it again and again. Its influence went to the depths of my being. Dr. Smiles in his *Self Help* gathered together the stories of persons who by sheer hard work, and I suppose some genius, had risen from humble beginnings and ascended the heights. He told of inventors like Bernard Palissy and of scientists such as Sir Humphry Davy and Michael Faraday. All his heroes had overcome what seemed to be insurmountable obstacles. I think I read the life story of most of the American Presidents but there were two that did much to mould my character. Lincoln was one and Garfield was the other.

There are two very special reasons for my remembering Garfield. At a time when I had read and re-read his story as told in *From Log Cabin to White House,* I went one evening into a youth meeting and, as I entered, the Chairman called out, "Oh, here is Jabez, he will be our speaker." The speaker booked for the occasion had failed. I had never spoken in public before and I was still in my early teens but when anything greatly interested me I had a great urge to give expression to what I felt, and I was full of Garfield's story. So I started off with that and the time went with quite a lot of the story untold so I was asked to come the next week and finish it.

The second incident was when it fell to my lot to introduce during War time the Chief Free Church Chaplain of the American

forces to the Baptists of London. I referred to the boundless hospitality that had been shown by the Americans towards friends of mine when they visited the United States, and hoped that Americans arriving in England would recieve the same generous hospitality. But my chief point had to do with Garfield. I admitted that *Log Cabin* did not hold a high place either for literary quality or accuracy but one thing that had stuck in my mind was his reputed refusal to say "I cannot," which same spirit of determination to succeed I said was an outstanding American characteristic.

But to turn to the question "how does the literature of to-day appear when compared with that of the Victorian period?" It stands to reason that literature of a scientific, philosophic, or historical nature is in advance of such like literature of Victorian days, but when it comes to general literature we have our problem novel, psychological novel, our period novel, thriller, and detective novels. Many of these are written with great ability, but have we produced any of the Immortals, men and women whose names remain known through successive generations? In those far off days there were writers of deathless fame. A *Daily Telegraph* dated July 7 1900 has a column headed "Daily Telegraph's 100 best novels in the world," —such names appear as Harrison Ainsworth, J. M. Barrie, Conan Doyle, Hall Caine, Mrs. Gaskell, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Oliver Wendel Holmes, Charles Read, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Mrs. Humphrey Ward, Sir Walter Scott, Charles Kingsley, Thackeray, Dickens, Charlotte, Emily and Anne Bronte, Anthony Trollope, Jane Austen and others.

Could we produce a list of authors of comparable value who have written in the last 60 years.

Some would take up the challenge and write down such names as Rudyard Kipling, John Buchan, Hardy, George Eliot, Hugh Walpole, Galsworthy and so on.

I should like to hear the subject discussed.

In one acquirement the Victorians were certainly superior to the present generation. In handicraft work they could accomplish tasks the skill for which today is lost. The handicrafts in metal and wood seem to have died out but I think especially of what I was constantly seeing as I sat in my father's shop. A man would come in and say he wanted a new pair of boots. He would take off his boot and, with a long stick measure, my father would measure the length of his foot, then with a tape measure would take the measure of the instep and of the foot at the base of the toes. Later he would go to the cutting-out board and cut out the uppers, and next the pieces would be put in clamps and sewn together. Next he would take a wooden last, and if the boots were for a regular customer a last set apart for him would be produced. If he had bunions or corns that last would have appropriate lumps fixed on it. Then came the

nailing of the upper to the last and father would proceed to fix up the soles, and after a day's work the boots would be finished and guaranteed to be built up so as to safeguard the swellings on the foot. How often I have seen my father take up a finished boot and hold it up looking at it from every angle with a pride that no one can have when about six persons are engaged in making a boot and all is done by machine and with such rapidity that a pair of boots can be made in less than five minutes. No single individual can say of those boots—this is my work.

Some people speak of the "good old days" but no one that was poor and lived in that period would use the expression. The wage of a farm labourer was 11/- a week and in harvest, working overtime, he might receive 16/-. In the weaving factory in which I worked, a young weaver paid by the piece might earn 16/- but the older and slower workmen rarely went beyond 12/-. To be in a trade and earn from 30/- to £2 a week sounded to some of us like fabulous wealth.

Against lowness of wages must also be set lowness of prices. Lard 6d. a pound, dripping 9d., butter 1/3d. and meat about the same for a pound, unless we had the scrag end of—I do not know quite what—which was much cheaper. A man could get a pair of boots hand-sewn for about 15/-, sometimes less, trousers also would cost from 10/- to 15/-, and a good quality cloth suit would be priced at about £2.

My step-mother's father was a farm labourer with 11/- for his weekly wage. He paid 2/- a week for his cottage. At the rear of the cottage was a long garden which would produce sufficient vegetables to meet the family needs. At the end of the garden was a pig-sty. He kept one pig which was fed very largely from hog-wash which neighbours put in tubs made up of the wastage from cooking. When the pig was killed pork became the chief element in the family diet.

There were no doles, no old age pensions. For many the only prospect in old age was the workhouse. A Bristol magistrate has spoken recently of the appalling conditions of the workhouse in the Victorian period and appalling was the right word. The Darbys and Joans were separated; food, clothing and all the conditions were coarse and repulsive. Some who were not ready for the workhouse would be allowed parish relief. They would receive so many loaves a week. I remember how I felt when one day a neighbour came to our back door and pulled a parish loaf into two pieces and the inside of the loaf was all stringy and sticky. Such a loaf seemed to me to be quite uneatable.

Those were the days in which Dancing Bears, Organ Grinders, and German Brass Bands appeared outside our houses, or perhaps it was someone with a cracked voice singing, "I need thee every

hour," hoping, often in vain, for a copper to be thrown out of some door or window. Tramps were constantly met on the roads, beggars would come knocking at the back door, or it might be an Irish Cheap Jack. As soon as the door was opened he would drop down his pack. He might be told that nothing was wanted, nothing would be bought, but with a smile that nothing could wipe off and with a clever sort of blarney that nothing could stop, would often prevail upon the cottager to buy something that was not wanted or which, when purchased, proved to be a length of shoddy material not worth making into a dress.

Conditions of education were deplorably less advantageous than they are to-day. There were two schools in my town of 4,000 inhabitants, a National School under the supervision of the Church of England and a private boarding school that took in day boys. I went to the National School where tradesmens' sons paid 2d. a week and the rest 1d. The Head Master was paid a price for each pupil that passed the annual examination. It was a rotten arrangement and meant that in the weeks previous to the examination, we were kept in school extra hours, the cane was in frequent use and every means was taken to cram our brains with knowledge in readiness for the examination.

The supreme thing for acquiring knowledge is the presence of interest in the subject and it is the greatest proof of possessing the essential quality for teaching when the teacher has a capacity for arousing and developing that initial interest.

I could always acquire knowledge swiftly and retain tenaciously what I had learned when this interest in the subject was present, otherwise learning was a painful business. Here is a story as evidence of the truth of this. As soon as I knew how to read, my father required that I should read to him political speeches made from either side of the House of Commons. Soon I became so passionate a politician and so well informed as to set people talking. They nicknamed me Gladstone because of my passionate hero worship.

One day at school we were asked to write a paper on the method by which our country was governed. There was no need for a puckered brow or to wish for time to gather knowledge. My one need was for time enough to write down what I knew. I explained that ours was a Constitutional Monarchy; that ruling power was centred in the House of Lords and the House of Commons. These made up our Parliament and the chief executive body was called "The Cabinet." I wrote down the name of Cabinet Offices and of those who occupied them, and when our time was up I was fit to go on for quite a long time. This paper was shown to prominent townsfolk and at a time when Sir C. Russell was advertised to speak in the Victoria Hall, a few days before the meeting there

was a rap at our front door. My father opened it and there stood the Secretary of our local Liberal association. He said, "I hear you have a son very interested in politics." "Yes, that's our Jabe," replied my father. "Well," he said, "I have brought him a ticket for the meeting."

The point I want to make is that whenever I was full of knowledge and could retain and express what I knew, the cause of this was not conscious effort but a deep interest in the subject.

Social distinctions in the Victorian days were much more sharply drawn than they are today. There was a succession of layers from the lowest level upwards. The man who had learned a trade was a notch above the casual labourer. The foreman was a remove higher than the ordinary workman and the employer far above both. The professional class, doctors, lawyers, architects and the like were of a status higher than the artisan. The country gentry were inclined to be contemptuous of the person in a trade. In our town the highest circle was comprised of Lord Rothschild, who was the lord of the manor, the "Williams" of Pendley and the "Butchers" of Frogmore. It was my good fortune as a boy to attract the attention of the oldest of Frederick Butcher's daughters. I attended a Bible Class she conducted for boys.

When in after years I was engaged to preach anniversary sermons in a town seven miles distance from my home, Miss Mary Anne Butcher and her two sisters motored over to attend the services. After the service was over she grasped my hand and talked to me just as she used to do when I was a boy. Through the whole of my ministry at Kings Cross she was a regular correspondent and a most generous subscriber to our funds.

The sharpness of social distictions came out very vividly in my attitude to a girl who was to me very special. I almost worshipped the ground on which she trod; the sound of her voice was as sweetest music and a smile from her was seventh heaven of delight, but she was just one notch higher than I in the social scale so I never revealed my feelings, or at least thought I did not. In the long years afterwards when I went to preach at my home church I was her guest. She said to me on one of these occasions, "You know, Jabez, you were such a shy boy." I wonder if she had guessed my secret. The fact was God had in reserve for me one of the noblest of women whose faith, courage and selflessness was to be to me a constant incentive to daring enterprise and the very strength of my life.

The mention of this girl calls to mind an enterprise in which we were both to take part. In those days, with the exception perhaps of a "Pepper's Ghost Show" once a year, no provision was made for entertaining young people. A body of young hopefuls made an appeal to our church leaders to do something, without success.

So we took the matter into our own hands. We formed an organization which we named "The Star of Hope." The use of a room once a week was secured in the Infant School. There we assembled with a programme of lectures, debates, music and question box. An orchestra was formed and once a year an entertainment, always well attended, was given in the town's largest hall. It was at the Star of Hope I gained my earliest training in public speaking. A little way on in my teens I gave three talks on the History of Jerusalem. One of the debates aroused great interest. The subject was "Is it a greater advantage to be born rich than poor?" I argued in favour of the advantage of being poor and quoted a verse. I do not know how I came by it, I do not remember memorizing it, and through seventy years or more I have never forgotten it. The verse was:

"The reward is in the race we run—
Not in the prize;
And they, the few, that have it
Ere they earn it,
Know not or ever can
The generous pride which glows in him
Who on himself relies,
Entering the lists of life."

Family life in my boyhood meant an experience of strictest discipline. It would have been less so if my mother, a greatly beloved woman, had lived. She died when I was five years old There appeared to be no thought of training a child The one requisite was obedience with no questions as to why. My father would say "I have spoken once, remember I do not speak twice." The silliest rules were drilled into us, such as, "A little boy should be seen and not heard;" "A little boy should speak only when he is spoken to." I was taught that when taking a meal out, if asked whether I would like a second helping to say "No," which reply would be a lie for I would have been glad to get a good big second helping.

I think that I must have inherited my father's strong will. Unfortunately, as I grew up into my teens there were serious and painful clashes between us. He was keen to see me successful in business. I had little ambition that way but I was consumably eager to become a scholar. On two occasions wonderful offers were made to me whereby I could devote my life wholly to study. My father's foot went down sharp and final and though every bit of my nature was hurt and fiercely rebellious, I was still in my teens and had no choice but to accept disappointment.

The second clash was concerning my entering the ministry and

in this matter no other will than God's could take command. My father's will for me was that I should establish myself in business, preach, yes, as he had done, without fee or reward and free from the controls of Officialdom. Somehow he had a grieveance against Church Officials and urged upon me never to allow myself to come under their control so that they at will could kick me, as he put it, from pillar to post. The result was that when I passed my 20th year, I packed up my small portmanteau and went away to London. I arrived with about 5/- in my pocket but kept expenses down by sleeping in my brother's kitchen. He had preceded me in going to live in London.

The Denomination to which I belonged did not require that I should have been to college before being called to become the minister of a church. There were other testings and they were very severe, but, in face of what seemed to be the impossible, in a short time I received a call and on my ordination day my father came and publicly gave me his blessing.

This story of the clash of wills seems to have allured me away from the subject of family discipline and yet it most definitely grows out of the question of whether the sheer domination of will by the stronger will can in any sense be regarded as training a child. Modern psychology goes to an opposite extreme. For my own part I am an "Aristotelian." I believe in the doctrine of "the wisdom of the middle way." The prime requisite in the training of children is a great love and sanctified common sense. All young things, pups and colts and boys and girls need training—training is the word, not coercing.

I ought to say something of political conditions as I knew them when a boy. In these days when interest is dissipated and weakened by the great variety of attractions such as the cinema, the radio, television, complaints are made of the smallness of audiences at political meetings. In those Victorian days no such complaints could be made for the rule in the village, town and city was that of crowded meetings. At these meetings heckling was rampant. Some of it was amusing, a good deal of it well informed and to the point, and some of it was angry and led up to a free fight and smashed furniture. Our own cottage would at election time be plastered over with orange colours. It was an invitation, always accepted, to have windows broken, but the same sort of treatment was served out to the cottages on the same street that showed blue colours.

The excitement of election days made us boys limp. We would stand in groups outside a polling station and boo or cheer according to the colour they bore as waggonette loads of voters were brought to record their votes.

I was a Gladstone worshipper and would stand out from my wheel in the factory and harangue the men in favour of his

political creed. I remember the factory owner, more in amusement than anger, putting his head through the window and rebuking me with the remark "Gladstoning again" In the midst of one of my outbursts one of the men, with a sort of prophetic instinct, shouted out "Build him a pulpit!"

One of the proudest moments of my life came when Gladstone was on a visit to Baron De Rothschild at the Waddesdon Manor. He was booked to end his train journey at Tring and go the rest of the journey by road, also to give an address in the large square facing the station. I was one of the huge crowd awaiting his arrival. I had one foot on the station steps and kept my balance by holding to the shoulder of a navvy. The train glided into the station and an immense hush fell upon the vast crowd. The Grand Old Man, as he was called, was seen coming out of the station by a private exit. He stepped into the carriage which was guarded by huge barriers but a sudden swaying of the crowd broke the barriers down and also swept me off my feet. When I recovered from the surge, I found myself at the foot of the carriage and, while he gave his speech, I stood awestruck looking up into that wonderful face and listening to the most marvellous of voices that at will could stir the hearts of the thousands of hearers.

My last point relates to religion. In those days, when the hour for Sunday morning worship arrived it would look as though the whole town was on the move. It was shocking to hear it said of a man that " that man never darkens the door of church or chapel." A shopkeeper knew that he would lose customers unless he went to a place of worship and no one of whom that was true could have the slightest hope of being elected to any public office. We compare the smallness of the congregations which is so often the rule in these day, but in doing so we need to remember that those who in these days assemble in church or chapel are not drawn by social habit nor desire for social prestige, nor material gain, rather they are there in resistance to a whole world of enticement to stay away. They attend the place of worship because it is their choice so to do, and so there is a value in their presence such as would not be if enticements other than worship had allured them to the house of God.

I suppose the kind of religious service usual at the chapel I attended would today be accounted as inexpressibly dull. The sermons were long and I do not remember anyone preaching as though he was aware of the fact that the gallery facing the pulpit was full of boys and girls. Three hymns were sung. The first verse would be read then sung and then the second verse and that sung, and so on through the hymn, which was a reminder that we were not far removed from the days when the majority of the congregation would be unable to read. There was no organ, a precenter

would use a pitch pipe to get the proper pitch of the tune and then start to lead the singing.

My Sunday began with Sunday School at 9 o'clock, then public worship at 10.30. Sunday School again at 4.30 and evening service at 6 o'clock. In addition to this I would often go to the Gospel Hall—the Brethren meeting place—in the afternoon and then, when our evening service was over, go to some evangelistic meeting or to the Salvation Army.

The explanation of all this was I was on a great quest. I could not be content with any advantage that had a time limit. What was the use of happiness upon which death would close the door? I wanted a life bigger than this brief spell of time—such a life that I could regard this life on earth as but the porch leading to the house, or as a preface introducing the book or as a preliminary canter to a race. I found what I sought and I know now in my 87th year that my life is not nearing an end, but reaching forward to a new beginning which will be endless and in which I shall be perfect as God is perfect.

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