

**PERSONAL
RECOLLECTIONS OF
BIRMINGHAM AND
BIRMINGHAM MEN**

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Personal Recollections of Birmingham and Birmingham Men by E. Edwards

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E. EDWARDS

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° PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS

OF

BIRMINGHAM

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BIRMINGHAM MEN.

REPRINTED FROM THE "BIRMINGHAM DAILY MAIL,"

WITH REVISIONS, CORRECTIONS, AND ADDITIONS.

By E. EDWARDS.

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1877.

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GIFT OF

WILLIAM ENDICOTT, JR.

THESE sketches, with the signature "S. D. R.," were originally published in the *Birmingham Daily Mail* newspaper. The earliest were written, as their title indicated, entirely from memory. Afterwards, when the title was no longer strictly accurate, it was retained for the purpose of showing the connection of the series. It must be understood, however, that for many of the facts and dates in the later sketches the writer is indebted to others.

The whole series has been very carefully revised, and some errors have been rectified. The writer would have preferred to remain *incognito*, but he is advised that, as the authorship is now generally known, it would be mere affectation to withhold his name. He hopes shortly to commence the publication of another series.

December, 1877.

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FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF BIRMINGHAM.

IT is a fine autumnal morning in the year 1837. I am sitting on the box seat of a stage coach, in the yard of the Bull-and-Mouth, St. Martin's-le-Grand, in the City of London. The splendid gray horses seem anxious to be off, but their heads are held by careful grooms. The metal fittings of the harness glitter in the early sunlight. Jew pedlar-boys offer me razors and penknives at prices unheard of in the shops. Porters bring carpet-bags and strange-looking packages of all sizes, and, to my great inconvenience, keep lifting up the foot-board, to deposit them in the "front boot." A solemn-looking man, whose nose is preternaturally red, holds carefully a silver-mounted whip. Passengers arrive, and climb to the roof of the coach, before and behind, until we are "full outside." Then the guard comes with a list, carefully checks off all our names, and retires to the booking office, from which a minute later he returns. He is this time accompanied by the coachman, who is a handsome, roguish-looking man. He wears a white hat, his boots are brilliantly polished, his drab great-coat is faultlessly clean, and the dark blue neckerchief is daintily tied. His whiskers are carefully brushed forward and curled, the flower in the button-hole is as fresh as if that instant plucked, and he has a look as if he were well fed, and in all other respects well cared for.

Looking admiringly over the horses, and taking the whip from his satellite, who touches his hat as he gives it up, Jehu takes the reins in hand; mounts rapidly to his seat; adjusts the "apron;" glances backward; gets the signal from the guard, who has just jumped up—bugle in hand—behind; arranges the "ribbons" in his well-gloved hand; produces a sound, somehow, with his tongue, that would puzzle the most skilful printer in the world to print phonetically, but which a Pole or a Russian would possibly understand if printed "tzchk;" gently shakes the reins, and we are off.

As we pass toward the gateway, the guard strikes up with the bugle, and makes the place resound with the well-known air, "Off, off, said the stranger." Emerging upon the street, we see, issuing from an opposite gateway, a dozen omnibuses, driven by scarlet-coated coachmen, and laden entirely with scarlet-coated passengers. Each of these men is a "general postman," and he is on his way to his "beat." As the vehicle arrives at the most convenient point, he will alight and commence the "morning" delivery. The process will be repeated in the evening; and these two deliveries suffice, then, for all the "country" correspondence sent to London.

Leaving them, our coach passes on through busy Aldersgate Street, where we are interrupted frequently by droves of sheep and numerous oxen on their way from Smithfield to the slaughter-houses of their purchasers. On through Goswell Street, alive with cries of "milk" and "water cresses." On through Goswell Road; past Sadler's Wells; over the New River, then an open stream; and in a few minutes we pull up at "The Angel." Here we take in some internal cargo. A lady of middle age, and of far beyond middle size, has "booked inside," and is very desirous that a ban-box (without the "d") should go inside, too. This the guard declines to allow, and this matter being otherwise arranged, on we go again. Through "Merrie Islington" to Highgate, where we pass under the great archway, then newly built; on to Barnet, where we stop to change horses, and where I stand up to have a look at my fellow outside passengers. There is not a lady amongst us. Coachman, guard, and passengers, we are fourteen. We all wear "top" hats, of which five are white; each hat, white or black, has its band of black crape. King William IV. was lately dead, and every decently dressed man in the country then wore some badge of mourning.

During the whole of that long day we rattled on. Through sleepy towns and pleasant villages; past the barracks at Weedon, near which we cross a newly-built bridge, on the summit of which the coachman pulls up, and we see a deep cutting through the fields on our right, and a long and high embankment on the left. Scores of men, and horses drawing strange-looking vehicles, are hard at work, and we are told that this is to be the "London and Birmingham Railway," which the coachman adds "is going to drive us off the road." On we go again, through the noble avenue of trees near

Dunchurch; through quaint and picturesque Coventry; past Meriden, where we see the words, "Meriden School," built curiously, with vari-coloured bricks, into a boundary wall. On still; until at length the coachman, as the sun declines to the west, points out, amid a gloomy cloud in front of us, the dim outlines of the steeples and factory chimneys of Birmingham. On still; down the wide open roadway of Deritend; past the many-gabled "Old Crown House;" through the only really picturesque street in Birmingham—Digbeth; up the Bull Ring, the guard merrily trolling out upon his bugle, "See the Conquering Hero Comes;" round the corner into New Street, where we pull up—the horses covered with foam—at the doors of "The Swan." Our journey has taken us just twelve hours.

And this is Birmingham! The place which I, in pleasant Kent and Surrey, had so often heard of, but had never seen. This is the town which, five years before, had vanquished the Conqueror of the Great Napoleon! This is the place which, for the first time in his life, had compelled the great Duke of Wellington to capitulate! This is the home of those who, headed by Attwood, had compelled the Duke and his army—the House of Lords—to submit, and to pass the memorable Reform Bill of 1832!

My destination was at the top of Bull Street, where my apartments were ready, and a walk to that spot completed an eventful day for me. I had come down on a special business matter, but I remained six months, and a few years later came again and settled down in Birmingham. My impressions of the place during those six months are fresh upon my memory now; and, if I write them down, may be interesting to some of the three hundred thousand people now in Birmingham, who know nothing of its aspect then.

Bull Street was then the principal street in Birmingham for retail business, and it contained some very excellent shops. Most of the then existing names have disappeared, but a few remain. Mr. Sufield, to whose courtesy I am indebted for the loan of the rare print from which the frontispiece to this little book is copied, then occupied the premises near the bottom of the street, which he still retains. Mr. Adkins, the druggist, carried on the business established almost a century ago. He is now the oldest inhabitant of Bull Street, having been born in the house he still occupies before the commencement of the present century. Mr. Gargory—still hale, vigorous,