

medium of such as were confessedly either Jews or infidels!

I have said that Disraeli was a Spanish Jew. He was, however, like his father before him, born in England; whither his grandfather, a stripling of eighteen, came in 1748 to seek his fortune. The family, driven from Spain by the Inquisition, had been settled for several generations in Venice; where they assumed the cognomen of D'Israeli,—a name at once significant and unique. But they never forgot their pedigree and prestige; and were proud of their Castilian progenitors. Indeed, Disraeli, who plumed himself on his heraldic lore, when he came to boast a coat of arms, used the tower of Castile as his crest, and quartered it upon his shield.

His genealogy, too, accounts for the strange affection formed for him by Mrs. Brydges Willyams, a wealthy widow of Cornwall, who subsequently bequeathed him the whole of her large fortune. She was a Jewess, of Spanish origin, and professed to trace some connection between her house and his own. For twelve years this eccentric old lady lavished her gifts upon him; and, at her death, she was by her own express desire interred at Hughenden, near the spot where Disraeli himself was to lie. He had gratified her by quartering her coat with the bearings of an ancient Spanish family from which she claimed descent, using the help of ambassadors and ministers, and ransacking the private cabinet of the Queen of Spain, for that purpose.

During that interesting period of a man's life usually referred to as his salad days, when most men are flaunting their chlorophyll in the face of an astonished world, Disraeli was settling down to hard work in the realm of letters. He came honestly by his preference.

For it is steadily maintained that certain gifts and qualities—wooden legs included—run in the blood; and Disraeli's father was a litterateur. Isaac Disraeli's books are still upon the market, and familiar to all of us. He simply lived in his library, scarcely leaving it except to "saunter in abstraction upon a terrace, muse over a chapter, or coin a sentence."

Of the son it is said that boyish pursuits and amusements had no interest for him. "He pondered over the music of language, studied the cultivation of sweet sounds, and constructed elaborate sentences in lonely walks." This employment became a passion with him; and in later days he found infinite pleasure in the composition of those rapier-like, incisive paragraphs, with which he was wont to torture his opponents in the House of Commons.

Disraeli did not enjoy the educational advantages which are usually associated with those who have risen to the high positions which he filled. He knew nothing of life in the great schools or at the university. Not that his father was unable or unwilling to send him thither. The truth is, his nationality was against him. For although, when Disraeli was nearly thirteen years of age, the whole family had been received into the Established Church, they were still pure-blooded Jews, and English prejudice in school and college was strong, if not intolerable.

The boy attended for a while a private school, and then a Unitarian institution at Walthamstow, where, however, his stay was of short duration. Soon, at home with his father, he was working hard twelve hours a day, apparently developing into a careless and conceited fop, but really consumed with a mighty ambition to make a great man of himself.