

**REMINISCENT
GOSSIP OF MEN
AND MATTERS**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649256426

Reminiscent gossip of men and matters by James Baker

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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JAMES BAKER

**REMINISCENT
GOSSIP OF MEN
AND MATTERS**

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Etc. Etc.

REMINISCENT GOSSIP OF MEN AND MATTERS

BY
JAMES BAKER, F.R.G.S.

AUTHOR OF "JOHN WESTACOTT," "THE CARDINAL'S PAGE,"
"THE GLEAMING DAWN," "THE INSUPERABLES,"
"AUSTRIA: HER PEOPLE AND THEIR
HOMELANDS," ETC.

"Our bending author hath pursued his story
In a little room confining mighty men."

LONDON
CHAPMAN & HALL, LTD.

1913



PREFACE

AN inconsequential book, following no order, mere gossip, personal and literary ; of scenes and incidents. A book to be opened at any page ; but in that page the reader should find incident or reminiscence to excite interest.

“Our bending author hath pursued his story
In a little room confining mighty men.”

So runs the couplet printed on the title page.

The author doth indeed bend, to the storm of criticism he is likely to incur for so orderless a book.

But the “little room,” the book, slight as it is, does confine mighty men ; how many famous men, and famous women whom I have met, appear in its pages ; what a wealth of noted historic incidents, that give occasion for gossip from intimate observation ; and the gossips range from the deepest thought to the flippant pun. Glimpses, snatches, stories, incidents.

The stage is never kept waiting, but the actors have little method in their entries or exits, and

thought leaps upon thought, to be dwelt upon by the reader who lays down the book to think awhile ; for surely this book is not one to be read through at a sitting, though I hope it may prove to be one to be picked up again and again by all types of readers.

Nine of the gossips appeared in the *St. James's Gazette*, and I have to thank the Editor of that journal for permission to reprint these chapters.

REMINISCENT GOSSIP OF MEN & MATTERS

I

THERE is a subtle charm in looking over old notebooks, wherein, as the years have flown on, facts have been commented on, striking incidents noted, travel hints preserved, books culled from, and thoughts inscribed.

Some of the notes seem vivid prophecies ; others, false reading of past portents.

Historical notes on famous scenes bring up visions of hours spent in spots whence the world has been influenced by men's action.

Some slight word, on some witnessed historic pageant of our own days, forces to the mind how swiftly the world's judgments are reversed.

" Je suis un ancêtre " (" I am an ancestor "), said Napoleon Premier, and yet to-day where are his descendants to speak of him as that ancestor ?

This note of this proud, defiant statement, " I am an ancestor," comes just after a note made in

the year 1867, upon a scene at St. Cloud, when, amidst crowds of folk from all nations clustered about the Imperial palace, a little knot of English gave Napoleon III a cheer, as he drove up to his palace gates to look in upon his son, who was then lying unwell at St. Cloud.

The palace is burnt to the ground, a permanent pleasure fair invades the quiet *allées* of St. Cloud, Napoleon III lies in an English grave in England, and that sick son now lies in an English grave in South Africa. So the old notebooks pick up history, and preach the moral of Ecclesiastes.

But in the same little black book is this note, upon the capital of the state, that prevented Napoleon's threat to become an ancestor being fulfilled.

“From 1547 to 1579 there is only one reference in the English State papers to Berlin; and that is on March 6th, 1564, when Joachim, Marquis of Brandenburg, desires licence ‘for his procurator at Hamburg to purchase 300 yards of cloth in England free from export duty’ (the fiscal question was with us then).” In those not far distant days so little weight had Berlin in the councils of the nations!

There is a constant change of subject in these