

CHAPTER II.

LIVERPOOL IN 1850.—MR. EDWARD RUSHTON AND
MR. WILLIAM RATHBONE.

WHEN engaged for the *Morning Chronicle* in 1850, to take part in its comprehensive inquiry into the great subject of "Labour and the Poor" throughout England, I passed three months in Liverpool. During that time I made many friends in that great town, or city as it might be called, though, through not being the see of a bishop or an archbishop, it has no valid title to that designation. In the United States, or Canada, even if it were but a tenth part of its size, or if it did not contain a tithe of its population, it would to a certainty be called a city; while perhaps some of its populous suburbs would claim the same designation. Among the valued friends, now, alas! no more, were two whom I especially prized, and whom I most affectionately remember; Mr. Edward Rushton, the able stipendiary magistrate, and the venerable William Rath-

bone, one of the most eminent merchants in Europe, whose firm imported the first consignment of cotton from America that ever arrived in England. Mr. Rathbone was the highly respected mayor of the town, and conferred honour upon the municipality by accepting the onerous but not particularly honourable charge. He was highly popular, as he deserved to be, though he differed in politics and religion from the great majority of the inhabitants. He was what it was then the fashion to call a "Whig-Radical," though more perhaps of a Radical than a Whig; and he was a pillar and support of the Unitarian Church. He bore his faculties so meekly as a politician and a Christian, as scarcely to make opponents of those who differed from him in opinions, and was wholly without enemies.

Mr. Rushton, called "Roaring Rushton" at an early period of his career by the plain-speaking and often foul-mouthed William Cobbett, in his once notorious "Register," had, for several years before my visit to Liverpool, exercised the functions of stipendiary magistrate with general favour and acceptance. He was worthy, as all who knew him admitted him to be, of a much higher post in the administration of justice than fate or fortune had accorded him. His politics had excluded him from the patronage of the Tory ministries, who were in possession of power in his early manhood, and he had not suc-

ceeded in obtaining a seat in Parliament after the passing of the Reform Bill—another circumstance which impeded his progress up the ladder of legal advancement. But, perhaps, he was too little acquainted with the technicalities, the quirks and quibbles, sharp practices, and possessed too admirable a fund of sound, sterling, and uncompromising common-sense, to have been made a judge of the superior courts in the metropolis. He found a sphere of greater usefulness, though of less dignity and emolument, in the inferior social position of stipendiary magistrate in a provincial town. In Liverpool he shone as a legal luminary of the first magnitude, whereas in London he might, like other police magistrates, have shone but as a faint star in a crowded galaxy, and been out-glittered by Solicitor and Attorney Generals, Puisne Judges, Barons of the Exchequer, Vice-Chancellors, and Chancellors. In Liverpool he reigned without a rival, except during the assizes, when he was eclipsed by the superior judges on the circuit, but nobody eclipsed him as a social star in the limited hemisphere in which his lot was cast. He was a man of varied erudition and accomplishments, a lover of literature, and of surprising tenacity of memory. He possessed a fund of humour, which rendered him an admirable conversationalist, a *raconteur* in all respects equal to the most celebrated adepts in the almost lost art of amusing, while instructing a mixed com-

pany of men and women without sermonising, lecturing or soliloquising, or otherwise becoming a bore or attempting to monopolise the attention of his listeners. His society was in consequence in great request in the town, to such an extent that he was seldom enabled to enjoy the luxury of a quiet dinner at home. Yet he managed at times to do so, to his great satisfaction, and very possibly to the equally great benefit of his health. Unlike many great diners-out, he was not a professed wit, neither a punster, nor a funster, though terse, epigrammatic witticisms often came un-studied and unbidden from his lips, and were invariably appropriate to the subject in hand. He and Mr. Rathbone were much attached to each other's society, and to their frequent symposia I was often invited as a favourite guest, an honour which I highly appreciated, more especially when the company on the occasion was select and not numerous, and no wet-blankets or extra stupid persons were invited.

I remember particularly on one occasion, when Mr. Rushton had invited Mr. Rathbone and myself to dine with him, that both of them were highly amused at the account I gave them of my morning's work among the slop tailors of the town, employed by firms engaged in the manufacture of cheap clothes for sailors and emigrants. The town was over-run, both with sempstresses and

journeymen tailors, all competing with each other for the lowest kind of needlework, and receiving in consequence the lowest kind of wages. I learned that many of the poor tailors earned—in twelve hours' daily toil—no more than from eleven to fourteen shillings a week, out of which they had to provide their own thread; and that they could not always reach the maximum of fourteen shillings without working at least half of the Sunday. I made a point of questioning each of them, who was willing to tell me the story of his hardships and privations, whether he was compelled to work on Sundays to earn so scanty a pittance. One man to whom I put the question answered me with a loud, emphatic and defiant No! adding that he would not work on Sundays for any man. There was such a gleam of anger in his eye, that I at first thought he was a rigid Calvinist, or other zealot of strong religious opinions, and so I questioned him once more, expecting to find him a fanatical Sabbatarian, and asked him if he went to church or chapel. He replied in a moment, with an oath, "Damn all churches and chapels! I never go near any of them!" The word he used in his anger was far more vulgarly odious than the not altogether ungentlemanly word "damn," once held on the Continent to be peculiarly English; but I shall not soil my page by repeating it. "What do you do with yourself then?" I continued. "Do

you read or go to sleep?" "If the weather is bad," he replied, "I try to go to sleep until the public-house opens; but if it is fine, I take a walk into the fields, lie on my back in the grass, or under a tree, watch the clouds as they sail over the sky, and thank God that I am alive!"

"I rather like that free-minded tailor," said Mr. Rushton, "except for his use of the most detestable word in the English language. I would fine every man five shillings who polluted his lips with it, if I could catch him at it."

"Somewhat of a philosopher, too," said Mr. Rathbone, "and with a spirit of independence in him, which needed but proper training to make a true man of him."

On another occasion, I informed Mr. Rushton that in making researches into the condition of the seafaring population of the town, I had discovered a street, called Denison Street, where no black man dared to show his face, except in peril of his life, and where, if he were seen, the alarm was raised as of the "Fiery Cross" of the olden time in Scotland, and the whole population turned out with sticks and stones and other convenient weapons of offence to expel him. Mr. Rushton was incredulous.

"You have been imposed upon," he said. "I have been a magistrate here for many years, and if the thing were true I should certainly have heard of it."

I repeated the story, gave him the name of my informant, and added, in explanation, that Denison Street was inhabited by Americans and Irish Americans of low grade, who kept sailors' boarding and lodging houses; that the sailors who patronised them were mostly from New York and Boston; and that the antipathy or hatred of the lower class of American white men, native or imported, to the negro race, was notorious.

"Dine with me to-morrow," replied Mr. Rushton, "and in the meantime I will make inquiries, and let you know the result. Were I a betting man, which I am glad to say I never was and never will be, I would bet ten to one against the truth of the story."

On repairing to Mr. Rushton's house on the morrow, as invited, where I found Mr. Rathbone had arrived before me, Mr. Rushton informed me that he had made inquiries of the police and found that my information was correct. The law had never been put in force to remove the scandal, mainly because the breaches of the peace had never been serious enough to call for an exercise of authority, and because the aggrieved negroes were either too poor, too ignorant, or too indolent to take the trouble of complaining.

"Strangers in a town, who keep their eyes and their ears open," said Mr. Rathbone, "often see and learn more about the ways and manners of

the inhabitants than the inhabitants themselves know."

"Because the inhabitants are too much occupied with money-getting and their own affairs," said Mr. Rushton, "to have time or inclination to attend to such every-day matters; while the stranger has but little else to do, and his curiosity is excited by novelty."

The conversation next turned upon the subject of the Irish and the police, and the very large numbers of Irish in the town, larger, it was believed, than the Irish population of any town in Ireland, except Dublin, Cork and Belfast. I learned that the conflicts between the Irish and the police, which had for many years been of constant recurrence, had of late shown signs of abatement, and that the welcome change had been mainly due to the counsels of an Irish gentleman, which had been followed by Mr. Rushton and the local magistracy. The Irish mob were so turbulent and excitable, and so strongly inclined to riot on the slightest pretexts, that it was thought necessary to arm the police when on duty with cutlasses. The police in repressing disturbances often had occasion, or fancied that they had occasion, to use these weapons, and bloodshed was the too frequent result. Bloodshed, it appeared, invariably led to renewals of the conflict on the following day, when the Irish gathered in increased numbers, to take revenge or

otherwise try conclusions with the forces of law and order. The Irish gentleman, who knew and had studied the character of his countrymen, represented to Mr. Rushton that the serious nature of the weapon in the hands of the police, especially if a fatal result should accidentally follow its use, only exasperated the lower classes of the Irish; that the sight of blood inflamed their passions, and urged them to revenge; and that the true way to deal with an Irish mob was to call out the parish fire-engines and pump dirty water upon them; or, if that were considered inexpedient, to arm the police with short shillelachs or long truncheons, and belabour the skulls of the rioters with those formidable but not commonly fatal weapons.

“An Irishman,” he said, “would encounter more recklessly the slash of a cutlass, or even a pistol-shot, than he would the crack of a shillelagh on his pate. If he were hurt by a blow, his fate would not largely excite the sympathy or the commiseration of his comrades.”

He advised the authorities of Liverpool to make the change and try the effect of the experiment, which would not be a costly one; nor would the drilling of the police in the dexterous manipulation of the shillelagh be either tedious or difficult. The advice was taken, after the usual dilatoriness exhibited by English municipalities and other public

bodies whenever change or improvement of any kind is recommended. The best results ensued. The Irish gentleman's opinion was supported by many of his well-to-do and peaceably-disposed countrymen in the town; and the conflicts between the Irish mob and the police, though they did not wholly cease, became less frequent than of old, and lost nearly all their bitterness. If heads were now and then broken, no lives were lost, and the police became to a certain extent popular even among the Irish, because they fought them, when fighting became necessary, with the familiar Irish shillelagh and no longer with what they called the cowardly cutlass of the "brutal and bloody Saxon."

During my visit to Liverpool, Mr. Rathbone was asked, as Mayor, to take the chair *ex-officio* at a public meeting which was to be called to advocate the extension of church accommodation. He at first refused on the plea that he was adverse to the project, and that he thought there were already too many mean-looking churches and chapels in the town, without architectural beauty of any kind, and that they disfigured the streets which they ought to adorn. He was ultimately prevailed upon to alter his resolution; and, on taking the chair, made a speech which, if it did not throw cold water upon the hot zeal of the promoters of the movement, did not give much aid to the cause which they had at heart. He was of opinion, he said, that there

were too many churches and chapels, and too little religion and Christian charity in Liverpool. He did not say this, he added, with any view of saving his money, for he was willing to subscribe the sum of £50,000 towards the building of a grand cathedral in Liverpool which would be an ornament to the town, on the one condition that it should be the church of every denomination of Christians, and even of Jews and Mahometans, and that it should be used by all sects at stated hours, so that the several services should not interfere with each other. This great cathedral, he thought, would render unnecessary the building of any inferior or meaner edifices, whether churches or chapels, while its very existence, and the purposes to which it was devoted, would preach Christian charity and Christian unity, and act as a shining example of enlightened toleration to all the too numerous sects of Christians in Great Britain.

The suggestion fell dead upon the ears of the Liverpoolians, who appeared to have no faith in the seriousness of the grand proposal, though Mr. Rathbone had both the will and the means to carry it into effect had it met with the sympathy, approval, and support of his fellow-citizens. Nothing more was ever heard of it, not even in the shape of friendly or unfriendly comment in the local newspapers.

Mr. Rathbone took much interest in the edu-

cation of the children of the poor, which all the benevolent and religious agencies at work in the town failed to accomplish, except by weak and hardly perceptible attacks upon the great citadel of ignorance, defended in its approaches by Apathy, Niggardliness, and Sectarian Bigotry, all enemies to, or stumbling-blocks in the way of, the instruction of destitute or poor children.

I accompanied him at his request to the Work-house, when the poor boys of tender age receiving the rudiments of education at the expense of the rate-payers were drawn up in line before us, that we might see their physical condition and examine them, if it so pleased us, in their knowledge either of Christian doctrine or of either of the three R's, which their master professed to teach them. This I for my part declined to do; but, seeing one bright little boy of about nine years of age, I asked the master what sort of a child he was.

"The worst boy in the school," replied the master. "We can do nothing with him. He is quite incorrigible."

I noticed that tears filled the large blue eyes of the little fellow and overflowed till they ran down his cheeks.

"In what way is he so bad?" I inquired.

"Oh!" replied the master in a tone the reverse of amiable, "it is impossible to make him keep still. He is always in movement, nudging the other

boys, and distracting their attention from their lessons."

"Poor little fellow," said Mr. Rathbone, "he cannot help it. He is of a lively and restless disposition ; but it is very cruel of you to confound all his notions of right and wrong by imputing to him as wickedness that which is but a result of a nervous temperament. You are doing your utmost to make a bad man of him in letting him suppose that there is no difference between restlessness and criminality."

Mr. Rushton and I both concurred in this rebuke, and Mr. Rushton bluntly told the pedagogue that he was unfit for his place, and that his denunciation of the boy's "wickedness," as he called it, might make the little fellow think, as he grew older, that if he were to be considered wicked for so little, he might as well be wicked in earnest, if he could gain anything by it. The teacher, if he might be so called without an abuse of words, did not seem to view the matter in that light. Mr. Rathbone, without telling him so, let us both know, as we left the room, that he would represent the case to the Board of Guardians, in the hope that a formal reprimand of the possibly well-meaning but ignorant official would be the result.

News of Mr. Rushton's death reached me in Vienna five years afterwards. He died universally

respected and regretted in Liverpool, and from eight to ten thousand people were reported to have formed in irregular procession to witness his funeral. All the shops in the town were closed and all business was suspended for the day.

And this reminds me of another funeral celebration at Liverpool. On the day fixed for the interment of the honoured remains of the great Sir Robert Peel, I noticed that the flags on the Royal Exchange and on many of the vessels in the harbour were hoisted half-mast high. I happened to meet the mayor in the street, and expressed my satisfaction at the tribute of respect which the town had shown to the memory of the lamented statesman. "Appearances are deceptive," replied Mr. Rathbone. "I wish, with all my heart, that the town had had the good taste and kind feeling to do as you suppose that they have done. The flags are waving half-mast high in respect to the memory of an insignificant royal personage, the Duke of Cambridge, and not to that of one of the greatest men of the century, the good and self-sacrificing Sir Robert Peel, to whom we owe the repeal of the Corn Laws."
