

Yes, worth all the hardships through which we had passed. And yet we had encountered a good many, though my personal recollection of them is somewhat of the faintest, and my information with respect to them is mainly derived from my mother's lips. Our story, up to the time of our arrival at Johnson's Ford, must be told sooner or later; and I may as well tell it in this place. It shall, however, have a chapter to itself. A chapter which must on no account be skipped by any reader who cares to understand the sequel.

CHAPTER III. PARENTAL MEMOIRS.

My father belonged to a family resident in the West Riding of Yorkshire, where his ancestors settled I know not how many generations ago. At any rate, my several-times-great-grandfather lived upon and owned the estate whereon the head of the family at present resides as long ago as the time of Oliver Cromwell. It is recorded in the domestic annals that the Lord-General of the Armies of the Commonwealth quartered himself and seventeen of his psalm-singing pikemen at Broxborough Hall, the ancestral seat of the Wilfords, only three days before the commencement of the siege of Pontefract Castle. It is further recorded that during the brief occupation of the mansion by those image-breaking apostles upon that occasion, one of their number, by name Increase-in-the-Sincere-Milk-of-the-Word, bestowed a rude buffet upon the right cheek of one of the family servitors because the discourse of the latter was unsavoury in the nostrils of those strait-laced but valiant disputants. As to whether the servitor obeyed the Scriptural injunction, and turned his other cheek to the smiter, history and tradition are alike silent. The head of the family, being a staunch royalist, was conveniently absent at the time. But with such remote genealogy this story has no concern; and I only mention the foregoing circumstances in order that it may be understood that our race, on the paternal side at least, is not one of yesterday. It may be all very true, as the laureate sings, that

"From yon blue heavens above us bent
The grand old gardener and his wife
Smile at the claims of long descent."

but it is at least equally certain that many very worthy members of the human family, contemplating the matter from a merely terrestrial point of view, are not at all disposed to emulate the example of our first parents in this particular. The Wilford family is one that could "look back" if it were so minded. Whether the retrospection would be worth the trouble is another question, into which it is unnecessary to enter.

To be sure, I might, if so disposed, carry my family chronicle ever so much farther back than the seventeenth century. I might give some interesting particulars of the career of that doughty Regynaulde de Wylfourde who fought under the Conqueror, and created such havoc among the Saxon ranks at Hastings. But I refrain; more especially as I have not the slightest reason for supposing that the aforesaid Regynaulde ever fought at Hastings at all. Indeed, I may have my private doubts as to whether he ever existed. If he did, and if he really took any part in that memorable conflict, the probability is in favour of his having fought under Harold; for his surname is pure Saxon, and was formerly written "Wilfrid." I am equally reticent about Hugo de Wyldefourde, who turned traitor to John Lack-land, and went over to Philip Augustus, who had him beheaded at Angiers; and—and, in short, the less said about that irreclaimable blackguard the better for the credit of his descendants. Neither will I occupy the reader's time and my own by recounting the achievements of that apocryphal Sir Marmaduke de Williforde, who was (or was not) knighted by Henry the Seventh for gallant services at Bosworth Field, and who was (or was not) afterwards deprived of his knighthood, and compelled to seek safety in Flanders, in consequence of his real or imaginary co-operation with Lambert Simnel. To speak truth, I have ever looked upon this Sir Marmaduke, his dignities and indignities, with a suspicious eye. As for that other ancestor of ours, who is alleged to have stood so high in the favour of the Virgin Queen as to have aroused the jealousy of Leicester, and who only missed been raised by his royal mistress to the peerage through the foul machinations of that nobleman, I have

about as much faith in him as I have in Bevis of Hampton. It would be folly for the present representative of the family to deny, after the evidence adduced in the leading case of *Brittredge vs. Wilford* (temp. Geo. II.) that the half-length portrait in the picture-gallery at Broxborough Hall, professing to represent the proud and fashionable Beau Wilford of Queen Anne's reign—I say, it will not be denied that this portrait was purchased from Isaac Levison, a Wardour-Street Israelite, for the inconsiderable sum of four guineas, and that it no more represents a member of our family than it represents Judas Iscariot. And in alluding to this somewhat delicate subject, should I be accused of running in the teeth of that expressive old Scottish proverb which declares that bird to be an ill one that fouls its ain nest, my answer must be that the facts of that case are matter of record, and accessible to any one who cares to become acquainted with them.

But enough of the traditions of bygone centuries, wherein a grain of truth lies embedded in a pound of fable: a half-penny worth of bread to an intolerable quantity of sack. Let us come down to a period comparatively recent, where we can lay hold of something tangible.

My father was a younger—or, to speak with greater precision, a youngest—son; and as his three brothers all enjoyed boisterous health, there was apparently no chance of his succeeding to the paternal acres. Under these circumstances, it was to be expected, as a matter of course, that he would devote his energies to the church, the bar, or the army. To none of these professions, however, did my father seriously incline. He chose rather to dally round the ancestral domain; riding, shooting, hunting, fishing, and losing his time generally; until one day, to his huge astonishment, he found that he was twenty years old. My grandfather, by all accounts, must have been a mere selfish bookworm, who cared for nothing but his library and his dinner, and left his children to bring themselves up as best they might, could, would, or should. He was a widower, his wife having died when my father was only a few months old. After her death, Squire Wilford repudiated the claims of society, and shut himself up with his books; from which, it is to be hoped, he derived a vast amount of consolation. He always dined alone, and in his library. He consequently saw little of his family, and apparently gave himself no concern about them.

On his twentieth birthday, my father was summoned to the Sublime Presence. I have heard the interview described so often that it almost seems as though I must have been present at it myself.

"Robert," began Paterfamilias; "I have sent for you in order that we may have a little serious talk together. Are you aware that to-day you are twenty years old?"

"I had not thought of the circumstance, Sir"; was the reply—"but I now remember that this is my birthday—the nineteenth of November."

"Exactly. I am afraid, my boy, that I have not quite done my duty by you of late, and have left you too much to follow your own devices. There must be an end to this, and at once. It is high time for you to think of a profession. By the way, what progress has been made with your education?"

My father admitted that he had not bestowed much attention upon the cultivation of his intellectual forces, and that his educational acquirements did not extend far beyond the three R's.

"And how do you propose to make a living for yourself, Sir? I suppose you are aware that you cannot go on in this way forever?"

My father had not looked at the matter in that light, but promised to think it over.

"Do so, Sir. And, mark me: think to some purpose. Your brothers are all fitting themselves to discharge their respective duties in life, and it is time for you to make a beginning. Come to me at the same hour this day week; by which time I shall expect you to have made up your mind what you are going to do with your life. Rycrofts will tell you how much I can do for you. Now, leave me, and see that you have your answer ready at the appointed time."

Mr. Rycrofts was the steward.

Robert Wilford went out from the presence of his father; and instead of seeking an audience with Rycrofts, had his horse saddled, and rode straight to the "Red Lion," at Barnsley. Having