Preface

Some lives are lived only to be written about. Whatever value they have — but most of all their *reality* — only comes into existence when they are in print. As work on this book proceeded, I realized that Eliot's lines were not merely the sort of thing that aging poets laden with honors feel obligated to turn out:

"We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started,
And know the place for the first time."

— Eliot, T. S., *Four Quartets*, "Little Gidding", V

The lines describe what we experience when we look back on our life from old age — when we attempt to document what we actually did, and what happened to us, and when.

"...I felt it possible to shed light on this life which we live in darkness and to bring back to its former true character this life which we distort unceasingly — in short, extract the real essence of life in a book. Happy the man who could write such a book, I thought to myself; what a mighty task before him! To convey an idea of it, one would have to go to the noblest and most varied arts for comparisons; for this writer... would need to prepare it with minute care, constantly regrouping his forces as if for an attack, endure it like an exhausting task, accept it like a rule of conduct, build it like a church, follow it like a regimen, overcome it like an obstacle, win it like a friendship, feed it intensively like a child, create it like a world, without overlooking those mysteries whose explanation is probably to be found only in other worlds and the presentiment of which is the quality in life and art which moves us most deeply. And in those great books there are certain portions which there has been time only to sketch in and which no doubt will never be completed because of the very magnitude of the architect's plan. How many great cathedrals remain unfinished! Such a book one nourishes over a long period of time, builds up its weaker parts, keeps it safe from harm; but later it is the book itself that grows up, selects our tomb, protects it against false rumours and somewhat against oblivion." — Proust, Marcel, *The Past Recaptured*, tr. Frederick A. Blossom, vol. 7 of *Remembrance of Things Past*, The Modern Library, N.Y., 1932, p. 384.

"Ten times over I must essay the task, must lean down over the abyss. And each time, the natural laziness which deters us from every difficult enterprise, every work of importance, has urged me to leave the thing alone..." — Proust, Marcel, "Overture", *Swann's Way*, Modern Library, N.Y., 1928, p. 57.

A word about the extensive detail concerning the trivia of everyday life in this book:

"Surprisingly little is known of the customs and practices in the ordinary routine of Puritan life, for the journals and diaries, so numerous in the period, seldom or but incidentally record what to them were the commonplaces of existence." — Miller, Perry, and Johnson, Thomas H., eds, *The Puritans*, Vol. 2, Harper Torchbooks, N.Y., 1963, p. 387.

This applies even to a great diarist like Pepys. In all the volumes of his book, we are not told how he carried money, or how much he typically carried. We don't know what the contents of his pockets were, or even if his clothes had pockets. We don't know what clothes he wore. We don't know how often he bathed.

One of my goals in writing this book, therefore, was to be a historian of the everyday, to include in what is, after all, a historical narrative, what is seldom if ever included in historical narratives.

But even apart from the potential historical interest, the ordinary, the everyday, is fundamentally interesting — fundamentally *strange* — for those with the ability to see what is before them. "Depend upon it, there is nothing so unnatural as the commonplace."[1] Several readers have told me that the details have called up memories of their own that they had long forgotten.

As to the organization of the material:

"Chronology is the key to narrative. Yet where a throng of events are marching abreast, it is inevitable that their progress should be modified by selection and classification. Some must stand on one side until the main press is over; others, taking advantage of any interlude, may hasten forward to periods beyond the general account." — Churchill, Winston, Chapter XIV, "The First Defeat of the U-Boats", in *The World Crisis*, vol. 2, Charles Scribner's Sons, N.Y., 1951, p. 285.

Even though I have become a scavenger of memories, this book would have been a much better record if I had had the full cooperation, in correcting and adding to what I remembered, of several of the leading personalities it describes. But one of them refused even to hear mentioned any events of the time we spent together; another is now famous in his field, and although he knows he appears in the book, I was reluctant to ask him to contribute further recollections for fear he would make demands on how the existing material was presented. The reliability of the memory of another leading personality I have good reason to regard as no longer trustworthy. (The names of all three of these persons, and of others, have been changed in the book.) On the other hand, I am deeply indebted for material provided by persons I knew in my childhood and early youth, especially those mentioned in the Acknowledgements, who read parts of the book online. Publishing online was definitely a good idea, I think, and so I must disagree with Saint-Simon:

"He who would write the story of his times truthfully and with no respect for persons, should never show it to anybody. He should leave it to ripen under lock and key." — Duc de Saint-Simon, Louis, *Versailles, the Court, and Louis XIV*, Harper & Row, Publishers, N.Y., 1966.

A certain amount of detail has been lost as a result of my failing to write down incidents remembered, and then being unable to recall them later. Memories would disappear sometimes even as I was in the process of looking for a pencil and paper. A strange phenomenon, suggesting that certain memories (and thoughts), no matter how clear they may seem, reside only on the "surface" of the mind, and evaporate at the slightest shift in attention.

In 2005, I began to use a cartoon technique to remember things when pencil and paper were not conveniently at hand. This involved simply making a cartoon, on an imaginary whiteboard in

1. Sherlock Holmes, in Conan Doyle, Arthur, "A Case of Identity".

my visual memory, of the thing to be remembered. I was surprised at how effective this technique was — much more so than my previous technique of coming up with a word formula representing the thing, and then saying it over and over in my mind. I could sometimes cram three or four drawings onto that internal drawing board and find that they remained for a day or two with very little interim revisualizing of them.

Since 2008, I have made a practice of carrying a small spiral-bound notebook in my shirt pocket, and jotting down thoughts and memories as soon as they occur to me.

Further material has been lost because, as I found out in early 2005, the word-processor I had been using for the previous four years (FrameMaker) had been randomly deleting passages from files. This continued in the later version of the word-processor (FrameMaker 11.0) I bought in October 2012 in an attempt to solve the problem. The potential losses in text that almost certainly would occur in a transfer of over 4,000 pages of text, to a new word-processor, seemed to outweigh the burden of staying with FrameMaker, and devoting part of each day to random checks of text to try to detect deleted passages. I have tried to rewrite passages I have discovered to have been deleted, but many others are irretrievably lost. As I have said elsewhere, "Writing books using the computer is making a bargain with the devil."

"...I was not free to choose [my memories] because they came into my mind pell-mell. And I felt that that must surely be the hall mark of their genuineness. [The sensation that brings forth a memory] is the guarantee of the truth of the entire picture composed of contemporary impressions which the sensation brings in its train, with that unerring proportion of light and shadow, emphasis and omission, remembrance and oblivion, which conscious memory and observation will never know." — Proust, Marcel, *The Past Recaptured*, tr. Blossom, Frederick A., The Modern Library, N.Y., 1932, p. 205-6.

And yet, the author of any autobiography must make a conscious attempt not to record the mere what-happened — the kind of detail whose only point is to give evidence that the author existed — the kind of detail that usually makes diaries such boring reading..

The present edition is only a first draft, since it was written almost entirely from memory, with minimal reference to a journal I kept for some thirty years. This edition retains considerable scaffolding from its construction, that is, the numerous subtitles and sub-subtitles. Eventually, these will probably be removed, but I have felt that, since the book is being published online, the subtitles will help readers to quickly locate parts of the book they might find interesting.