

Reminiscences of Sir Richard Burton.

BY HIS NIECE, GEORGIANA M. STISTED.

ONE of the earliest pictures in my memory is of a travelling carriage crossing snow-covered Alps. A carriage containing my mother and uncle, sister and self, an English maid, and a romantic but surly Asiatic, named Allahdad.

Richard Burton, then a handsome man hardly thirty, tall and broad-shouldered, was oftener outside the carriage than in it, as the noise made by his two small nieces rendered pedestrian exercise, even in the snow, an agreeable and almost necessary variety. Very good-humouredly, however, did he bear the uproar, now and then giving us bits of snow to taste which we hoped might be sugar.

He had just returned invalided from India, and we were all on our way to England for a cousin's wedding. He wished also to be near London, as he was bringing home the fruits of seven years study and travel in Sind, Goa, and the Neilgherries. Seven years' of hardest work, for, joining the Indian army at twenty-one, he learnt eleven languages, did yeoman's service in the Sind Canal Survey, travelled in disguise amongst the wild tribes of the hills and plains, strained every power to such a degree, that had it not been for the nursing of surly Allahdad on board ship, he would never have come back alive. On arriving in England he was so delighted at the prospect of seeing his relations again, that he knocked up his aunt's household in London in the middle of the night, and then in a day or two travelled post haste to Pisa to greet his parents and sister.

We spent twelve months partly at Dover, partly at Leamington; then migrated to Boulogne. There he corrected and published, 'Sind, or the Unhappy Valley,' 'Goa and the Blue Mountains, and, 'Falconry in the Valley of the Indus.' We were a large party, as his father and mother, Col. and Mrs. J. Netterville Burton, lived with us most of the time. Naturally they were very

proud of their clever son, and wanted to see as much of him as possible.

And here I must correct a mistake made more than once in notices of his life. These parents are frequently represented as a pair of Low Church bigots who wished to force Richard into an unsuitable profession, *i.e.* the Church. On the contrary, moderate, old-fashioned Church people, they desired he should become a clergyman only because he seemed too clever a lad for a soldier. Soldiers in those days were not the learned persons they are at present. Besides, Col. Burton had lost his own health campaigning, and Richard when a boy showed few signs of the marvellous physical strength of later years. As regards the established creeds, he then believed as much as most lads, and the accounts of wildness and turbulence have been absurdly exaggerated. However, it was fortunate the parents' well-meant project came to nothing; for when about three-and-twenty he became a Deist, and although, as his friend Cameron truly says, no man was ever more qualified to write a critical comparison of the religions of the world, he never altered his views again.

A-propos of health, a curious difference between him and his father may be mentioned. The latter would hardly permit a doctor to come near him, and he had such a horror of drugs that he preferred suffering all the agonies of asthma to burning a little nitre-paper. Richard, incredulous as he was on most debatable points, always kept a warm corner for the physician, and even allowed himself to be dosed with marvellous docility. Perhaps a result of a sanguine disposition. The father and mother were invalids, but Richard and his sister entered into Boulogne society.

At Boulogne he first saw his future wife, then a girl in her early teens. He was not to become a Benedict yet awhile, but twice between twenty and thirty he thought of marrying. On each occasion pecuniary difficulties arose. Until his father's death in 1857 he had only a moderate allowance besides his pay; he seemed doomed to life-long exile in India, and his prospects of advancement did not appear so bright to anxious relatives as to his sanguine Irish self. All his attachments were to pretty or handsome women, ugly ones he wouldn't look at; with him love of the beautiful almost took the place of religion.

The second marriage project having come to nought, the grand idea of a pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina gained full possession of his mind. Gradually it matured, preparations were made, and it was set on foot. Every one interested in his life knows how he left London as a Persian, and travelled to Southampton with a friend, Captain Grindlay acting as interpreter. How he lived at

Cairo as a Dervish until the departure of the pilgrims; and performed the pilgrimage as a genuine Moslem.

There was terrible woe in the family circle when he went away. Unlike many clever men, he was pleasant at home, always occupied and marvellously sweet-tempered about trifles. My mother says the only time she ever saw him really angry during the years they spent together at Boulogne, was when he found one of his nieces straying near the edge of the quay, which, in common with most places of the kind abroad, lacked a railing. Then he was so brave when ill. Like Sir Walter Scott, a favourite hero of his, he allowed no amount of pain to interfere with his work. Even as a mere boy only next day was it known that he had suffered from toothache—by the swelling of his face. In fact he was too brave; for those around him, accustomed to less stoical invalids, were sometimes deceived by such extraordinary fortitude. Mumps, raging neuralgia, and an internal inflammation severally attacked him at Boulogne. During the last he did incautiously remark one day, "If this doesn't get better, before night I shall be an angel;" and at once inexpressible consternation reigned around.

The pilgrimage over, he went to Egypt, thence to Bombay. There he organised his expedition into Somali-Land, which terminated disastrously. When we saw him again, his handsome face was scarred by the lance which had transfixed his jaw and palate. Later on he received a wound on the left cheek which was still more noticeable. These scars marred his good looks very little, and for many years, in spite of fevers by the score, and exposure to climate such as people read of, but seldom experience, he remained a strikingly handsome man, brown-haired, bright-eyed, upright, the living image of that magnificent portrait by Sir Frederick Leighton. Whoever has seen that portrait has seen Richard Burton. Another picture of him, taken with his sister, painted at Boulogne by Jacquand, a French historical painter of some eminence, hangs in our dining-room. He wears the uniform of the East India Company's Service (infantry), and although never a striking likeness, it gives some idea of him as a young man of twenty-nine.

He paid us a flying visit before his expedition into Equatorial Africa—1856-9, when he discovered Lake Tanganyika; and again before setting out for the United States in 1860, to visit Great Salt Lake City, and collect materials for his book on the Mormons, 'The City of the Saints.' His longest sojourn with us was during the summer of 1859, when he joined us at Dover. His father and mother were dead, but his brother-in-law, the late

Lieut.-General Sir Henry Stisted, had just returned to England to recruit after the Mutiny; and we all spent several months together at that war-like little watering-place.

We did our best to cheer him up, for all that summer he seemed ailing and despondent. In his family the expression, "an unlucky Burton," is proverbial, and certainly at times his ill-luck was almost inveterate enough to terminate his career. Even a good thing would come to him like a scorpion, with a sting in its tail. He had just discovered Lake Tanganyika, but then ensued all the trouble and disappointment about Speke: and he was too affectionate and sensitive a man not to take such a grievous annoyance to heart. Later on, evil fate dealt him a worse blow. Nineteen years' service in the Indian army was swept away in 1861 on his accepting the Consulate of Fernando Po. Perhaps he had not made sufficient enquiries as to the rules of the Staff Corps at that particular date, perhaps he was intentionally misinformed, for he had many enemies, fearfully bitter ones they were too; anyhow, on accepting the consulate he heard that all chance of rising in the army was gone for ever. And with his health threatening to break up, the prospect of Fernando Po, and only Fernando Po, was not exactly exhilarating.

In January, 1861, he married handsome, fascinating Isabel Arundell. A great surprise to us, as he had become such an inveterate traveller that we began to think of him as a confirmed bachelor. It is generally known there were some difficulties in the way of this marriage. Mrs. Arundell, a very strict Romanist, objected to a Protestant son-in-law; there was no superabundance of ways and means, for though he made large sums by his writings later, at that time he seldom received more than three hundred pounds for a book; and the ghastly African consulate was not a suitable residence for an Englishwoman. But Isabel very wisely allowed none of these obstacles to prevent her from marrying the man of her choice, and she never had reason to regret it, a better husband never lived. They both stayed with us at Dovercourt in Essex almost immediately after their marriage, spending the rest of the winter and spring between that place and London. Their time together was short, as he was soon obliged to leave for Africa, and he knew the vile climate too well to take his wife with him. However, there were occasional meetings at Madeira and Teneriffe: once he came for a few months to London on leave; and as soon as he obtained a healthier post, that of Santos, his wife joined him, and was never separated from him for any length of time afterwards.

During the four years he held the consulship of Fernando Po,

he marched up to Abeokuta, ascended the Cameroon Mountains, explored the Yellalah Rapids of the Congo River, and passed three months at Agbome as British Commissioner with presents from Her Majesty to the King of Dahomey. The published records of these explorations are: 'Abeokuta and the Cameroon Mountains,' 'Wanderings in West Africa,' 'A Mission to Gelele, King of Dahomey,' and 'Essay on the Nile Basin.'

At Santos he thoroughly explored his own province, the gold mines and diamond diggings of Minas Geraes, and canoed down the river São Francisco 1500 miles, an adventure described in 'The Highlands of Brazil.' He visited the Argentine Republic, and the rivers Plata, Parana and Paraguay; then crossed the Pampas and the Andes to Chili and Peru, and visited the Pacific coast, returning by the Straits of Magellan, Buenos Ayres, and Rio de Janeiro to London. All this in about four years!

Then followed his happiest days in later life, the short time spent at Damascus. The appointment (Lord Derby's) thoroughly suited him. Climate, occupation, mode of living, were all just what he loved best. For once he was in his right place, and his big brain had full and ample scope for work. There was not time enough for such prodigies of travel as those performed from other consulates, but he explored all the unknown parts of Syria, and what with the multifarious duties of his post, and his indefatigable pen, not a day was idle. Strong, brave man though he was, the shock of his sudden recall told upon him cruelly. I never saw him, even during his last years when his health had all but given way, so "down." He came straight home to us at Norwood in wretched spirits, and as he could not sleep, sat up until the small hours of the morning with my father smoking. Tragedy was dashed with comedy; one night a terrible uproar arose. The dining-room windows had been left open, the candles alight, and the pug asleep under the table, forgotten. A policeman, seeing the windows unclosed, knocked incessantly at the street door, the pug awoke and barked himself hoarse, and every one clattered out of his or her bedroom to ascertain the cause of the disturbance. My uncle had quite forgotten that in quiet English households servants retire to rest before 3 A.M.

We saw too in another way how shaken his nerves were by the loss of his appointment. He had always been very fond of tea, which he insisted on having of first-rate quality, not twice drunk, as he described cheap compounds. An ordinary breakfast-cup did not suffice, he preferred the slop-basin. But shortly after his arrival he gave up tea and took cocoa. The habit, however, was resumed later, slop-basin and all.

Sensitive though he was, he possessed that enviable common-sense, so very uncommon, by the way, which enables us to speedily reconcile ourselves to the inevitable. His cherished appointment was lost, irretrievably lost, so he turned his thoughts elsewhere. After a few months in London he joined us in Edinburgh *en route* for Iceland. We soon ascertained, much to our satisfaction, that the Damascus trouble had skinned over, he had quite recovered his health and seemed thoroughly able to enjoy himself. He liked the town, he liked the bracing air, and he liked the people. The 93rd Highlanders stationed at the castle, entertained with true Scotch hospitality; and he met at our house Lord and Lady Perth, General Sir John and Lady Elizabeth Douglas, the Macphersons of Cluny, and other well-known families then in Edinburgh. Lord Airlie was High Commissioner that year, and we all went together to the receptions at Holyrood. Orders and uniforms are donned on these occasions, and a very gay, picturesque scene the old palace presented, the men brightened up for once with a dash of colour; but Richard Burton, in those days, had no decoration whatever. It may be remembered the K.C.M.G. was given him within only four years of his death.

We enjoyed this Edinburgh visit of his just as much as he did, but it seemed all too short. My father and a few friends saw him off early in June from the quay at Granton. He had always been very anxious to go to Iceland, and this was the first pleasurable excitement in the travelling line since the Damascus worry. Most men would have thought of little else, and I think nothing could show better what a great loving heart he had than that the saying good-bye for what promised to be but a short absence, was positively painful to him. Indeed, as a rule, he did his very best to avoid good-byes; and when unavoidable, I have often seen tears in his eyes and felt his hands turn stone cold.

The trip to Iceland proved pleasant and prosperous; then came the Trieste appointment, which he held to the day of his death. Though unsuitable in many respects, it must be allowed the duties were light, the pay was good, and the leave unlimited. To a more responsible post he would have been chained, as it were, but from Trieste he could travel to his heart's content. Of course he often wearied of the commonplace town, and its disagreeable climate; and had he not been able to pass many months wandering amidst pleasanter scenes, would have suffered even more than he did. A wonderful amount of travel and literary work was crowded into the twenty years he held this consulate. Every spot of ground within a hundred miles of his new home having been explored, he went again to India in 1875, bringing out 'Sind Revisited' as a

result; he commanded two expeditions to Midian; returned to his old diggings, as he expressed it, on the West Coast of Africa in company with Commander Cameron, besides taking short trips to Suez, Tangier, many to England. He published several fresh volumes of travels, translations of all the works of Camoens, and last of all, what is called his monumental work, the 'Arabian Nights.' This last brought in quite a little fortune, twelve thousand pounds, including the sum received for the supplemental volumes.

Throughout life he kept up a regular correspondence with his sister, whom he tenderly loved, and who much resembles him. A fortnight seldom passed without a letter in his quaint little handwriting, which often required our joint efforts to decipher. Frequently one would contain some terse remark which became a household saying for months afterwards. "What fools think others don't," for example; or writing about people with very large self-esteem,—“People much to be envied,—pity they are such beasts;” again *à-propos* of those who receive kicks and cuffs from the world without resenting them, “a good plan, if you can but follow it.” He always wrote fully about himself and his plans, but invariably noticed any little piece of family or society news we had told him, however insignificant it might have been. The last letter was written within a few days of his death, rejoicing in improved health, and anticipating his return in the spring.

Each time he came to England we saw him frequently. When we lived at Sydenham he often went with us to the Crystal Palace. We used to joke on these occasions, declaring he explored the palace and grounds as thoroughly as Harar or Lake Tanganyika; and generally we had to divide into two parties, one resting while the other accompanied him. Later, when we moved to Folkestone, that place received its share of attention. Cæsar's Hill, the Warren, and Sandgate, &c., all were carefully reconnoitred. In short he seemed unable to rest until he had walked or driven all over a new place and its environs.

The fine bracing air of Folkestone always revived him, and he invariably left us looking and feeling better. Most devoted care was taken of his health by both wife and doctor; and if he could only have lived in really pure air, done less work, and slept more, ten years might have been added to his existence. We tried hard to persuade him to spend the winter with us instead of going on to Cannes the year of the Riviera earthquakes. Gipsy-like, he abhorred the idea of tying himself down for any length of time. So long as it was possible even to be carried in and out of trains

and steamers, travel he would ; and he had only just returned from the fatiguing trip to Malogia, to rest a few weeks before starting for Greece, when one night he died suddenly, quite worn out. The brave heart so unmercifully tried could literally beat no longer. And no doubt he knew what was best for himself. Better to die in full possession of his glorious faculties, able to the last to work with those who lead the van of human progress, than to husband his remaining strength for all the horrors of old age. We

“Who lack the light that on earth was he,
Mourn.”

But for him the quick, painless death in the zenith of his matchless genius was surely well.
