A British Diplomat's Recollections.*

In his septuagenarian retirement from public service, Sir Henry Drummond Wolff has indulged the inclination natural to his time of life to review the past and live over again in anecdotic reminiscence the experiences of his more active years. In two volumes of "Rambling Recollections," as they are entitled, and which, he informs his readers at the outset, are "not an autobiography, nor even a continuous narrative," and which are "founded on no diary or record," the ex-diplomat puts down, just as they come unbidden to his memory — and it proves to be a remarkably tenacious one — stories of persons and places and events that he has had to do with in his more than half a century of service as a government official. To tell what noted persons of his day he has not met and has not brought into his book would be much

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easier and shorter than to enumerate the celebrities he has thus become acquainted with and helped his readers to know more intimately. Fifty-four pages of index, mostly of personal names, follow the narrative and indicate in a striking way its anecdotic, even gossipy, nature.

"I consider nothing in my recollection irrelevant," writes the author in recording one of his hundreds of anecdotes of persons; and he rambles on (to use the verb of his own choice) much as one might in familiar conversation after dinner. In fact, not a little of his matter will to many seem too trivial for print; but it entertains, and it also excites wonder at the writer's readiness in recalling so many and so varied occurrences after such a lapse of time. The division of the book into chapters, seventy in number, serves as a convenient chopping into attractive bits what might otherwise discourage the hardiest reader to undertake. Simply as a collection of miscellaneous anecdotes, the matter logically falls into no such sections, although it does try to follow some chronological order.

Leaving Rugby to enter the Foreign Office at sixteen years of age, Sir Henry was in the diplomatic service at many posts,—in Florence, the Ionian Islands, Bulgaria, Turkey, Egypt, Persia, Roumania, and finally as British Ambassador at Madrid, whence he returned to private life eight years ago. The stories and jokes that enliven Sir Henry's pages are strung together on so slender a thread that it will be permissible to quote a few of them here with no more system than is observed in their compilation. An amusing hit at the English tuft-hunter is innocently administered in the following anecdote:

"At a time when I was frequenting the Athenæum a good deal, a Cingalese gentleman, who had come to England to read for the bar, was recommended by Sir Roderick Murchison to all his acquaintances. One day, finding him dining alone, Mr. Hayward and I invited him to our table. Mr. Hayward wished to instruct him as to the constitution of English society, and said, 'You will find in England that men of distinction, who belong neither to the aristocracy nor to the richer classes, but have made a mark, either in literature or by their conversational powers, are always received in great houses on a footing of perfect equality. You never go to a great house but you will see some distinguished literary man received as one of the most highly honoured guests.' The Cingalese said, very naïvely, 'But are these not called sycophants?' There was complete silence."

A reminiscence of John Delane, of "The Times," with an incidental witticism from the alert Mr. Lowe, catches the eye not inopportunely.

"During the time I was in the Foreign Office, I naturally made a great many acquaintances, many of whom I have already mentioned; but there were some who became my friends as I went on in experience, and whom I shall always recollect. Mr. John Delane, the editor of the *Times*, was exceedingly kind to me. I was introduced to him by Sir John Burgoyne. He had a homelike, old-fashioned, panelled house — 16 Serjeants' Inn. Here he used to give most agreeable dinners, and there came Mr. Bernal Osborne, Mr. Lowe, and the most amusing people in London. On one occasion we were talking of a member of the Government supposed to be a great failure. Some one said, 'They want to make him a peer.' Mr. Lowe retorted, 'No, they want to make him disappear.'"

The change and expansion that the Foreign Office has undergone since the author's entrance there as "additional clerk" in 1846 is significant. In his day, he tells us, there was on the ordinary staff one permanent Under-Secretary of State, and also one political, whereas now there are three assistant Under-Secretaries in addition to these. Two Legal Advisers are now appointed to the Foreign Office; in Sir Henry's time there was none. Twenty-eight clerks in the diplomatic establishment, of whom seven were Heads of Departments, have increased to forty-four, eight of whom are Heads of Departments. The Financial Department has been correspondingly enlarged, also the Librarian's Department, and, in short, "the force of the Foreign Office has been augmented to an enormous extent." That the earlier and far smaller force of clerks was at times sadly overworked appears from the narrative.

It must not be inferred that the book is wholly devoted to personal anecdotes. Political topics are discussed, but as the discussions often concern dead issues, or matters of interest chiefly to English statesmen, the present review will not concern itself with them. As the author, in addition to his diplomatic service abroad, was also in Parliament for some years (from 1874 to 1880, and again from 1880 to 1885), parliamentary questions as well as parliamentarians furnish matter for his pages. He remarks on the almost invariable absence of personal animosity between the bitterest political foes. "One of the greatest examples of this," he continues, "was the late Lord Lansdowne, who, though a strong politician, never allowed party feeling to actuate private actions. I recollect hearing him say to one of his guests that he was very anxious about Lord Derby, who was ill, as he was one of his oldest friends." Of the ever-delightful Labouchère he says that he was the wittiest man in the House of Commons, and that, though at times he was politically unpopular, all who knew him felt a strong friendship for him. His wit, clever but sometimes over-elaborate, was always good-natured.

From the time of the Berlin Congress there comes down an excellent Bismarck anecdote. The Chancellor had one day received Lord Odo Russell, the English Ambassador, and was chatting with him familiarly and at some length, when the visitor took occasion to ask his host whether he was not often annoyed by having his callers prolong their interviews unduly. Bismarck replied that he had a private arrangement with his wife whereby she took care to send for him on some pretext whenever it appeared that his hospitality was being abused. Just then a servant entered and told the Prince, from the Princess, that it was time for him to take his medicine.

As the author was in Spain, in the capacity of British Ambassador, at the time of the Spanish-American War, it is interesting to note his comment on that event.

"The difficulties caused by the disagreement with America were incalculable. The United States declared — and their subsequent conduct verified their declaration — that they did not seek to annex Cuba, which an American gentleman described to me as 'the richest slice of earth,' nor to establish a Protectorate over the island. The first alternative, they considered, would disturb the voting balance of the United States, and the latter would entail endless care and responsibility. The Americans were desirous that Spain should settle the war in a manner just and honourable to herself, while securing to Cuba peace and prosperity. . . .

"In Spain, unfortunately, the acceptance of party office often paralyses Ministerial energy, and even with an army of 130,000 men, and an expenditure of a million a month, but little progress was made in crushing out the insurrection by force. These difficulties were enhanced by financial straits and by the interference of the United States Legislature. The obvious solution of the difficulty was the concession of liberties sufficient to satisfy the Cuban people. This, as has been said, was the aim of the United States Government; but the Spanish Government dreaded any spontaneous action. . .

"Spain's difficulties were great. The fact that, notwithstanding the loss of her colonies, the present dynasty remains unshaken is entirely due to the Queen Regent, who struggled almost unaided at this trying crisis. When we left Spain, the feeling of loyalty towards her Majesty was very much on the increase. That loyalty has been extended to her son. Perhaps Spain may prosper, as England prospered notwithstanding the loss of America."

The author's friendly feeling for America becomes again apparent in his preface, which we take to be his closing word to the reader. He says of his book: "There are many points omitted. I have not even alluded to the great change in English society caused by the influx of American notables. I believe that this peculiar feature of recent years is likely to bring great improvement and advantage to both countries." He then names some still-living Americans whose acquaintance has brought him especial pleasure.

The mechanical execution of these two ample volumes, with their large print in Scotch-face type, and their interesting portraits and other illustrations, is all that could be desired. Errors of typography or of proof-reading are welcomely absent, although one of the author's stories — concerning the remarkable detection of an assassin by means of his handwriting — is marred by the misspelling of the French term *graphologie*, which appears as *graphiologie*. Whatever criticism the author may have subjected himself to — and he frankly says, "I am prepared to accept criticism without remonstrance" — he will not be censured as having taxed his readers' attention in a manner unbefitting this season of rest and recreation.

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