

THE ROCKWOOD REVIEW

GRANDFATHER'S CORNER.

MY SCHOOL DAYS.

In these times of rapid and frequent changes, nothing is more noticeable, even in America, than the increased and increasing opportunities for the education of the people. In England, which for a century was behind Scotland, in its facilities for popular intellectual training, the strides made during the past generation have been enormous, even though much remains to be done. Hodge, in his school standard, is not yet abreast of Sandie, or his cousins Jonathan and Canuck, although he is surely getting there. In my boyhood's days, free or cheap public schools were scarce, and probably nine out of ten of school-going age who sought the services of the school-master, were indebted to private tuition for their stock of early knowledge. As a result, the children of the poor remained untaught, and not until recently have reforms been effected which tend to improve the condition of the workingman's son and daughter. My own experience affords a fair average of the instruction given to the middle class, and it may not be amiss to devote a few pages to telling what the character of such education was.

I was born before the passage of the Reform Bill which ushered in so many municipal improvements, and an Infant School had not found its way to the sleepy old Roman, Saxon, Mediaeval City which was my native place, although it arrived before I had doffed my first pinafore. A Grammar School, endowed in Catholic days, and conducted on ancient lines, and exclusive in its character, was kept open for the benefit of a chosen few. A Blue-coat School, or Christ's Hospital, founded by private benevolence in 1602, for twelve children, and ultimately, by further bequests, finding

accommodation for about one hundred scholars, was entered only through the door of official patronage. A National School, taught on the Lancaster or monitorial system, in a rather ineffective manner, under the control of State Church authorities, was the only approach to an institution open to the public, and extended its benefits to a limited number of a sect. Attendance on the week-days involved further attendance at the parish church on Sundays. The Wesleyans Methodists and Independents, in after years, attempted the formation of similar day-schools, and a Mechanics Institute established night-classes, while the Cathedral authorities gave secular education to a dozen or so of young choirister boys. And that exhausted the list of educational facilities of a public character. Private schools, of variable usefulness, necessarily did the work of instruction, and they were of all sorts and conditions, like the men and women who taught them.

I can vividly remember my first school, held in the living room of a remarkably ancient lady, whose recollections of infancy must have gone back to the days of Prince Charlie, and in whose face the lines of extreme old age had destroyed all traces of early beauty. A dozen very little folks,—fit subjects for a Kinder-garten, were ranged on stools in front of a smouldering fire even in summer days, and at their backs stood a mangle, a constant source of mystery and wonderment to the students. For body and soul of old Mrs. Holmes were kept together by the efforts of her buxom maiden daughter, of fifty at least, who took in washing and ironing, and briskly turned the mangle to the lively strain "I'd be a Butterfly." The washtub was in an outer apartment, and we had no very intimate acquaintance with it, but that mangle lives in the memory, and a