

THE PEOPLE'S WAR

husbandmen of hill and dale,
dressers of the vines,
sea-tossed fighters of the gale,
hewers of the mines,
wealthy ones who need not strive,
sons of learning, art,
craftsmen of the city's hive,
traders of the man,
Hark to the cannon's thunder-call
Appealing to the brave!
Your France is wounded, and may fall
Beneath the foreign grave!
Then gird your loins! Let none delay
Her glory to maintain;
Drive out the foe, throw off his sway,
Win back your land again!

1870. E.A.V.

PREFACE

While this volume is largely of an autobiographical character, it will be found to contain also a variety of general information concerning the Franco-German War of 1870-71, more particularly with respect to the second part of that great struggle – the so-called "People's War" which followed the crash of Sedan and the downfall of the Second French Empire. If I have incorporated this historical matter in my book, it is because I have repeatedly noticed in these later years that, whilst English people are conversant with the main facts of the Sedan disaster and such subsequent outstanding events as the siege of Paris and the capitulation of Metz, they usually know very little about the manner in which the war generally was carried on by the French under the virtual dictatorship of Gambetta. Should England ever be invaded by a large hostile force, we, with our very limited regular army, should probably be obliged to rely largely on elements similar to those which were called to the field by the French National Defence Government of 1870 after the regular armies of the Empire had been either crushed at Sedan or closely invested at Metz. For that reason I have always taken a keen interest in our Territorial Force, well realizing what heavy responsibilities would fall upon it if a powerful enemy should obtain a footing in this country. Some indication of those responsibilities will be found in the present book.

Generally speaking, however, I have given only a sketch of the latter part of the Franco-German War. To have entered into details on an infinity of matters would have necessitated the writing of a very much longer work. However, I have supplied, I think, a good deal of precise information respecting the events which I actually witnessed, and in this connexion, perhaps, I may have thrown some useful sidelights on the war generally; for many things akin to those which I saw, occurred under more or less similar circumstances in other parts of France.

People who are aware that I am acquainted with the shortcomings of the French in those already distant days, and that I have

watched, as closely as most foreigners can watch, the evolution of the French army in these later times, have often asked me what, to my thinking, would be the outcome of another Franco-German War. For many years I fully anticipated another struggle between the two Powers, and held myself in readiness to do duty as a war-correspondent. I long thought, also, that the signal for that struggle would be given by France. But I am no longer of that opinion. I fully believe that all French statesmen worthy of the name realize that it would be suicidal for France to provoke a war with her formidable neighbour. And at the same time I candidly confess that I do not know what some journalists mean by what they call the "New France." To my thinking there is no "New France" at all. There was as much spirit, as much patriotism, in the days of MacMahon, in the days of Boulanger, and at other periods, as there is now. The only real novelty that I notice in the France of to-day is the cultivation of many branches of sport and athletic exercise. Of that kind of thing there was very little indeed when I was a stripling. But granting that young Frenchmen of to-day are more athletic, more "fit" than were those of my generation, granting, moreover, that the present organization and the equipment of the French army are vastly superior to what they were in 1870, and also that the conditions of warfare have greatly changed, I feel that if France were to engage, unaided, in a contest with Germany, she would again be worsted, and worsted by her own fault.

She fully knows that she cannot bring into the field anything like as many men as Germany; and it is in a vain hope of supplying the deficiency that she has lately reverted from a two to a three years' system of military service. The latter certainly gives her a larger effective for the first contingencies of a campaign, but in all other respects it is merely a piece of jugglery, for it does not add a single unit to the total number of Frenchmen capable of bearing arms. The truth is, that during forty years of prosperity France has been intent on racial suicide. In the whole of that period only some 3,500,000 inhabitants have been added to her population, which is now still under 40 millions; whereas that of Germany has increased by leaps and bounds, and stands at about 66 millions. At the present time the German birth-rate is certainly falling, but the numerical superiority which Germany has acquired over France since the war of 1870 is so

great that I feel it would be impossible for the latter to triumph in an encounter unless she should be assisted by powerful allies. Bismarck said in 1870 that God was on the side of the big battalions; and those big battalions Germany can again supply. I hold, then, that no such Franco-German war as the last one can again occur. Europe is now virtually divided into two camps, each composed of three Powers, all of which would be more or less involved in a Franco-German struggle. The allies and friends on either side are well aware of it, and in their own interests are bound to exert a restraining influence which makes for the maintenance of peace. We have had evidence of this in the limitations imposed on the recent Balkan War.

On the other hand, it is, of course, the unexpected which usually happens; and whilst Europe generally remains armed to the teeth, and so many jealousies are still rife, no one Power can in prudence desist from her armaments. We who are the wealthiest nation in Europe spend on our armaments, in proportion to our wealth and our population, less than any other great Power. Yet some among us would have us curtail our expenditure, and thereby incur the vulnerability which would tempt a foe. Undoubtedly the armaments of the present day are great and grievous burdens on the nations, terrible impediments to social progress, but they constitute, unfortunately, our only real insurance against war, justifying yet to-day, after so many long centuries, the truth of the ancient Latin adage—*Si vis pacem, para bellum*.

It is, I think, unnecessary for me to comment here on the autobiographical part of my book. It will, I feel, speak for itself. It treats of days long past, and on a few points, perhaps, my memory may be slightly defective. In preparing my narrative, however, I have constantly referred to my old diaries, note-books and early newspaper articles, and have done my best to abstain from all exaggeration. Whether this story of some of my youthful experiences and impressions of men and things was worth telling or not is a point which I must leave my readers to decide.

E.A.V.

London, *January* 1914.

CONTENTS

- I. INTRODUCTORY – SOME EARLY RECOLLECTIONS
 - II. THE OUTBREAK OF THE FRANCO-GERMAN WAR
 - III. ON THE ROAD TO REVOLUTION
 - IV. FROM REVOLUTION TO SIEGE
 - V. BESIEGED
 - VI. MORE ABOUT THE SIEGE DAYS
 - VII. FROM PARIS TO VERSAILLES
 - VIII. FROM VERSAILLES TO BRITTANY
 - IX. THE WAR IN THE PROVINCES
 - X. WITH THE "ARMY OF BRITTANY"
 - XI. BEFORE LE MANS
 - XII. LE MANS AND AFTER
 - XIII. THE BITTER END
- INDEX

MY DAYS OF ADVENTURE

I

INTRODUCTORY—SOME EARLY RECOLLECTIONS

The Vizetelly Family—My Mother and her Kinsfolk—The *Illustrated Times* and its Staff—My Unpleasant Disposition—Thackeray and my First Half-Crown—School days at Eastbourne—Queen Alexandra—Garibaldi—A few old Plays and Songs—Nadar and the "Giant" Balloon—My Arrival in France— My Tutor Brossard—Berezowski's Attempt on Alexander II—My Apprenticeship to Journalism—My first Article—I see some French Celebrities—Visits to the Tuileries—At Compiègne—A few Words with Napoleon III—A "Revolutionary" Beard.

This is an age of "Reminiscences," and although I have never played any part in the world's affairs, I have witnessed so many notable things and met so many notable people during the three-score years which I have lately completed, that it is perhaps allowable for me to add yet another volume of personal recollections to the many which have already poured from the press. On starting on an undertaking of this kind it is usual, I perceive by the many examples around me, to say something about one's family and upbringing. There is less reason for me to depart from this practice, as in the course of the present volume it will often be necessary for me to refer to some of my near relations. A few years ago a distinguished Italian philosopher and author, Angelo de Gubernatis, was good enough to include me in a dictionary of writers belonging to the Latin races, and stated, in doing so, that the Vizetellys were of French origin. That was a rather curious mistake on the part of an Italian writer, the truth being that the family originated at Ravenna, where some members of it held various offices in the Middle Ages. Subsequently, after dabbling in a conspiracy, some of the Vizetelli

fled to Venice and took to glass-making there, until at last Jacopo, from whom I am descended, came to England in the spacious days of Queen Elizabeth. From that time until my own the men of my family invariably married English women, so that very little Italian blood can flow in my veins.

Matrimonial alliances are sometimes of more than personal interest. One point has particularly struck me in regard to those contracted by members of my own family, this being the diversity of English counties from which the men have derived their wives and the women their husbands. References to Cheshire, Lancashire, Yorkshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, Leicestershire, Berkshire, Bucks, Suffolk, Kent, Surrey, Sussex, and Devonshire, in addition to Middlesex, otherwise London, appear in my family papers. We have become connected with Johnstons, Burslems, Bartletts, Pitts, Smiths, Wards, Covells, Randalls, Finemores, Radfords, Hindes, Pollards, Lemprières, Wakes, Godbolds, Ansells, Fennells, Vaughans, Edens, Scotts, and Pearces, and I was the very first member of the family (subsequent to its arrival in England) to take a foreigner as wife, she being the daughter of a landowner of Savoy who proceeded from the Tissots of Switzerland. My elder brother Edward subsequently married a Burgundian girl named Clerget, and my stepbrother Frank chose an American one, *née* Krehbiel, as his wife, these marriages occurring because circumstances led us to live for many years abroad.

Among the first London parishes with which the family was connected was St. Botolph's, Bishopsgate, where my forerunner, the first Henry Vizetelly, was buried in 1691, he then being fifty years of age, and where my father, the second Henry of the name, was baptised soon after his birth in 1820. St. Bride's, Fleet Street, was, however, our parish for many years, as its registers testify, though in 1781 my great-grandfather was resident in the parish of St. Ann's, Blackfriars, and was elected constable thereof. At that date the family name, which figures in old English registers under a variety of forms—Vissitaler, Vissitaly, Visataly, Visitelly, Vizetely, etc.—was by him spelt Vizzetelly, as is shown by documents now in the Guildhall Library; but a few years later he dropped the second *z*, with the idea, perhaps, of giving the name a more English appearance.

This great-grandfather of mine was, like his father before him, a printer and a member of the Stationers' Company. He was twice married, having by his first wife two sons, George and William, neither of whom left posterity. The former, I believe, died in the service of the Honourable East India Company. In June, 1775, however, my great-grandfather married Elizabeth, daughter of James Hinde, stationer, of Little Moorfields, and had by her, first, a daughter Elizabeth, from whom some of the Burslems and Godbolds are descended; and, secondly, twins, a boy and a girl, who were respectively christened James Henry and Mary Mehetabel. The former became my grandfather. In August, 1816, he married, at St. Bride's, Martha Jane Vaughan, daughter of a stage-coach proprietor of Chester, and had by her a daughter, who died unmarried, and four sons—my father, Henry Richard, and my uncles James, Frank, and Frederick Whitehead Vizetelly.

Some account of my grandfather is given in my father's "Glances Back through Seventy Years," and I need not add to it here. I will only say that, like his immediate forerunners, James Henry Vizetelly was a printer and freeman of the city. A clever versifier, and so able as an amateur actor that on certain occasions he replaced Edmund Kean on the boards when the latter was hopelessly drunk, he died in 1840, leaving his two elder sons, James and Henry, to carry on the printing business, which was then established in premises occupying the site of the *Daily Telegraph* building in Fleet Street.

In 1844 my father married Ellen Elizabeth, only child of John Pollard, M.D., a member of the ancient Yorkshire family of the Pollards of Bierley and Brunton, now chiefly represented, I believe, by the Pollards of Scarr Hall. John Pollard's wife, Charlotte Maria Fennell, belonged to a family which gave officers to the British Navy—one of them serving directly under Nelson—and clergy to the Church of England. The Fennells were related to the Brontë sisters through the latter's mother; and one was closely connected with the Shackle who founded the original *John Bull* newspaper. Those, then, were my kinsfolk on the maternal side. My mother presented my father with seven children, of whom I was the sixth, being also the fourth son. I was born on November 29, 1853, at a house called Chalfont Lodge in Campden House Road, Kensington, and well do I remember the great conflagration which destroyed the fine old historical

mansion built by Baptist Hicks, sometime a mercer in Cheapside and ultimately Viscount Campden. But another scene which has more particularly haunted me all through my life was that of my mother's sudden death in a saloon carriage of an express train on the London and Brighton line. Though she was in failing health, nobody thought her end so near; but in the very midst of a journey to London, whilst the train was rushing on at full speed, and no help could be procured, a sudden weakness came over her, and in a few minutes she passed away. I was very young at the time, barely five years old, yet everything still rises before me with all the vividness of an imperishable memory. Again, too, I see that beautiful intellectual brow and those lustrous eyes, and hear that musical voice, and feel the gentle touch of that loving motherly hand. She was a woman of attainments, fond of setting words to music, speaking perfect French, for she had been partly educated at Evreux in Normandy, and having no little knowledge of Greek and Latin literature, as was shown by her annotations to a copy of Lemprière's "Classical Dictionary" which is now in my possession.

About eighteen months after I was born, that is in the midst of the Crimean War, my father founded, in conjunction with David Bogue, a well-known publisher of the time, a journal called the *Illustrated Times*, which for several years competed successfully with the *Illustrated London News*. It was issued at threepence per copy, and an old memorandum of the printers now lying before me shows that in the paper's earlier years the average printings were 130,000 copies weekly—a notable figure for that period, and one which was considerably exceeded when any really important event occurred. My father was the chief editor and manager, his leading coadjutor being Frederick Greenwood, who afterwards founded the *Pall Mall Gazette*. I do not think that Greenwood's connection with the *Illustrated Times* and with my father's other journal, the *Welcome Guest*, is mentioned in any of the accounts of his career. The literary staff included four of the Brothers Mayhew—Henry, Jules, Horace, and Augustus, two of whom, Jules and Horace, became godfathers to my father's first children by his second wife. Then there were also William and Robert Brough, Edmund Yates, George Augustus Sala, Hain Friswell, W.B. Rands, Tom Robertson, Sutherland Edwards, James Hannay, Edward Draper, and Hale White (father of "Mark

Rutherford"), and several artists and engravers, such as Birket Foster, "Phiz." Portch, Andrews, Duncan, Skelton, Bennett, McConnell, Linton, London, and Horace Harrall. I saw all those men in my early years, for my father was very hospitably inclined, and they were often guests at Chalfont Lodge.

After my mother's death, my grandmother, *née* Vaughan, took charge of the establishment, and I soon became the terror of the house, developing a most violent temper and acquiring the vocabulary of the roughest market porter. My wilfulness was probably innate (nearly all the Vizetellys having had impulsive wills of their own), and my flowery language was picked up by perversely loitering to listen whenever there happened to be a street row in Church Lane, which I had to cross on my way to or from Kensington Gardens, my daily place of resort. At an early age I started bullying my younger brother, I defied my grandmother, insulted the family doctor because he was too fond of prescribing grey powders for my particular benefit, and behaved abominably to the excellent Miss Lindup of Sheffield Terrace, who endeavoured to instruct me in the rudiments of reading, writing, and arithmetic. I frequently astonished or appalled the literary men and artists who were my father's guests. I hated being continually asked what I should like to be when I grew up, and the slightest chaff threw me into a perfect paroxysm of passion. Whilst, however, I was resentful of the authority of others, I was greatly inclined to exercise authority myself—to such a degree, indeed, that my father's servants generally spoke of me as "the young master," regardless of the existence of my elder brothers.

Having already a retentive memory, I was set to learn sundry "recitations," and every now and then was called upon to emerge from behind the dining-room curtains and repeat "My Name is Norval" or "The Spanish Armada," for the delectation of my father's friends whilst they lingered over their wine. Disaster generally ensued, provoked either by some genial chaff or well-meant criticism from such men as Sala and Augustus Mayhew, and I was ultimately carried off—whilst venting incoherent protests—to be soundly castigated and put to bed.

Among the real celebrities who occasionally called at Chalfont Lodge was Thackeray, whom I can still picture sitting on one side of the fireplace, whilst my father sat on the other, I being installed on the hearthrug between them. Provided that I was left to myself, I could behave decently enough, discreetly preserving silence, and, indeed, listening intently to the conversation of my father's friends, and thereby picking up a very odd mixture of knowledge. I was, I believe, a pale little chap with lank fair hair and a wistful face, and no casual observer would have imagined that my nature was largely compounded of such elements as enter into the composition of Italian brigands, Scandinavian pirates, and wild Welshmen. Thackeray, at all events, did not appear to think badly of the little boy who sat so quietly at his feet. One day, indeed, when he came upon me and my younger brother Arthur, with our devoted attendant Selina Horrocks, in Kensington Gardens, he put into practice his own dictum that one could never see a schoolboy without feeling an impulse to dip one's hand in one's pocket. Accordingly he presented me with the first half-crown I ever possessed, for though my father's gifts were frequent they were small. It was understood, I believe, that I was to share the aforesaid half-crown with my brother Arthur, but in spite of the many remonstrances of the faithful Selina—a worthy West-country woman, who had largely taken my mother's place—I appropriated the gift in its entirety, and became extremely ill by reason of my many indiscreet purchases at a tuck-stall which stood, if I remember rightly, at a corner of the then renowned Kensington Flower Walk. This incident must have occurred late in Thackeray's life. My childish recollection of him is that of a very big gentleman with beaming eyes.

My grandmother's reign in my father's house was not of great duration, as in February, 1861, he contracted a second marriage, taking on this occasion as his wife a "fair maid of Kent," [Elizabeth Anne Ansell, of Broadstairs; mother of my step-brother, Dr. Frank H. Vizetelly, editor of the "Standard Dictionary," New York.] to whose entry into our home I was at first violently opposed, but who promptly won me over by her unremitting affection and kindness, eventually becoming the best and truest friend of my youth and early manhood. My circumstances changed, however, soon after that marriage, for as I was now nearly eight years old it was

deemed appropriate that I should be sent to a boarding-school, both by way of improving my mind and of having some nonsense knocked out of me, which, indeed, was promptly accomplished by the pugnacious kindness of my schoolfellows. Among the latter was one, my senior by a few years, who became a very distinguished journalist. I refer to the late Horace Voules, so long associated with Labouchere's journal, *Truth*. My brother Edward was also at the same school, and my brother Arthur came there a little later.

It was situated at Eastbourne, and a good deal has been written about it in recent works on the history of that well-known watering-place, which, when I was first sent there, counted less than 6000 inhabitants. Located in the old town or village, at a distance of a mile or more from the sea, the school occupied a building called "The Gables," and was an offshoot of a former ancient school connected with the famous parish church. In my time this "academy" was carried on as a private venture by a certain James Anthony Bown, a portly old gentleman of considerable attainments.

I was unusually precocious in some respects, and though I frequently got into scrapes by playing impish tricks—as, for instance, when I combined with others to secure an obnoxious French master to his chair by means of some cobbler's wax, thereby ruining a beautiful pair of peg-top trousers which he had just purchased—I did not neglect my lessons, but secured a number of "prizes" with considerable facility. When I was barely twelve years old, not one of my schoolfellows—and some were sixteen and seventeen years old—could compete with me in Latin, in which language Bown ended by taking me separately. I also won three or four prizes for "excelling" my successive classes in English grammar as prescribed by the celebrated Lindley Murray.

In spite of my misdeeds (some of which, fortunately, were never brought home to me), I became, I think, somewhat of a favourite with the worthy James Anthony, for he lent me interesting books to read, occasionally had me to supper in his own quarters, and was now and then good enough to overlook the swollen state of my nose or the blackness of one of my eyes when I had been having a bout with a schoolfellow or a young clodhopper of the village. We usually fought with the village lads in Love Lane on Sunday eve-

nings, after getting over the playground wall. I received firstly the nickname of Moses, through falling among some rushes whilst fielding a ball at cricket; and secondly, that of Noses, because my nasal organ, like that of Cyrano de Bergerac, suddenly grew to huge proportions, in such wise that it embodied sufficient material for two noses of ordinary dimensions. Its size was largely responsible for my defeats when fighting, for I found it difficult to keep guard over such a prominent organ and prevent my claret from being tapped.

Having generations of printers' ink mingled with my blood, I could not escape the unkind fate which made me a writer of articles and books. In conjunction with a chum named Clement Ireland I ran a manuscript school journal, which included stories of pirates and highwaymen, illustrated with lurid designs in which red ink was plentifully employed in order to picture the gore which flowed so freely through the various tales. My grandmother Vaughan was an inveterate reader of the *London Journal* and the *Family Herald*, and whenever I went home for my holidays I used to pounce upon those journals and devour some of the stories of the author of "Minnegrey," as well as Miss Braddon's "Aurora Floyd" and "Henry Dunbar." The perusal of books by Ainsworth, Scott, Lever, Marryat, James Grant, G. P. R. James, Dumas, and Whyte Melville gave me additional material for storytelling; and so, concocting wonderful blends of all sorts of fiction, I spun many a yarn to my schoolfellows in the dormitory in which I slept—yarns which were sometimes supplied in instalments, being kept up for a week or longer.

My summer holidays were usually spent in the country, but at other times I went to London, and was treated to interesting sights. At Kensington, in my earlier years, I often saw Queen Victoria and the Prince Consort with their children, notably the Princess Royal (Empress Frederick) and the Prince of Wales (Edward VII). When the last-named married the "Sea-King's daughter from over the sea"—since then our admired and gracious Queen Alexandra—and they drove together through the crowded streets of London on their way to Windsor, I came specially from Eastbourne to witness that triumphal progress, and even now I can picture the young prince with his round chubby face and little side-whiskers, and the vision