

James Ewing Ritchie

East Anglia: Personal Recollections and Historical Associations



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«Public Domain»

Ritchie J.

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/ J. Ritchie — «Public Domain»,

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PRESS NOTICES OF THE FIRST EDITION

‘We cordially recommend Mr. Ritchie’s book to all who wish to pass an agreeable hour and to learn something of the outward actions and inner life of their predecessors. It is full of sketches of East Anglian celebrities, happily touched if lightly limned.’ —*East Anglian Daily Times*.

‘A very entertaining and enjoyable book. Local gossip, a wide range of reading and industrious research, have enabled the author to enliven his pages with a wide diversity of subjects, specially attractive to East Anglians, but also of much general interest.’ —*Daily Chronicle*.

‘The work is written in a light gossip style, and by reason both of it and of the variety of persons introduced is interesting. To a Suffolk or Norfolk man it is, of course, especially attractive. The reader will go through these pages without being wearied by application. They form a pleasant and entertaining contribution to county literature, and “East Anglia” will, we should think, find its way to many of the east country bookshelves.’ —*Suffolk Chronicle*.

‘The book is as readable and attractive a volume of local chronicles as could be desired. Though all of our readers may not see “eye to eye” with Mr. Ritchie, in regard to political and theological questions, they cannot fail to gain much enjoyment from his excellent delineation of old days in East Anglia.’ —*Norwich Mercury*.

““East Anglia” has the merit of not being a compilation, which is more than can be said of the great majority of books produced in these days to satisfy the revived taste for topographical gossip. Mr. Ritchie is a Suffolk man – the son of a Nonconformist minister of Wrentham in that county – and he looks back to the old neighbourhood and the old times with an affection which is likely to communicate itself to its readers. Altogether we can with confidence recommend this book not only to East Anglians, but to all readers who have any affinity for works of its class.’ —*Daily News*.

‘Mr. Ritchie’s book belongs to a class of which we have none too many, for when well done they illustrate contemporary history in a really charming manner. What with their past grandeur, their present progress, their martyrs, patriots, and authors, there is plenty to tell concerning Eastern counties: and one who writes with native enthusiasm is sure to command an audience.’ —*Baptist*.

‘Mr. Ritchie, known to the numerous readers of the *Christian World* as “Christopher Crayon,” has the pen of a ready, racy, refreshing writer. He never writes a dull line, and never for a moment allows our interest to flag. In the work before us, which is not his first, he is, I should think, at his best. The volume is the outcome of extensive reading, many rambles over the districts described, and of thoughtful observation. We seem to live and move and have our being in East Anglia. Its folk-lore, its traditions, its worthies, its memorable events, are all vividly and charmingly placed before us, and we close the book sorry that there is no more of it, and wondering why it is that works of a similar kind have not more frequently appeared.’ —*Northern Pioneer*.

‘It has yielded us more gratification than any work that we have read for a considerable time. The book ought to have a wide circulation in the Eastern counties, and will not fail to yield profit and delight wherever it finds its way.’ —*Essex Telegraph*.

‘Mr. Ritchie has here written a most attractive chapter of autobiography. He recalls the scenes of his early days, and whatever was quaint or striking in connection with them, and finds in his recollections ready pegs on which to hang historical incident and antiquarian curiosities of many kinds. He passes from point to point in a delightfully cheerful and contagious mood. Mr. Ritchie’s

reading has been as extensive and careful as his observation is keen and his temper genial; and his pages, which appeared in *The Christian World Magazine*, well deserve the honour of book-form, with the additions he has been able to make to them.' —*British Quarterly Review*.

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

The chapters of which this little work consists originally appeared in the *Christian World Magazine*, where they were so fortunate as to attract favourable notice, and from which they are now reprinted, with a few slight additions, by permission of the Editor. In bringing out a second edition, I have incorporated the substance of other articles originally written for local journals. It is to be hoped, touching as they do a theme not easily exhausted, but always interesting to East Anglians, that they may help to sustain that love of one's county which, alas! like the love of country, is a matter reckoned to be of little importance in these cosmopolitan days, but which, nevertheless, has had not a little share in the formation of that national greatness and glory in which at all times Englishmen believe.

One word more. I have retained some strictures on the clergy of East Anglia, partly because they were true at the time to which I refer, and partly because it gives me pleasure to own that they are not so now. The Church of England clergyman of to-day is an immense improvement on that of my youth. In ability, in devotion to the duties of his calling, in intelligence, in self-denial, in zeal, he is equal to the clergy of any other denomination. If he has lost his hold upon Hodge, that, at any rate, is not his fault.

Clacton-on-Sea,
January, 1893.

CHAPTER I. A SUFFOLK VILLAGE

Distinguished people born there – Its Puritans and Nonconformists – The country round Covehithe – Southwold – Suffolk dialect – The Great Eastern Railway.

In his published Memoirs, the great Metternich observes that if he had never been born he never could have loved or hated. Following so illustrious a precedent, I may observe that if I had not been born in East Anglia I never could have been an East Anglian. Whether I should have been wiser or better off had I been born elsewhere, is an interesting question, which, however, it is to be hoped the public will forgive me if I decline to discuss on the present occasion.

In a paper bearing the date of 1667, a Samuel Baker, of Wattisfield Hall, writes: 'I was born at a village called Wrentham, which place I cannot pass by the mention of without saying thus much, that religion has there flourished longer, and that in much piety; the Gospel and grace of it have been more powerfully and clearly preached, and more generally received; the professors of it have been more sound in the matter and open and steadfast in the profession of it in an hour of temptation, have manifested a greater oneness amongst themselves and have been more eminently preserved from enemies without (albeit they dwell where Satan's seat is encompassed with his malice and rage), than I think in any village of the like capacity in England; which I speak as my duty to the place, but to my particular shame rather than otherwise, that such a dry and barren plant should spring out of such a soil.' I resemble this worthy Mr. Baker in two respects. In the first place, I was born at Wrentham, though at a considerably later period of time than 1667; and, secondly, if he was a barren plant – he of whom we read, in Harmer's Miscellaneous Works, that 'he was a gentleman of fortune and education, very zealous for the Congregational plan of church government and discipline, and a sufferer in its bonds for a good conscience' – what am I?

Nor was it only piety that existed in this distant parish. If the reader turns to the diary of John Evelyn, under the date of 1679, he will find mention made of a child brought up to London, 'son of one Mr. Wotton, formerly amanuensis to Dr. Andrews, Bishop of Winton, who both read and perfectly understood Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Arabic and Syriac, and most of the modern languages, disputed in divinity, law and all the sciences, was skilful in history, both ecclesiastical and profane; in a word, so universally and solidly learned at eleven years of age that he was looked on as a miracle. Dr. Lloyd, one of the most deep-learned divines of this nation in all sorts of literature, with Dr. Burnet, who had severely examined him, came away astonished, and told me they did not believe there had the like appeared in the world. He had only been instructed by his father, who being himself a learned person, confessed that his son knew all that he himself knew. But what was more admirable than his vast memory was his judgment and invention, he being tried with divers hard questions which required maturity of thought and experience. He was also dexterous in chronology, antiquities, mathematics. In sum, an *intellectus universalis* beyond all that we reade of Picus Mirandula, and other precocce witts, and yet withal a very humble child.' This prodigy was the son of the Rev. Henry Wotton, minister of Wrentham, Suffolk. Sir William Skippon, a parishioner, in a letter yet extant, describes the wonderful achievements of the little fellow when but five years old. He was admitted at Katherine Hall, Cambridge, some months before he was ten years old. In after-years he was the friend and defender of Bentley and the antagonist of Sir William Temple in the great controversy about ancient and modern learning. He died in 1726, and was buried at Buxted, in Sussex. It is clear that there was no such intellectual phenomenon in all London under the Stuarts as that little Wrentham lad.

Of that village, when I came into the world, my father was the honoured, laborious and successful minister. The meeting-house, as it was called, which stood in the lane leading from the church to the highroad, was a square red brick building, vastly superior to any of the ancient meeting-houses round. It stood in an enclosure, one side of which was devoted to the reception of the farmers' gigs, which, on a Sunday afternoon, when the principal service was held, made quite a respectable show when drawn up in a line. By the side of it was a cottage, in which lived the woman who kept the place tidy, and her husband, who looked after the horses as they were unharnessed and put in the stable close by. The backs of the gigs were sheltered from the road by a hedge of lilacs, and over the gateway a gigantic elm kept watch and ward. The house in which we lived was also part of the chapel estate, and, if it was a little way off, it was, at any rate, adapted to the wants of a family of quiet habits and simple tastes. On one side of the house was a water-butt, and I can well remember my first sad experience of the wickedness of the world when, getting up one morning to look after my rabbits and other live stock, I found that water-butt had gone, and that there were thieves in a village so rural and renowned for piety as ours. I say renowned, and not without reason. Years and years back there was a pious clergyman of the name of Steffe, who had a son in Dr. Doddridge's Academy, at Daventry, and it is a fact that the great Doctor himself, at some time or other, had been a guest in the village.

In 1741 the Doctor thus records his East Anglian recollections, in a letter to his wife: 'You have great reason to confide in that very kind Providence which has hitherto watched over us, and has, since the date of my last, brought us about sixty miles nearer London. From Yarmouth we went on Friday morning to Wrentham, where good Mrs. Steffe lives, and from thence to a gentleman's seat, near Walpole, where I was most respectfully entertained. As I had twenty miles to ride yesterday morning, he, though I had never seen him before last Tuesday, brought me almost half-way in his chaise, to make the journey easier. I reached Woodbridge before two, and rode better in the cool of the evening, and had the happiness to be entertained in a very elegant and friendly family, though perfectly a stranger; and, indeed, I have been escorted from one place to another in every mile of my journey by one, and sometimes by two or three, of my brethren in a most respectful and agreeable manner.' Dr. Doddridge's East Anglian recollections seem to have been uncommonly agreeable, owing quite as much, I must candidly confess, to the presence of the sisters as of the brethren. Writing to his wife an account of a little trip on the river, he adds: 'It was a very pleasant day, and I concluded it in the company of one of the finest women I ever beheld, who, though she had seven children grown up to marriageable years, or very near it, is still herself almost a beauty, and a person of sense, good breeding, and piety, which might astonish one who had not the happiness of being intimately acquainted with you.' What a sly rogue was Dr. Doddridge! How could any wife be jealous when her husband finishes off with such a compliment to herself?

But to return to the good Mrs. Steffe, of whom I am, on my mother's side, a descendant. I must add that as there were great men before Agamemnon, so there were good people in the little village of Wrentham before Mrs. Steffe appeared upon the scene. The Brewsters, who were an ancient family, which seems to have culminated under the glorious usurpation of Oliver Cromwell, were eminently good people in Dr. Doddridge's acceptance of the term, and I fancy did much as lords of the manor – and as inhabitants of Wrentham Hall, a building which had ceased to exist long before my time – to leaven with their goodness the surrounding lump. It seems to me that these Brewsters must have been more or less connected with Brewster the elder – of Robinson's Church at Leyden, who, we are told, came of a wealthy and distinguished family – who was well trained at Cambridge, and, says the historian, 'thence, being first seasoned with the seeds of grace and virtue, he went to the Court, and there served that religious and godly Mr. Davison divers years, when he was Secretary of State, who found him so discreet and faithful as he trusted him, above all others that were about him, and only employed him in matters of great trust and secrecy; he esteemed him rather as a son than a servant, and for his wisdom and godliness in private, he would

converse with him more like a familiar than a master.' When evil times came, this Brewster was living in the big Manor House at Scrooby, and how he and his godly associates were driven into exile by a foolish King and cruel priests is known, or ought to be known, to everyone. Of these Wrentham Brewsters, one served his country in Parliament, or I am very much mistaken. It was to their credit that they sought out godly men, to whom they might entrust the cure of souls. In this respect, when I was a lad, their example certainly had not been followed, and Dissent flourished mainly because the moral instincts of the villagers and farmers and small tradesmen were shocked by hearing men on the Sunday reading the Lessons of the Church, leading the devotions of the people, and preaching sermons, who on the week-days got drunk and led immoral lives. As to the right of the State to interfere in matters of religion, as to the danger to religion itself from the establishment of a State Church, as to the liberty of unlicensed prophesying, such topics the simple villagers ignored. All that they felt was that there came to them more of a quickening of the spiritual life, a fuller realization of God and things divine, in the meeting-house than in the parish church. They were not what pious Churchmen so much dread nowadays – Political Dissenters; how could they be such, having no votes, and never seeing a newspaper from one year's end to the other?

It was to the Brewsters that the village was indebted for the ministry of the Rev. John Phillip, who married the sister of the pious and learned Dr. Ames, Professor of the University of Franeker. Calamy tells us that by means of Dr. Ames, Mr. Phillip had no small furtherance in his studies, and intimate acquaintance with him increased his inclination to the Congregational way. Archbishop Abbot, writing to Winwood, 1611, says: 'I have written to Sir Horace Vere touching the English preacher at the Hague. We heard what he was that preceded, and we cannot be less cognisant what Mr. Ames is, for by a Latin printed book he hath laden the Church and State of England with a great deal of infamous contumely, so that if he were amongst us he would be so far from receiving preferment, that some exemplary punishment would be his reward. His Majesty had been advertised how this man is entertained and embraced at the Hague, and how he is a fit person to breed up captains and soldiers there in mutiny and faction.' One of Dr. Ames's works, which got him into trouble, was entitled 'A Fresh Suit against Ceremonies,' a work which we may be sure would be as distasteful to the Ritualists of our day as it was to the Ritualists of his own. One of his works, his 'Medulla Theologiæ,' I believe, adorned the walls of the paternal study. There is, belonging to the Wrentham Congregational Church Library, a volume of tracts, sixty-seven in number, of six or eight pages each, printed in 1622, forming a series of theses on theological topics, maintained by different persons, under the presidency of Dr. Ames; and I believe a son of the Doctor is buried in Wrentham Churchyard, as I recollect my father, on one occasion, had an old gravestone done up and relettered, which bore testimony to the virtues and piety and learning of an Ames. Thus if Mr. Phillip was chased out of Old England into New England for his Nonconformity, some of the good old Noncons remained to uphold the lamp which was one day to cast a sacred light on all quarters of the land. That some did emigrate with their pastor is probable, since we learn that there is a town called Wrentham across the Atlantic, said to have received that name because some of the first settlers came from Wrentham in England.

Touching Mr. Phillip, a good deal has been written by the Rev. John Browne, the painstaking author of 'The History of Congregationalism in Suffolk and Norfolk.' It appears that his arrival in America was not unexpected, as the Christian people of Dedham had invited him to that plantation beforehand. He did not, however, accept their invitation, but being much in request, 'and called divers ways, could not resolve; but, at length, upon weighty reasons concerning the public service and foundations of the college, he was persuaded to attend to the call of Cambridge;' and, adds an American writer, 'he might have been the first head of that blessed institution.' On the calling of the Long Parliament, he and his wife returned to England, and in 1642 we find him ministering to his old flock. So satisfied were the neighbouring Independents of his Congregationalism, that when, in 1644, members of Mr. Bridge's church residing in Norwich desired to form themselves

into a separate community, they not only consulted with their brethren in Yarmouth, but with Mr. Phillip also, as the only man then in their neighbourhood on whose judgment and experience they could rely. In 1643 Mr. Phillip was appointed one of the members of the Assembly of Divines, and was recognised by Baillie in his Letters as one of the Independent men there. The Independents, as we know, sat apart, and were a sad thorn in the Presbyterians' side. Five of them, more zealous than the rest, formally dissented from the decisions of the Assembly, and afraid that toleration would not be extended to them, appealed to Parliament, 'as the most sacred refuge and asylum for mistaken and misjudged innocence.' Mr. Phillip's name, however, I do not find in that list; and possibly he was too old to be very active in the matter. He lived on till 1660, when he died at the good old age of seventy-eight. In the later years of his ministry he was assisted by his nephew, W. Ames, who in 1651 preached a sermon at St. Paul's, before the Lord Mayor and Aldermen, 'On the Saint's Security against Seducing Sports, or the Anointing from the Holy One.' It is to be feared, in our more enlightened age, a good Wrentham Congregational minister would have little chance of preaching before a London Lord Mayor. Talent is supposed to exist only in the crowded town, where men have no time to think of anything but of the art of getting on.

Other heroic associations – of men who had suffered for the faith, who feared God rather than man, who preferred the peace of an approving conscience to the vain honours of the world – also were connected with the place. I remember being shown a bush in which the conventicle preacher used to hide himself when the enemy, in the shape of the myrmidons of Bishop Wren, of Norwich, were at his heels. That furious prelate, as many of us know, drove upwards of three thousand persons to seek their bread in a foreign land. Indeed, to such an extent did he carry out his persecuting system, that the trade and manufactures of the country materially suffered in consequence. However, in my boyish days I was not troubled much about such things. Dissent in Wrentham was quite respectable. If we had lost the Brewster family, whose arms were still to be seen on the Communion plate, a neighbouring squire attended at the meeting-house, as it was then the fashion to call our chapel, and so did the leading grocer and draper of the place, and the village doctor, the father of six comely daughters; and the display of gigs on a Sunday was really imposing. Alas! as I grew older I saw that imposing array not a little shorn of its splendour. The neighbouring baronet, Sir Thomas Gooch, M.P., added as he could farm to farm, and that a Dissenter was on no account to have one of his farms was pretty well understood. I fancy our great landlords have, in many parts of East Anglia, pretty well exterminated Dissent, to the real injury of the people all around. I write this advisedly. I dare say the preaching in the meeting-house was often very miserably poor. The service, I must own, seemed to me often peculiarly long and unattractive. There was always that long prayer which was, I fear, to all boys a time of utter weariness; but, nevertheless, there was a moral and intellectual life in our Dissenting circle that did not exist elsewhere. It was true we never attended dinners at the village public-house, nor indulged in card-parties, and regarded with a horror, which I have come to think unwholesome, the frivolity of balls or the attractions of a theatre; but we had all the new books voted into our bookclub, and, as a lad, I can well remember how I revelled in the back numbers of the *Edinburgh Review*, though even then I could not but feel the injustice which it did to what it called the Lake school of poets, and more especially to Coleridge and Wordsworth. Shakespeare also was almost a sealed book, and perhaps we had a little too much of religious reading, such as Doddridge's 'Rise and Progress,' or Baxter's 'Saint's Rest,' or Alleine's 'Call to the Unconverted,' or Fleetwood's 'Life of Christ' – excellent books in their way, undoubtedly, but not remarkably attractive to boys redolent of animal life, who had thriven and grown fat in that rustic village, on whose vivid senses the world that now is produced far more effect than the terrors or splendours of the world to come.

The country round, if flat, was full of interesting associations. At the back of us – that is, on the sea – was the village of Covehithe, and when a visitor found his way into the place – an event which happened now and then – our first excursion with him or her – for plenty of donkeys were to

be had which ladies could ride – was to Covehithe, known to literary men as the birthplace of John Bale, Bishop of Ossory, in Ireland. In connection with donkeys, I have this interesting recollection, that one of the old men of the village told me. At the time of the Bristol riots, he remembered Sir Charles Wetherall, the occasion of them, as a boy at Wrentham much given to donkey-riding. In the history of the drama John Bale takes distinguished rank. He was one of those by whom the drama was gradually evolved, and all to whom it is a study and delight must remember him with regard. His play of ‘Kynge John’ is described by Mr. Collier as occupying an intermediate place between moralities and historical plays – and it is the only known existing specimen of that species of composition of so early a date. Bale, who was trained at the monastery of White Friars, in Norwich, thence went to Jesus College, Cambridge, and was expelled in consequence of the zeal with which he exposed the errors of Popery. However, Bale had a friend and protector in Cromwell, Henry VIII.’s faithful servant. On the death of that nobleman Bale proceeded to Germany, where he appears to have been well received and hospitably entertained by Luther and Melancthon, and on the accession of Edward VI. he returned to England. In Mary’s reign persecution recommenced, and Bale fled to Frankfort. He again returned at the commencement of Elizabeth’s reign, and was made prebend of Canterbury, at which place he died at the age of sixty-three. Covehithe nowadays is not interesting so much as the birthplace of Bale, as on account of its ecclesiastical ruins, which are covered with ivy and venerable in their decay. The church was evidently almost a cathedral, and surely at one time or other there must have been an enormous population to worship in such a sanctuary; and yet all you see now is a public-house just opposite the church, a few cottages, and a farmhouse. A few steps farther bring you to the low cliff, and there is the sea ever encroaching on the land in that quarter and swallowing up farmhouse and farm. Miss Agnes Strickland, who lived at Reydon Hall – a few miles inland – has thus sung the melancholy fate of Covehithe:

‘All roofless now the stately pile,
And rent the arches tall,
Through which with bright departing smile
The western sunbeams fall.

* * * * *

‘Tradition’s voice forgets to tell
Whose ashes sleep below,
And Fancy here unchecked may dwell,
And bid the story flow.’

Ah! what was that story? How the question puzzled my young head, as I walked in the sandy lane that led from my native village! How insignificant looked the little church built up inside! What had become of the crowds that at one time must have filled that ancient fane? How was it that no trace of them remained? They had vanished in the historical age, and yet no one could tell how or when. Nature was, then, stronger than man. He was gone, but the stars glittered by night and the sun shone by day, and the ivy had spread its green mantle over all. Yes! what was man, with his pomp and glory, but dust and ashes, after all! How I loved to go to Covehithe and climb its ruins, and dream of the distant past!

Here in that eastern point of England it seemed to me there was a good deal of decay. Sometimes, on a fine summer day, we would take a boat and sail from the pretty little town of Southwold, about four miles from Wrentham, to Dunwich, another relic of the past. According to

an old historian, it was a city surrounded with a stone wall having brazen gates; it had fifty-two churches, chapels, and religious houses; it also boasted hospitals, a huge palace, a bishop's seat, a mayor's mansion, and a Mint. Beyond it a forest appears to have extended some miles into what is now the sea. One of our local Suffolk poets, James Bird (I saw him but once, when I walked into his house, about twelve miles from Wrentham, having run away from home at the ripe age of ten, and told him I had come to see him, as he was a poet; and I well remember how then, much to my chagrin, he gave me plum-pudding for dinner, and sent me to play with his boys till a cart was found in which the prodigal was compelled to return), wrote and published a poetical romance, called 'Dunwich; or, a Tale of the Splendid City;' and Agnes Strickland also made it the subject of her melodious verse, commencing:

'Oft gazing on thy craggy brow,
We muse on glories o'er.
Fair Dunwich! Thou art lonely now,
Renowned and sought no more.'

Never has a splendid city more utterly collapsed. After a long ride over sandy lanes and fields, you come to the edge of a cliff, on which stand a few houses. There is all that remains of the Dunwich where the first Bishop of East Anglia taught the Christian faith, and where was born John Daye, the printer of the works of Parker, Latimer, and Fox, who, in the reign of Mary, became, as most real men did then, a prisoner and an exile for the truth. He has also the reputation of being the first in England who printed in the Saxon character. In the records of type-founding the name of Daye stands with that of the most illustrious. When the Company of Stationers obtained their charter from Philip and Mary, he was the first person admitted to their livery. In 1580 he was master of the company, to which he bequeathed property at his death. The following is the inscription which marks the place of his burial in Little Bradley, Suffolk:

'Here lyes the Daye that darkness could not blynd,
When Popish fogges had overcast the sunne;
This Daye the cruel night did leave behind,
To view and show what bloudie actes were donne.
He set a Fox to write how martyrs runne
By death to lyfe, Fox ventured paynes and health.
To give them light Daye spent in print his wealth,
But God with gayne returned his wealth agayne,
And gave to him as he gave to the poore.
Two wyfes he had partakers of his payne:
Each wyfe twelve babes, and each of them one more,
Als was the last increaser of his store;
Who, mourning long for being left alone,
Sett up this tombe, herself turned to a stone.'

Unlike Covehithe, Dunwich has a history. In the reign of Henry II., a MS. in the British Museum tells us, the Earl of Leicester came to attack it. 'When he came neare and beheld the strength thereof, it was terror and feare unto him to behold it; and so retired both he and his people.' Dunwich aided King John in his wars with the barons, and thus gained the first charter. In the time of Edward I. it had sixteen fair ships, twelve barks, four-and-twenty fishing barks, and at that time there were few seaports in England that could say as much. It served the same King in his wars with France with eleven ships of war, well furnished with men and munition. In most of these ships

were seventy-two men-at-arms, who served thirteen weeks at their own cost and charge. Dunwich seems to have suffered much by the French wars. Four of the eleven ships already referred to were captured by the French, and in the wars waged by Edward III. Dunwich lost still more shipping, and as many as 500 men. Perhaps it might have flourished till this day had it not been for the curse of war. But the sea also served the town cruelly. That spared nothing – not the King's Forest, where there were hawking and hunting – not the homes where England nursed her hardy sailors – not even the harbour whence the brave East Anglians sailed away to the wars. In Edward III.'s time, at one fell swoop, the remorseless sea seems to have swallowed up '400 houses which payde rente to the towne towards the fee-farms, besydes certain shops and windmills.' Yet, when I was a lad, this wreck of a place returned two members to Parliament, and Birmingham, Manchester and Sheffield not one. Between Covehithe and Dunwich stood, and still stands, the charming little bathing-place of Southwold. Like them, it has seen better days, and has suffered from the encroachments of the ever-restless and ever-hungry sea. It was at Southwold that I first saw the sea, and I remember naturally asking my father, who showed me the guns on the gun-hill – pointing seaward – whether that was where the enemies came from.

Southwold appears to have initiated an evangelical alliance, which may yet be witnessed if ever a time comes of reasonable toleration on religious matters. In many parts of the Continent the same place of worship is used by different religious bodies. In Brussels I have seen the Episcopalians, the Germans, the French Protestants, all assembling at different times in the same building. There was a time when a similar custom prevailed in Southwold, and that was when Master Sharpen, who had his abode at Sotterley, preached at Southwold once a month. There were Independents in the towns in those days, and 'his indulgence,' writes a local historian, 'favoured the Separatists with the liberty and free use of the church, where they resorted weekly, or oftener, and every fourth Sunday both ministers met and celebrated divine service alternately. He that entered the church first had the precedence of officiating, the other keeping silence until the congregation received the Benediction after sermon.' Most of the people attended all the while. It was before the year 1680 that these things were done. After that time there came to the church 'an orthodox man, who suffered many ills, and those not the lightest, for his King and for his faith, and he compelled the Independents not only to leave the church, but the town also. We read they assembled in a malt-house beyond the bridge, where, being disturbed, they chose more private places in the town until liberty of conscience was granted, when they publicly assembled in a fish-house converted to a place of worship.' At that time many people in the town were Dissenters; but it was not till 1748 that they had a church formed. Up to that time the Southwold Independents were members of the Church at Wrentham, one of the Articles of Association of the new church being to take the Bible as their sole guide, and when in difficulties to resort to the neighbouring pastor for advice and declaration. Such was Independency when it flourished all over East Anglia.

A writer in the *Harleian Miscellany* says that 'Southwold, of sea-coast town, is the most beneficial unto his Majesty of all the towns in England, by reason all their trade is unto Iceland for lings.' In the little harbour of Southwold you see nowadays only a few colliers, and I fear that the place is of little advantage to her Majesty, however beneficial it may be as a health-resort for some of her Majesty's subjects. It is a place, gentle reader, where you can wander undisturbed at your own sweet will, and can get your cheeks fanned by breezes unknown in London. The beach, I own, is shingly, and not to be compared with the sands of Yarmouth and Lowestoft; but, then, you are away from the Cockney crowds that now infest these places at the bathing season, and you are quiet – whether you wander on its common, till you come to the Wolsey Bridge, getting on towards Halesworth, where, if tradition be trustworthy, Wolsey, as a butcher's boy, was nearly drowned, and where he benevolently caused a bridge to be erected for the safety of all future butcher-boys and others, when he became a distinguished man; or ramble by the seaside to Walberswick, across the harbour, or on to Easton Bavent – another decayed village, on the

other side. Southwold has its historical associations. Most of my readers have seen the well-known picture of Solebay Fight at Greenwich Hospital. Southwold overlooks the bay on which that fight was won. Here, on the morning of the 28th May, 1672, De Ruyter, with his Dutchmen, sailed right against those wooden walls which have guarded old England in many a time of danger, and found to his cost how invincible was British pluck. James, Duke of York – not then the drivelling idiot who lost his kingdom for a Mass, but James, manly and high-spirited, with a Prince's pride and a sailor's heart – won a victory that for many a day was a favourite theme with all honest Englishmen, and especially with the true and stout men who, alarmed by the roar of cannon, as the sound boomed along the blue waters of that peaceful bay, stood on the Southwold cliff, wishing that the fog which intercepted their view might clear off, and that they might welcome as victors their brethren on the sea. I can remember how, when an old cannon was dragged up from the depths of the sea, it was supposed to be, as it might have been, used in that fight, and now is preserved at one of the look-out houses on the cliff as a souvenir of that glorious struggle. The details of that fight are matters of history, and I need not dwell on them. Our literature, also, owes Southwold one of the happiest effusions of one of the wittiest writers of that age; and in a county history I remember well a merry song on the Duke's late glorious success over the Dutch, in Southwold Bay, which commences with the writer telling —

‘One day as I was sitting still
Upon the side of Dunwich Hill,
And looking on the ocean,
By chance I saw De Ruyter's fleet
With Royal James's squadron meet;
In sooth it was a noble treat
To see that brave commotion.’

The writer vividly paints the scene, and ends as follows:

‘Here's to King Charles, and here's to James,
And here's to all the captains' names,
And here's to all the Suffolk dames,
And here's to the house of Stuart.’

Well, as to the house of Stuart, the less said the better; but as to the Suffolk dames, I agree with the poet, that they are all well worthy of the toast, and it was at a very early period of my existence that I became aware of that fact. But the course of true love never does run smooth, and from none – and they were many – with whom I played on the beach as a boy, or read poetry to at riper years, was it my fate to take one as wife for better or worse. In the crowded city men have little time to fall in love. Besides, they see so many fresh faces that impressions are easily erased. It is otherwise in the quiet retirement of a village where there is little to disturb the mind – perhaps too little. I can well remember a striking illustration of this in the person of an old farmer, who lived about three miles off, and at whose house we – that is, the whole family – passed what seemed to me a very happy day among the haystacks or harvest-fields once or twice a year. The old man was proud of his farm, and of everything connected with it. ‘There, Master James,’ he was wont to say to me after dinner, ‘you can see three barns all at once!’ and sure enough, looking in the direction he pointed, there were three barns plainly visible to the naked eye. Alas! the love of the picturesque had not been developed in my bucolic friend, and a good barn or two – he was an old bachelor, and, I suppose, his heart had never been softened by the love of woman – seemed to him about as beautiful an object as you could expect or desire. One emotion, that of fear, was, however,

I found, strongly planted in the village breast. The boys of the village, with whom, now and then, I stole away on a birds'-nesting expedition, would have it that in a little wood about a mile or two off there were no end of flying serpents and dragons to be seen; and I can well remember the awe which fell upon the place when there came a rumour of the doings of those wretches, Burke and Hare, who were said to have made a living by murdering victims – by placing pitch plasters on their mouths – and selling them to the doctors to dissect. At this time a little boy had not come home at the proper time, and the mother came to our house lamenting. The good woman was in tears, and refused to be comforted. There had been a stranger in the village that day; he had seen her boy, he had put a pitch plaster on his mouth, and no doubt his dead body was then on its way to Norwich to be sold to the doctor. Unfortunately, it turned out that the boy was alive and well, and lived to give his poor mother a good deal of trouble. Another thing, of which I have still a vivid recollection, was the mischief wrought by Captain Swing. In Kent there had been an alarming outbreak of the peasantry, ostensibly against the use of agricultural machinery. They assembled in large bodies, and visited the farm buildings of the principal landed proprietors, demolishing the threshing machines then being brought into use. In some instances they set fire to barns and corn-stacks. These outrages spread throughout the county, and fears were entertained that they would be repeated in other agricultural districts. A great meeting of magistrates and landed gentry was held in Canterbury, the High Sheriff in the chair, when a reward was offered of £100 for the discovery of the perpetrators of the senseless mischief, and the Lords of the Treasury offered a further reward of the same amount for their apprehension; but all was in vain to stop the growing evil. The agricultural interest was in a very depressed state, and the number of unemployed labourers so large, that apprehensions were entertained that the combinations for the destruction of machinery might, if not at once checked, take dimensions it would be very difficult for the Government to control. When Parliament opened in 1830, the state of the agricultural districts had been daily growing more alarming. Rioting and incendiarism had spread from Kent to Suffolk, Norfolk, Surrey, Hampshire, Wiltshire, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Huntingdonshire, and Cambridgeshire, and a great deal of very valuable property had been destroyed. A mystery enveloped these proceedings that indicated organization, and it became suspected that they had a political object. Threatening letters were sent to individuals signed 'Swing,' and beacon fires communicated from one part of the country to the other. With the object of checking these outrages, night patrols were established, dragoons were kept in readiness to put down tumultuous meetings, and magistrates and clergymen and landed gentry were all at their wits' ends. Even in our out-of-the-way corner of East Anglia not a little consternation was felt. We were on the highroad nightly traversed by the London and Yarmouth Royal Mail, and thus, more or less, we had communications with the outer world. Just outside of our village was Benacre Hall, the seat of Sir Thomas Gooch, one of the county members, and I well remember the boyish awe with which I heard that a mob had set out from Yarmouth to burn the place down. Whether the mob thought better of it, or gave up the walk of eighteen miles as one to which they were not equal, I am not in a position to say. All I know is, that Benacre Hall, such as it is, remains; but I can never forget the feeling of terror with which, on those dark and dull winter nights, I looked out of my bedroom window to watch the lurid light flaring up into the black clouds around, which told how wicked men were at their mad work, how fiendish passion had triumphed, how some honest farmer was reduced to ruin, as he saw the efforts of a life of industry consumed by the incendiary's fire. It was long before I ceased to shudder at the name of 'Swing.'

The dialect of the village was, I need not add, East Anglian. The people said 'I woll' for 'I will'; 'you warn't' for 'you were not,' and so on. A girl was called a 'mawther,' a pitcher a 'gotch,' a 'clap on the costard' was a knock on the head, a lad was a 'bor.' Names of places especially were made free with. Wangford was 'Wangfor,' Covehithe was 'Cothhigh,' Southwold was 'Soul,' Lowestoft was 'Lesteff,' Halesworth was 'Holser,' London was 'Lunun.' People who lived in the midland counties were spoken of as living in the shires. The 'o,' as in 'bowls,' it is specially difficult

for an East Anglian to pronounce. A learned man was held to be a ‘man of larnin’,’ a thing of which there was not too much in Suffolk in my young days. A lady in the village sent her son to school, and great was the maternal pride as she called in my father to hear how well her son could read Latin, the reading being reading alone, without the faintest attempt at translation. Sometimes it was hard to get an answer to a question, as when a Dissenting minister I knew was sent for to visit a sick man. ‘My good man,’ said he, ‘what induced you to send for me?’ ‘Hey, what?’ said the invalid. ‘What induced you to send for me?’ Alas! the question was repeated in vain. At length the wife interfered: ‘He wants to know what the deuce you sent for him for.’ And then, and not till then, came an appropriate reply. This story, I believe, has more than once found its way into *Punch*; but I heard it as a Suffolk boy years and years before *Punch* had come into existence.

One of the prayers familiar to my youth was as follows:

‘Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John,
Bless the bed that I lie on;
Four corners to my bed,
Four angels at my head;
Two to watch and one to pray,
And one to carry my soul away.’

An M.P., who shall be nameless, supplies me with an apt illustration of East Anglian dialect. It was at the anniversary of a National School, with the great M.P. in the chair, surrounded by the benevolent ladies and the select clergy of the district. The subject of examination was Christ’s entry into Jerusalem on an ass’s colt. ‘Why,’ said the M.P. – ‘why did they strew rushes before the Saviour? can any of you children tell me?’ Profound silence. The M.P. repeated the question. A little ragamuffin held up his hand. The M.P. demanded silence as the apt scholar proceeded with his answer. ‘Why were the rushes strewed?’ said the M.P. in a condescending tone. I don’t know,’ replied the boy, ‘unless it was to hull the dickey down.’

Roars of laughter greeted the reply, as all the East Anglians present knew that ‘hull’ meant ‘throw,’ and ‘dickey’ is Suffolk for ‘donkey,’ but some of the Cockney visitors present were for a while quite unable to enjoy the joke.

It is to be feared the three R’s were not much patronized in East Anglia, if it be true that some forty or fifty years ago, in such a respectable town as Sudbury, it was the fashion for some fifty of the leading inhabitants to meet in the large bar-parlour of the old White Horse to hear the leading paper of the eastern counties read out by a scholar and elocutionist known as John. For the discharge of this important duty he was paid a pound a year, and provided with as much free liquor as he liked, and there were people who considered that the Saturday newspaper-reading did them more good than what they heard at church the next day.

In some cases our East Anglian dialect is merely a survival of old English, as when we say ‘axe’ for ‘ask.’ We find in Chaucer:

‘It is but foly and wrong wenging
To axe so outrageous thing.’

In his ‘Envious Man,’ Gowing made ‘axeth’ to rhyme with ‘taxeth.’ No word is more common in Suffolk than ‘fare’; a pony is a ‘hobby’; a thrush is a ‘mavis’; a chest is a ‘kist’; a shovel is a ‘skuppet’; a chaffinch is a ‘spink.’ If a man is upset in his mind, he tells us he is ‘wholly stammed,’ and the Suffolk ‘yow’ is at least as old as Chaucer, who wrote:

‘What do you ye do there, quod she,

Come, and if it lyke yow
To daucen daunceth with us now.'

An awkward lad is 'ungain.' A good deal may be written to show that our Suffolk dialect is the nearest of all provincial dialects to that of Chaucer and the Bible, and if anyone has the audacity to contradict me, why, then, in Suffolk phraseology, I can promise him – 'a good hiding.'

I am old enough to remember how placid was the county, how stay-at-home were the people, what a sensation there was created when anyone went to London, or any stranger appeared in our midst. From afar we heard of railways; then we had a railway opened from London to Brentwood; then the railways spread all over the land, and there were farmers who did think that they had something to do with the potato disease. The change was not a pleasant one: the turnpikes were deserted; the inns were void of customers; no longer did the villagers hasten to see the coach change horses, and the bugle of the guard was heard no more. For a time the Eastern Counties Railway had a somewhat dolorous career. It was thought to be something to be thankful for when the traveller by it reached his journey's end in decent time and without an accident. Now the change is marvellous. The Great Eastern Railway stands in the foremost rank of the lines terminating in London. It now runs roundly 20,000,000 of train miles in the course of a year. It carries a larger number of passengers than any other line. It carries the London working man twelve miles in and twelve miles out for twopence a day. It is the direct means of communication with all the North of Europe by its fine steamers from Harwich. It has yearly an increased number of season-ticket-holders. On a Whit Monday it gives 125,000 excursionists a happy day in the country or by the seaside. In 1891 the number of passengers carried was 81,268,661, exclusive of season-ticket-holders. It is conspicuous now for its punctuality and freedom from accidents. It is, in short, a model of good management, and it also deserves credit for looking well after the interests of its employés, of whom there are some 25,000. It contributes to the Accident Fund, to the Provident Society, to the Superannuation Fund, and to the Pension Fund, to which the men also subscribe, in the most liberal manner, and besides has established a savings bank, which returns the men who place their money in it four per cent. It is a liberal master. It does its duty to its men, who deserve well of the public as of the Great Eastern Railway itself; but its main merit, after all, is that it has been the making of East Anglia.

CHAPTER II. THE STRICKLANDS

Reydon Hall – The clergy – Pakefield – Social life in a village.

As I write I have lying before me a little book called ‘Hugh Latimer; or, The School-boy’s Friendship,’ by Miss Strickland, author of the ‘Little Prisoner,’ ‘Charles Grant,’ ‘Prejudice and Principle,’ ‘The Little Quaker.’ It bears the imprint – ‘London: Printed for A. R. Newman and Co., Leadenhall Street.’ On a blank page inside I find the following: ‘James Ewing Ritchie, with his friend Susanna’s affectionate regards.’ Susanna was a sister of Miss Agnes Strickland, the authoress, and was as much a writer as herself. The Stricklands were a remarkable family, living about four or five miles from Wrentham, on the road leading from Wangford to Southwold, at an old-fashioned residence called Reydon Hall. They had, I fancy, seen better days, and were none the worse for that. The Stricklands came over with William the Conqueror. One of them was the first to land, and hence the name. A good deal of blue blood flowed in their veins. Kate – to my eyes the fairest of the lot – was named Katherine Parr, to denote that she was a descendant of one of the wives of the too-much-married Henry VIII., and in the old-fashioned drawing-room of Reydon Hall I heard not a little – they all talked at once – of what to me was strange and rare. Mr. Strickland had deceased some years, and the widow and the daughters kept up what little state they could; and I well remember the feeling of surprise with which I first entered their capacious drawing-room – a room the size of which it had never entered into my head to conceive of. It is to the credit of these Misses Strickland that they did not vegetate in that old house, but held a fair position in the world of letters. Miss Strickland herself chiefly resided in town. Agnes, the next, whose ‘Queens of England’ is still a standard book, was more frequently at home. The only one of the family who did not write was Sarah, who married one of the Radical Childses of Bungay, and who not till after the death of her husband became respectable and atoned for her sins by marrying a clergyman. Kate, as I have said, the fairest of the whole, married an officer in the army of the name of Traill, and went out to Canada, and wrote there a book called ‘The Backwoods of Canada,’ which was certainly one of the most popular of the four-and-sixpenny volumes published under the auspices of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful and Entertaining Knowledge. Our friend was Susanna, who wrote a volume of poems on Enthusiasm, and who seemed to me, with her dark eyes and hair, a very enthusiastic personage indeed. The reason of her friendship with our family was her deeply religious nature, which impelled her to leave the cold and careless service of the Church – not a little to the disgust of her aristocratic sisters, who, as of ancient lineage, not a little haughty, and rank Tories, had but little sympathy with Dissent.. Susanna was much at our house, and when away scarcely a day passed on which she did not write some of us a letter or send us a book. Then there was a brother Tom, a midshipman – a wonderful being to my inexperienced eyes – who once or twice came to our house seated in the family donkey-chaise, which seemed to me, somehow or other, not to be an ordinary donkey-chaise, but something of a far superior character. I have pleasant recollections of them all, and of the annuals in which they all wrote, and a good many of which fell to my share. Like her sister, Susanna married an officer in the army – a Major Moodie – and emigrated to Canada, where the Stricklands have now a high position, where she had sons and daughters born to her, and wrote more than one novel which found acceptance in the English market. The Stricklands gave me quite a literary turn. When I was a small boy it was really an everyday occurrence for me to write a book or edit a newspaper, and with about as much success as is generally achieved by bookmakers and newspaper editors, whose merit is overlooked by an unthinking public. Let me say in the Stricklands I found an indulgent audience. On one occasion I remember reciting some verses of my own composition, commencing,

‘I sing a song of ancient men,
Of warriors great and bold,
Of Hercules, a famous man,
Who lived in times of old.
He was a man of great renown,
A lion large he slew,
And to his memory games were kept,
Which now I tell to you,’

which they got me to repeat in their drawing-room, and which, though I say it that should not, evinced for a boy a fair acquaintance with ‘Mangnall’s Questions’ and Pinnock’s abridgment of Goldsmith’s ‘History of Rome.’ Happily, at that time, Niebuhr was unknown, and sceptical criticism had not begun its deadly work. We had not to go far for truth then. It was quite unnecessary to seek it – at any rate, so it seemed to us – at the bottom of a well; there it was right underneath one’s nose – before one’s very eyes in the printed pages of the printed book.

Agnes Strickland did all she could to confer reputation on her native county. The tall, dark, self-possessed lady from Reydon Hall was a lion everywhere. On one occasion she visited the House of Lords, just after she had written a violent letter against Lord Campbell, charging him with plagiarism. Campbell tells us he had a conversation with her, which speedily turned her into a friend. He adds: ‘I thought Brougham would have died with envy when I told him the result of my interview, and Ellenborough, who was sitting by, lifted his hands in admiration. Brougham had thrown me a note across the table, saying: “So you know your friend Miss Strickland has come to hear you.”’ Miss Strickland often visited Alison, the historian, at Possil House. He says of her that she had strong talents of a masculine rather than feminine character – indefatigable perseverance, and that ardour in whatever pursuit she engaged in without which no one could undergo similar fatigue. On one occasion she was descanting on the noble feeling of Queen Mary, ‘That may all be very true, Miss Strickland,’ replied the historian; ‘but unfortunately she had an awkward habit of burning people – she brought 239 men, women, and children to the stake in a reign which did not extend beyond a few years!’ ‘Oh yes,’ was her reply, ‘it was terrible, dreadful, but it was the fault of the age – the temper of the times; Mary herself was everything that is noble and heroic.’ Such was her feminine tendency to hero-worship. Another tendency of a feminine character was her love of talking. ‘She did,’ instances Sir Archibald, ‘not even require an answer or a sign of mutual intelligence; it was enough if the one she was addressing simply remained passive. One day when I was laid up at Possil on my library sofa from a wound in the knee, she was kind enough to sit with me for two hours, and was really very entertaining, from the number of anecdotes she remembered of queens in the olden time. When she left the room she expressed herself kindly to Mrs. Alison as to the agreeable time she had spent, and the latter said to me on coming in, “What did you get to say to Miss Strickland all this time? She says you were so agreeable, and she was two hours here.” “Say!” I replied with truth; “I assure you I did not say six words to her the whole time.”’ Agnes was a terrible one to talk – as, indeed, all the Stricklands were. In Suffolk such accomplished conversationalists were rare.

It must have been, now I come to think of it, a dismal old house, suggestive of rats and dampness and mould, that Reydon Hall, with its scantily furnished rooms and its unused attics and its empty barns and stables, with a general air of decay all over the place, inside and out. It had a dark, heavy roof and whitewashed walls, and was externally anything but a showy place, standing, as it did, a little way from the road. It must have been a difficulty with the family to keep up the place, and the style of living was altogether plain; yet there I heard a good deal of literary life in London, of Thomas Pringle, the poet, and the Secretary of the Anti-Slavery Society, whose

‘Residence in South Africa’ is still one of the most interesting books on that quarter of the world, and of whom Josiah Conder, one of the great men of my smaller literary world at that time, wrote an appreciative biographical sketch. Mr. Pringle, let me remind my readers, was the original editor of *Blackwood’s Magazine*, a magazine which still maintains its reputation as being the best of its class. Mr. Pringle, I believe, at some time or other, had visited Wrentham; at any rate, the Stricklands, especially Susanna, were among his intimate friends, and, from what I heard, I could well believe, when, at a later period, I visited his grave in Bunhill Fields, what I found recorded there – that ‘In the walks of British literature he was known as a man of genius; in the domestic circle he was loved as an affectionate relative and faithful friend; in the wide sphere of humanity he was revered as the advocate and protector of the oppressed,’ who ‘left among the children of the African desert a memorial of his philanthropy, and bequeathed to his fellow-countrymen an example of enduring virtue.’ At the home of the Pringles the Stricklands made many literary acquaintances, such as Alaric Watts, and Mrs. S. C. Hall, and others of whom I heard them talk. At that time, however, literature was not, as far as women were concerned, the lucrative profession it has since become, and I have a dim remembrance of their paintings – for in this respect the Stricklands, like my own mother, were very accomplished – being sold at the Soho Bazaar, a practice which helped to maintain them in the respectability and comfort becoming their position in life. But in London they never forgot the old home, and wrote so much about it in their stories, that there was not a flower, or shrub, or tree, or hedge, or mossy bank redolent in early spring of primroses and violets, to which they had not given, to my boyish eyes, a glory and a charm. This reference to painting reminds me of a feature of my young days, not without interest, in connection with the name of Cunningham – a name at one time well known in the religious world.

The reader must be reminded that the reverend gentleman referred to was a *rara avis*, and that between him and the neighbouring clergy there was little sympathy – unless the common rallying cry of ‘The Church in Danger!’ was raised as an electioneering dodge. The clergyman at Wrentham at that time, who declared himself the appointed vessel of grace for the parish, I have been led to believe, since I have become older, was by no means a saint, and his brethren were notorious as evil-livers. Some twenty years ago one of them had his effects sold off, and his library was viewed with no little amusement by his parishioners, to many of whom, if popular fame be an authority, he was more than a spiritual father. The library contained only one book that could be called theological, and the title of that wonderfully unique volume was, ‘Die and be Damned; or, An End of the Methodists.’ All the other books were exclusively sporting, while the pictures were such as would have been a disgrace to Holywell Street. It was of him that the clerk said that ‘next Sunday there would be no Divine service, as maaster was going to Newmarket.’ Once upon a time after a sermon one of his flock approached him, as he had been preaching on miracles, to ask him to explain what a miracle really was. The reverend gentleman gave his rustic inquirer a kick, adding, ‘Did you feel that?’

‘Oh yes, sir; but what of that?’

‘Why,’ said the reverend gentleman, ‘if you had not felt it, it would have been a miracle, that is all.’ Yet that man was as popular as any parson in the district, perhaps more so, and it was with some indignation in certain quarters that the people learned that a new Bishop had come to Norwich, and that the parson had been deprived of his living for immoral conduct. Of another it is said that, calling on a poor villager, dying and full of gloomy anticipations as to the future, all he could say was, ‘Don’t be frightened; I dare say you will meet a good many people you know.’ I have often heard old men talk of the time when they used to take the parson home in a wheelbarrow – but that was before we had a Sunday-school, at which I was a regular teacher. The church had a Sunday-school, but not till after the one in the chapel had existed many years. Of these ornaments of the Church and foes of Dissent, some had apparently a sense of shame – one of them, at any rate, committed suicide.

At Pakefield, some seven miles from Wrentham, and just on the borders of Lowestoft, then, as now, the most eastern extremity of England, resided the Rev. Francis Cunningham. He was a clergyman of piety and philanthropy, rare at that time in that benighted district, and in this respect he was aided by his wife, a little dark woman whom I well remember, a sister of the far-famed John Joseph Gurney, of Earlham. It is with pleasure I quote the following from the Journal of Caroline Fox: ‘A charming story of F. Cunningham coming in to prayers just murmuring something about the study being on fire, and proceeding to read a long chapter and make equally long comments thereupon. When the reading was over, and the fact became public, he observed, “Yes, I saw it was a little on fire, but I opened the window on leaving the room.”’ Mr. Cunningham had much to do with establishing a branch of the British and Foreign Bible Society in Paris in connection with the Buxtons. In this way, but on a smaller scale, the Cunninghams were equally distinguished, and one of the things they had established at Pakefield was an infant school, to which I, in company with my parents – indeed, I may add, the whole family – was taken, in order, if possible, that our little village should possess a similar institution. But my principal pilgrimages to the Pakefield vicarage were in connection with some mission to aid Oberlin in his grand work amongst the mountains and valleys of Switzerland. It appeared Mr. and Mrs. Cunningham had visited the good man, and watched him in his career, and had come back to England to gain for him, if possible, sympathy and friends. Mrs. Cunningham had taken drawings of the principal objects of interest, which had been lithographed, and these lithographs my mother, who in her way was as great an enthusiast as Susanna Strickland herself, was very anxious to obtain; the financial position of the family, however, forbade any thought of purchase. But she had a wonderful gift of painting, and she painted while we children were learning the Latin grammar, or preparing our lessons in the *Delectus*, much to my terror, as I had a habit of restlessness which, by shaking the table, not only impaired her work, but drew down upon me not a little of reproach; and with these paintings I was despatched on foot to Pakefield, where, in return for them, I was given the famous lithographs, which were to be preserved for many a year in the spare room we called the parlour – drawing-rooms at that time in East Anglia were, I think, unknown. What a joy it was to us children when that parlour had its fire lit, and we found out that company was coming – partly, I must add, for sensual reasons. We knew that the best tea-things were to be used, that unusual delicacies were to be placed upon the table, and I must do my mother the justice to say that she could cook as well as she could paint; but for other and higher motives, and not as an occasion of feasting or for the disuse of the economical pinafore which was always worn to keep our clothes clean, did we rejoice when we found there was to be tea in the parlour. If young people were coming, we were sure to dissect puzzles, or play some game which combined amusement with instruction; and if the party consisted of seniors, as on the occasion of the Book Club – almost all Dissenting congregations had their Book Clubs then – it was a pleasure to listen to my father’s talk, who was a well-read man, and who, being a Scotchman, had inherited his full share of Scotch wit, which, however, was enlivened with quotations from ‘*Hudibras*,’ the only poet, alas! in whom he seemed to take any particular interest. There, in the parlour, were the fraternal meetings attended by all the neighbouring Independent ministers, all clad in sober black, and whose wildest exploits in rollicking debauchery were confined to a pipe and a glass of home-made wine. Madeira, port and sherry were unknown in ministers’ houses, though now and then one got a taste of them at the houses of men better to do, and who, perhaps, had been as far as London once or twice in their lives. Of these neighbouring ministers, one of the most celebrated at that time was the Rev. Edward Walford, then of Yarmouth, who afterwards became tutor of Homerton College, and who, after the death of a favourite and accomplished daughter – I can still remember the gracefulness of her person – sank into a state of profound melancholy, which led him to shut himself from his friends, to give up all public preaching and tutorial work, and to consider himself as hopelessly lost. It is a curious fact that he dated his return to reason and happiness and usefulness after a visit paid him by my father, who happened to be in town, and who naturally was

drawn to see his afflicted friend, with whom, in the days of auld lang syne, he had smoked many a pipe and held many an argument respecting Edwards on Freedom of the Will, and his favourite McKnight. Mrs. Walford, who was aware of my father's intended visit, had thoughtfully prepared pipes and tobacco, and placed them on the table of the room where the interview was to take place. My father went and smoked his pipe and talked as usual, poor Mr. Walford sitting sad and dejected, and refusing to be comforted all the while. When my father had left – owing, I suppose, to the force of old associations – actually the poor man approached the table, took up a pipe, filled it with tobacco, and smoked it. From that hour, strange to say, he recovered, wrote a translation of the Psalms, became a trustee of Coward's College, and took charge of a church at Uxbridge. This is 'a fac,' as Artemus Ward would say, and 'facs' are stubborn things. Of this Mr. Walford, the well-known publisher of that name in St. Paul's Churchyard was a son, and the firm of Hodder and Stoughton may be said to carry on his business, though on a larger scale.

Dressed in rusty black, with hats considerably the worse for wear, with shoes not ignorant of the cobbler's art, unconscious of and careless for the fashions of the world, rarely in London, except on the occasion of the May Meetings – no one can tell, except those who, like myself, were admitted behind the scenes, as it were, how these good men lived to keep alive the traditions of freedom, civil and religious, in districts most under the sway of the ignorant squire and the equally ignorant parson of the parish. If there has been a decency and charm about our country life it is due to them, and them alone. Perhaps, more in the country than in the crowded city is the pernicious influence felt of sons of Belial, flushed with insolence and wine. It is difficult to give the reader an idea of the utter animalism, if I may so term it, of rural life some fifty years ago. For small wages these Dissenting ministers did a noble work, in the way of preserving morals, extending education, promoting religion, and elevating the aim and tone of the little community in which they lived, and moved, and had their being. At home the difficulties of such of them as had large families were immense. The pocket was light, and too often there was but little in the larder. But they laboured on through good and bad report, and now they have their reward. Perhaps one of their failings was that they kept too much the latter end in view, and were too indifferent to present needs and requirements. They did not try to make the best of both worlds. I can never forget a remark addressed to me by all the good men of the class with whom I was familiar in my childhood as to the need of getting on in life and earning an honest penny, and becoming independent in a pecuniary point of view. I was to be a good boy, to love the Lord, to study the Assembly's Catechism, to read the Bible, as if outside the village there was no struggle into which sooner or later I should have to plunge – no hard battle with the world to fight, no temporal victory to win.

CHAPTER III

LOWESTOFT

Yarmouth bloaters – George Borrow – The town fifty years ago – The distinguished natives.

‘I’m a-thinking you’ll be wanting half a pint of beer by this time, won’t you?’

Such were the first words I heard as I left the hotel where I was a temporary sojourner about nine o’clock. Of course I turned to look at the speaker. He wore an oilskin cap, with a great flap hanging over the back of the neck; his oilskin middle was encased in a thick blue guernsey; his trousers were hidden in heavy jack-boots, which came up above his knees; his face was red, and his body was almost as round as that of a porpoise. When I add that the party addressed was similarly adorned and was of a similar build, the reader will guess at once that I was amongst a seafaring community, and let me add that this supposition is correct. I was, in fact, at Lowestoft, and Lowestoft just now is, with Yarmouth, the headquarters of the herring fishery. The truth is, as the poet tells us, ‘Things are not what they seem,’ and that many of the Yarmouth bloaters which we are in the habit of indulging in at breakfast in reality come from Lowestoft.

It is worth going from London at the season of the year when the finest bloaters are being caught, to realize the peril and the enterprise and the industry connected with the herring trade, which employs some five hundred boats, manned by seven to twelve men, who work the business on the cooperative system, which, when the season is a good one, gives a handsome remuneration to all concerned, and which drains the country of young men for miles around. Each boat is furnished with some score of nets, and each net extends more than thirty-two yards. The boat puts off according to the tide, and if it gets a good haul, at once returns to the harbour with its freight; if the catch is indifferent, the boat stays out; the fish are salted as they are caught, and then the boat, generally at a distance of about twenty miles from the shore, waits till a sufficient number have been caught to complete the cargo. When that is the case, the boat at once makes for Lowestoft, and the fish are unloaded under a shed in heaps of about half a last (a last is professedly 10,000 herrings, but really much more). At nine a bell rings and the various auctioneers commence operations. A crowd is formed, and in a very few minutes a lot is sold off to traders who are well known, and who pay at the end of the week. The auctioneer then proceeds to the next group, which is disposed of in a similar way. Other auctioneers in various parts of the enormous shed erected for their accommodation do the same, and then, as more boats arrive, other cargoes are sold, the sailors bringing a hundred as a sample from the boat. And thus all day long the work of selling goes on, and as soon as a lot are sold they are packed up with ice, if fresh, or with more salt, if already salted, and despatched by train to various quarters of England, where, it is to be presumed, they meet with a speedy and immediate sale. In this way as many as one hundred and ninety-eight trucks are sometimes sent off in a single day. But in London we are familiar with the kipper, the red herring, and the Yarmouth bloater, and to see how they are prepared for consumption I leave the market – always wet and fishy and slippery – and make my way to the extensive premises on the beach belonging to Mr. Thomas Brown – the only Brown whose name is familiar to the fish-dealer in every market in England, and the extent of whose business may be best realized by the reader when I state that Mr. Brown sends off from his factory as many as forty lasts a week.

An intelligent foreman, after I have evaded the attack of a formidable dog which keeps watch and ward over the premises, explains to me the mystery of the trade. I find myself in the midst of a square. On one side are a great stack of oak and many casks of old salt. The latter, I gather, is sold to be used as manure. The former is applied to the fire, which gently smokes the Yarmouth bloater. On one side, the herrings, as they are received, are pickled – that is, first washed in fresh

water, and then immersed in great tubs in which the water is mixed with salt. The next thing is to take them into a room in which several women are engaged in spitting them – that is, hanging them on rods – and then they are carried to the apartment where they are hung up, while oak logs are burnt beneath. In twelve hours they are sufficiently smoked, and then you have the real Yarmouth bloater. I am glad I have seen the process, as I have a horrible suspicion that the costermonger manufactures many a Yarmouth bloater in some filthy Whitechapel slum, the odour of which by no means tends to improve the flavour of so delicate a fish.

But we have to discuss the red-herring, not of the artful politician, anxious to dodge his hearers, but of the breakfast-table. For this purpose I am taken to a large oven filled with oak sawdust, gathered from Ipswich, and oak shavings, which are also brought from a distance, principally from Bass's Brewery, and, indeed, from all the great works where oak is used; I see heaps of fire made from these ashes, which give out much heat, and at the same time much smoke. In a loft above are hung the herrings, and there they hang twelve days, till they gradually become of the colour of a guinea, when they are packed up and sent away in casks, while the bloaters go away in baskets of a hundred, in pots holding a smaller number, and in barrels in which as many as three hundred are stowed away. As to the kippered herring, he undergoes quite a different treatment. Some twenty or thirty women get hold of him, cut him open, take out his gut and wash him, and then he is hung over an oak fire and smoked for twelve hours, and thus, saturated with smoke inside and out, is regarded in many circles as a delicacy to be highly prized. But he must be got off the premises. Well, if we climb to a loft, we shall see a good many young women hard at work stripping the rods, on which he and his fellows have been suspended, and stowing the fish away. In the autumn especially the peculiar industries connected with the trade are very considerably exercised. All day long carts come in with the fish; all day long carts go out with the manufactured articles to the railway-station; day and night the men and women are at work; in one quarter the women make and mend the nets, which are then boiled in cutch and put on board the boats; in another quarter coopers are at work making boxes and casks and barrels. As to the baskets, the country is ransacked for them, and as soon as they are filled they take the train and away they go, to give a flavour to the potato dinner of the poor man, or to form a tasty adjunct to the dishes under which the breakfast table of his lord and master groans. In London we get the best – the smaller herrings go to the North, as the dwellers in those parts will not pay the price the Londoner does. Great is the joy and rejoicing, as well can be imagined, at Lowestoft when the herring season comes on. It is true, the Lowestoft fishers do not have it all to themselves. Yarmouth is a fierce rival in the race, and, as it has now superior accommodation, many a boat makes for that far-famed port. Then, the Scotch, when they have done their fishing, make for the English coast, and manage, as Scotchmen ever do, to gather a fair share of the spoil. As to the foreigners, they are not such formidable rivals as sometimes we are apt to believe. The Frenchman or the Dutchman comes, but that is when he is blown off by a gale from his own happy hunting-ground, and then we know, all the world over, the cry is, 'Any port in a storm.'

Oh, these storms! how terrible they are! and how little, as we eat our Yarmouth bloater of a morning, or spread the bloater-paste as a covering to the thin slice of bread-and-butter, to tempt the languid appetite – how little do we who sit at home at ease realize their fury and their power! As I now write, twenty-one orphans are bewailing the loss of fathers who went out in a craft during the last gale, and of whom no sign has been seen, nor ever will. Hour by hour the women, weeping and watching on the sandy shore, saw one and another familiar boat come, more or less buffeted, into port. On more than one a hand had been washed away, but the craft and the rest of the crew were saved somehow. But one boat yet remained missing, and in vain the survivors were questioned as to what had become of the *Skimmer of the Sea*. Day by day anxious eyes swept the distant horizon. Day by day a sadder weight came down on weeping child and broken-hearted wife; and now all hope is gone, and all felt that in the fury of the gale the *Skimmer of the Sea* foundered with all her

hands. Well, as the good old Admiral said, as he and his men were about to perish, 'My lads, the way to heaven is as short by sea as by land.' But the wounded heart in the agony of its grief is slow to realize that fact. Sailors ought to be serious men; every halfpenny they earn is won at the risk of a life. In Lowestoft, I am glad to find, many of them are. 'The Salvation Army has done 'em a deal of good,' says a decent woman, with whom I happened to scrape an acquaintance at the most attractive coffee-house I have ever seen – the Coffee Pot at Mutford Bridge. 'Not that I holds with the Salvation Army myself, sir, but they've done the men a deal of good, and they don't spend their wages, as they used to do, in drink.'

Lowestoft, when I was there last, had just lost one of its heroes – I mean the late Mr. George Borrow – whose 'Bible in Spain' was the talk of the season in religious and worldly circles alike, and whose writings on Gipsies and Wild Wales and the 'Bible in Spain' achieved at one time an enormous popularity. He lived – I can still remember his tall form – on a bank a couple of miles out of Lowestoft, sloping down to a large piece of water known in those parts as Oulton Broad. The tourist, if he looks to his right just after he has passed Mutford Bridge on the rail from Lowestoft to Beccles, across the wide sheet of water, which, as I saw it last, lay calm and blue in the fading glory of an autumnal sun, will perhaps see a white house at a distance, nestled in among the fir-trees – that was where George Borrow lived, and where he died, though he was buried in Brompton Cemetery by the side of his wife. You cannot make a mistake, for houses are rare in those parts. As his step-daughter observed to me, the proper way is by water; to get to the house by land – at least as I did – you walk along the rail for a couple of miles, then break off across a bit of a swamp, to a little lane that conducts you to Oulton Church – a very ancient one, which, however, is in a state of good repair and is noted partly on account of the fact that the steeple is built in the middle, and partly on account of its containing, so it is said, the earliest example of a brass to an ecclesiastic which is to be found in England. A narrow path from the church leads you to Oulton Hall, which came into the possession of Borrow by marriage, really a very plain, red-brick, capacious, comfortable-looking old farmhouse, only of a superior class. Keeping the Hall to the right, you reach a gate, which opens into a very narrow lane, full of mud in the winter and dust in the summer. The lane loses itself in the marshland, on the borders of Lake Lothing – a name supposed to have been derived from a certain Danish prince, murdered on the spot by a jealous Court retainer; and it is a fitting place for a murder, as in that lonely district there was no eye to pity, no ear to hear, no hand to save. Even to-day, as you look away from the train, there is little sign of life, save the sail of a distant wherry as it makes sluggishly for Norwich or Beccles, as it goes either into the Waveney or the Yare; or the gray wing of the heron as it flies heavily along the marsh; and that is all. Far away, perhaps, rises a ridge, with a house on it; or a steeple, with a few trees struggling to yield the barren spot a shelter from the suns of summer or the howling winds of winter; but all is still life there, and the habitations of men are few and far between. In the particular lane to which I have introduced the reader – there are but two – there is a little cottage on your left, and beyond, under a group of trees, mostly fir, which almost hide it from view, a home of a rather superior character, in a very dilapidated condition, with everything around it more or less untidy – that was where George Borrow lived and worked in his way for many a long day. The step-daughter and her husband reside there now – very ancient people, who are to be seen driving about Lowestoft in a little wicker car, drawn by an amiable and active donkey, an aged dog guarding the cottage during their temporary absence. The female, an ancient one, who did for the house, lives in the little cottage which the tourist will have already observed, and the interior of which presented, when I peeped in, a far greater idea of comfort than did Oulton Cottage, the residence of the late George Borrow. The picture one gets is rather a melancholy one. 'He was a funny-tempered man' – that seems to have been the idea of the few people around. Latterly he kept no company, and no one came to see him. All who did call on him, however, tell me that he was well dressed, but that all the interior of the house was dirty. Well, that was to be expected of a man who loved to live with the

gipsies, and patter to them in Romany of Egyptian lore, for it could not have been want of means. Borrow must have made a good deal of money by his books, and I have heard his landed property estimated at five hundred per year. The house looked like the residence of a miser who would not lay out a penny in keeping up appearances or in repairs. It must be remembered, however, that the grand old man had long become bowed with age; that for some years before his death he was scarcely able to move himself without help; that the grasshopper, as it were, had become a burden. In summer time such a residence, in good repair and well furnished, would be perfectly charming. The house contains a sitting-room on each side of the entrance-hall. Behind is the kitchen, and above are four bedrooms and two attics – none of them large, I own, but at any rate capable of being made very cosy. On your right, in a little niche in the cliff, is a small stable. Lower down is a large summer-house, then full of books (amongst them, I believe, there were a hundred lexicons), where their learned proprietor loved to write. Farther down the lawn you come to the lake, where Borrow could enjoy his morning bath without fear of being disturbed, and where any amount of fish can be got. Just previous to my last visit to the spot a pike of more than twenty pounds' weight – I am afraid to say how many pounds more, lest the reader should think I was exaggerating – had been caught. For a real angler or sportsman such a house as that in which George Borrow spent the latter years of his long life must have been a perfect paradise. The world is utterly away from you, and, what is better still, in such a spot the world has no chance of finding you out. Approaching by road, you see no sign of the house till you are in it, so completely is it hidden in the nook of trees in which it stands. Only to the water is it open. It would be really beautiful to live there in the summer, and have a gondola to row into Beccles or Lowestoft or Bungay when you wanted to be gay.

One good anecdote I heard of George Borrow the last time I was in the neighbourhood, which is worth repeating. My informant was an Independent minister, at that time supplying the pulpit at Lowestoft, and staying at Oulton Hall, then inhabited by a worthy Dissenting tenant. One night a meeting of the Bible Society was held at Mutford Bridge, at which the party from the Hall attended, and where George Borrow was one of the speakers. After the meeting was over, all the speakers went back to supper at Oulton Hall, and my friend among them, who, in the course of the supper, found himself attacked very violently by the clergyman for holding Calvinistic opinions. Naturally my friend replied that the clergyman was bound to do the same. 'How do you make that out?' 'Why, the Articles of your Church are Calvinistic, and to them you have sworn assent.' 'Oh yes, but there is a way of explaining them away.' 'How so?' said my friend. 'Oh,' replied the clergyman, 'we are not bound to take the words in their natural sense.' My friend, an honest, blunt East Anglian, intimated that he did not understand that way of evading the difficulty; but he was then a young man, and did not like to continue the discussion further. However, George Borrow, who had not said a word hitherto, entered into the discussion, opening fire on the clergyman in a very unexpected manner, and giving him such a setting down as the hearers, at any rate, never forgot. All the sophistry about the non-natural meaning of terms was held up by Borrow to ridicule, even contempt; and the clergyman was beaten at every point. 'Never,' says my friend, 'did I hear one man give another such a dressing as on that occasion.' It was not always, however, that Borrow thus shone. In the neighbourhood of Bungay lived a gentleman much given to collect around him men of literary taste and culture. A lecture was to be given in the neighbourhood, and all the men of light and leading around were invited. George Borrow was one of the earliest arrivals, and seated himself before the fire with a book in his hand, over which he nodded superciliously, as the host brought up all his guests in succession to be introduced to the lion of the town. At dinner which followed, which was rather a jovial one, and at which the bottle went round freely, so loud and general was the conversation that my friend, a clever lawyer, with remarkably good ears, was quite unable to catch a sentence from the great author's lips. Perhaps Borrow really did say nothing, or next to nothing. It is quite as likely that he did as not, as I have already informed the reader that 'he was a funny-tempered man.'

‘Catherine Gurney,’ writes Caroline Fox, ‘gave us a note to George Borrow, so on him we called – a tall, ungainly man, with great physical strength, quick, penetrating eye, a confident manner, and a disagreeable tone and pronunciation.’ We gather from the same lady that it was Joseph John Gurney who recommended George Borrow to the Committee of the Bible Society. ‘So he stalked up to London, and they gave him a hymn to translate into the Manchow language, and the same to one of their people to translate also. When compared they proved to be very different. When put before their reader, he had the candour to say that Borrow’s was much the better of the two. On this they sent him to Petersburg to get it printed, and then gave him business in Portugal.’

One thing is clear – that Borrow was a lonely man, and evidently one who did not hold the resources of civilization in such esteem as Mr. Gladstone does. He loved Nature and her ways, and people like the gipsies, who are supposed to be of a similar way of thinking. He eschewed the hum of cities and the roar of the ‘madding crowd.’ He was big in body and in mind, and wanted elbow-room; and yet what would he have been if he had not lived in a city, and come under the stimulative influence of such men as Edward Taylor, of Norwich? It is idle to complain of cities, however they sully the air, and deface the land, and pollute the water, and rear the weak and vicious and the wicked – to remind us how low and depraved human nature can become when it is cut off from communion with Nature and Nature’s God. Borrow owed much to cities, and was best appreciated by the men who dwelt in them. There is often a good deal of affectation about the love of rural solitude, nor does it often last long when there is a wife to have a voice in the matter. Yet in Borrow undoubtedly the feeling was sincere, and of him Wordsworth might have written —

‘As in the eye of Nature he has lived,
So in the eye of Nature let him die.’

Lowestoft was a frequent attraction for a youthful ramble – perhaps almost too far, unless one could manage to get a lift in a little yellow-painted black-bodied vehicle called a whisky, which was grandfather’s property, and into the shafts of which could be put any spare quadruped, whether donkey, or mule, or pony, it mattered little, and which afforded a considerable relief when a trip as far as Lowestoft was determined on. At that time there was no harbour, and the town consisted simply of one High Street, gradually rising towards the north, with a fine space for boys to play in between the cliff and the sea, called the denes. I can well remember being taken to view the works of the harbour before the water was let in, and not a little astonished at what then was to me a new world of engineering science and skill. In the High Street there was a little old-fashioned and by no means flourishing Independent Chapel, where at one time the preacher was the Rev. Mr. Maurice, the father of the Mr. Maurice to whom many owe a great awakening of spiritual life, and whose memory they still regard as that of a beloved and honoured teacher. Mr. Maurice was a Unitarian, I believe, and, when he retired, handed over the chapel to my father with the remark that it was no use his preaching there any longer. The preacher in my time was the Rev. George Steffe Crisp, a kindly, timid, tearful man, always in difficulties with his people, and who often resorted to Wrentham for advice. Latterly he retired from the ministry, and kept a shop and school. In this capacity one day my old friend John Childs, of Bungay, the far-famed printer – of whom I shall have much to say anon – called on him, when the following dialogue took place: ‘Good-morning, Mr. Crisp.’ ‘Good-morning, Mr. Childs.’ ‘Well, how are you getting on?’ ‘Oh, very well; but there is one thing that troubles me much.’ ‘What is that?’ ‘That I am getting deaf, and can’t hear my minister.’ ‘Oh,’ was the cynical reply, ‘you ought to be thankful for your privileges.’

Lowestoft is reported to have been a fishing station as early as the time of the Romans; but the ancient town is supposed to have been long engulfed by the resistless sea, for there was to be seen till the 25th of Henry VIII. the remains of an old house upon an inundated spot – left dry at low water about four furlongs east of the present beach. The town has been the birthplace

of many distinguished men – of Sir Thomas Allen, for instance, who was steadily attached to the Royal cause, and who after the Restoration rose high in command, and won many a victory over the Dutch and the Algerines; of Sir Andrew Leake, who fell in the attack on Gibraltar; of Rear-Admiral Richard Utbar, also a renowned fighter when England and Holland were at war. To the same town also belong Admiral Sir John Ashby, who died in 1693, and his nephew Vice-Admiral James Mighells. Nor must we fail to do justice to Thomas Nash, a facetious writer of considerable reputation in the latter part of the sixteenth century. The most witty of his productions is a satirical pamphlet in praise of red herrings, intended as a joke upon the great staple of Yarmouth, and the pretensions of that place to superiority over Lowestoft. It must be confessed that Nash is chiefly famous as a caustic pamphleteer and an unscrupulous satirist. For illustration we may point to his battle with Gabriel Harvey, the friend of Edmund Spenser, who desired that he might be epitaphed the inventor of the not yet naturalized English hexameter; and his other battle with Martin Mar Prelate, or the writer or writers who passed under that name, and who have acquired a reputation to which poor Nash can lay no claim. His one conspicuous dramatic effort is ‘Summer’s Last Will and Testament.’ Nash wrote for bare existence – to use his own words, ‘contending with the cold, and conversing with scarcity.’ Nash lived in an unpropitious age. A recent French writer has placed him in the foremost rank of English writers. Dr. Jusserand, the author referred to, in his accounts of the English novel in the time of Shakespeare, tells us Nash was the most successful exponent in England of the picturesque novel. The picturesque novel is the forerunner of the realistic novel of modern times. It portrays the life and fortunes of the picaro – the adventurer who tries all roads to fortune. Spanish in its origin, it developed into a school in which Defoe and Thackeray distinguished themselves. ‘Nash,’ writes the French author, ‘mingled serious scenes with his comedy, in order that his romances might more nearly resemble real life.’ In fact (he writes), ‘Nash does not only possess the merit of learning how to observe the ridiculous side of human nature, and of portraying in a full light picturesque figures – now worthy of Teniers and now of Callot – some fat and greasy, others lean and lank; he possesses a thing very rare with the picturesque school, the faculty of being moved. He seems to have foreseen the immense field of study which was to be opened later to the novelist. A distant ancestor of Fielding, as Lilly and Sidney appear to us to be distant ancestors of Richardson, he understands that a picture of active life, reproducing only in the Spanish fashion scenes of comedy, is incomplete and departs from reality. The greatest jesters, the most arrogant, the most venturesome, have their days of anguish. No hero has ever yet remained imprisoned from the cradle to the grave, and no one has been able to live an irresponsible spectator, and not feel his heart sometimes beat the quicker, nor bow his head unmoved. Nash caught a glimpse of this.’ As an illustration, Dr. Jusserand points to his ‘Jack Wilton’ – ‘The best specimen of the picturesque tale in English literature anterior to Defoe.’ In Lowestoft they ought to keep his memory green.

The writer well remembers the day when Mr., afterwards Sir, Morton Peto, assembled the inhabitants of Lowestoft in the then dilapidated Town Hall, and promised that if they would sell their ruined harbour works, and back him in making a railway, their mackerel and herrings should be delivered almost alive in Manchester, Liverpool, and London. The inhabitants believed in the power of the enchanter, and Lowestoft is metamorphosed. The old town remains upon its beautiful eminence, and memory clings to the cliffs and to the denes, tenanted only, the one by wild rabbits, the other by the merry children and the nets of the fishermen. But a new town has grown up around the harbour – a grand hotel, excellent lodging-houses, a new church; a great population have upset the romance, and borne witness to the spirit of enterprise which characterizes this generation. The new town has spread to Kirkley, has Londonized even quiet Pakefield, and awakened a sleeping neighbourhood to what men call life.

At Lowestoft commence what are known to sailors as the Yarmouth Roads – a grand stretch of sea protected by the sands, where an armada might anchor secure; and it was a sight not to be

seen now, when gigantic steamers do all the business of the sea, to watch the hundreds of ships that would come inside the Roads at certain seasons of the year. There, in the winter-time – that is, from Lowestoft to Covehithe – I have seen the beach strewn with wrecks, chiefly of rotten colliers, or ships in the corn trade; but inside ‘Lowestoft Roads,’ to which they were guided by a lighthouse on the cliff, they were supposed to be secure. Lowestoft at that time, with its charming sands, was little known to the gay world, and depended far more on the fishing than the bathing season. The former was a busy time, and kept all the country round in a state of excitement. Many were the men, for instance, who, even as far off as Wrentham, went herring or mackerel fishing in the big craft, which, drawn up on the beach when the season was over, seemed to me ships such as never had been seen by the mariners of Tyre and Sidon; but the chief interest to me were the vans in which the fish were carried from Lowestoft to London – light spring-carts with four wheels and two horses, that, after changing horses at our Spread Eagle, raced like lightning along the turnpike-road, at all hours, and even on Sundays – a sad grievance to the godly – beating the Yarmouth mail.

Now and then, even at that remote period, when railways were not, and when Lowestoft was no port, nothing but a fishing-station, distinguished people came to Lowestoft, attracted by its bracing air and exceptional bathing attractions. I can in this way recollect Sir Edward Parry and M. Guizot. But there were other personages equally distinguished. One of these was Mrs. Siddons, with whom an old Dissenting minister – the Rev. S. Sloper, of Beccles, whom I can well remember – contracted quite an intimacy. She had already passed the zenith of her celebrity. ‘Providence,’ writes my friend, Mr. Wilton Rix, of Beccles, in his ‘East Anglian Nonconformity,’ published as far back as 1851, ‘had repeatedly and recently called her to tread in domestic life the path of sorrow, and her religious advantages, however few, had taught her that

“‘That path alone
Leads to the land where sorrow is unknown.”

“‘Sweet, sometimes,” said she, “are the uses of adversity. It not only strengthens family affection, but it teaches us all to walk humbly with God.” It is not surprising that she was disposed to cultivate the society of those who could blend piety with cheerfulness, and with whom she might be on friendly terms without ceremony. Such acquaintances she found in Mr. Sloper’s family. Mrs. Siddons, with unassuming kindness, contributed to their amusement by specimens of her powerful reading. She joined willingly in the worship of the family, and maintained the same invaluable practice at her own lodgings.’ Mr. Rix continues: ‘Just at that time Mr. Sloper was requested to preach to his own people on an affecting and mournful occasion, the death of a suicide. Though he keenly felt the delicacy and difficulty of the task, a sense of duty and a possibility of usefulness overcame his scruples. He selected for his text the impressive sentiment of the Apostle, “The sorrow of the world worketh death.” Mrs. Siddons was one of his auditors. She, who had been the honoured guest of Royalty, who had been enthroned as the Tragic Muse, and whose voice had charmed applauding multitudes, was seen in the humble Dissenting meeting-house at Beccles shedding abundant and unaffected tears at the plain and faithful exhibition of religious truth. Mr. Sloper’s preaching was as powerfully recommended to her by the delightful illustration of Christian principles exhibited in his private character, as by the intrinsic importance of those principles, and the simple gravity and penetrating earnestness with which they were announced from his lips. He afterwards procured for her, at her request, a copy of Scott’s admirable “Commentary on the Bible,” which he accompanied with a letter, warmly urging upon her attention the great realities her profession had so manifest a tendency to exclude from her contemplations. Mrs. Siddons,’ again I quote Mr. Rix, ‘more than once expressed her gratitude for the interest Mr. Sloper had evinced in her eternal welfare; she thanked him in writing for the advice he had given her, adding an emphatic wish that God might enable her to follow it – a wish which her pious and amiable

correspondent echoed with all the fervour of his heart. She returned into the glare of popularity, but a hope may easily be indulged that the pressure of subsequent relative afflictions and of old age were not permitted to come upon her unaccompanied by the impressions and consolations of true religion. Her elegant biographer, Mr. Campbell, draws a veil over the state of her mind during her last hours, which it would be deeply interesting to penetrate. Would she not then, if reason were undimmed, reflect upon the faithful counsel she received with Scott's Bible as being of infinitely greater value than the applause of myriads or the fame of ages?

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