

to abuse a quality he admired so intensely. He took pen and wrote *con brio*, yet judgmentally, his ideas. . . . Without ambition as a motive power, he contended, there would be no excellence, nothing but a dead level of mediocrity. . . . Further, he argued that the sole alternative of ambition would be a chaotic stagnation of all the mental faculties; and, in brief, his peroration was the warmest eulogium of the very quality which the other candidates had been gibbeting as the meanest of vices."

This original conduct of Reade's elicited this approving comment from one of the tutors: "Good heavens, here is a boy who gives us his own ideas instead of other people's!" Dr. Routh, the President of the college, endorsed the favourable verdict of his subordinate, and Charles Reade became Demy of Magdalen. No more characteristic anecdote could be told of Charles Reade. He was honest and straightforward, even Quixotic at times, but sincere always.

His undergraduate life was uneventful enough, and his whole academic career irksome to him. He was successively Demy, Fellow, Dean, and Vice-President of his college—Magdalen, but took no very active part in college life, except upon the question of the conversion of the Fellows into stipendiaries, at fixed salaries. Reade showed that this move would render the Fellows no longer "the masters in their own house, and that the control of their vast estates would virtually pass from them."

He interested himself in the election of the Rev. Mr. Bulley, as successor to that "poor human fossil," Dr. Routh, in the Presidency of Magdalen College, and when the rapacious University Commissioners attacked the revenues of the college, with a view to its reorganization, Charles Reade stepped into the breach and did much to undo the mischief done by the stupidity and cupidity of the President and Fellows. By his "Rupertlike impetuosity," he carried all opposition before him, and saved his college at a most critical period of her history.

Charles Reade's acquaintanceship with Laura Seymour was contemporaneous with the beginning of his serious career as an author and a man of letters. His biographer tells us that "like almost every author who has attained celebrity, he began by sowing a large crop of literary wild oats. He believed himself to be a dramatist born, and at the outset his thoughts focussed themselves entirely upon the stage." This infatuation, and one can scarcely call it by another name, remained always present with him, and upon his tombstone he wished to have written: "Charles Reade, Dramatist, Novelist, Journalist," placing his favourite occupation in the first place. He was always true to his coy and oftentimes unresponsive mistress, and wooed her with an ardour worthy of a better reward than was vouchsafed him. The chief, the dominating trait of his whole character is well summed up in the remark: "Charles Reade thirsted not so much for gold as for fame; no man suffered less from the *auri sacra fames*; none was less mercenary." And this seems strange when it is considered that at the time Charles Reade first essayed authorship, a good novel commanded a high price, and he was never well off in this world's goods, being extravagant and careless in money matters—whereas there was little or no encouragement held out for a good play, and yet it is not strange when one remembers who and what Charles Reade was.

Mrs. Seymour was a member of Mr. Buckstone's Haymarket Company, and if we are to believe Mr. Compton Reade, "never an actress of the very highest rank; but she was magnanimous and appreciative, and, like many women of her calibre, could recognize the difference between a real and a sham gentleman." The relationship between Charles Reade and Mrs. Seymour is paralleled in that which existed between Mr. Lewes and George Eliot. It was something more than a mere literary partnership, and as his biographer, upon the testimony of Mr. Winwood Reade, an avowed atheist, and a man who, on philosophic grounds, despised morality, clearly and unequivocally acquits Charles Reade and Mrs. Seymour of anything even savouring of a *liaison*, or a morganatic marriage, we can only say, with him, and believing in the honesty and sincerity of Charles Reade: "*Honi soit qui mal y pense!*" This friendship was a lasting one, and was the making of

Reade. Laura Seymour was indeed "the architect of his fortune, if not of his reputation."

"Peg Woffington," the novel, and "Masks and Faces," the drama, were deemed by Charles Reade the "first fruits" of his genius, and are incomparably the best work done by him as a novelist and as a dramatist. Upon them both he lavished his tenderest care, his most loving elaboration; and it is safe to affirm that for graphic force, brilliancy of execution, and sustained power "Peg Woffington" stands unrivalled in the list of English novels; while "Masks and Faces" will always rank deservedly high, to use the words of Mr. Arnold Taylor, "one of the very best finished comedies of modern times." From the pecuniary result of the sales of his next novel, "Christie Johnstone," we are certainly justified in regarding it only as a *success d'estime*, as Compton Reade phrases it. The next novel, "It is Never too Late to Mend," was instantly and enthusiastically recognized by the public as a masterpiece. Its publication must be regarded as a veritable victory for Charles Reade. He had at last caught the public ear, at last had achieved what he was thirsting for—fame. Its *morale* was thus eloquently stated by Serjeant Cox, the editor of *The Critic*:—

"It is a principle-novel, aimed against a system, and that system one of the most crying evils which affect humanity; it attacks that code of discipline which converts error into crime, crime into madness; which makes pickpockets burglars, and burglars murderers; which, under the pretence of philanthropy, inflicts tortures beside which the most cruel refinements of the Inquisition were as gentle mercies; which treats the criminal as a machine to be systematized, and not as a soul to be saved; it is levelled at the solitary, separate and silent system of treating criminals."

Such a work, as, indeed, were most of the novels of Charles Reade, was born of his boundless sympathies, his exceeding love of truth and justice, and his undying hatred of their opposites. Nearly all his novels were what are called "principle novels"—that is, they were aimed at the great social abuses of the day; and it is not too much to say that to these novels is attributable much of the change which came over public opinion with reference to them. Notable in this respect are "Hard Cash," directed against private asylums, and "Put Yourself in His Place," which deals with trades-unionism, its terrorism, and the outrages incident thereto. It is not necessary to enumerate further his literary works; their names and purpose are well known. Suffice it to say that in all of them there is that high literary, artistic, and noble sincerity so characteristic of all Charles Reade's writings. He battled long and single handed against pride, prejudice, and ignorance, and it is his highest praise to say that he overcame them all by the honesty of his purpose, the pertinacity of his will power, and by the sheer force of his genius.

Charles Reade's religious principles are well expressed and summed up in the touching epitaph which he wrote for himself, and with which we shall close this sketch of his life and work:

HERE LIES,

BY THE SIDE OF HIS BELOVED FRIEND,

THE MORTAL REMAINS OF

CHARLES READE

DRAMATIST, NOVELIST, JOURNALIST.

His last words to mankind are on this stone:

"I hope for a resurrection—not from any power in nature, but from the will of the Lord God Omnipotent, who made nature and me. He created man out of nothing, which nature could not. He can restore man from the dust, which nature cannot.

"And I hope for holiness and happiness in a future life—not for anything I have said or done in this body, but from the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ.

"He has promised His intercession to all who seek it, and He will not break His word; that intercession once granted cannot be rejected; for He is God, and His merits infinite; a man's sins are but human and finite.

"Him that cometh unto Me, I will in nowise cast out.' 'If any man sin we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the Righteous, and He is the propitiation for our sins.' Amen."

F. W. P.