

James Ewing Ritchie

**Christopher Crayon's  
Recollections. The  
Life and...**



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**Christopher Crayon's Recollections.  
The Life and Times of the late James  
Ewing Ritchie as told by himself**

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**Ritchie J.**

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# **Ritchie J. Ewing James Ewing Christopher Crayon's Recollections / The Life and Times of the late James Ewing Ritchie as told by himself**

## **CHAPTER I. East Anglia in 1837**

In 1837 Lord Melbourne was Prime Minister – the handsomest, the most cultivated, the most courteous gentleman that ever figured in a Royal Court. For his young mistress he had a loyal love, whilst she, young and inexperienced, naturally turned to him as her guide, philosopher and friend. The Whigs were in office, but not in power. The popular excitement that had carried the Reform Bill had died away, and the Ministry had rendered itself especially unpopular by a new Poor-Law Bill, a bold, a praiseworthy, a successful attempt to deal with the growing demoralisation of the agricultural population. Lord Melbourne was at that time the only possible Premier. “I have no small talk,” said the Iron Duke, “and Peel has no manners,” and few men had such grace and chivalry as Lord Melbourne, then a childless widower in his manhood’s prime. He swore a good deal, as all fine gentlemen did in the early days of Queen Victoria. One day Mr. Denison, afterwards Lord Ossington, encountered Lord Melbourne as he was about to mount his horse, and called attention to some required modification in the new Poor-Law Bill. Lord Melbourne referred him to his brother George. “I have been with him,” was the reply, “but he damned me, and damned the Bill, and damned the paupers.” “Well, damn it, what more could he do?” was the rejoinder. And in East Anglia there was a good deal of swearing among the gentry. I can remember an ancient peer who had been brought up in the Navy, who resided in the Eastern Counties, and who somehow or other had been prevailed upon to attend as chairman at a meeting of the local Bible Society. I have forgotten the greater part of the noble Lord’s speech, but I well remember how his Lordship not a little shocked some of his hearers by finishing up with the remark – that the Bible Society was a damned good Society, and ought to be damned well supported. Another noble Lord, of Norfolk, had some fair daughters, who distinguished themselves in the hunting field, where they had a habit of swearing as terribly as an army in Flanders. In this respect we have changed for the better; ladies never swear now.

In politics bribery and corruption and drunkenness everywhere prevailed. It was impossible to fight an election with clean hands. In 1837 there was an election at Norwich; the late Right Hon. W. E. Forster has left us a good account of it. “Went to the nomination of city candidates this morning. The nomination was at eight. Went in with the mob into the lower court. Great rush when the door was opened. When the Crier demanded attention for the reading of the Act against bribery and corruption, he burst out laughing at the end, in which he was followed by the Sheriff, candidates and almost everybody else.” The show of hands was, as was generally the case, in favour of the Liberal. But on the next day – that of the poll – the Tories were declared to have the majority. All round the polling booths the rioting was great, as men were brought up in batches to vote – each party struggling to prevent their being done by the other, and a good deal of fighting ensued. Mr. Forster writes: – “About nine I sallied forth to take observations. At the Magdalen Ward booth I saw some dreadful cases of voting by drunken people, both Whig and Tory – one in which the man could hardly speak, and there were two men roaring Smith and Nurse (the names of the Whig candidates) in his ears. I went to see all the polling places in the course of time. About three I saw some furious bludgeon-fighting in Palace Plain, the police taking bludgeons from some Tory hired countrymen. The Mayor

and Sheriff were there. One of the police was badly wounded by a bludgeon. The soldiers were sent for, and then the Mayor, thinking he could do without them, sent George Everett, the Sheriff's son, a boy, and myself to stop them. We very soon met them in the road leading from the Plain to the barracks trotting forward with their swords drawn. We held up our hands and partially stopped them, but the Mayor altered his mind and they came on. The policemen had got the better, but the soldiers soon cleared the place.”

The election over – it is said to have cost £40,000 – the triumphant Members were borne in chairs on men's shoulders and carried through the streets – a very unpleasant process, as they had to smile and bow to the crowd of lookers-on in the streets and in the houses along which they passed. The old dragon Snap from St. Andrew's Hall figured in the show. Out-voters were brought from London and other parts of the country in stage coaches hired for the purpose. Every one showed his colour, and every one was primed with beer and ready for a row. A General Election was a saturnalia of the most blackguard character. In all, Norfolk returned twelve Members – four for the county, the Eastern Division sending two Members, the influential landlords being Lord Wodehouse, the Earl of Desart and the Marquis of Cholmondeley, with an electorate of 4,396. In West Norfolk the electors were not so numerous, and the influence was chiefly possessed by the Earl of Leicester, Lord Hastings, the Marquis of Cholmondeley, Lord Charles Townshend and the Marquis of that name. In both divisions Conservatives were returned. In the Eastern Division of Suffolk, which had its headquarters at Ipswich, the electorate returned two Members – Lord Henniker and Sir Charles Broke Vere. The leading landlords were the Earl of Stradbroke, the Duke of Hamilton, the Marquis of Hertford, the Dysart family, and Sir Thomas Gooch. Sir Thomas had represented the county up to the time of the Reform Bill; in 1832 Robert Newton Shawe was elected. West Suffolk, whose chief electoral town was Bury St. Edmund's, returned Tories, under the influence of the Marquis of Bristol and other landlords. The boroughs did a little better; Bury St. Edmund's returned one Liberal, Lord Charles Fitzroy, elected by 289 votes, and Lord Jermyn (C.), who polled 277 votes. Colchester, however, a very costly seat to gain, was held by the Conservatives. Chelmsford and Braintree were the chief polling places of Essex north and south, and in both divisions Conservatives were returned. Eye rejoiced in its hereditary representative, Sir Edward Kerrison, Conservative. It is strange that so small a borough was spared by the first Reform Bill. In our time it has been very properly disfranchised. Sudbury, a Suffolk borough, a little larger, which returned two Conservatives in 1837, was very properly disfranchised for bribery in 1844. Ipswich was also supposed to be by no means an immaculate borough. Dodd writes concerning it: “Money has long been considered the best friend in Ipswich, and petitions on the ground of bribery, &c., have been frequent.” In 1837 it returned one Liberal and one Conservative, Milner Gibson, whom Sir Thomas Gooch, of Benacre Hall, recommended to the electors as a promising Conservative colt. He lived to become M.P. for Manchester, to be one of the leaders of the Anti-Corn Law Movement, the head of the Society for the Repeal of the Taxes on Knowledge, a society which owed a great deal of its success to his Parliamentary skill as a tactician, and to be a Member of a Liberal Administration. There were few finer, manlier-looking men in the House of Commons than Thomas Milner Gibson. At any rate, I thought so as I watched him, after the delivery of a most effective speech in Drury Lane Theatre on the Corn Laws, step into a little ham and beef shop close by for a light for his cigar. At that time, let me remind the reader, waxlights and matches were unknown. The electoral body in Ipswich was not a large one. At the Reform Act period it consisted of 1,800. At that time the constituency had been increased by adding to the freemen, of whom little more than three hundred remained, the ten-pound householders within the old borough, which included twelve parishes. It is curious to note that, in 1839, Mr. Milner Gibson, who had resigned his seat on his becoming a Liberal, was rejected, the numbers being – Sir Thomas Cochrane (Conservative), 621; Milner Gibson, 615. Ipswich seems always to have been undergoing the excitement of a General Election – and, it is to be feared, enjoying the profits of an election contest, as no sooner was an election over than it was

declared void – and a new writ was issued. In 1837 Thetford, no longer a Parliamentary borough, returned two M.P.'s, one Conservative and one Liberal. A little more has yet to be written relative to smaller East Anglian boroughs. Lynn, under the influence of the Duke of Portland, in 1837 returned two distinguished men to Parliament: Lord George Bentinck, then a great racing man, but who was better known as the leader of the Protectionist party, and Sir Stratford Canning, the great Eltchi, who was to reign imperiously in the East, and at whose frown Turkish Sultans trembled. Maldon returned two Conservatives. It has long very properly ceased to exercise that privilege. Great Yarmouth, which has now an electorate of 7,876, at the General Election in 1837 returned two Liberals, but the highest Liberal vote was 790, and the highest Tory vote 699. Money was the best friend at Yarmouth, as in most boroughs. In accounting for the loss of his seat at Weymouth in 1837, one of our greatest East Anglians, Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton, writes: – “My supporters told me that it would be necessary to open public-houses, and to lend money – a gentle name for bribery – to the extent of £1,000. I, of course, declined.” Yet, as a boy, I must own I enjoyed the fun, the excitement, the fighting of the old elections, much more than the elections of later times. If now and then a skull was cracked, what mattered, while the Constitution was saved!

In the religious world the change in East Anglia has been immense; the Church was weak, now it has become strong. In most of the villages were good Dissenting congregations, but the landlords set their faces against the Dissenters – “pograms” was what they were contemptuously called – and the landlord's lady had no mercy on them. The good things in the hall were only reserved for those who attended the parish church. At that time we had two bishops; both resided in Norwich. One was the Bishop of the Diocese; the other was the Rev. John Alexander, who preached in Princes Street Chapel, where the Rev. Dr. Barrett has succeeded him – a man universally beloved and universally popular, as he deserved to be. As for the clergy of that day, I fear many of them led scandalous lives: there was hardly one when I was a boy, within reach of the parish where I was born, whom decent women, with any serious thoughts at all, could go to hear, and consequently they, with their families, went to the nearest Independent Chapel, where it was a sight to see the farmers' gigs on the green in the chapel yard. They go to the Church now, as the clergyman is quite as devoted to his high calling and quite as earnest in his vocation as his Independent brother. Bishop Bathurst had let things slide too much, as was to be expected of a man whose great complaint in his old age was that they had sent him a dean who could not play whist. Bishop Stanley's wife complained to Miss Caroline Fox how trying was her husband's position at Norwich, as his predecessor was an amiable, indolent old man, who let things take their course, and a very bad course they took. It was in his Diocese – at Hadleigh – the Oxford movement commenced, when in 1833 the Vicar, the Rev. James Rose, assembled at the parsonage – not the present handsome building, which is evidently of later date – the men who were to become famous as Tractarians, who had met there to consider how to save the Church. It was then in danger, as Lord Grey had recommended the Bishops to put their house in order. Ten Irish Bishops had been suppressed; a mob at Bristol had burnt the Bishop's palace; and in Norwich the cry had been raised for “more pigs and less parsons.” One of the leaders of the Evangelical party resided at Kirkley. The Rev. Francis Cuningham – afterwards Rector of Lowestoft – had established infant schools, which were then a novelty in East Anglia. His wife was one of the Gurneys, of Earlham, a great power in Norfolk at that time. Joseph John was well known in London philanthropic circles and all over the land, especially in connection with the anti-Slavery and Bible Societies; and at his house men of all religious parties were welcome. At that time, Clarkson, the great anti-Slavery advocate, had come to Playford Hall, near Woodbridge, there to spend in quiet the remainder of his days. In all East Anglian leading towns Nonconformity was very respectable, and its leading men were men of influence and usefulness in their respective localities. It was even so at Bury St. Edmund's in Mr. Dewhurst's time. His son, whom I met with in South Australia holding a position in the Educational Department, told me how Rowland Hill came to the town to preach for his father. As there were no railways the great preacher came in his own carriage, and naturally was very anxious as to the

welfare of his horses. Mr. Dewhurst told him that he need have no anxiety on that score, as he had a horsedealer a member of his church, who would look after them. "What!" said Rowland Hill, in amazement, "a horsedealer a member of a Christian Church; whoever heard of such a thing?" From which I gather that Rowland Hill knew more of London horsedealers than East Anglian ones. I can well remember that many of the old Nonconformist pulpits were filled by men such as Ray of Bury St. Edmund's, Creak of Yarmouth, Elvin of Bury (Baptist), Notcutt of Ipswich, and Sloper of Beccles, a friend of Mrs. Siddons. A great power in Beccles and its neighbourhood was the Rev. George Wright, the father of the celebrated scholar, Dr. Aldis Wright, of Cambridge, who still lives to adorn and enlighten the present age. Some of the old Nonconformist chapels were grotesque specimens of rustic architecture. This was especially so at Halesworth, which had a meeting-house – as it was then called – with gigantic pillars under the galleries. It was there the Rev. John Dennant preached – the grandfather of the popular Sir John Robinson, of *The Daily News*, a dear old man much given to writing poetry, of which, alas! posterity takes no heed. The charm of the old Nonconformist places was the great square pews, lined with green baize, where on a hot Sunday afternoon many a hearer was rewarded with – I can speak from experience – a delightful snooze. The great exception was at Norwich, where there was a fine modern Baptist Chapel, known as "the fashionable watering-place," where, in 1837, the late William Brock had just commenced what proved to be a highly-successful pastoral career.

As to the theology of the cottagers in East Anglia at that time, I can offer no better illustration of it than that given by Miss Caroline Fox of a cottage talk she had somewhere near Norwich. She writes, "A young woman told us that her father was nearly converted, and that a little more teaching would complete the business," adding "He quite believes that he is lost, which, of course, is a great consolation to the old man."

Literature flourished in East Anglia in 1837. Bulwer Lytton, an East Anglian by birth and breeding, had just published "Paul Clifford," and was about to commence a new and better style of novel. Norwich had long been celebrated for its Literary Society, and one of the most remarkable of the literary men of the age was George Borrow, author of the "Bible in Spain," the materials for which he was then collecting, and who spent much of his life in East Anglia, where he was born. He was five years in Spain during the disturbed early years of Isabella II., and he travelled in every part of Castile and Leon, as well as the southern part of the Peninsula and Northern Portugal. Again and again his adventurous habits brought him into danger among brigands and Carlists, as well as Roman Catholic priests, and he experienced a brief imprisonment in Madrid. At Norwich also was then living Mrs. Opie – as a Quakeress – after having spent the greater part of her life in London gaiety. A lady who met her in Brussels says she spoke with much enthusiasm of the eminent artists, who, in her part of the world – videlicet, the Eastern Counties – had become men of mark. Of her husband, who had been dead many years, she said playfully that if neither Suffolk nor Norfolk could boast of the honour of being his birthplace, he had done his best to remedy the evil by marrying a Norwich woman. At Reydon Hall, rather a tumble-down old place, as I recollect it, lived the Stricklands, and of the six daughters of the house five were literary women more or less successful. Of these the best known was Agnes, author of "The Lives of the Queens of England," which owed much of its success to being published just after the Princess Victoria had become Queen of England.

It was amusing to hear her talk, in her somewhat affected and stilted style, of politics. She was a Jacobin, and hated all Dissenters, whom she sneered at as Roundheads. With modern ideas she and her sisters had no sympathy whatever. There never was such an antediluvian family. All of them were very long-lived, and must have bitterly bewailed the progress of Democracy and Dissent. I question whether the "Lives of the Queens of England" has many readers now. Near Woodbridge, as rector of Benhall, lived the Rev. J. Mitford, an active literary man, the editor of *The Gentleman's Magazine*, and of some of the standard works known as Pickering's Classics. As a clergyman he was a failure. It was urged in his defence, by his friends, that his profession had been chosen for him by others,

and that when it was too late for him to escape from the bonds which held him in thrall he made the discovery that the life that lay before him was utterly uncongenial to his tastes and habits. His life, when in Suffolk, writes Mrs. Houston, author of “A Woman’s Memories of World-known Men,” must have been a very solitary one. For causes which I have never heard explained, his wife had long left him, and his only son was not on speaking terms with the Rector of Benhall. In his small lodgings on the second floor in Sloane Street, he was doubtless a far happier man than, in spite of his well-loved garden and extensive library at Benhall Rectory, he ever, in his country home, professed to be. But perhaps the most notable East Anglian author at the time was Isaac Taylor, of Ongar, whose books – “The Natural History of Enthusiasm” and “The Physical Theory of Another Life” – were most popular, and one of which, at any rate, had been noticed in *The Edinburgh Review*. In a private letter to the editor, Sir James Stephen describes Taylor “as a very considerable man, with but small inventive but very great diffusive powers, possessing a considerable mastery of language, but very apt to be over-mastered by it – too fine a writer to write very well; too fastidious a censor to judge men and things equitably; too much afraid of falling into cant and vulgarity to rise to freedom and ease; an over-polished Dissenter, a little ashamed of his origin among that body; but, with all this, a man of vigorous and catholic understanding, of eminent purity of mind, happy in himself and in all manner of innocent pleasure, and strenuously devoted to the grand but impracticable task of grafting on the intellectual democracy of our own times the literary aristocracy of the days that are passed.” Quite a different man was dear old Bernard Barton, the Quaker poet, of Woodbridge, with whom I dined once, who was more fat than bard beseems, and who seemed to me to enjoy a good dinner, a glass of port – people could drink port in those days – and a pinch of snuff, quite as much as any literary talk. Poor Bernard never set the Thames on fire – he would have been shocked at the thought of doing anything so wicked; but he was a good man, and quite competent to shine in “Fulcher’s Pocket Book,” a work published yearly by Fulcher, of Bury St. Edmund’s, and much better than any of its contemporaries.

In connection with this subject let me quote from Bernard Barton a sketch of a Suffolk yeoman, very rare in these times: “He was a hearty old yeoman of about eighty-six, and occupied the farm in which he lived and died, about fifty-five years. Sociable, hospitable, friendly; a liberal master to his labourers, a kind neighbour, and a right merry companion within the limits of becoming mirth; in politics a staunch Whig; in his theological creed as sturdy a Dissenter; yet with no more party spirit in him than a child. He and I belonged to the same book club for about forty years. He entered it about fifteen years before I came into these parts, and was really a pillar in our literary temple, not that he greatly cared about books or was deeply read in them, but he loved to meet his neighbours and get them round him on any occasion or no occasion at all. As a fine specimen of the true English yeoman I have met few to equal, hardly any to surpass him, and he looked the character as well as he acted it, till within a very few years, when the strong man was bowed with infirmity. About twenty-six years ago, in his dress costume of a blue coat and yellow buckskins, a finer sample of John Bullism you would rarely see. It was the whole study of his long life to make the few who revolved about him in his little orbit as happy as he always seemed to be himself; yet I was gravely queried with, when I happened to say that his children had asked me to write a few lines to his memory, whether I could do so in keeping with the general tenor of my poetry. The speaker doubted if he was a decidedly pious character. He had at times been known in his altitudes to vociferate at the top of his voice a song, the chorus of which was not certainly teetotalish: —

Sing, old Rose, and burn the bellows,  
Drink and drive dull care away.”

Can anything be finer than this picture of a Suffolk yeoman? Is it not a pity that such men are no more to be seen? High farming was unknown when the old Suffolk yeoman lived. I claim

for Bernard Barton that this sketch of the Suffolk yeoman is the best thing he ever wrote. Bernard Barton's daughter married the great Oriental scholar, Edward Fitzgerald, the friend of Carlyle and correspondent of Fanny Kemble, who lived in the neighbourhood of Woodbridge, and whose fame now he is no more is far greater than when he lived. Little could he have anticipated that in after years literary men would assemble in the quiet churchyard of Boulge to erect his monument over his grave, or to found a society to perpetuate his name.

As I lean back for another glance, my eyes, as Wordsworth writes, are filled with childish tears

—  
My heart is idly stirred.

I see the dear old village where I was born, almost encroaching on Sir Thomas Gooch's park, at Benacre Hall; I see the old baronet, a fine old bigoted Tory, who looked the picture of health and happiness, as he ambled past on his chestnut cob, wearing a blue coat, a white hat and trousers, in summer; his only regret being that things were not as they were – his only consolation the fact that, wisely, the Eternal Providence that overrules all human affairs had provided snug rectories for his kith and kin, however unworthy of the sacred calling; and had hung up the sun, moon and stars so high in the heavens that no reforming ass

Could e'er presume to pluck them down, and light the world with gas.

Then comes the village medico, healthy and shrewd and kindly, with a firm belief – alas! that day is gone now – in black draught and blue pill. I see his six sunny daughters racing down the village street, guarded by a dragon of a governess, and I get out of their way, for I am a rustic, and have all the rustic's fear of what the East Anglian peasant was used to term "morthers"; and then comes the squire of the next parish, in as shabby a trap as you ever set eyes on, and the fat farmer, who hails me for a walk, and going to the end of a field, joyously, or as joyously as his sluggish nature will permit, exclaims, "There, Master James, now you can see three farms." My friend was a utilitarian, and could only see the beautiful in the useful. Then I call up the memory of the village grocer, a stern, unbending Radical, who delights me with the loan of Cruikshank's illustrations to the "House that Jack Built," mysteriously wrapped in brown paper and stowed away between the sugar and treacle. He does not talk much, but he thinks the more. And now it strikes me that conversation was not much cultivated in the villages of East Anglia in 1837, and yet there were splendid exceptions – on such evenings as when the members of the Book Club met in our parlour, where the best tea things were laid, and where a kindly mother in black silk and white shawl and quakerish cap made tea; where an honoured father, who now sleeps far away from the scene of his life-long labours, indulged in a genial humour, which set at ease the shyest of his guests; and again, what a splendid talk there was when the brethren in black from Beccles, from Yarmouth, from Halesworth, gathered for fraternal purposes, perhaps once a quarter, to smoke long pipes, to discuss metaphysics and politics, and to puzzle their heads over divines and systems that have long ceased to perplex the world. Few and simple were East Anglian annals then. It was seldom the London coach, the Yarmouth Mail and Telegraph brought a cockney down to astonish us with his pert ways and peculiar talk. Life was slow, but it was kindly, nevertheless. There was no fear of bacteria, nor of poison in the pot, nor of the ills of bad drainage. We were poor, but honest. Are we better now?

In 1837 the railways which unite the country under the title of the Great Eastern had not come into existence.

All is changed in East Anglia except the boys. "You have seen a good many changes in your time," said the young curate to the old village clerk. "Yes," was the reply; "everything is changed except the boys, and they're allus the same." I fear the boys are as troublesome as ever – perhaps a little more so now, when you cannot touch them with a stick, which any one might do years ago. When we caught a boy up to mischief a stick did a deal of good in the good old times that are gone never to return.

In connection with literature one naturally turns to the Bungay Printing Press, at the head of which was John Childs, who assembled round his hospitable board at Bungay many celebrated people, and to whom at a later period Daniel O'Connell paid a visit. It was Childs who gave to the poor student cheap editions of standard works such as Burke and Gibbon and Bacon. It was he who went to Ipswich Gaol rather than pay Church Rates. It was he who was one of the first to attack the Bible printing monopoly, and thus to flood the land with cheap Bibles and Testaments. A self-made man, almost Napoleonic in appearance, with a habit of blurting out sharp cynicisms and original epigrams, rather than conversing. He was a great phrenologist, and I well remember how I, a raw lad, rather trembled in his presence as I saw his dark, keen eyes directed towards that part of my person where the brains are supposed to be. I imagine the result was favourable, as at a later time I spent many a pleasant hour in his dining-room, gathering wisdom from his after-dinner talk, and inspiration from his port – as good as that immortalised by Tennyson. Mr. Childs had a numerous and handsome family, most of whom died after arriving at manhood. His daughter, who to great personal charms added much of her father's intellect, did not live long after her marriage, leaving one son, a leading partner in the great City firm of solicitors, Ashurst, Morris, and Crisp. After John Childs, of Bungay, I may mention another East Anglian – D. Whittle Harvey, who was a power in his party and among the London cabbies – to whom the London cabby owes his badge V.R. – which, as one of them sagely remarked, was supposed to signify “Whittle 'Arvey,” an etymology at any rate not worse than that of the savant who in his wisdom derived gherkin from Jeremiah King. In 1837 Mr. Johnson Fox, born at Uggheshall, near Wangford – better known afterwards as the Norwich “Weaver Boy,” the “Publicola” of *The Weekly Dispatch* – the great orator of the Anti-Corn Law League, was preaching in the Unitarian Chapel, South Place, Finsbury, and a leading man in London literary society. One of the best-known men in East Anglia was Allan Ransome, of Ipswich, the young Quaker, who was on very friendly terms with the Strickland family, who cultivated literature and business with equal zest. Nor, in this category, should I pass over the name of George Bird, of Yoxford, a local chemist, who found time to write of Dunwich Castle and such-like East Anglian themes – I fancy now read by none. A Suffolk man who was making his mark in London at that time was Crabbe Robinson, the pioneer of the special correspondent of our later day. And just when Queen Victoria began to reign, Thomas Woolner, the poet-sculptor, was leaving his native town of Hadleigh to begin life as the pupil of Boehm, sculptor in ordinary to the Queen. And yet East Anglia was by no means distinguished, or held to be of much account in the gay circles of wit and fashion in town. The gentry were but little better than those drawn to the life in the novels of Fielding and Smollett. I am inclined to think there was very little reading outside Dissenting circles – where the book club was a standing institution, and *The Edinburgh Review* was looked up to as an oracle, as indeed it was, sixty years ago. There was little encouragement of manly sports and pastimes – indeed, very little for any one in the way of amusement but at the public-house. Not that any one was ever drunk, in the liberal opinion of the landlord of the public-house, only “a little fresh,” and the village policeman was unknown. It is true there might be a constable, but he was a very mythical person indeed. Everybody drank, and as a rule the poorer people were the more they drank.

One of the early temperance lecturers in the district, Mr. Thomas Whittaker, who was mobbed, especially at Framlingham, tells us Essex and Suffolk are clayey soils, in some districts very heavy and not easily broken up, and the people in many cases correspond. It was due to Mr. Marriage, of Chelmsford, a maltster, who turned his malting house into a temperance hall, and Mr. D. Alexander, of Ipswich, that the temperance reformers made way; and at that time James Lerner, of Framlingham, aided by young Mr. Thompson (now the great London surgeon, Sir Henry Thompson), was quite a power. But the difficulties were great in the way of finding places for meetings, or of getting to them in muddy lanes, or of getting the anti-teetotalers to behave decently, or of the lecturers finding accommodation for the night. Education would have been left almost alone, had not the Liberals started the British and Foreign schools, which roused the Church party to action. The one village

schoolmaster with whom I came into contact was – as were most of his class – one who had seen better days, who wore top boots, and whose chief instrument in teaching the young idea how to shoot was a ruler, of which he seemed to me to take rather an unfair advantage. The people were ignorant, and, like Lord Melbourne, did not see much good in making a fuss about education. They could rarely read or write, and if they could there was nothing for them to read – no cheap books nor cheap magazines and newspapers. Now we have run to the other extreme, and it is to be hoped we are all the better. Cottages were mostly in an unsanitary state, but the labourer, in his white smock, looked well on a Sunday at the village church or chapel, and the children at the Sunday-school were clean, if a little restless under the long, dry sermon which they were compelled to hear, the caretaker being generally provided with a long stick to admonish the thoughtless, to wake up the sleepy, to prevent too much indulgence in apples during sermon time, or too liberal a display of the miscellaneous treasures concealed in a boy's pocket. Perhaps the most influential person in the village was the gamekeeper, who was supposed to be armed, and to have the power of committing all boys in undue eagerness to go bird-nesting to the nearest gaol. He was to me, I own, a terror by night and by day, as he was constantly in my way – when tempted to break into the neighbouring park in search of flowers or eggs. The farmer then, as now, was ruined, but he was a picture of health and comfort as he drove to the nearest market town, where after business he would spend the evening smoking and drinking, with his broad beaver on his head, his fat carcass ornamented with a blue coat with brass buttons, and his knee breeches of yellow kerseymere. It was little he read to wake up his sluggish intellect, save the county newspaper, which it was the habit for people to take between them to lessen the expense. A newspaper was sevenpence, of which fourpence went to pay for the stamp. Everything was dear – the postage of a letter was 10d. or 1s. The franking of letters by Members of Parliament existed at that time; they could receive an unlimited number of letters free of postage, of any weight, even a pianoforte, a saddle, a haunch of venison, and they might send out fourteen a day. Loaf sugar was too dear to be in daily use; tea and coffee were heavily taxed; soap was too dear to use; and wearing apparel and boots and shoes very expensive; even if you went for a drive there was the turnpike gate, and a heavy toll to pay. As to geography, it was a science utterly unknown. Poor people when they talked of the Midland Counties called them the Shires, and I have heard serious disputes as to whether you got to America by sea or land. The finest men in East Anglia were the sailors at the various sea-ports along the coast, well-shaped, fair-haired, with grand limbs and blue eyes, evidently of Saxon or Norse descent, and their daughters were as handsome as any girls I ever saw. The peasant had his little bit of garden, where he could keep a pig and grow a few vegetables and flowers, but much of the furniture was of the poorest description, much inferior to what it is now, and his lot was not a happy one. As to locomotion, it did not exist. To go a few miles from home was quite an event; on the main roads ran coaches, with two, or three, or four horses, but the general mode of conveyance was the carrier's cart, sometimes drawn by one horse and sometimes by two. Some of the happiest days of my life were spent in the carrier's cart, where the travellers were seated on the luggage, their feet well protected by straw, where we were all hail fellows well met, and each enjoyed his little joke, especially when the rural intellect was stimulated by beer and baccy. The old village inn where we stopped to water the horses and refresh the inner man seemed to me all the more respectable when compared with the pestiferous beershops that had then begun to infest the land, to increase the crime, the misery, the pauperism of a district which already had quite enough of them before.

But to return to locomotion. A post-chaise was generally resorted to when the gentry travelled. It was painted yellow and black, and on one of the two horses by which it was drawn was seated an ancient, withered old man, generally known as the post-boy, whose age might be anywhere between forty and eighty, dressed in a jockey costume, in white hat and top boots; altogether, a bent, grotesque figure whom Tennyson must have had in his eye when he wrote – for the post-boy was often as not an ostler —

Wrinkled ostler, grim and thin,  
Here is custom come your way;  
Take my brute and lead him in,  
Stuff his ribs with mouldy hay.

## CHAPTER II.

### A life's memories

Long, long before John Forster wrote to recommend everyone to write memoirs of himself it had become the fashion to do so. "That celebrated orator," writes Dr. Edmund Calamy, one of the most learned of our Nonconformist divines, "Caius Cornelius Tacitus, in the beginning of his account of the life of his father-in-law, Julius Agricola (who was the General of Domitian, the Emperor, here in Britain, and the first who made the Roman part of Britain a Præsidial province), excuses this practice from carrying in it anything of arrogance." This excellent example was followed by Julius Cæsar, Marcus Antoninus, many emperors who kept diaries, Flavius Josephus, St. Gregory of Nazianzen, St. Augustine, to say nothing of Abraham Schultetus, the celebrated professor at Heidelberg; of the learned Fuetius; of Basompierre, the celebrated marshal of France; of the ever-amusing and garrulous Montaigne; or of our own Richard Baxter, or of Edmund Calamy himself. The fact is, it has ever been the fashion with men who have handled the pen freely to write more or less about themselves and the times in which they lived, and there is no pleasanter reading than such biographical recollections; and really it matters little whether on the world's stage the actor acted high tragedy or low comedy so that he writes truthfully as far as he can about himself and his times. If old Montaigne is to be believed there is nothing like writing about oneself. "I dare," he writes, "not only speak of myself, but of myself alone," and never man handled better the very satisfactory theme. If I follow in the steps of my betters I can do no harm, and I may do good if I can show how the England of to-day is changed for the better since I first began to observe that working men and women are better off, that our middle and upper classes have clearer views of duty and responsibility, that we are the better for the political and social and religious reforms that have been achieved of late, that, in fact,

.. through the ages one increasing purpose runs,  
And the thoughts of men are widened with the process of the suns.

The one great complaint I have to make with respect to my father and mother, to whom I owe so much, and whose memory I shall ever revere, was that they brought me into the world forty or fifty years too soon. In 1820, when I first saw the light of day, England was in a very poor way. It was what the late Earl of Derby used to call the pre-scientific era. Gross darkness covered the land. The excitement of war was over, and the lavish outlay it occasioned being stopped, life was stagnant, farmers and manufacturers alike were at low-water mark, and the social and religious and political reforms required by the times were as yet undreamed of. However, one good thing my parents did for me. They lived in a country village in the extreme east of Suffolk, not far from the sea, where I could lead a natural life, where I could grow healthy, if not wise, and be familiar with all the impulses which spring up in the heart under the influences of rural life. "Boyhood in the country," writes William Howitt in his autobiography – "Paradise of opening existence! Up to the age of ten this life was all my own." And thus it was with me. Existence was a pleasure, and the weather, I believe, was better then than it is now. We had summer in summer time. We had fine weather when harvest commenced, and to spend a day at one of the neighbouring farmers riding the fore horse was a delight which thrilled me with joy; and winter, with its sliding and snowballing, with its clear skies and its glittering snows, rendering the landscape lovelier than ever, made me forget the inevitable chilblains, which was the price we had to pay for all its glories and its charms.

Our little village was situated on the high road between London and Great Yarmouth, along which rolled twice a day the London and Yarmouth Royal Mail, drawn by four horses, and driven by a fat man in red, whom we raw village lads regarded as a very superior person indeed. Behind

sat the guard, also in red, with a horn, which he blew lustily when occasion required. There was a time, but that was much later, when a day coach was put on, and, as it changed horses at our village inn, one of our chief delights was to see the tired, heated, smoking horses taken out, and their places filled by a new set, much given to kicking and plunging at starting, to the immense delight of the juvenile spectators. Even the passengers I regarded with awe. In fourteen hours would they not be in London where the King lived – where were the Houses of Parliament, the Bank and the Tower and the soldiers? What would I not have given to be on that roof urging on, under the midnight stars, my wild career! Now and then a passenger would be dropped in our little village. What a nine days' wonder he was, especially if he were a Cockney and talked in the language of Cockaigne – if he had heard the Iron Duke, or seen royalty from afar. Nonconformity flourished in the village in spite of the fact that the neighbouring baronet, at the gates of whose park the village may be said to have commenced, was Sir Thomas Gooch – (Guche was the way the villagers pronounced his dread name) – for was he not a county magistrate, who could consign people to Beccles Gaol, some eight miles off, and one of the M.P.'s for the county, and did not he and his lady sternly set their faces against Dissent? If now and then there were coals and blankets to be distributed – and very little was done in that way, charity had not become fashionable then – you may be sure that no Dissenter, however needy and deserving, came in for a share.

The churches round were mostly filled by the baronet's relatives, who came into possession of the family livings as a matter of course, and took little thought for the souls of their parishioners. In fact, very few people did go to church. In our chapel, of which my father was the minister for nearly forty years, we had a good congregation, especially of an afternoon, when the farmers with their families, in carts or gigs, put in an appearance. One of the ejected had been the founder of Nonconformity in our village, and its traditions were all of the most honourable character. A wealthy family had lived in the hall, which Sir Thomas Gooch had bought and pulled down, one of whom had been M.P. for the county in Cromwell's time, and had left a small endowment – besides, there was a house for the minister – to perpetuate the cause, and it was something amidst the Bœotian darkness all round to have a man of superior intellect, of a fair amount of learning, of unspotted life, of devoted piety, such as the old Nonconformist ministers were, ever seeking to lead the people upward and onward; while the neighbouring gentry and all the parsons round, I am sorry to say, set the people a very bad example. In our time we have changed all that, and the Church clergy are as zealous to do good as the clergy of any other denomination. But that things have altered so much for the better, I hold is mainly due to the great progress made all over the land by Dissent, which woke up the Church from the state of sloth and luxury and lethargy which had jeopardised its very existence. Really, at the time of which I write and in the particular locality to which I refer, decent godly people were obliged to forsake the Parish Church, and to seek in the neighbouring conventicle the aids requisite to a religious life. At the same time, there was little collision between Church and Dissent. The latter had its own sphere, supporting, in addition to its local work, the Bible Society, the Tract Society, the London Missionary Society, and the Anti-Slavery Society. It had also its Sunday-school, very much inferior to what they are now; and, if possible, secured a day school on the British and Foreign plan. Dissenters paid Church rates, which the wealthy Churchmen were not ashamed to collect. They gave the parson his tithes without a murmur, and politically they were all on the side of the Whigs, to whom they were indebted for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts – barbarous laws – which had ostracised intelligent and conscientious Dissenters from all parochial and municipal and Parliamentary life. When I was a boy no one could be a parish constable without going through the hideous farce of taking the Sacrament at his Parish Church. It was the Dissenters who created the public opinion which enabled Sir Robert Peel and the Iron Duke to grant Roman Catholic emancipation. It was they who carried reform and abolished rotten boroughs, and gave Manchester and Sheffield and Birmingham the representatives which the Tories, and especially the parsons, would have denied them. To be a reformer was held by the clergy and gentry to be a rogue and rascal of

the first rank. I cannot call to mind any public action taken in support of the suffering and the poor to which the clergy and the gentry in our village, or in any of the villages round, lent any support whatever. As regards the great Anti-Slavery agitation, for instance, the only meeting on the subject was held in our chapel, where a Captain Pilkington came down from London to lecture, and touched all our hearts as he showed the lash and the chains, and the other instruments of torture which that cruel system sanctioned and required, and you may be quite sure that when next day I, with boyish pride, pardonable under the circumstances, was sent round to get signatures for a petition to Parliament on the subject, it was not long before I got my paper filled. Naturally the Dissenters were active in the work, for had not one of their number – poor Smith, missionary at Demerara – been foully murdered by Demerara magistrates and planters because he took the part of the black slave against his white owner and tyrant? Yet I was disgusted, after remembering the effect produced in our Suffolk village by the captain's eloquence, to read thirty years after in Sir George Stephens's "Anti-Slavery Recollections," that "Pilkington was a pleasing lecturer, and won over many by his amiable manners, but that he wanted power, and resigned the duty in about six months." In our simple village it was enough for us that a lecturer or speaker came from London; or as the country people called it Lunnen. That was a sufficient guarantee for us of his talent, his respectability, and his power. Since then the scales have fallen even from the eyes of the rustic, and he no longer sees men as trees walking. Railways have rendered the journey to London perilously easy. Hodge, in the vain hope to better himself, has left his village home, its clear skies, its bracing air, its healthy toil, its simple hours, and gone to live in the crowded slums. It may be that he earns better wages, but you may buy gold too dear. A healthy rustic is far happier in his village. It is there he should strive to live, rather than in the town; and a time may come when English legislators will have wisdom enough to do something to plant the people on the land, rather than compel them to come to town, to be poisoned by its bad air, its dangerous companionship, and its evil ways.

As regards intelligence, we were in a poor way. On Saturdays *The Suffolk Chronicle* appeared, much to the delight of the Radicals, while the Tories were cheered by *The Ipswich Journal*. At a later time *The Patriot* came to our house, and we got an idea of what was going on in the religious and Dissenting world. Foster's Essays were to be seen on many shelves, and later on the literary and religious speculations of Isaac Taylor, of Ongar, and Dick's writings had also a wonderful sale. I fancy no one cares much now for any of the writers I have named. Such is fame!

As a boy it seemed to me I had too much of the Assembly's Catechism and Virgil, to whose poetic beauties I was somewhat blind. I resolved to run away, as I fancied there was something better and brighter than village life. Religion was not attractive to me. Sunday was irksome. The land was barren, from Dan to Beersheba. I longed for the conflict and excitement and life of the distant town, and I ran away unconscious of the pain I should inflict on parents I dearly loved. Oh, that running away! If I live – and there is little chance of that – to the age of Methuselah I shall never forget it! It took place in the early morn of a long summer's day. The whole scene rises distinctly before me. I see myself giving a note to my sister for father and mother when they came down to breakfast, I see myself casting an eye to the bedroom window to see if there was any chance of their being up and so stopping the enterprise on which I had set my mind. Happily, as I thought, the blinds were down and there was nothing to forbid my opening the garden gate and finding myself on the London road. I was anxious to be off and yet loth to leave. I had a small parcel under my arm, consisting of very small belongings; and I was free of Latin and the Assembly Catechism, free as the air – my own master. All the world was hushed in slumber. There was no one to stop me or bid me return to the roof where I had been happy, and to the parents whom I was to return to, to love more than I had ever done before, and whom it then saddened me to think that I might never see again. Not a soul was in the street, and the few shops which adorned it were shut up – cottagers and shopkeepers, they were all in the arms of Morpheus. I hastened on, not wishing to be seen by any one; but there was no fear of that, only cows, horses at grass, and pigs and hens and birds were conscious of my flight, and they regarded me

with the indifference with which a Hottentot would view an ape. In my path was a hill on which I stayed awhile to take a last look at the deserted village. The white smoke was then curling up from the chimneys and the common round of daily life was about to begin. How peaceful it all seemed. What a contrast to my beating heart! There was not one of those cottages behind into which I had not been with my father as he visited the poor and the afflicted – not a lane or street along which I had not trundled my hoop with boyish glee – not a meadow into which I had not gone in search of buttercups and cowslips and primroses or bird's nests. I only met one man I knew, the miller, as he came from the mill where he had been at work all night, and of him I stood somewhat in awe, for once when the mill was being robbed he had sat up alone in darkness in the mill till the robbers came in, when he looked, through a hole in the upper floor, as they were at their wicked work below, and had thus identified them; and I had seen them in a cart on their way to Beccles gaol. Perhaps, thought I, he will stop me and ask me what I am about; but he did nothing of the kind, and henceforth the way was clear for me to London, where I was to fight the battle of life. Did I not write poetry, and did not I know ladies who were paid a guinea a page for writing for the *Annuals*, and could not I do the same? And thus thinking I walked three miles till I came to a small beershop, where I had a biscuit and a glass of beer. The road from thence was new to me, and how I revelled in the stateliness of the trees as I passed a nobleman's (Earl Stradbroke's) mansion and park. In another hour or so I found myself at Yoxford, then and still known as the Garden of Suffolk. There lived a Mr. Bird, a Suffolk poet of some note in his day. On him I called. He gave me a cordial welcome, kept me to dinner, and set me to play with his children. Alas! Yoxford was to me what Capua was to Hannibal – I got no further; in fact, my father traced me to the house, and I had nothing for it but to abandon my London expedition and return home. I don't think I was very sorry that my heroic enterprise had thus miscarried. What annoyed me most was that I was sent home in an open cart, and as we got into the street all the women came to their doors to see Master James brought back. I did not like being thus paraded as a show. I found my way to the little attic in which I slept, not quite so much of a hero as I had felt myself in the early morn.

It was a stirring time. The nation was being stirred, as it was never before or since, with the struggle for Reform. The excitement reached us in our out-of-the-way village. We were all Whigs, all bursting with hope. Yet some of the respectable people who feared Sir Thomas Gooch were rather alarmed by my father's determination to vote against him – the sitting Member – and to support the Liberal candidate. People do not read Parliamentary debates now. They did then, and not a line was skipped. I was a Radical. An old grocer in the village had lent me Hone's "House that Jack Built," and similar pamphlets, all illustrated by Cruikshank. My eyes were opened, and I had but a poor opinion of royalty and the Tory Ministers and the place men and parasites and other creeping vermin that infest courts. It is impossible to believe anything more rotten than that glorious Constitution which the Tories told us was the palladium of our liberties, the glory of our country, and the envy of surrounding nations. The Ministry for the time being existed by bribery and corruption. The M.P. bought his seat and sold his vote; the free and independent electors did the same. The boroughs were almost entirely rotten and for sale in consequence of the complicated state of voting in them, and especially in those incorporated by charter. In one borough the right was acquired by birth, in another by servitude, in another by purchase, in a fourth by gift, in a fifth by marriage. In some these rights were exercised by residents, in others by non-residents; in one place by the mayor or bailiff and twelve aldermen only, as at Buckingham, Malmesbury, &c.; in another by eight aldermen or ten or twelve burgesses, as at Bath, Andover, Tiverton, Banbury, &c.; in another by a small number of burgesses – three or four or five, as at Rye, Winchelsea, Romney, &c. As to what was called long ago tenure in boroughs there was no end to its absurdity. At Midhurst the right was in the possession of a hundred stones erected in an open field; at Old Sarum it was in the remaining part of the possession of a demolished castle; at Westbury in a long wall. In many other places it was in the possession of half-a-score or a dozen old thatched cottages, the conveyances to which were made on the morning of election to a few

trusty friends or dependents, who held a farcical election, and then returned them to the proprietor as soon as the business was finished. In the little borough of Aldeburgh, where Crabbe was born, the number of electors was eighty, all the property of a private individual; at Dunwich, a little further on the coast, the number of voters was twelve; at Bury St. Edmunds the number of voters was thirty-seven; another little insignificant village on the same coast was Orford, where the right of election was in a corporation of twenty individuals, composed of the family and dependents of the Marquis of Hertford. No wonder the popular fury swept away the rotten boroughs, and no wonder that the long struggle for reform ended in the triumph, not so much of the people, as the middle-class.

## CHAPTER III.

### Village Life

In recalling old times let me begin with the weather, a matter of supreme importance in country life – the first thing of which an Englishman speaks, the last thing he thinks of as he retires to rest. When I was a boy we had undoubtedly finer weather than we have now. There was more sunshine and less rain. In spring the air was balmy, and the flowers fair to look on. When summer came what joy there was in the hayfield, and how sweet the smell of the new-mown hay! As autumn advanced how pleasant it was to watch the fruit ripening, and the cornfields waving, far as the eye could reach, with the golden grain! People always seemed gay and happy then – the rosy-cheeked squire, the stout old farmer with his knee-breeches and blue coat with brass buttons, and Hodge in his smock-frock, white as the driven snow, on Sunday, when he went now to his parish church, or more generally to the meeting-house, where he heard sermons that suited him better, and where the musical part of the service, by means of flute and bass violin and clarionet, was ever a gratification and delight. And even winter had its charms in the shape of sliding and skating under a clear blue sky – all the trees and hedges everywhere decked out with diamonds, ever sparkling in the rays of an unclouded sun. We were all glad when the snow came and covered the earth with a robe of white. We were glad when it went away, and the birds began to build their nests, and the plougher went forth to turn up the soil, which had a fragrant savour after the wet and snow of winter, and the sower went forth to sow, while the rooks cawed in the morning air as they followed like an army in search of worms and whatever else they could feed on, and the graceful swallow, under the eaves of the old thatched cottage, built her clay nest, and lined it carefully for the reception of the little ones that were to come. They were always welcome, for in the opinion of the villagers they brought good luck. Abroad in the meadows there were the white woolly lambs, always at their gambols, and leaping all over the meadows.

It was a great happiness to be born in a village. Our village was rather a pretty one. Afar off we heard the murmurs and smelt the salt air of the distant sea, and that was something. There were no beerhouses then, and, alas! few attractions to keep raw village lads under good influence. My father, as I have said, was a Dissenting minister, painful, godly and laborious, ever seeking the spiritual welfare of his people, and relieving as far as possible their temporal wants. I had to accompany him in his pastoral visits, sometimes an irksome task, as the poor were numerous and garrulous, and made the most on such occasions of the infirmities of their lot. Some of the old ones were so worn and withered that their weird faces often haunted me by night and terrified me in my dreams.

Another thing that gave me trouble was the fact of being a Dissenter. It seemed to me a badge of inferiority, as the ignorant farmers and tradesmen around made Nonconformity the subject of deprecating remarks. "Dissenters were sly," said the son of the village shopkeeper, the only boy of my age in the village, whose father was the most servile of men himself to the parochial dignitaries, and I felt that, as a Dissenter, I was under a cloud. It was the fashion to call us "Pograms," and the word – no one knew what it meant – had rather an unpleasant sound to my youthful ears. This I knew, that most of the leading men of the place went to church when they went anywhere, and not to our meeting-house, where, however, we had good congregations. Many of our people were farmers who came from a distance for the afternoon service, and at whose homes when the time came I had many a happy day going out ferreting in the winter and in the autumn riding on the fore-horse. As the harvest was being gathered in, how proud was I to ride that fore-horse, though I lost a good deal of leather in consequence, and how welcome the night's rest after tumbling about in the waggon in the harvest field. Happily did the morning of my life pass away amidst rural scenes and sights. It is a great privilege to be born in the country. Childhood in the city loses much of its zest. Yet I had my dark moments. I had often to walk through a small wood, where, according to the village boys, flying

serpents were to be seen, and in the dark nights I often listened with fear and trembling to the talk of the villagers of wretched miscreants who were to be met with at such times with pitch-plaster, by means of which they took away many a boy's life for the sake of selling his dead body to the doctor for the purposes of dissection. But the winter night had its consolations nevertheless. We had the stories of English history by Maria Hack and other light literature to read. We had dissecting maps to put together, and thus acquire a knowledge of geography. And there was a wonderful game invented by a French *abbé*, which was played in connection with a teetotum and a map of England and Wales, the benefits of which even at this distance of time I gratefully record. It is true cards were looked upon as sinful, but we had chess and draughts. Later on we had *The Penny Magazine*, and *Chambers's Journal*, and *The Edinburgh Review*, which had to me all the fascination of a novel. We had also *The Evangelical Magazine* and *The Youth's Companion*, a magazine which, I believe, has long ceased to exist, and the volumes with illustrations of the Society for Diffusion of Useful and Entertaining Knowledge, and we had the book club meetings, when it was the fashion for the members to take tea at each other's homes, and propose books, and once a year meet to sell the old ones by auction. My father shone on such occasions. He was a good talker, as times went – conversation not being much of a gift among the members of the club, save when the ladies cheered us with their presence. As a Scotchman he had a good share of the dry humour of his nation. But chiefly did he shine when the brethren met. Foremost of the party were Sloper of Beccles, who had talked on things spiritual with Mrs. Siddons, Crisp of Lowestoft, Blaikie of Bungay, Longley of Southwold, and others, who discussed theology and metaphysics all the evening, till their heads were as cloudy as the tobacco-impregnated room in which they sat. At all these gatherings Alexander Creak of Yarmouth was a principal figure; a fine, tall, stately man, minister of a congregation supposed to be of a very superior class. One of his sons, I believe, still lives in Norfolk. As to the rest they have left only their memories, and those are growing dimmer and fainter every year.

At that time amongst the brethren who occasionally dawned upon our benighted village were Mayhew of Walpole, good old Mr. Dennant of Halesworth (of whom I chiefly remember that he was a bit of a poet, and that he was the author of a couplet which delighted me as a boy – and delights me still – “Awhile ago when I was nought, and neither body, soul nor thought”), and Mr. Ward of Stowmarket, who was supposed to be a very learned man indeed, and Mr. Hickman of Denton, whose library bespoke an erudition rare in those times. Most of them had sons. Few of them, however, became distinguished in after life; few of them, indeed, followed their fathers' steps as ministers. One of the Creaks did, and became a tutor, I think, at Spring Hill College, Birmingham; but the fact is few of them were trained for contest and success in the world. As regards myself, I own I was led to think a great deal more of the next world than of this. We had too much religion. God made man to rule the world and conquer it, to fight a temporal as well as spiritual battle, to be diligent in business, whilst at the same time fervent in spirit, serving the Lord. What I chiefly remember was that I was to try and be good, though at the same time it was awfully impressed upon me that of myself I could think no good thought nor do one good thing; that I was born utterly depraved, and that if I were ever saved – a fact I rather doubted – it was because my salvation had been decreed in the councils of heaven before the world was. Naturally my religion was of fear rather than of love. It seems to me that lads thus trained, as far as my experience goes, never did turn out well, unless they were namby-pamby creatures, milksops, in fact, rather than men. I have lived to see a great change for the better in this respect, and a corresponding improvement of the young man of the day. It may be that he is less sentimental; but his religion, when he has any, is of a manlier type. I never saw a copy of Shakespeare till I was a young man. As a child, my memory had been exercised in learning passages from Milton, the hardest chapters in the Old or New Testament, and the Assembly Catechism. If that Assembly Catechism had never been written I should have been happier as a child, and wiser and more useful as a man. I have led an erratic life; I have wandered far from the fold. At one time I looked on myself

as an outcast. With the Old Psalmist – with brave Oliver Cromwell – with generations of tried souls, I had to sing, as Scotch Presbyterians, I believe, in Northern kirks still sing: —

Woe's me that I in Meshec am  
A sojourner so long,  
Or that I in the tents do dwell  
To Kedar that belong.

Yet nothing was simpler or more beautiful than the lives of those old Noncons.; I may say so from a wide experience. They were godly men, a striking contrast to the hunting, drinking, swearing parsons of the surrounding district. Hence their power in the pulpit, their success in the ministry. But they failed to understand childhood and youth; childhood, with its delight in things that are seen and temporal, and youth with its passionate longing to burst its conventional barriers, and to revel in the world which looks so fair, and of which it has heard such evil. Ah, these children of many prayers; how few of them came to be pious; how many of them fell, some, alas, to rise no more. One reason was that if you did not see your way to become a church member and a professor of religion you were cut off, or felt inwardly that you were cut off, which is much the same thing, and had to associate with men of loose lives and looser thoughts. There was no *via media*; you were either a saint or a sinner, of the church or the world. It is not so now, when even every Young Men's Christian Association has its gymnasium, and the young man's passions are soothed by temperance and exercise and not inflated by drink. There may not be so much of early piety as there was – though of that I am not sure. There is a great deal more of religion than there was, not so much of sensational enjoyment or of doctrinal discussion perhaps, but more practical religion in all the various walks of life.

We had to teach in the Sunday-school. My services were early utilised in that direction, for the village was badly supplied with the stuff of which teachers were made, and as the parson's son I was supposed to have an *ex-officio* qualification for the task. I fear I was but a poor hand in the work of teaching the young idea how to shoot, especially when that idea was developed in the bodies of great hulking fellows, my seniors in years and superiors in size. However, one of them did turn out well. Many years after he recognised me in the Gray's Inn Road, London, where he had made money as a builder, and where, though he never learned to read – perhaps that was my fault – he figured for a time largely on the walls as the Protestant churchwarden. “You know, sir,” he said to me, “how poor we all were at W – ” (the father, I fear, was a drunkard), “Well, I came to London, resolving to be either a man or a mouse”; and here he was, as respectable-looking a man as any you could see, thus proving what I hold to be the truth, that in this land of ours, however deep in the mire a man may be, he may rise, if he has the requisite power of work and endurance and self-denial. I fear he did not much profit by our Sunday-school, though he told me he had put it down in his will for a small legacy. Our chief man was a shoemaker named Roberts, who sat with the boys under the pulpit in face of all the people; the girls, with the modesty of the sex, retiring to the back seats of the gallery. In his hand he bore a long wand, and woe to the unfortunate lad who fell asleep while the sermon was going on, or endeavoured to relieve the tedium of it by eating apples, sucking sweets, or revealing to his fellows the miscellaneous treasures of his pocket in the shape of marbles or string or knife. On such an offender down came the avenging stroke, swift as lightning and almost as sharp. As to general education, there was no attempt to give it. Later on, the Dissenters raised enough money to build a day-school, and then the Churchmen were stirred up to do the same. There was a school, kept by an irritable, red-faced old party in knee-breeches, who had failed in business, where I and most of the farmers' sons of the village went; but I can't say that any of us made much progress, and I did better when I was taken back to the home and educated, my father hearing my Latin and Greek as he smoked his pipe, while my mother – a very superior woman, with a great taste for literature and art – acted as teacher, while she was at work painting, after the duties of housekeeping were over. I ought to have been a

better boy. But there were two great drawbacks – one, the absence of all emulation, which too often means the loss of all worldly success; the other, the painful and useless effort to be good.

## **CHAPTER IV.**

### **Village Sports and Pastimes**

It was wonderful the utter stagnation of the village. The chapel was the only centre of intellectual life; next to that was the alehouse, whither some of the conscript fathers repaired to get a sight of the county paper, to learn the state of the markets, and at times to drink more ale than was good for them. About ten I had my first experience of death. I had lost an aged grandmother, but I was young, and it made little impression on me, except the funeral sermon – preached by my father to an overflowing congregation – which still lives in my recollections of a dim and distant past. I was a small boy. I was laid up with chilblains and had to be carried into the chapel; and altogether the excitement of the occasion was pleasing rather than the reverse. But the next who fell a victim was a young girl – whom I thought beautiful – who was the daughter of a miller who attended our chapel, and with whom I was on friendly terms. On the day of her funeral her little brothers and sisters came to our house to be out of the way. But I could not play with them, as I was trying to realise the figure I thought so graceful lying in the grave – to be eaten of worms, to turn to clay. But I shuddered as I thought of what we so often say:

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