

FLEET STREET MEMORIES.

A DIP INTO THE DIARIES AND NOTEBOOKS
LEFT BY THE LATE SIR JOHN RICHARD
ROBINSON, THE LONDON JOURNALIST.

Written for THE NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW by
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ABOUT a year ago, when the announcement of the sudden death of Sir John Robinson came as a shock to his many friends, filling the whole journalistic world of Great Britain with a sense of personal loss, there was made at the same time the announcement that he had left a volume of memoirs covering fifty years of active life and work in Fleet Street. Those of us who knew him personally, those who had heard his after-dinner speeches at club and literary gatherings, and the thousands who had followed his work as it appeared in the once great organ of English Liberal opinion, *The London Daily News*, looked forward with the keenest pleasure and delight to the publication of his memoirs. Most of the conspicuous persons in the world of politics, literature, art, and music during the past fifty years had been the personal friends and associates of the great journalist. He was the friend of Douglas Jerrold, Dickens, Thackeray, Gladstone, Kossuth, the Hungarian; he discovered the great war correspondent, Archibald Forbes, and during the Franco-Prussian War revolutionized the methods of getting war news. During our American civil war *The Daily News*, under his management, stood out bravely and almost, if not entirely, alone among London newspapers, advocating the cause of the North, assisted by that noble woman, Harriet Martineau, then a member of its staff.

Into the dingy old room where first he had his sanctum in Bouverie Street, went Garibaldi, stepping carefully over the rickety floor. There persons whose names were made in the literary world went to receive commissions. Young men, just starting in journalism, climbed the stairs and stood before the genial manager, asking for his encouragement. There also went the poor in spirit and the poor in purse, and all left that room with a tender recollection of the kindly gentleman who worked so busily at his desk, yet was never so busy that he forgot the humanities and the gentle courtesies of life.

It was something between eleven and twelve years ago now that I, a struggling, half-discouraged American girl in London, trying to introduce to staid Britishers a novel kind of journalism, passed the now imposing Daily News Building in Bouverie Street, and, knowing but little of the paper, its history, its politics, or its manager, climbed the stairs, pushed by commissionaire and office boy, and presented myself at the desk of Sir John Robinson. There was a fog outside—one of London's thickest and blackest. Sir John got up from the leader he was writing, held out his hand, and smilingly said: "Why, the sun has come out!"

Thus began one of the happiest and most valuable friendships of my life. It was about two years ago that at one of the underground stations I heard a pleasant voice inquiring:

"And what is the American Girl in London doing now that's new and startling to shock the British?"

"Writing her autobiography!" I answered laughingly, meeting the smiling eyes of Sir John Robinson.

"Such a coincidence that we two young persons should be doing the same thing!" he exclaimed, shaking with laughter. "I'm writing my memoirs." During the journey down to Blackfriars station Sir John entertained me with a description of his plans for his memoirs and recollections of some of the incidents and persons who were to appear in them.

It has, therefore, been with a feeling of great personal interest that I have looked forward to the appearance of the book which I have now before me for review, and it is with a sense of personal regret that I read the announcement of the compiler, Mr. Frederick Moy Thomas, that, after the death of the distinguished journalist, the promised memoirs were not found among his papers. Whether failing health made it impossible for Sir John to follow out his plan or whether dissatisfaction with the work he had done upon them caused him to destroy them will probably never be known.

What he did leave behind him, in a fragmentary state, were a number of diaries, journals, and closely written pages of jottings and impressions, doubtless intended for future assorting and revision, and from these Mr. Thomas has constructed a volume of great

***FIFTY YEARS OF FLEET STREET.** Being the Life and Recollections of Sir John R. Robinson. Compiled and edited by Frederick Moy Thomas. Portrait frontispiece. New York: The Macmillan Company.