

MEMORIES OF TRAVEL



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MEMORIES OF TRAVEL

BY
VISCOUNT BRYCE

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Dedication

It had been the intention of the author to dedicate this volume to Sir COURTENAY ILBERT. Since that cannot be, it is now offered to him in memory of a friendship of sixty years and of many days of companionship in travel.

PREFACE

THE sketches of travel gathered together in this volume represent only a small part of what the author intended to publish ; but few and slight though they be, they may serve as an illustration of the scope and variety of his experiences in all parts of the world.

James Bryce was a great lover of nature—an inheritance from his father, with whom he rambled in boyhood over the Scottish and Irish mountains, and from whom, and also from an uncle (Dr. William Bryce of Edinburgh), he acquired the taste for geology and botany which was a never-failing source of pleasure throughout his life. This love of natural scenery, combined with an intense interest in the countries and peoples of the world, led him to devote his vacations, whenever possible, to travelling, and a steady and systematic pursuit of this object enabled him in the course of years, in spite of a life well filled with other work, to accomplish much. Some of these travels have already been described at greater length in the volumes on *Transcaucasia and Ararat* (1876), *South Africa* (1895), and

South America (1910). Travels in countries such as Egypt (1887), India (1888), Australia, Tasmania, and New Zealand (1912), and Japan, Corea, and China (1913), were not recorded in book form, nor were they fit subjects for brief description. But wherever he voyaged it was his habit to note down at the time, and while they were still fresh in his memory, impressions of travel which could later on be developed and expanded into fuller sketches or short articles. Such, for instance, were notes referring to days spent in the Balearic Islands and the Canaries; to climbs in the Pyrenees and a visit to the little Republic of Andorra; or again, an account of the Hawaiian Islands and of the ascent of the interesting volcano Kilauea; of Mexico with its snow-clad volcanoes, its varied vegetation, and its memories of the Aztecs and the Conquistadores; and of a short tour in Cuba and Jamaica on the way back. There were notes, too, on Sicily and Corsica, Constantinople, the Greek Islands, with Ithaca and Troy, North Africa from Tunis to Tangier, and through the Pillars of Hercules to French Morocco and the old Moorish cities of Rabat, Fez, and Marrakeesh. Impressions of all these countries, with reflections inspired by their natural beauty and historical interest, were to have found a place in these *Memories of Travel* had leisure permitted; but the necessary completion of other work intervened, and they

remained unwritten. The earlier years were chiefly devoted to mountain-climbing ; but in 1872 the journey to Iceland (in company with his Oxford friends Sir Courtenay Ilbert and Sheriff Æneas Mackay of Edinburgh), which forms the first of the sketches here published, broke entirely new ground and left a deep impression on his mind. The sense of remoteness, the loneliness of the desert, the savage, almost sinister, aspect of the volcanic region with its harsh tones of colour, appealed strongly to his imagination, contrasting strangely as it did with the civilisation and education of the people ; and an unexpected detention in the country enabled him to master sufficient Icelandic to read the literature of the Sagas—an unfailing source of pleasure to him throughout his life. The expeditions in the Polish and Hungarian Alps were made with Leslie Stephen in 1878 in places at that time little frequented by English travellers. His companion in the Alps in 1884 was Edward Bowen of Harrow, and their tour was undertaken with the purpose of following the famous march of the Russian General Suvaroff in the campaign against the French in 1799, when, with troops and artillery, he crossed the St. Gotthard from the Italian side and attempted to make his way through Canton Schwyz to join the Austrian Archduke Charles at Zürich—an attempt which, though unsuccessful in its main object, led to

one of the most extraordinary achievements in Alpine warfare. The years preceding and following 1884 include unrecorded expeditions in the Alps, the Dolomites, Dalmatia and Montenegro, the Balkans and Macedonia, as well as the more distant travels previously referred to. The visit to the Islands of the Southern Pacific was made in 1912 in passing from San Francisco to New Zealand and Australia; and the journey through Siberia, and two hundred miles up the Obi River and across the steppe to the Altai Mountains, in 1913, on the way home from the United States after retiring from his post at Washington. Palestine (including a visit to Petra), which had long been looked forward to, was achieved in the spring of 1914, three months before the outbreak of the Great War, and the weeks spent there, partly driving through the country and partly riding and camping, gave him his last sight of the Near East which he had first entered thirty-eight years before. In 1920 he revived his memories of Southern Spain and added a short expedition to French Morocco; and in 1921 he crossed the Atlantic for the eleventh and last time to pay a farewell visit to the United States.

The travels here referred to, which covered a period of some sixty years and comprised an extraordinary variety of climate, scenery, and vegetation, as well as of human races and institu-

tions, constantly stimulated powers of observation which were exceptional and were used to their full extent. In these days the born traveller, with all his faculties alert, and all the facilities of modern travel at his command, has a world of unending interest and pleasure within his grasp, and the desire to share the interest and the beauty of these experiences with those who may not have had a like opportunity, suggested the records, of which only these few can now be given to his friends.

I desire to acknowledge with grateful thanks the help received from Lord Bryce's friends, Sir Courtenay Ilbert, Mr. Douglas Freshfield, and Mr. H. A. L. Fisher, who have kindly read through the proofs of these articles and made the alterations and corrections that were necessary.

E. M. BRYCE.

HINDLEAP,
December 10, 1922.

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APPENDIX TO CHAPTER ON ICELAND

I WAS one of the two friends who accompanied James Bryce on his visit to Iceland in the autumn of 1872. The other was Æneas Mackay, then practising at Edinburgh as an advocate of the Scottish Bar. We had travelled together before in the Alps and elsewhere, and two years later Mackay was the companion of Bryce in their assault on Ararat, when Bryce alone reached the summit.

Our first intention in 1872 was to make Norway the scene of our autumn holiday, but, almost at the last moment, Mackay diverted our plans to Iceland. He had heard of a trading steamer which was to sail from Leith to Seyðisford on the east coast of Iceland and to return from Reykjavik some three weeks later. Those three weeks, he suggested, might be well spent in a ride across some parts of an island then known to us only by description. Hence the voyage to Seyðisford and the ride by Myvatn (Midge-water—ominous name) to Akureyri, a little hamlet on the north coast. Here we were met by the disquieting news that the return voyage from Reykjavik was not to come off. Apparently the trading venture had not been a success. Could we catch the next mail steamer? Not, they said, by the ordinary western route, but it *might* be possible to cross the central desert by a shorter, less known, and more difficult route. Hence the desert journey which Bryce has described. We started at an early hour, but I, as the junior member of

the party, was left temporarily behind to bid farewell to our kind hosts at Akureyri. A responsible task, for the stirrup-cups included such items as beer, corn-brandy, and sacrament wine, and the rule was "no heel-taps." But, by the grace of Odin, the junior member was able to mount his pony and ride several miles to rejoin his party. When he found them, Sigurðr, the guide, was at their head, gaily waving his whip aloft.

Sir Richard Burton was in Iceland while we were there, but we did not happen to come across him. He has left an account of his Iceland experiences in the book entitled *Ultima Thule: or, a Summer in Iceland*, which was published in 1874. It would be interesting to compare his narrative with Bryce's impressions. No two great travellers ever differed from each other more profoundly, in sympathies, antipathies, and points of view, than Bryce and Burton.

What were the main impressions left by Bryce as a fellow-traveller? What made him the most delightful of travelling companions? Was it his rich intellectual equipment, the unfailing memory, the inexhaustible stores of knowledge, which seemed to supply everything that the inquisitive traveller ought to know, which suggested associations, historical or other, for every place visited? He had read widely the literature both of the modern and of the ancient world. He had learned all that was to be learned from Konrad Maurer and others about early Icelandic laws and institutions. He knew and loved the Icelandic Sagas, and would listen to long recitations from *Njala* (*Dasent's Story of Burnt Njal*) in an Icelandic rectory or farmhouse. In later days, when Bryce was at Washington, President Roosevelt would draw up his knees and slap them with delight if he succeeded in eliciting Bryce's stores of knowledge about the Sagas.

When we were detained at Reykjavik late in the

autumn, Bryce and I, with the help of a local professor, spent many hours in spelling out Egil's Saga. I have recently refreshed my memory of it, and I am sorry to say that I find it harder reading now than I did fifty years ago. Bryce had a good working acquaintance with many modern languages. The Icelandic language has been said to be the delight of the grammarian and the despair of the traveller. Our conversational knowledge of it in 1872 approached zero, but could sometimes be supplemented from other sources. The Reykjavik professor, the up-country priest, would occasionally produce a Latin sentence or two, though the up-country Latin was apt to be queer. At Reykjavik a member of our party once succeeded in using Latin for the sale of a pony. He was accosted in a sentence which might have come straight out of Henry's *First Latin Book*, a work which was once familiar to schoolboys, and fragmentary remembrances of which were, in 1872, found useful for conversational purposes. "Rusticus quidam, amicus meus, vult emere equum tuum varicolore, quanti stabit?" Eventually a bargain was struck, and the piebald was sold for so many "imperialibus" (rix dollars).

Now for a specimen of up-country Latin. At Thingvellir our greeting from the local priest was "Temfus havemus optimum, jao jao (yow yow), temfus havemus optimissimum." The modern Icelander, like the ancient Vascon, is apt to interchange his labials. If Latin or Danish failed, the resources of civilisation were not exhausted, and other languages might be called into play. One evening, after a long and fatiguing ride, we were trying to see what kind of a meal could be concocted at an Icelandic farmhouse. "Ma dov' è il frying-pan?" was Bryce's query to the startled daughter of the house.

Bryce's interests were multiform, and were not confined to human nature. He inherited from his

father his love for and knowledge of botany and geology. In Iceland he was always jumping off his pony to inspect some interesting plant or geological feature, just as in the Alps he was always skipping up a hill or cliff for some similar purpose.

But it was not Bryce's rich intellectual gifts that endeared him chiefly to his friends. For a friend in trouble his sympathy was unflinching, practical, helpful. Should a travelling companion be temporarily incapacitated by fatigue or illness, Bryce's solicitude for him would be tender and unremitting. He would watch over him and minister to all his needs. These are things that an old friend and travelling companion can never forget.

The Iceland journey was merely an episode in a life-long friendship, and its incidents have been blurred and dimmed by time. But the memories of friendship are indestructible. Of what Bryce's friendship has meant for me I cannot trust myself to speak.

C. P. ILBERT.

THE END

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