

Henry Whitehead

1825-1896

A Memorial Sketch

By the

Rev. H. D. Rawnsley

Hon. Canon of Carlisle

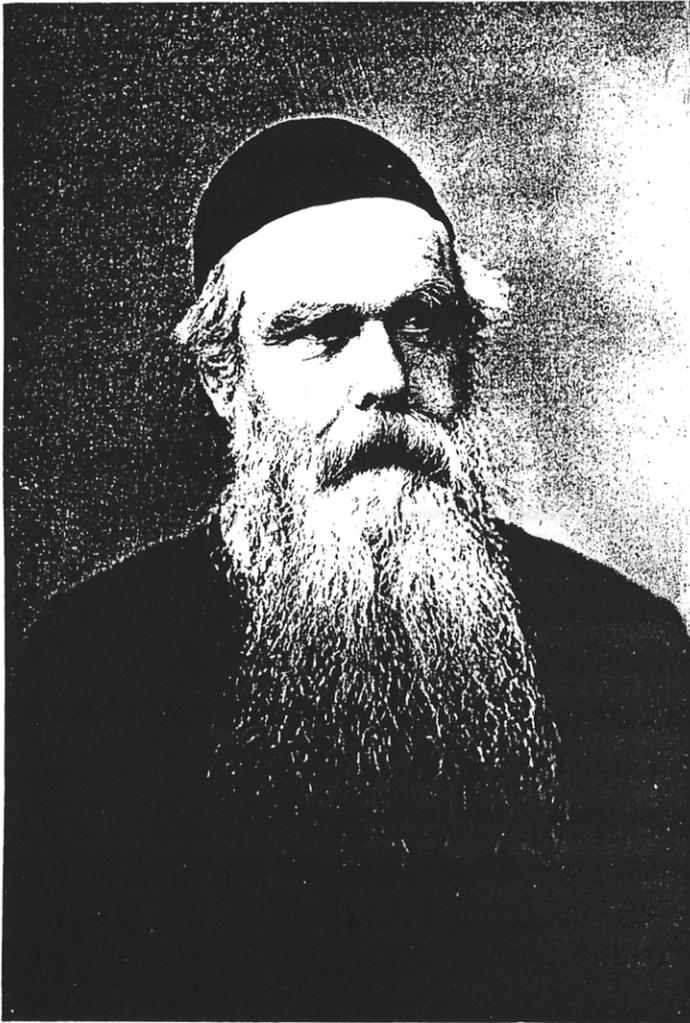
Author of "Life of Bishop Goodwin,"
"Literary Associations of the English Lakes," etc.

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W. T. H. Whitehead -

CHAPTER II

COLLEGE DAYS

FOR family reasons Henry Whitehead went up to Oxford rather later than is now the custom, and matriculated at Lincoln College in 1847. He had previously acted as assistant master in the Chatham House School for two or three years.

It was a golden time he spent at Lincoln. Its 'grove' had not yet been cut down. Its eight were rowing high upon the river, with Barras and Frank Simmons as leading oarsmen. Dr. Radford was head of the College; young Mark Pattison, who afterwards became rector, was beginning his vigorous tutorial career, and R. Mitchell and William Kay were lecturers. The Lincoln men of his time were a bright genial set, of more than average ability and much individuality of character.

In one element they were at this time strong. It was an element dear to the heart of Whitehead: it was humour—not horseplay, nor only practical joking, but real delight in clever fun

and mother-wit. Amongst the scholars of Lincoln the names of Bampffield, Cox, Tidman, Charles Morris, Walker, Alfred Church, the well-known author and translator of Tacitus, occur at this date; others of his friends were Felix Verity; Espin—now Chancellor Espin; Stilwell; F. Barlow Guy, late headmaster of Forest School, Walthamstow; T. Kebbel, barrister and journalist; J. Healy; R. Ogle; W. Gurdon Lee, a famous amateur boxer; Gowen Evans, afterwards editor of the *Melbourne Argus*; J. S. Sidebotham; Howard; Hodgson, in those days a famous mimic; and Austin of Exeter College, brother of Alfred Austin the poet, and an inveterate practical joker.

Whitehead, though he was reserved, had a deep vein of humour in him, which at the least provocation declared itself, and he was soon one of the most popular men of the College.

This was partly owing to his geniality and ability to take provocation kindly, partly to his quiet ability to endure fools gladly, partly again to his wide sympathies with men of all sets, his quaint independence of the opinion of others, and his hatred of all sham or pretence. He looked on men as books wherein to read character, and men who were voted 'bores' by others found in him a kind and interested listener.

Many years after, one of his College friends—then the editor of one of the great colonial papers—reminded him of old Lincoln days, saying:

well-to-do people. Single rooms do I say? aye! and many of them *quarters* of single rooms (for this was before the days of the Lodging House Act), under which difficult circumstances they had to make the best of life, if any best could be possible, sharing the one fire in turn for cooking purposes. He has often been heard to relate, when talking over the old St. Luke's days, the pathetically humorous reply of the woman of whom he inquired:

"Why, however do you manage to get along in such close quarters?"

"Well, sir," was the reply, "we was comfortable enough till the gentleman come in the middle," an answer which explained the chalk circle in the middle of the room, which defined the limit within which the aforesaid 'gentleman' lived and moved and had his being.

Those were days when the cows lived upstairs on the top storey, conveyed thither by means of a windlass, never to return to earth whilst their milk lasted.

St. Luke's parish was a great place for shoemakers and cobblers, mostly of a sceptical turn of mind, as is their wont, in London at any rate, with whom he had many a tough argument which often tended to create no little amount of respect for one another, this possibility being largely due to his tolerant wide-mindedness.

In St. Luke's, Berwick Street, was fair field for inquiry into human nature. If some of it

was shady and disheartening, there was much that was good and to be had in honour. Mr. Aldous the church-warden, Mr. Orme the clerk and superintendent of the boys' Sunday school, Mr. Robson the organist, and Gibson the bellowsman were real friends; and many an evening in the Soho lodgings was made pleasant by the animated discussion on matters political and religious with the brave Scotch Sergeant Richardson, the scripture-reader of St. Luke's, a man brim-full of metaphysics, and a most fluent quoter of Burns and Scott; and Joseph Randall, the national schoolmaster of the neighbouring parish of St. James, and a prominent man in his day.

It was during the cholera epidemic of 1854 that Whitehead found the sergeant smitten of the plague. "I knew you would come," he said. "And I knew," replied Whitehead, "how I should find you when I did come." He then told me of a conversation he had had with a man who had often been rude to him, but whose rudeness had now given way to fear. "And what," said the man, "is the best thing to take for cholera?"

"I don't know what to take," said Sergeant Richardson, "but I know what to do. It may neither prevent nor cure cholera, but it will save me from what is worse than cholera, that is from fear."

"But what is your antidote?"

"I shall look up to my God," said the ser-

geant, "and though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him."

Speaking of his friend the sergeant, at the Rainbow dinner, Whitehead said, "Mr. Richardson recovered from his sickness 'to fight a good fight' in the cause of his Master for many a year to come. But he is now in his grave; and in the long list of my friends I recognize no more honourable name than that of the ex-sergeant of the Grenadier Guards."

Whitehead lived on in St. Luke's, but kept touch with the world outside of it. His rooms in Soho Square were conveniently central; and many of his old Lincoln College chums delighted to come in upon him and learn something of the secrets of that other world in which he now was teacher and learner.

Others there were who made a point of coming to hear him preach on Sundays. One of these writes thus:—

"I went to hear him preach in the early days of his ministrations in St. Luke's, Berwick Street. I was greatly impressed by his tersely earnest delivery, and his incisive but always reverent utterances. I have always felt that as his sermons,¹ as compositions, were marked by wide and careful reading, deeply devotional thought, exceptional power and originality, so his delivery

¹ He published a small volume of these sermons under the title of *The Church and the People*. London, Skeffington, 1856. Now out of print.

was such as not to fail to impress any who heard him with his own deep sense of responsibility in delivering the message entrusted to him."

There had been a committee of old Lincoln men formed to present Mark Pattison with some testimonial; and after having finished their labours, they were so fraternally affected one to the other that they did not dissolve, but determined to form a social club to meet at the 'Edinburgh Castle' periodically, with solemn agreement that the bill of fare should be rump steak pudding and a bowl of punch. These meetings were bright spots in the hard life the young curate found was his portion; and though the old 'Lincoln Club' went to pieces after a time, because, as Whitehead put it, 'it deviated from the original bill of fare,' the recollection of the capital stories and comic situations of those pleasant gatherings were to the end of his life a source of great delight to him. A friend who knew Whitehead intimately writes thus of those Soho days:

It was when he was living in Soho as curate of St. Luke's, Berwick Street, that I first got to know him. He was very fond of having two or three friends to dinner in his lodgings, when the fare was always the same, a roast leg of mutton and sea kale. But it was after he became Mr. Bowyer's curate at Clapham, and lodged in Manor Street, that I began to know what he was really like. His rector, a man of high culture and genial spirit, thoroughly understood him; and I remember very well when Whitehead took some of us to