

CHAPTER II.

THE "MORNING CHRONICLE" AND THE NEWSPAPER
PRESS HALF A CENTURY AGO.

IT was in the year 1834, two years after I had been knocking about in London, a mere floating straw on the great river of literature, that I succeeded in obtaining a firm hold on journalism as a profession. My first anchorage was on the *Sun*, a Liberal evening paper, the proprietor of which was Mr. Munro Young, a warm-hearted and able man, whose memory I shall always cherish with affection and respect. My second anchorage, after a year, was on the *Morning Chronicle*, the leading Whig and Liberal journal of the metropolis, the commercial and literary rival of the *Times*, with which it was running a neck-and-neck race for power, popularity, and influence.

The present generation has but vague and imperfect ideas of the impediments to success which in that early day beset the career of journalism.

Governments obliged to tolerate newspapers, and compelled to a large extent to be indebted to them for support, feared rather than loved them, and did their best, or worst, to render their establishment difficult, their existence disagreeable, and their prosperity precarious. The tax-gatherer laid his heavy hand upon them *ab ovo*, by an excise duty of three-halfpence per pound on the raw material, levied at the paper mill. The next burthen placed upon them was a stamp duty of fourpence on every copy printed; and the last was a tax of three shillings and sixpence for every commercial announcement, whether long or short, important or unimportant, which was made in their columns. A landed estate for sale, a house or lodgings to be let, a servant wanting a place, or a master wanting a servant, Warren's blacking for the feet, Rowland's Macassar Oil for the head, or a quack pill for the stomach, warranted to have been habitually taken during his whole life by Methuselah, had severally to contribute three and sixpence on each advertisement to the greedy gullet of the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

The price of the daily papers, whether morning or evening, was sevenpence, though they were not half or even a quarter of the size of the *Standard* and *Daily Telegraph* now published at a penny. The consequence was that comparatively few persons bought them, but were contented to hire them;

and thus every paper, when it had served its turn and gone through several hands in London, was sent by post to a new set of customers in the country. The space at the command of the editors being limited, as well as the capital at the command of the proprietors, the weary nuisance of unnecessary comments upon public affairs in the shape of leading articles, was kept perforce within moderate bounds; and it was rare that the *Chronicle* or *Times* indulged in more than one or at most two leading articles on the principal topics of the day. These articles were mostly political and seldom social, and never expatiated on any minor events recorded elsewhere. The comic leading article was undreamed of. The death of an elephant, a cow with a wooden leg, a mouse caught by the tail in an oyster-shell, were facts that, if recorded at all, were recorded in a paragraph, and not made the texts, as they are in this drearily comic age, for the overflow of editorial balderdash in a column or more of pumped-up attempts at fine writing.

The principal editor wrote the leading articles himself, being unprovided with any editorial staff to assist him. It is true that he often received, and was glad to welcome, the aid of volunteers in political life, who desired either to attack or support the policy of an administration. Many of the most eminent party leaders in those days contributed, *sub rosa*, to the columns of the daily press. Among

others that might be mentioned were George Canning, Sir James Mackintosh, and Lord Brougham.

I remember once, when assistant sub-editor of the *Morning Chronicle*, that I waited on the Duke of Sussex at the Hyde Park Hotel, where he was resident, for a few days, with the proof of a leading article which he had either written or dictated. The Duke was an earnest and consistent Whig, and had fallen into disfavour with his royal father, and with George IV. I do not at this distance of time remember the subject of the royal article, except that it was in support of some Liberal measure, and that the style was crude and involved. I remember well that the proof was a rough one and contained several grammatical as well as literal errors that required correction. I also remember that the Duke detected the errors very readily, but that he was not able to correct them, *secundum artem*, and that he had ultimately to ask me to show him how to make such technical marks as would be understood in the printing office.

All the London journals at the time were particularly careful to exclude from their reports of the law proceedings the shameless evidence that it is but too often necessary to produce in courts of justice. They generally dismissed it unreported, with the curt statement that it was "unfit for publication." Even those scandalous journals the *Age* and *Satirist* were decent in their language,

though filthy in innuendo and suggestion and prolific in foul libels. These latter were quite as often punished by the horsewhips or cudgels of the slandered persons as by the slower and more uncertain process of the law.

Mr. Murdo Young of the *Sun*, under whom I was happy to serve when only in my twentieth year, was a sound Whig, with a leaning more or less towards Radicalism, a ready writer, a poet of considerable reputation, and an able and very enterprising man of business. He was much pleased with two articles I submitted on my first introduction to him. The one was on the literary controversy that had been raging for some years in Paris on the merits and demerits of the rival schools of Classicism and Romanticism; the other on the leading prophet of the Romanticist faith, Victor Hugo, with a review of the works by which he was then favourably known, *Le Dernier Jour d'un Condamné*, *Notre Dame de Paris*, and his stirring poems *Les Orientales*, the latter all but unknown in England. The articles were published in the *Sun*, and paid for handsomely. Mr. Young expressed at the same time his wish to be useful to me in case any vacancy should occur in the literary staff of his journal. He was as good as his word, and speedily found or made an opportunity to appoint me to the post of junior or assistant editor, under Mr. Deacon, author of a novel called the

Bashful Irishman, and Mr. Collins, who afterwards and for many years edited the *Hull Advertiser*.

I was principally employed in writing notices on foreign literature, of which I knew something, and on foreign politics, of which my residence on the Continent had given me a somewhat more familiar knowledge than was possessed by my two older colleagues. In this employment I remained for about a twelvemonth, publishing in the meanwhile a small volume of songs and poems, which fortunately attracted, through the intervention of my friend Mr. Roberts, the notice of Mr. Dubois, a contributor to the *Morning Chronicle*, and through Mr. Dubois and Mr. Robert MacWilliam, a Middlesex magistrate, the still more important notice of Mr. John Black, the editor of that powerful journal. The *Chronicle* had for some years been in a failing condition under the proprietorship of Mr. William Clement of the *Observer* and *Bell's Life in London*, a mere tradesman, without literary training or political knowledge. He had long been anxious to disembarass himself of the *Chronicle*, which his mismanagement had well-nigh ruined; and, about six or eight months before I was appointed by Mr. Black to a subordinate position—such as befitted my youth and inexperience, but offering, nevertheless, a fair field for my ambition—it had been purchased, for seventeen thousand pounds, by Mr. John Easthope, a flourishing stock-broker,

Mr. Simon MacGillivray, a retired Mexican and Canadian merchant, and Mr. James Duncan, a London publisher in Paternoster Row. These gentlemen had found Mr. Black in possession of the editorship, and retained him in it; and had set themselves, by a judicious and liberal expenditure, to improve the paper and extend its influence in all its departments. They appointed an Irish barrister, Mr. Michael Joseph Quin, author of *A Voyage Down the Danube*, to be Foreign Editor; Mr. Eyre Evans Crowe, author of a History of France, to be their Paris Correspondent; Mr. George Hogarth, of Edinburgh, a friend and intimate of Sir Walter Scott, and a musical amateur and violoncello player of some celebrity in the society of the Scottish capital, to be Sub-editor; and engaged a numerous staff of the best Parliamentary reporters in London, with the view of making the *Chronicle* the channel of the fullest and most correct reports of the proceedings in both Houses of the Legislature. Among the reporters so engaged were Mr. John Payne Collier, the afterwards celebrated Shakespearean editor and commentator; Mr. Charles Dickens, then only partially known to fame as "Boz," but soon afterwards to shine forth brilliantly as the most popular novelist of the age; William Hazlitt, son of the famous critic and essayist of a previous generation, and now one of the Registrars in Bankruptcy; James Harfield, the

secretary of Jeremy Bentham; Mr. William Bernard McCabe, and other able men of less note.

My immediate duty was to assist Mr. Hogarth in the sub-editorship, to which, after his transference to the theatrical and musical department, for which he was better fitted, Mr. Collier succeeded for a short time. The latter gentleman was finally displaced under somewhat mysterious circumstances, which I was never thoroughly able to understand, to make way for Mr. Thomas Fraser, who was about ten years my senior, the son of the Laird of Eskadale, in Ross-shire, to which estate he succeeded at his father's death, and afterwards disposed of to the then Lord Lovat for a considerable sum. Mr. Fraser had formerly been connected with the *Scotsman*, and, in his capacity of reporter for that journal, had attended the memorable dinner when Sir Walter Scott had, for the first time, publicly avowed the authorship of the *Waverley* novels.

Mr. Fraser did not long retain the sub-editorship, having been transferred to Paris as permanent agent and correspondent of the *Chronicle*. He is the same gentleman who is celebrated in Thackeray's well-known "Ballad of Bouillabaisse," under the name of "Laughing Tom." Mr. Thackeray was himself a candidate for the sub-editorship of the *Chronicle*. His friends thought I was too young for the post, and his chances for the position, for that and other reasons, seemed to be greatly superior to mine.

But I had two advantages over him : first, I was in possession ; and, secondly, I had the support and influence of Mr. Black, that never failed or slackened, and that of his friend and countryman, Mr. MacGillivray, who was an enthusiastic Highlander, and took a fancy to me because I also was of Highland blood and extraction.

But what, as I afterwards learned, had been greatly instrumental in securing me the victory over Mr. Thackeray was the publication in the *Morning Chronicle* of a little political squib which I had contributed to its columns. It was *apropos* of the coy reluctance to accept office, if it were offered to him, recently expressed in the House of Commons by Sir Robert Peel. It was highly to the taste of my friends MacGillivray and Black, and approved, on their verdict, by Messrs. Easthope and Duncan—who had but few literary tastes, and scarcely any appreciation of literature. It ran as follows :—

Beauty, when maiden, on the brink
Of the ripe age of thirty-two,
Cries, "Aid me, Virtue, lest I sink,
When teasing lovers come to woo.
Should they plant kisses on my cheek,
And speak me fair, and sue me long,
I fear I should be very weak,
And the temptation very strong."

And so says coy Sir Robert Peel,
When dreams of Office charm his sight;

“Guard me,” he cries, “in coat of steel
 Against that siren of delight !
 Oh ! Virtue, aid me when I speak.
 Should Place, the charmer, woo me long,
 I feel I should be very weak,
 And the temptation very strong.”

Old women both ! You flaunt in vain ;
 In vain expose your fading charms,
 And broadly hint your wish to gain
 Husband and Office to your arms.
 Resign yourselves, and live at ease ;
 Bear your lone lot with patience meet,
 For young men now are hard to please,
 And nations difficult to cheat.

Mr. Thackeray was often a paid contributor to the *Chronicle*, especially on subjects connected with the Fine Arts, but never succeeded in establishing a permanent connection with it.

Two incidents connected with the *Morning Chronicle*, during my tenure of the sub-editorship, have firmly fixed themselves in my memory. The one was the reported death of Lord Brougham by a carriage accident, in the North of England, when in company with his friend, Mr. John Temple Leader—who either was at the time, or had previously been—the representative in Parliament of the city of Westminster. The news was so minute and particular in the details which were given of the fatal catastrophe, that it received general credence ; and the conductors of the *Morning Chronicle*

went so far, in the manifestation of their sorrow for what they considered a public calamity, as to put the whole page which contained the particulars of the event, and the reflections of the editor and conductors upon it, into mourning, such as English newspapers are only accustomed to use in announcing the death of the Sovereign or a member of the Royal Family. The press generally—though not all so eulogistic of the character of the supposed defunct—agreed in recognition of his many noble qualities, and of the great place he held in contemporary politics and history. But, in two or three days, indignation, more or less fervid, gave place to the admiration which had been extorted, when it was found that the whole narrative of the fatal accident was a falsification, and that the supposed victim—even if he had been thrown from his carriage, which was doubtful—was alive and unhurt, and ready to resume the part he had so long played as the stormy petrel of politics. Mr. Black, who had been more enthusiastic than his contemporaries in laudation of the great virtue of the "departed," was louder than any in the expression of his disgust, and did not hesitate to express his belief—which was also that of the Clubs, and of Society in general—that Lord Brougham himself was the concocter and author of the hoax. Mr. Black, who had been familiar in his earlier days with the literary gossip of Edinburgh, remembered that, in

1825, John Gibson Lockhart had caused to be inserted, as a practical joke, in the *Edinburgh Weekly Journal*, with which he was at the time connected, a report of the death of his friend, John Wilson, the well-known "Christopher North" of *Blackwood's Magazine*. The report was accompanied by a highly eulogistic memoir and review of the Professor's literary character and genius. Mr. Black maintained that Lord Brougham had taken the idea of the mystification from his remembrance of this frolic of Lockhart's, and that he desired, in the excess of his morbid vanity, to know what good, if any, posterity would say of him. Doubtless his lordship was gratified for the time, as his contemporaries were all more or less friendly, and found more good than evil to report of him, when they thought that, after "life's fitful fever," he was finally at rest. But the *Chronicle*, and the other leading journals, had their revenge in after years, and Lord Brougham became, whenever his perversities and eccentricities afforded an opportunity for newspaper or party attack, "one of the best abused men in the country."*

* "So little reliance is placed upon his (Brougham's) words that everybody laughs at his denials, and hardly anybody has a shadow of doubt that he was himself at the bottom of it. He has taken the trouble to write to all sorts of peoples, old friends and new, to exonerate himself from the charge; but never was trouble more thrown away.

The next incident which I remember was the visit of Marshal Soult to London, when Mr. Easthope, the principal proprietor of the *Chronicle*, received a hasty message from the Admiral in command of the fleet in the Thames, stating that the Marshal, on his departure for France, had consented to lunch with him on board of H.M.'s warship *Howe*, stationed opposite Sheerness, and suggesting that a gentleman from the office should be sent down immediately, to give an account of the proceedings. There was no time to be lost when the notification arrived, and, as I happened to be in the office, I was requested to start immediately, though it was the business of a reporter, not of a sub-editor, and do the best I could in the sudden emergency. I was nothing loth, made no preparation, and no difficulties; and by a liberal expenditure of money for the hire of the means of locomotion on land and water, just managed to arrive in sight of the *Howe* as the French steamer, conveying the Marshal to his own country, was within a quarter of a mile's distance. This was intensely provoking, but, on boarding the *Howe*, I was hospitably received

D'Orsay says that he carefully compared the supposed letter of Shafto with one of Brougham's to himself, and that they were evidently written by the same hand. The paper, with all its marks, was the same, together with other minute resemblances, leaving no doubt of the fact."—*Greville's Memoirs: Journal of the Reign of Queen Victoria.*

by the Admiral, who, while regretting the inevitable lateness of my arrival, due mainly to the shortness of the notice which he had given, made, like a wise man, the best of the circumstances, and invited me to lunch, which was set on the table, at which several of the officers were still seated. He afterwards supplied me with such particulars as he could command of the toasts that had been given, and the speeches that had been made. An adequate report of the speeches of the Admiral and the Marshal, both full of friendly sentiments and hopes for the permanent alliance of France and Great Britain, as necessary to the happiness and prosperity of both nations, and to the peace of Europe, duly appeared in the *Morning Chronicle*.

Among the able men employed as reporters at this time by the *Chronicle* was one whom, for the purposes of this narrative, I shall call "Hooper." He was expeditious, correct, thoroughly conscientious and trustworthy in his profession; but in all matters relating to himself and to his intimacy with the great men whom he knew, or fancied he knew, he was incorrigibly addicted to boasting, exaggerating, romancing, and inventing. So well was he known in literary society for this peccadillo, and so famous had some of his exaggerations of his own importance become, that Hooper's last escapades were famous in half of the Clubs of London—so

famous, that Theodore Hook introduced him in one of his novels as Jack Brag.

It happened one day, at the usual afternoon meeting of the proprietors and editors of the *Chronicle*, that Mr. Charles Buller, the well-known Liberal Member of Parliament, and one of the leading-article writers, who was present, accidentally mentioned "Jack Brag," and said how much he would like to see him. I had seen Mr. Hooper in the reporter's room a few minutes previously, and mentioned the fact to Mr. Black. Mr. Black, remembering that he had himself sent for Mr. Hooper to receive his instructions before proceeding to Lewes, in Sussex, to report the speeches of the Liberal candidate, and, if possible, to aid the cause by the local and other knowledge which he possessed of the town, directed that he should be shown in accordingly, that he might receive his instructions *vivâ voce*. Hooper, true to his character, and innocently unsuspecting of any *arrière pensée* on the part of Mr. Black or any of the company, replied: "I shall start immediately; but it will be of little use, except to report the speeches. You should have sent me earlier, if you expect me to be of any service in the election. I know well how to manage an election, in any doubtful and close contest like that of Lewes. Mr. Canning taught me how to win an election!"

Mr. Charles Buller, much amused, though dis-

creetly showing no sign of surprise, said, without meaning any imputation on his veracity: "You must have been very intimate with Mr. Canning, if he took you into his confidence, Mr. Hooper. You cannot have been much more than fourteen or fifteen years of age when Mr. Canning died."

"Yes!" replied Hooper, without hesitation or a blush, "that is true; but then, you see, I was a very precocious boy!"

Another all but forgotten incident of my early days at the *Morning Chronicle* was vividly recalled to my memory in 1876, by an accidental meeting at the foot of Boxhill, Surrey, with a gentleman, who remembered me after an interval of forty years.

An action had been brought against the *Morning Chronicle* in 1836, by Mr. Powell, a gentleman once engaged in the sub-editorial department, for wrongful dismissal. I was summoned as a witness by the proprietors, to depose to the fact that the plaintiff was dismissed for frequent intoxication in business hours, which rendered him unable to perform his duties in a satisfactory manner. I was submitted to a very severe cross-examination by Mr. Earle, the plaintiff's counsel, who was afterwards raised to the Bench, which he adorned for many years. Mr. Earle persisted in asking me what was the "occasion" of the dismissal, and the constant iteration of the question puzzled me to know

whether the counsel meant, by the word "occasion," the *time* or *date* at which the dismissal took place, or the cause of the dismissal. I believe I was nettled at the manner in which the questions were put, with the evident design, as I thought, of making me contradict myself, and I replied in a manner that amused the judge, and amused the counsel, by asking Mr. Earle to define what meaning he attached to the word "occasion." "If you mean," I said, "the date at which the dismissal took place, I have already declared, more than once, that I do not exactly remember; if you mean 'cause,' I have already said, and again repeat, that it was intoxication." Mr. Earle, in his summing-up the case for the plaintiff, alluded pointedly to my evidence, which he denounced as that of an "arrogant and presumptuous boy." I was at the time a young man of two-and-twenty, and took silent revenge in my own mind, by reflecting that barristers were too often reprehensibly insolent to the unfortunate victims submitted to their untender mercies in the witness-box.

Acacia Grove, Dulwich,

15.5.76.

DEAR DR. MACKAY,

How strange was our meeting on Saturday, after an interval of forty years; and no less strange that I should have recognised you. It was in the year 1836, that, going into court upon some other business, I saw you being baited in the witness-box, and wondered at hearing you

were "sub-editor," you looked so young. I had not seen you since then, and you have not yet lost your boyish features. Since then we have both been climbing different hills, you of literature, and I of law. We parted in a law court, and met again, accidentally, in a lovely Surrey lane. There are few left (who were known to me) forming the assemblage at that trial: Easthope, Duncan, MacGillivray, Black, the Judge, and all the counsel are gone, all the Jury—all gone, perhaps, but you and me.

I never go into that part of Surrey without lounging about where you met me. I was in what is now called the coffee-room, at the "Hare and Hounds," before I was "breeched," in fact, when I was in petticoats, and lunched there on Saturday! There is a melancholy pleasure in these revisits, like the lake described by Moore in his "Epicurean," in the Land of Roses, whose waters were half sweet, half bitter.

Believe me, with pleasing recollections of having met you again, and of our place of meeting,

Yours truly,
W. WALLER.

When I joined the *Morning Chronicle* in 1835, the *Morning Chronicle* had been in existence for seventy-five years. It appears, according to a deed signed on the 23rd of October 1760, that the original proprietors of the *Morning Chronicle* amounted in number to twenty. Their names, and, as far as known, their businesses and professions, were as follow:—

William Kenrick.

R. Highway.

William Griffin (bookseller).

John Nicod.
T. Evans (bookseller).
Samuel Webb (pattern-drawer).
Louis Lenoir (silversmith).
John Richards.
David Richards.
J. Spilsbury (bookseller).
George Kearsly.
J. Fletcher.
James Robson (bookseller).
W. Woodfall (printer).
Peter Elmsly (bookseller).
Peter Crawford.
John Murray (bookseller).
James Bowles (stationer).
Henry Barford (upholsterer).
James Christie (auctioneer).

This information, though of no public, and but slight literary, importance, may be of interest to many living persons if they chance to be the descendants of any of the enterprising pioneers of the daily press in London, and as such I here reproduce it.