

SIR HENRY FAWCETT.*

THE BLIND POSTMASTER OF ENGLAND.

I.



HENRY FAWCETT was born at Salisbury, August 26th, 1833. His father, William Fawcett, a draper, was a man of great vigour of body, genial temperament, a good political speaker, and became Mayor of Salisbury. His mother, Mary Cooper, the daughter of a solicitor, was a woman of strong common-sense, deeply interested in politics, and an ardent reformer.

The boy, Henry, active, enthusiastic, and merry, was placed at a small dame-school. That he did not help the quiet and order of it is manifest from a remark made by him to his mother: "Mrs. Harris says that if we go on, we shall kill her, and we do go on, and yet she does not die!"

At the age of eight the boy was sent to the school of Mr. Sopp, at Alderbury, five miles from Salisbury. He was not especially pleased, as his letters home show. He writes, "I have begun 'Ovid.' I hate it. . . . This is a beastly school—milk and water, no milk; bread and butter, no butter."

At fourteen he entered Queen-

wood College. Here the lad became much interested in science. A composition which he wrote on "steam" so pleased the father, that he promised to give Henry a sovereign. It was the first thing which convinced Mr. Fawcett that there was "something in the boy." He preferred study to boyish sports, and, in spite of prohibitions, would desert the playground to steal into a copse with his books.

"In an old chalk-pit, he would gesticulate as he recited, till passing labourers had doubts as to his sanity. Even at this time, when the boys talked of their future lives, he always declared that he meant to be a member of Parliament—an avowal they received by 'roars of laughter.'"

The Dean of Salisbury, Dr. Hamilton, was consulted as to the future of this lad, who "meant to go to Parliament." Upon seeing Henry's mathematical papers, the Dean said at once that he ought to go to Cambridge University.

As the father was not a rich man, Henry decided upon that college which gave the largest fellowships. He had a certain rustic air, in strong contrast to that of the young Pendennises who might stroll along the bank to make a book upon the next boat-race. He rather resembled some of the athletic figures who may be seen at the side of a north-country wrestling ring."

Though fond of sports, "He never," says his classmate, Stephen, "condescended to gambling. The moral standard of Cambridge was, in certain respects, far from elevated; but Fawcett, though no ascetic, was in all senses perfectly blameless in his life."

Fond of mathematics himself,

* The life-story of a great statesman who, in spite of his blindness, conquered his way to the very first rank in the British Ministry; who devoted his energies to the welfare of the poor, the friendless and oppressed; and especially to those suffering the same disabilities as himself—a man who in spite of his infirmities lived an active, uncomplaining, nay, joyous existence, is well worth telling. We are dependent for the facts here given chiefly to the admirable sketch by Sarah Knowles Bolton.—Ed.