

THE EYE-WITNESS: BEING A SERIES OF DESCRIPTIONS AND SKETCHES IN WHICH IT IS ATTEMPTED TO REPRODUCE CERTAIN INCIDENTS AND PERIODS IN HISTORY, AS FROM THE TESTIMONY OF A PERSON PRESENT AT EACH

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The Eye-Witness: Being a Series of Descriptions and Sketches in Which It Is Attempted to Reproduce Certain Incidents and Periods in History, as from the Testimony of a Person Present at Each by H. Belloc

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H. BELLOC

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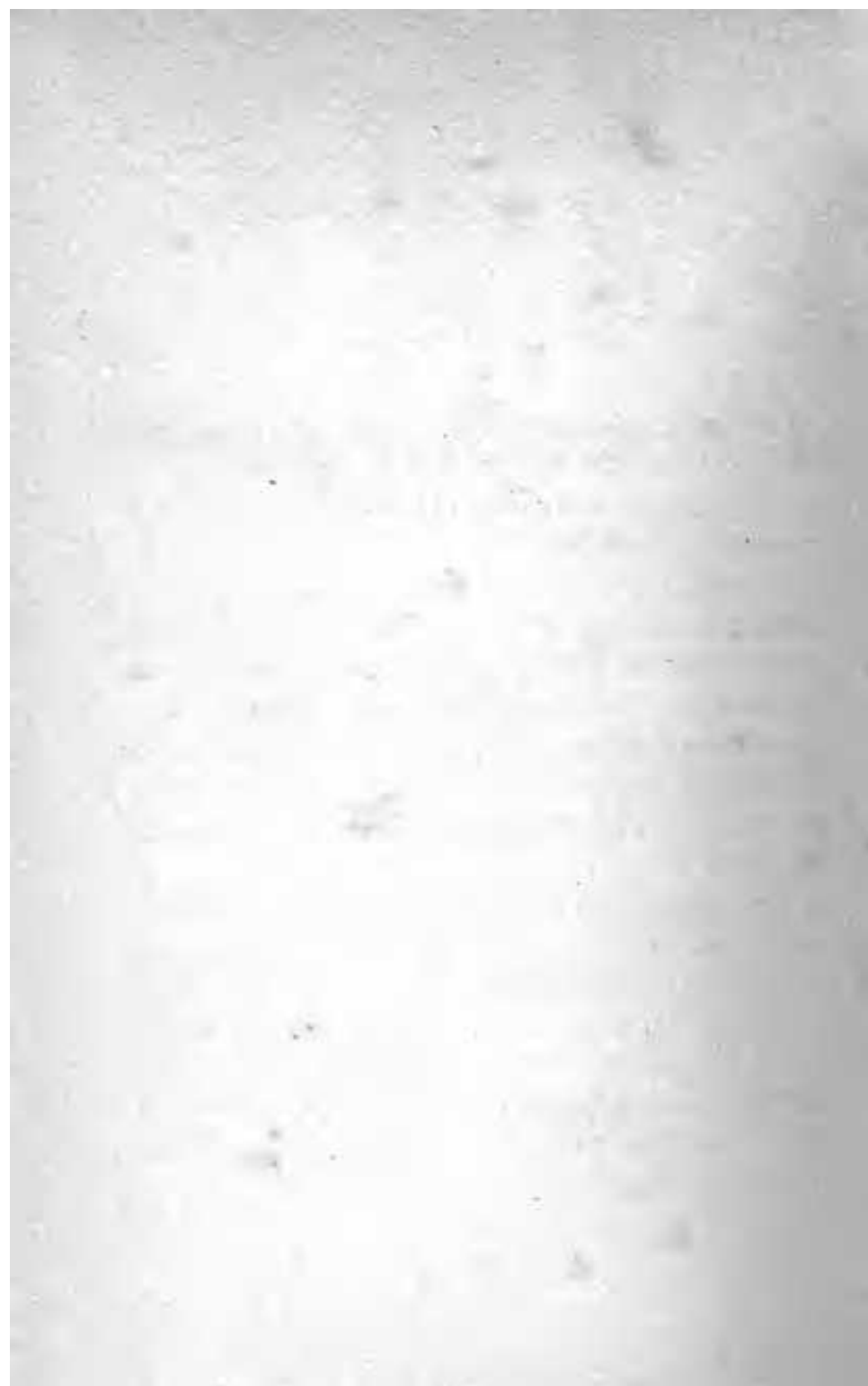
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*[The greater part of the sketches in this book
are reprinted from the Morning Post, to the
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author owes his thanks for the permission to
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EVELEIGH NASH
FAWSIDE HOUSE
1908

TO
LORD LUCAS



PREFACE

IN the sketches of which this book is composed, the author has attempted, upon the model of one vivid experience, to reconstruct certain passages of the past.

In each he has accumulated as well as he could such evidence for detail as would make an actual presentment of history rather than an aid to its realisation. The hours, the colours, the landscape, the weather, the language, are, as far as his learning permitted, the hours, the colours, the landscape, the weather, the language of the times and places he describes.

The reader will of course distinguish between those episodes in which the actors and events are purely imaginary (as, for example, in "The Christian"); those in which some part only of the actors are real (as in "The Familiar"); and those in which every detail of person and of scene is rigidly historical (as in "Drouet's Ride" or "The *Ark-Royall*").

In all of these, from the purely imaginative to the purely historical, whatever the author could verify has been verified ; but he well knows the impossibility of arriving at a complete accuracy where such minute details are attempted.

He has desired in these pages to present successive pictures stretching across the 2000 years of Christian history ; in so doing he has been compelled to restrict himself to places with which he was himself familiarly acquainted and to authorities which he had the power to consult. Thus the crossing of the Channel by sail under a light wind (as in "The Two Soldiers") he can claim to know from experience. He has visited the arena in Southern Tunisia which is the scene of "The Christian," and the coast of the Narbonese which is that of "The Pagans." He is familiar with the banks of the Itchen on which "The Saxon School" was built ; and the voyage of the Greek traveller whose progress is imagined in "The Barbarians" took place in his own county. He has sailed, as did "The Danish Boat," from the North Sea over the bar of the Three Rivers up Breydon, and so to Norwich, and before the same wind. He has often walked through the thickets in the valley of the Brede, where the soldiers came in "The Night after Hastings." Like all the world he knows the

Roman road to Staines, which is the road to "Runnymede"; the way up from the Weald, through Combe on to Mount Harry, and the aspect of "Lewes" from that height is familiar to him, as is also the approach from the Vale of Glynde: as for the flying buttresses of Westminster (which appear in "The End of Henry IV.") he knows them well. The Madrid of "The Familiar" he has visited in just such a blinding summer; and in those shoals between Calais and Dunkirk, where "The *Ark-Royall*" watched the Armada, he has dropped a little anchor more than once for a few hours. He has passed from the Lakes to the Hudson where was the tragedy of "Saratoga;" he has paced the ranges upon the field where "The Guns at Valmy" were unlimbered; and he has gone upon his feet over the "Guadarrama" by that same road which Napoleon took with his indomitable but half-mutinous army: men who further followed him some six thousand miles.

This long list is only permitted to occupy the space it does in order to assure the reader that the writer has not presumed to set down fancy descriptions of landscapes and of climates which he did not know.

As to historical references, I must beg the indulgence of the critic, but I believe I have not