

**REMINISCENCES OF
FOREIGN
TRAVEL. A FRAGMENT OF
AUTOBIOGRAPHY**

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Reminiscences of Foreign Travel. A Fragment of Autobiography by Robert C. Winthrop

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ROBERT C. WINTHROP

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A Fragment of Autobiography.

BY
ROBERT C. WINTHROP.

PRIVATELY PRINTED.

1894.

PREFATORY NOTE.

MANY of these Reminiscences were written long ago, and then laid aside for future consideration. Finding them during the past winter with other almost forgotten papers, I have occupied myself in adding to this little fragment of autobiography, in order to print it privately for my grandchildren and a few surviving friends. I am sensible that portions of it may seem egotistical, but this is the privilege of an octogenarian. At all events, the task has helped me through some of those weary hours which press with increasing heaviness upon one who is now within a few weeks of entering upon his eighty-sixth year.

ROBERT C. WINTHROP.

90 MARLBOROUGH STREET, BOSTON.
April 19, 1894.

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A FRAGMENT OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY.

A VALUED literary friend, to whom I once sent the Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society on the Centennial Anniversary of the birthday of Sir Walter Scott, said to me in his note of acknowledgment, "I wish that you would prepare for publication, now, or when we have paid too high a price for knowledge, your recollections of the distinguished men of both hemispheres whom you have known." It was not the first time that such a suggestion had been made to me; but it was the first time that I seriously entertained it, and resolved to make, sooner or later, an effort to comply with it. I am by no means sure, however, that the effort is worth making, or that I shall succeed in jotting down anything worthy of remembrance. But I may at least occupy a leisure hour, from day to day, pleasantly and not unprofitably, in living over again some of the scenes through which I have passed, abroad or at home, and in bringing back to my remembrance, partly by the aid of old journals and letters, some of the eminent persons whom I have met more or less intimately, in other lands or in my own, but so few of whom I can meet again on earth.

I prefer to begin with those whom I have known in foreign countries, because they are fewer in number

and my account of them will thus be briefer; and when I have once dealt with these, I shall feel that I have finished one part of my story, and perhaps be more ready to turn to the other and longer part.

Crossing the Atlantic for the first time in April, 1847, I visited London with some peculiar advantages for seeing the English celebrities of that day. I was a member of Congress, and during the six or seven years I had been at Washington I had served for a part of the time on the Committee of Foreign Affairs. I had thus been brought into official as well as personal association with members of the Diplomatic Corps in Washington, more than one of whom, without solicitation, gave me letters of introduction. Mr. Webster, too, on learning that I was going abroad, sent me several valuable letters to friends in England; and Mr. Everett, who had recently returned from there after a four-years residence as our Minister in London, sent me a number of introductions of the most desirable character. Meantime Mr. Bancroft, who was then our Minister in England, was a personal though not at that time a political friend, and he was full of the kindest attentions on my arrival.

My very first day in London was one to be marked with white chalk. Calling without delay to see the Lyells, whom I had known intimately in Boston while Sir Charles was delivering his first course of Lowell Institute Lectures,¹ he said at once to me: "I cannot let you sit down an instant. You must go with me

¹ Lady Lyell was a far removed connection of mine, and we soon resolved to shorten the distance and count ourselves cousins for life.

without a moment's delay to the Royal British Institution. FARADAY delivers the closing lecture of his course in a few minutes; and you may never have another opportunity of hearing him." So off we hurried to Albemarle Street, where we found Faraday already on the platform, just about to commence one of those charming lectures on Chemistry, or Electro-Chemistry, which gave so much delight and instruction to all who heard him. I cannot venture, after such a lapse of time, to give the precise topics of his lecture, — unhappily, I made no notes of it; but I remember well the sweetness and the power of his manner and delivery, and the exquisite ease and grace of his experiments. Tyndall, in his memoir of Faraday, says: "Taking him for all in all, I think it will be conceded that Michael Faraday was the greatest experimental philosopher the world has ever seen."

Like so many other really great men, however, he seemed to me one of the most modest and simple. Declining all distinctions and honors, and remaining, as he said he would, "plain Michael Faraday to the last," he has impressed that name upon the pages of science so deeply that it can never be effaced. Lyell introduced me to him after the lecture was over, and nothing could have been more kind or cordial than his reception of me. His whole air and address were those of one who had rather been made to feel more humble, than more proud, by his successful researches into the realms of Nature, and who was rather awed by the wonders which baffled his inquiries than intoxicated by the success of his discoveries.

Faraday had a distinguished audience that day; and I remember being introduced to Dean Milman among others, and to Dr. Edward Stanley, then Bishop of Norwich, the father of my lamented friend the Dean of Westminster. Lyell, Faraday, Milman, and Stanley were a goodly company of notables to have been personally associated with in a single hour of my first morning in London.

But though the audience was a distinguished one, it was by no means numerous. The little theatre of the British Institution was, indeed, well filled, but it could hardly accommodate more than a few hundreds; and I could not help reverting to the scene I had witnessed only a few evenings before I sailed from Boston, when I was one of fifteen hundred or two thousand persons crowding every seat and every corner of the hall of the old Masonic Temple to hear a lecture on the glaciers by Louis Agassiz. Nor did I fail to remember, before I left the British Institution, that its earliest and most effective promoter, if not its absolute founder, was a native of my own country and of my own State, — Benjamin Thompson, afterward known to all the world as Count Rumford, of whom an admirable biography has been written by my friend Dr. George E. Ellis, and published under the auspices of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences: a man whose great services — military, civil, and still more philanthropic — in Bavaria, and whose eminent contributions to science and the practical arts, have entitled him to a celebrity only second to that of Franklin in our own land, and not inferior to that of Tyndall or Faraday on