

MR. GLADSTONE'S COLLEGE DAYS.



THE Grand Old Man was born in Liverpool on the 29th of December, 1809. The house in which he first saw the light of day is still standing, but, owing to the progress and great extension of the city, it has undergone remarkable changes. When the child was but nine years old, his father, Mr. John Gladstone, sought another residence more in accordance with his high and independent position. Early charmed with the quick intelligence of his son, Mr. John Gladstone loved to discuss with him the interesting questions of the day, and tried to impress upon his young mind the necessity of serious thought and reflection, and the utility of arranging his ideas and opinions according to some standard order before expressing them.

Mr. John Gladstone, being too much taken up with the obligations of his calling to discharge the duties of teacher, and convinced that contact with other natures different from his own, would materially help to form the boy to the different characters of men, sent him to Eton at the age of twelve years. He was then, according to the celebrated mineralogist, Sir Roderick Murchison, the prettiest little boy that had ever entered.

Eton, though reputed one of the best classical colleges, was then and is still, notwithstanding the various attacks made upon it, as well as the different reforms it has undergone, a school which, on account of certain peculiarities in its mode of teaching, of its interior regulations, its discipline, &c., brings back to our minds, the idea of the colleges of the middle ages. But, let the description given by Sir Francis Doyle, a condisciple of Mr. Gladstone, suffice "I cannot say," he writes, "that Eton was a good school in a technical point of view; a student could not but learn some Greek and Latin poetry, but for any other kind of study there was no such certainty. The *Pounders* wrote a good deal of Latin verse, taking a certain quantity from Homer and Virgil to help to refine, more or less, their own productions. The result of this system was our

complete liberty, physical liberty for those who preferred it, intellectual for the others. There was a Debating Society held in the house of a Miss Hatton. A good many of the more intelligent students from the different classes, who should have otherwise remained unknown, attended this society. Whigs and Tories formed themselves into bands and disputed with one another on historical or literary subjects as they walked along together; sometimes their debate turned on Shakespeare, Milton or one of the ancient dramatists, and so faithfully did we keep to our work in the society, that I imagine we made more progress outside the school than we did within.

Were it not for the Debating Society, I should have known neither Gladstone, nor my dear friend, Arthur Hallam, nor Lord Elgin, nor Lord Milton, nor Canning, nor a good many others."

Mr. Gladstone, with his store of natural talents, was in his element in that society, whose spirit was essentially politic. As soon as admitted he took the first rank among the debaters, brought a great number of new members with him and gave to the debates an interest and animation which they never had before. So overpowering was his passion for speaking, that the old society was considered insufficient. He then formed a second more in accordance with his tastes, and gave it the name *Weg*, to correspond with the three principal letters of his name,—William Ewart Gladstone. For more than sixty years the *Weg* society has continued to flourish and to be, as it were, the nursery of eloquence that can with difficulty be surpassed. But the society, though formed to his own model, was not sufficient for the display of his abilities, it was necessary to find another means to give full vent to his overflowing mind. He became first director of *The Miscellanies of Eton*, and this publication enjoyed, under his able and energetic direction, at least one year of brilliant existence. The numbers collected form two volumes, certain chapters of which can still be read with pleasure. The first of these volumes contains thirteen, the second seventeen articles by Mr. Gladstone. Naturally