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Stoker Wilde Christie Maupassant Haggard Chesterton Molière Eliot Grimm
Garnett Engels Schiller Byron Maupassant Schiller
Goethe Hawthorne Smith Kafka
Cotton Dostoyevsky Kipling Doyle Willis
Baum Henry Nietzsche Dumas Flaubert Turgenev Balzac
Leslie Stockton Vatsyayana Crane
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Curtis Tocqueville Gogol Busch
Homer Tolstoy Whitman Twain
Darwin Zola Lawrence Dickens Plato
Potter Freud Jowett Stevenson Andersen Harte
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**Memoirs of Arthur Hamilton, B.
A. Of Trinity College, Cambridge
Extracted From His Letters And
Diaries, With Reminiscences Of
His Conversation By His Friend
Christopher Carr Of The Same
College**

Arthur Christopher Benson

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"Pro jucundis aptissima quaeque dabunt di;
Carior est illis homo quam sibi."
Juvenal

DEDICATION

To H. L. M.

My dear Friend,

When you were kind enough to allow me to dedicate this book to you—you, to whose frank discussion of sacred things and kindly indifference to exaggerations of expression I owe so much—I felt you were only adding another to the long list of delicate benefits for which a friend can not be directly repaid.

My object has throughout been this: I have seen so much of what may be called the dissidence of religious thought and religious organization among those of my own generation at the Universities, and the unhappy results of such a separation, that I felt bound to contribute what I could to a settlement of this division, existing so much more in word than in fact—a point which you helped me very greatly to grasp.

I have been fortunate enough to have seen and known both sides of the battle. I have seen men in the position of teachers, both anxious and competent to position of teachers, both anxious and competent to settle differences, when brought into contact with men of serious God-seeking souls, with the nominal intention of dropping the bandying of words and cries and of attacking principles, meet and argue and part, almost unconscious that they have never touched the root of the matter at all, yet dissatisfied with the efforts which only seem to widen the breach they are intended to fill.

And why? Both sides are to blame, no doubt: the teachers, for being more anxious to expound systems than to listen to difficulties, to make their theories plain than to analyse the theories of their—I will not say adversaries—but opponents; the would-be learners, for hasty generalization; for bringing to the conflict a deliberate prejudice against all traditional authority, a want of patience in translating dogmas into life, a tendency to flatly deny that such a transmutation is possible.

Fortunately, the constructive side is in no want of an exponent; but I have tried to give a true portrait in this arrangement, or rather

selection, of realities, of what a serious and thoughtful soul-history may in these days be: to depict the career of a character for which no one can fail to have the profoundest sympathy, being as it is, by the nature of its case, condemned to a sadder sterner view of life than its uprightness justifies, and deprived of the helpful encouragement of so many sweet natures, whose single aim in life is to help other souls, if they only knew how.

And so, as I said before, it is with a most grateful remembrance of certain gracious words of yours, let fall in the stately house of God where we have worshipped together, in lecture-rooms where I have sat to hear you, and in conversations held in quiet college rooms or studious gardens, that I place your name at the head of these pages, the first I have sent out to shift for themselves, or rather to pass whither the Inspirer of all earnest endeavour may appoint.

I remain ever affectionately yours,
Christopher Carr.
Ashdon, Hants.

PREFACE

There are several forms of temperament. The kind that mostly issues in biography is the practical temperament. Poets have the shortest memoirs, and the most uninteresting. The politician, the philanthropist, the general, make the best, the most graphic Lives. The fact remains, however, that the question, "What has he done?" though a specious, is an unsatisfactory test of greatness.

But there is a temperament called the Reflective, which works slowly, and with little apparent result. The very gift of expression is a practical gift: with the gift of expression the reflective man becomes a writer, a poet, an artist; without it, he is unknown.

The reflective temperament, existing without any particular gift of expression, wants an exponent in these times. Reflection is lost sight of; philanthropy is all the rage. I assert that for a man to devote himself to a reflective life, that is, in the eyes of the world, an indolent one, is often a great sacrifice, and even on that account, if not essentially, valuable. Philanthropy is generally distressing, often offensive, sometimes disastrous.

Nothing, in this predetermined world, fails of its effect, as nothing is without its cause. There is a call to reflection which a man must follow, and his life then becomes an integral link in the chain of circumstance. Any intentional life affects the world; it is only the vague drifting existences that pass it by.

The subject of this memoir was, as the world counts reputation, unknown. His only public appearance, as far as I know, besides the announcement of his birth, is the fact that his initials stand in a dedication on the title-page of a noble work of fiction.

Arthur Hamilton left me his manuscripts, papers, and letters; from these, and casual conversations I have had with him in old days, this little volume is constructed.

C.C.

CHAPTER I

He was born November 2, 1852. He was the second son of a retired cavalry officer, who lived in Hampshire. Besides his elder brother, there were three sisters, one of whom died. His father was a wealthy man, and had built himself a small country house, and planted the few acres of ground round it very skillfully. Major Hamilton was a very religious man, of the self-sufficient, puritanical, and evangelical type, that issues from discipline; a martinet in his regiment, a domestic tyrant, without intending to be. He did not marry till rather late in life; and at the time when Arthur was growing up—the time when memory intertwines itself most lingeringly with its surroundings, the time which comes back to us at ecstatic moments in later, sadder days—all the *entourage* of the place was at its loveliest. Nothing ever equalled the thrill, he has told me, of finding the first thrush's nest in the laurels by the gate, or of catching the first smell of the lilac bushes in spring, or the pungent scent of the chamomile and wild celery down by the little stream.

The boy acquired a great love for Nature, though not of the intimate kind that poets have by instinct. "In moments of grief and despair," he wrote in later life, "I do not, as some do, crouch back to the bosom of the great Mother; she has, it seems, no heart for me when I am sorry, though she smiles with me when I am glad." But he has told me that he is able to enjoy a simple village scene in a way that others can not easily understand: a chestnut crowded with pink spires, the clack of a mill-wheel, the gush of a green sluice out of a mantled pool, a little stream surrounded by flags and water lobelias, gave him all his life a keen satisfaction in his happy moments. "I always gravitate to water," he writes. "I could stop and look at a little wayside stream for hours; and a pool—I never tire of it, though it awes me when I am alone."

The boy was afraid of trees, as many children are. If he had to go out alone he always crossed the fields, and never went by the wood; wandering in a wood at night was a childish nightmare of a peculiarly horrible kind.

I quote a few childish stories about him, selecting them out of a large number.

His mother saying to him one day that the gardener was dead, he burst out laughing (with that curious hysteria so common in children), and then after a little asked if they were going to bury him.

His mother, wishing to familiarize him with the idea of continued existence after death, dwelt on the fact that it was only his body that was going to be buried: his soul was in heaven.

The boy said presently, "If his body is in the churchyard, and his soul in heaven, where is David?"

Upon which his mother sent him down to the farm.

He was often singularly old-fashioned in his ways. If he was kept indoors by a childish ailment, he would draw his chair up to the fire, by his nurse, and say, "Now that the children are gone out, nurse, we can have a quiet talk." And he always returned first of all his brothers and sisters, if they were playing in the garden, that he might have the pleasure of clapping his hands from the nursery window to summon them in. "Children, children, come in," he used to say.

A curious little dialogue is preserved by his aunt in a diary. He laughed so immoderately at something that was said at lunch by one of his elders, that when his father inquired what the joke was, he was unable to answer. "It must be something very funny," said his mother in explanation. "Arthur never laughs unless there is a joke." The little boy became grave at once, and said severely, "There's hardly ever anything to laugh at in what you say; but I always laugh for fear people should be disappointed."

He was very sensitive to rebuke. "I am not so sensitive as I am always supposed to be," he said to me once. "I am one of those people who cry when they are spoken to, and do it again."

For instance, he told me that, being very fond of music when he was small, he stole down one morning at six to play the piano. His father, a very early riser, was disturbed by the gentle tinkling, and coming out of his study, asked him rather sharply why he couldn't do something useful—read some Shakespeare. He never played on the piano again for months, and for years never until he had ascertained that his father was out. "It was a mistake," he told me once, apropos of it. "If he had said that it disturbed him, but that I might

do it later, I should have been delighted to stop. I always liked feeling that I was obliging people."

He disliked his father, and feared him. The tall, handsome gentleman, accustomed to be obeyed, in reality passionately fond of his children, dismayed him. He once wrote on a piece of paper the words, "I hate papa," and buried it in the garden.

For the rest, he was an ordinary, rather clever, secretive child, speaking very little of his feelings, and caring, as he has told me since, very little for anybody except his nurse. "I cared about her in a curious way. I enjoyed the sensation of crying over imaginary evils; and I should not like to say how often in bed at night I used to act over in my mind an imaginary death-bed scene of my nurse, and the pathetic remarks she was to make about Master Arthur, and the edifying bearing I was to show. This was calculated within a given time to produce tears, and then I was content."

He went to a private school, which he hated, and then to Winchester, which he grew to love. The interesting earnest little boy merged into the clumsy loose-jointed schoolboy, silent and languid. There are hardly any records of this time.

"My younger sister died," he told me, "when I was at school. I experienced about ten minutes of grief; my parents were overwhelmed with anguish, and I can remember that, like a quick, rather clever child, I soon came to comprehend the sort of remark that cheered them, and almost overdid it in my zeal. I am overwhelmed with shame," he said, "whenever I look at my mother's letters about that time when she speaks of the comfort I was to them. It was a *fraus pia*, but it was a most downright *fraus*."

I think I may relate one other curious incident among his public school experiences: it may seem very incredible, but I have his word for it that it is true.

"A sixth-form boy took a fancy to me, and let me sit in his room, and helped me in my work. The night before he left the school I was sitting there, and just before I went away, being rather overcome with regretful sentiments, he caught hold of me by the arm and said, among other things, 'And now that I am going away, and shall probably never see you again, I don't believe you care one bit.' I

don't know how I came to do it," he said, "because I was never demonstrative; but I bent down and kissed him on the cheek, and then blushed up to my ears. He let me go at once; he was very much astonished, and I think not a little pleased; but it was certainly a curious incident."

During this time his intellectual development was proceeding slowly. "I went through three phases," he said. "I began by a curious love for pastoral and descriptive poetry. I read Thomson and Cowper, similes from 'Paradise Lost,' and other selections of my own; I read Tennyson, and revelled in the music of the lines and words. I intended to be a poet.

"Then I became omnivorous, and read everything, whether I understood it or not, especially biographies. I spent all my spare time in the school library; one only valuable thing have I derived from that—a capacity for taking in the sense of a page at a glance, and having a verbal memory of a skimmed book for an hour or two superior to any one that I ever met."

Then there came an ebb, and he read nothing, but loafed all day, and tried to talk. He had a notion he said, that he could argue Socratically; and he was always trying to introduce metaphors into his conversation. But his remarks in a much later letter to a friend on childish reading are so pertinent that I introduce them here.

"Never take a book away from a child unless it is positively vicious; that they should learn how to read a book and read it quickly is the great point; that they should get a habit of reading, and feel a void without it, is what should be cultivated. Never mind if it is trash now; their tastes will insensibly alter. I like a boy to cram himself with novels; a day will come when he is sick of them, and rejects them for the study of facts. What we want to give a child is 'bookmindedness,' as some one calls it. They will read a good deal that is bad, of course; but innocence is as slippery as a duck's back; a boy really fond of reading is generally pure-minded enough. When you see a robust, active, out-of-door boy deeply engrossed in a book, then you may suspect it if you like, and ask him what he has got; it will probably have an animal bearing."

Friendships more or less ardent, butterfly-hunting, school games, constant visits to the cathedral for service, to which he was always

keenly devoted, uneventful holidays, filled up most of his school life. His letters at this date are very ordinary; his early precocity seemed, rather to the delight of his parents, to have vanished. He was not a prig, though rather exclusive; not ungenial, though retiring. "A dreadful boy," he writes of himself, "who is as mum as a mouse with his elders, and then makes his school friends roar with laughter in the passage: dumb at home, a chatterbox at school."

"I had no religion at that time," he writes, "with the exception of six months, when I got interested in it by forming a friendship with an attractive ritualistic curate; but my confirmation made no impression on me, and I think I had no moral feelings that I could distinguish. I had no inherent hatred of wrong, or love for right; but I was fastidious, and that kept me from being riotous, and undemonstrative, which made me pure."

CHAPTER II

Arthur went up to the University, Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1870; he did not distinguish himself there, or acquire more than he had done at Winchester: "The one thing I learnt at Winchester that has been useful to me since, was how to tie up old letters: my house-master taught me how to do that—it was about all he was fit for. The thing I learnt at Cambridge was to smoke: my cousin Fred taught me that, and he was hardly fit for that."

As it was at Cambridge that I first met him, I will give a short description of him as far as I can remember.

He was a tall, lounging fellow, rather clumsy in his movements, but with a kind of stateliness about him; he looked, and was, old for his years. He was a little short-sighted and wore glasses; without them his brow had that puzzled, slightly bothered look often seen in weak-sighted people. His face was not unattractive, though rather heavy; his hair was dark and curly—he let it grow somewhat long from indolence—and he had a drooping moustache. He was one of the men who, without the slightest idea of doing so, always managed to create rather an impression. As he lounged along the street with his hands in his pockets, generally alone, people used to turn and look at him. If he had taken a line of any kind he would have been known everywhere—but he did nothing.

The occasion on which I met him first was in the rooms of a common friend; there was a small gathering of men. He was sitting in a low chair, smoking intently. It was the one occupation he loved; he hardly said anything, though the conversation was very animated; silence was his latest phase; but as it was his first term, and he was not very well acquainted with the party, it appeared natural; not that being surrounded by dukes and bishops would have made the slightest difference to him if he had been disposed to talk, but he was not talkative, and held his tongue.

There had been some discussion about careers and their relative merits. One rather cynical man had broken in upon the ambitious projects that were being advanced with, "Well, we must remember that we are after all only average men."

"Yes," said Arthur, slowly, from the depths of his chair, "no doubt; only not quite so average."

The gentleman addressed, who was a senior man, stared for a moment at the freshman who had ventured to correct him, to whom he had not even been introduced; but Arthur was staring meditatively at the smoke rising from his pipe, and did not seem inclined to move or be moved, so he concluded not to continue the discussion.

The only other thing I heard him say that night was as follows. An ardent enthusiast on the subject of missions was present, who, speaking of an Indian mission lately started and apparently wholly ineffective, said, "But we must expect discouragement at first. The Church has always met with that."

"Yes," said Arthur; "but we must also remember, what people are very apt to forget, that ill success is not an absolute proof that God is on our side."

These two remarks, slight as they were, struck me; and, indeed, I have never quite forgotten that indefinable first impression of the man. There was a feeling about him of holding great things in reserve, an utter absence of self-consciousness, a sensation that he did not value the opinions of other people, that he did not regulate his conduct by them, which is very refreshing in these social days, when everybody's doings and sayings are ventilated and discussed so freely. He had none of the ordinary ambitions; he did not want a reputation, I thought, on ordinary grounds; he struck me as liking to observe and consider, not to do or say.

I am fond of guessing at character and forming impressions; and I very soon found out that these were not mistaken. My way that night lay with him as far as the gate of his college. We struck up a kind of acquaintanceship, though I felt conscious that he did not in the least care about doing so, that he probably would not give me another thought. It seems strange, reflecting on that evening, that I should now come to be his biographer.

However, I was interested in the type of character he displayed, and did not let the acquaintance drop. I invited him to my rooms.

He would not come of his own accord at first, but by-and-by he got habituated to me, and not unfrequently strolled in.

He never let any one into the secret of his motives; he never confessed to any plans for the future, or to taking any interest in one line of life more than another. He was well off and did not spend much, except on his books, which were splendid. His rooms were untidy to the last degree, but liberally supplied with the most varied contrivances for obtaining a comfortable posture. Deep chairs and sofas, with devices for books and light, and for writing in any position. "When my mind is at work," he said to me once, "I don't like to be reminded of my body at all. I want to forget that I have one; and so I always say my prayers lying down."

He dressed badly, or rather carelessly, for he never gave the subject a moment's thought. If his friends told him that a suit was shabby, he appeared in a day or two in a new one, till that was similarly noticed; then it was discarded altogether. He always wore one suit till he had worn it out, never varying it. But he consulted fashion to a certain extent. "My object," he said, "is to escape notice, to look like every one else. I think of all despicable people, the people who try to attract attention by a marked style of dress, are perhaps the lowest."

His life at Cambridge was very monotonous, for he enjoyed monotony; he used to say that he liked to reflect on getting up in the morning, that his day was going to be filled by ordinary familiar things. He got up rather late, read his subjects for an hour or two, strolled about to see one or two friends, lunched with them or at home, strolled in the afternoon, often dropping in to King's for the anthem, went back to his rooms for tea, the one time at which he liked to see his friends, read or talked till half, and finally settled down to his books again at ten, reading till one or two in the morning.

He read very desultorily and widely. Thus he would read books on Arctic voyages for ten days and talk of nothing else, then read novels till he sickened for facts and fact till he sickened for fiction; biographies, elementary science, poetry, general philosophy, particularly delighting in any ideal theories of life and discipline in state or association, but with a unique devotion to "Hamlet" and "As You

Like It," the "Pilgrim's Progress," and Emerson's "Representative Men." He rarely read the Bible, he told me, and then only in great masses at a sitting; and the one thing that he disliked with an utter hatred was theology of a settled and orthodox type, though next to the four books I have mentioned, "The Christian Year" and "Ecce Homo" were his constant companions.

He did not care for history; he used to lament it. "I have but a languid interest in facts, qua facts," he said; "and I try to arrive at history through biography. I like to disentangle the separate strands, one at a time; the fabric is too complex for me."

He had the greatest delight in topography. "That is why," he used to say, "I delight in a flat country. The idea of *space* is what I want. I like to see miles at a glance. I like to see clouds league-long rolling up in great masses from the horizon—cloud perspective. I rejoice in seeing the fields, hedgerow after hedgerow, farm after farm, push into the blue distance. It makes me feel the unity and the diversity of life; a city bewilders and confuses me, but a great tract of placid country gives me a broad glow of satisfaction."

He went for a walking tour in the fens, and returned enchanted. "By Ely," he said, "the line crosses a gigantic fen—Whittlesea mere in old days—and on a clear day you can see at least fifteen miles either way. As we crossed it a great skein of starlings rose out of a little holt, and streamed north; the herons or quiet cattle stood along the huge dykes. You could see the scattered figures of old labourers in the fields, and then for miles and miles the squat towers, at which you were making, staring over the flat, giving you a thrill every time you sighted them, and right away west the low hills that must have been the sandy downs that blocked the restless plunging sea; they must have looked for centuries over rollers and salt marsh and lagoon, felt the tread of strange herds and beasts about them till they have become the quiet slopes of a sunny park or the simple appendages of a remote hill farm."

But his greatest delight was in music. He knew a smattering of it scientifically, enough to follow up subjects and to a certain extent to recognize chords. There occurs in one of his letters to me the following passage, which I venture to quote. He is speaking of the delight of pure sound as apart from melody: