

CHAPTER VI

A ROLLING STONE GATHERS NO MOSS

ONE of my intimate friends in Haddington was George Scouler—a man of whom a great deal might have been made. Though constitutionally delicate, he had a vigorous mind, which teemed with imagination. Like everybody else in those days, he was a great politician, and took an immense interest in the reform cause. He first came to light at a public meeting held to petition Parliament in aid of Municipal Reform. To the surprise of his friends, who before had seen nothing in that pale, delicate man, with his face overshadowed by his massive forehead, he made a powerful speech. He carried the meeting with him, and the petition was enthusiastically adopted. He spoke again and again, always improving. But his constitution was too weak for mental work. He was taken ill of a form of mesenteric disease, and sent for me. For change of air, I sent him, with his sister, to Portobello, near Edinburgh ; and there I had my old teacher, Dr Mackintosh, called in as consulting physician. The doctor did what he could, but the case was hopeless ; and shortly after George Scouler returned to Haddington, became worse, and died quite peacefully.

During my interview with Dr Mackintosh at

Portobello, he asked me how I was getting on at Haddington.

"I am not getting on," I said, "I am going off."

"How is that?"

"Too many doctors," I answered; "more than enough to doctor double the population."

"Well," he rejoined, "remember that a rolling stone gathers no moss."

"Very true," I said; "but while I have been settled there, I have gathered none whatever: I think I had better begin *to roll*."

"Well, of course, you are the best judge."

And so we parted.

Another of my friends was Dr Carstairs of North Berwick, about nine miles off. He was of about my own age, and was, like myself, struggling for a practice. He was settled on the coast, having the sea on one side and the land on the other; so that he had less country to travel over. While laid up, on one occasion, by an inflamed throat, he asked me if I could come down and assist him with his patients. I did so, and remained a few days. While there, I was sent for to attend a remarkable character named Jock Whitecross. He was a fisherman at Carty Bay, a little fishing village lying almost immediately under the ruins of the ancient castle of Tantallon. Jock had a lease of the Bass Rock, which lay, a big round rock in the Firth of Forth, screaming with solan geese and flights of sea-birds, only a few miles off.

Not long before, Jock had lost his son—a finely-built young fellow—whose boat had been upset in a stormy sea, and his body was washed ashore on the strand almost in front of his father's door. Jock, on speaking of the sad event, said to a neighbour, "Eh, man, the Lord's gien me a sair whup the day." Jock

had to deliver twelve solan geese a year to the minister of the parish, as his “teinds.” But the minister of the parish having complained about the deliveries of the geese, and the fishy taste of the birds, Jock delivered the whole of them one day together; on which the minister was worse satisfied than ever.

“I canna make them into butcher meat,” said Jock, “nor can I be fashed to deliver them as ye like, so there they are, helter skelter.”

There were many similar stories told about Jock; but this was to be the last of him. I found him attacked with cholera of a bad sort. He was dying when I entered his cottage, and when I left, his last breath had departed. Such are the scenes that country doctors have often to witness.

Whether it was because of my frequent visits to the neighbourhood of North Berwick, or how it was I know not, but one night I was sent for to attend a case at Redhouse, on the way thither, about seven miles from Haddington. After attending to it—and it was altogether a gratuitous case—I was riding homeward on my old mare. It was about two o’clock in the morning, and having been up for two nights previously, I was very sleepy. While going down hill, the horse put its foot on a stone and tumbled down. I fell over its head, and lit upon my white hat, which was crushed; but it saved my head. I got up, thoroughly awakened, but the horse was off. I walked after it for some four miles, where I found the poor creature, with its broken knees, standing at a door where I had called a few days before. I parted with the horse, and did not buy another. “The game was not worth the candle.”

Among the various things which I did to fill up

my abundant time, was to write a book! That was a difficult matter. But I made up my mind, read and studied diligently, and prepared the sheets for the printer. My subject was *Physical Education*—not a bad idea. Dr Combe's work on *The Principles of Physiology applied to the Preservation of Health*, had been found of great use; and it occurred to me that a work devoted more particularly to instructions as to the Nurture and Management of Children might be equally useful. It was, at all events, beginning at the beginning, with the education of the human creature. For philosophy has been in the wrong in not descending more deeply into physical man, for it is there that the moral man lies concealed. I took for my motto the following passage from Paley: "The health and virtue of a child's future life are considerations so superior to all others, that whatever is likely to have the smallest influence upon these, deserves the parents' first attention." I accordingly treated of nursing, air, and exercise; and endeavoured to show that the due education of the body was the basis of moral and intellectual culture; protesting, at the same time, against cramming the youthful mind with unnecessary knowledge.

I did the best that I could in preparing the work. It might have been better done. Indeed, it was shortly after much better done by Dr Andrew Combe himself, in his *Treatise on the Physiological and Moral Management of Infancy*. But I did not know, at the time I wrote my book, that that excellent man was engaged in such a treatise. When finished, I took my manuscript to the Messrs Chambers of Edinburgh, who were engaged at that time in bringing out many entertaining and useful works. I saw William Chambers, and he told me that he expected Dr

Combe would prepare for their house a similar work. As I had the MS. with me, I went to Mr Boyd (of Oliver & Boyd), whom I knew, and asked him to furnish me with an estimate of the cost of printing and publishing my little treatise. The result was, that it was shortly after in the hands of the printer. But before it appeared, I received a letter from William Chambers, saying that he had been disappointed in Dr Combe—that he was about to publish a treatise on his own account, and asking for the perusal of my manuscript. It was too late, and my book came out, and was well reviewed in the *Athenæum*, *Chambers's Journal*, and other periodicals.

I only printed 750 copies. The book sold fairly well, but if it paid its expenses, that was all. During the last few years, the advertisements swallowed up the proceeds of the sales. At last there remained about 100 copies of the unbound sheets. These I disposed of in the following manner. There was a Mr Slater, related to a friend of mine, who had brought out a cheap series of books in London, including Emerson's Essays, and Frederica Bremer's Tales—(the last very much to the disgust of William Howitt, who was left with a whole room full of printed and unsold volumes, translated by Mary Howitt)—and these were well known at the time as "Slater's Shilling Series." Though the books had a large sale, they were too cheap, and eventually ruined the publisher. Slater gathered his traps together, and was about to leave for Australia to pursue his trade as a bookseller. He asked me if I could give him a lift. I made him a present of all the unsold copies of my book; and I hope they proved of use to the colonists and their children. I afterwards found that the emigrant had married a

young wife and settled at Geelong, where, with her help, he brought out a new series of *Slater*.

The last of my occupations to which I must refer, as it had some influence on my future life, was the writing of leading articles for an Edinburgh newspaper. Dr Thomas Murray, a Lecturer on Political Economy, was at that time editor of the *Edinburgh Weekly Chronicle*. I knew the doctor, and he asked me occasionally to send him paragraphs of intelligence. I went a little further, and sent him regular articles. In course of time, he promoted these to the leading columns; and I wrote with the "we," as if I were the editor. I became a regular, and as Dr Murray afterwards said, "a much-prized contributor." Might not this prove an opening into the press? I thought so at the time, and when an advertisement appeared in *Tait's Magazine* for an editor of the *Leeds Times* in the room of Robert Nicoll, the poet, who died in December 1837, I applied for the position.

I received an answer from the proprietor, requesting me to send a specimen of my powers, and mentioning as the subject, an article on the Suffrage. I wrote one, and sent it by return of post. It was approved, but I was informed that, on further consideration—as the *Leeds Times* was strongly opposed by a new paper, the *Northern Star*, the organ of the Chartists or extreme Radicals—it was thought necessary to appoint as editor a gentleman of great newspaper experience, one who had recently been editor of the *True Sun*, a Mr Charles Hooton. He was certainly a most accomplished man, an able writer, the author of the *Adventures of Bilberry Thurland*, *Colin Clink*, and other clever works of fiction. I could not complain of this, and I accord-

ingly altogether gave up the prospect. Something else would, without doubt, turn up.

In the meantime I arranged for the collection of my accounts, sold off my stock of drugs, and prepared to leave Haddington. I did so in May 1838. My intention was to proceed to Leyden or Heidelberg, and take the degree of M.D.; and, besides, to learn the German language and improve my knowledge of French. With that view I took leave of my old town, and set out for Hull by sea, accompanied with testimonials—from the Rev. Mr Hogg, my revered minister; Mr Graham, my old teacher; Dr Burton, my attached friend; Provost Lea, my neighbour and fellow-violoncello player, and many more dear friends and acquaintances.

Dr Burton truly said that, “in a limited and not increasing population, under the professional care of old-established practitioners, the opportunities for a young medical man, however talented, to display his skill and attainments, are so few that they do not merit a sacrifice of the time necessary for the trial; and I believe you have done wisely in the step you have taken, and that you deserve to succeed, and will succeed, wherever you settle.” I may add that Dr Carstairs had already left North Berwick, and had settled at Sheffield, where he was doing well; that Dr Cruickshank afterwards left Haddington to practise in North Berwick, and eventually in Australia; and that Dr Burton himself shortly after left for Walsall, and entered upon a large practice—thereby reducing the number of practitioners in Haddington to something like the proper average number.

I may add that, before I left Haddington, I was elected a member of the Town Council, and that,

had I waited, I might even have been made a Bailie! But I could not wait any longer. I wanted to make a living; and for that purpose it was necessary for me to look out for some other field of labour.

I left Leith for Hull by steamer about the middle of May 1838. As we passed down the Firth of Forth by the Bass Rock, the gulls and solan geese were screaming more loudly than usual, and wheeling in wild convulsions round the cliffs. A storm was evidently brewing, and by the time we reached St Abb's Head it had come on furiously. It was a very wild night. The winds blew, the rain fell, and the storm raged. The waves swept the deck, and as I was unwilling to go to my sleeping-berth, I went down to the engine-room behind the boilers for warmth. At length, I found it necessary to go to my cabin—and then I felt very ill—the first and only time I have ever been discomfited when at sea.

In the early morning I went on deck. The waves were still surging and the wind blowing furiously. I noticed the captain peering through the mist at some object behind us. What was he looking for? It was for the *Pegasus*, the rival steamer. He feared that she had gone down during the night, for she was not so good a sea boat as the one we were in. But there she was behind us, with her white funnel and red hull, far away in the distance. Only five years after, the *Pegasus* was wrecked on the Fern Islands, and lost nearly all her passengers.

We reached Hull in safety, and after resting there for a few days, I embarked on the *Sea Horse* for Rotterdam, which was reached after a pleasant voyage of twenty-four hours. I took up my lodgings in an English hotel for a few days. After admiring the Boomjees—the quay which extends for about a

mile and a quarter along the river side—and taking a general view of the town, its public buildings, canals, and bridges, I called upon the Rev. Mr Stevens, the Scotch minister, to whom I had a letter of introduction. He received me kindly and gave me much information as to the University of Leyden, which decided me, although I had a letter to Professor Tiedemann of Heidelberg, to go on to Leyden to take my degree. I went thither by the Trekschuyt, on canal boat, then the popular mode of conveyance.

We travelled to Leyden through a rich flat district, past country houses, villages, windmills, gardens, green pastures, and canals spanned by bridges stretching in all directions. Then came the old collegiate city with its tall spires standing black against the setting sun. I was taken by a fellow-passenger to a *logement* in a retired part of the town, where I remained for a few weeks. The family consisted of host and hostess, two sons, and three daughters. They kept a small private hotel, in which I was the only boarder. The father and two of the daughters were very musical; and I greatly enjoyed their performances. I soon felt quite at home, and got to know a great deal about Dutch manners and customs.

In due course of time I submitted myself to an examination by Professor Van der Hoeven, Dean of the Faculty of Medicine, and other gentlemen. It was by no means so thorough as the one at Edinburgh some years before. Being conducted in a sort of dog Latin, the same amount of information could not be educed. It was, however, more costly than I had expected, and nearly emptied my purse. But I had still enough money left after the first examination to enable me to make my proposed walking tour

through Holland and up the Rhine. Leaving my luggage behind me, I shouldered a knapsack containing a change of linen and some books, and left Leyden by the eastern gate on the morning of the 15th of June.

It was a very fine day, bright and sunny. Of all the ways of seeing a country, commend me to the Walk. A staff in hand, and kit on back, and away along the high road, turning into the byeways, if you like ; resting occasionally under the porch of a village hostel ; then on again, hearing the bells tolling far away across the plain ; watching the passing changes of the clouds, and how they cast their purple shadows on the foreground, while through an opening in the skies a stream of bright sunshine illuminates the white sails of a distant windmill, or of the Dutch boats as they work their way among the farmsteads and cattle-fields. This is the true way to see and enjoy a country. To appreciate thoroughly the fresh and healthy and beautiful in Nature, you must walk ; and those only can enjoy the pleasure who are willing to give to the work the requisite amount of physical exercise.*

* I may mention I took copious notes during my residence abroad. I afterwards worked them up into a series of articles which were published in a London Journal. They form enough to make a book ; but they are not worthy of republication.