

THE LIFE OF  
WILLIAM COBBETT,

DEDICATED TO HIS SONS.



COBBETTS FARM.

London.

F. J. MASON, 444, WEST STRAND.

1835.





WILLIAM COBBETT.

IV.  
H.



LONDON :  
JOHN LEIGHTON, JOHNSON'S-COURT,  
FLEET-STREET.

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OF

WILLIAM COBBETT.

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Who—what man ever performed a greater quantity of labour than I  
have performed? What man ever did so much?—WILLIAM COBBETT.

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SECOND EDITION.

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1835.



TO THE SONS OF  
WILLIAM COBBETT,  
THESE MEMORIALS OF THE LIFE OF  
A GREAT AND ILLUSTRIOUS MAN,  
*Their Father,*  
A LABOURER ON THE ENGLISH SOIL,  
A LABOURER FOR THE HAPPINESS OF LABOURERS,  
AND, LASTLY, A LABOURER IN  
THE ENGLISH PARLIAMENT,  
ARE RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED.



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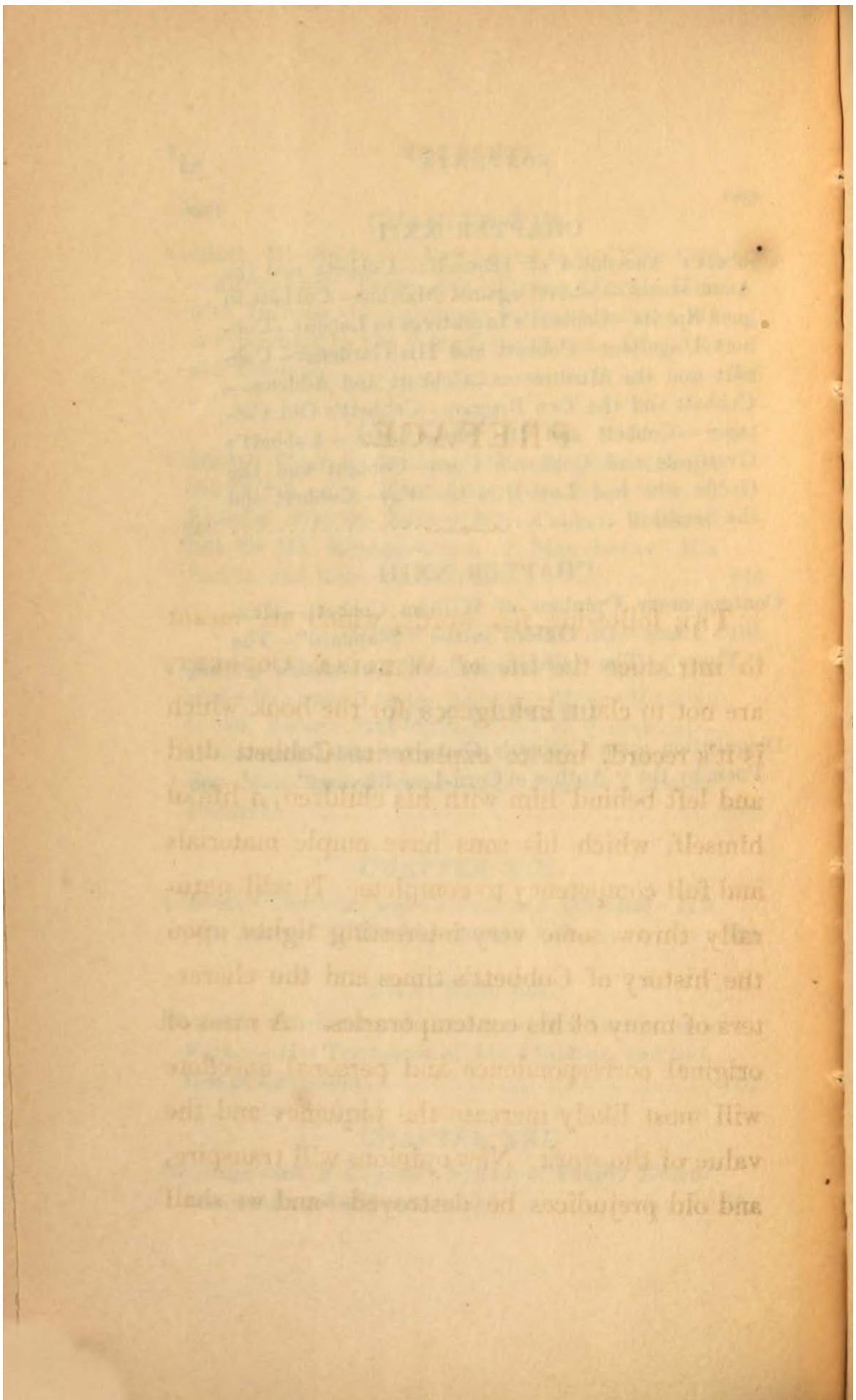
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## PREFACE.



THE following few words, which are meant to introduce the life of WILLIAM COBBETT, are not to claim indulgence for the book which is it's record, but to explain it. Cobbett died and left behind him with his children, a life of himself, which his sons have ample materials and full competency to complete. It will naturally throw some very interesting lights upon the history of Cobbett's times and the characters of many of his contemporaries. A mass of original correspondence and personal anecdote will most likely increase the piquancy and the value of the work. New opinions will transpire, and old prejudices be destroyed—and we shall



have a fresh ground-work of information upon which to build a larger structure of truth. Such a book, written about such a man, will assuredly command a most extensive circulation ; but as it must be of necessity voluminous, its circulation must be one of time. It cannot, on its first appearance, (for a voluminous book to pay its mere expences cannot be very cheap) fall at once into the hands of that class for whom Cobbett most laboured and by whom he was best known.

We felt this—the public called for a life—Cobbett was a man of the million, and at his death the million looked to obtain as many memorials of his remarkable career, as could be placed within their reach in small compass and at a cheap rate :—they would hold them at a great value, but their means required that they should get them at a *small cost*. Our determination was soon made and this little volume is its result.

Upon its pages the reader will peruse a detailed narration of all the events of Cobbett's

life—domestic, literary, and political—nearly all penned originally by William Cobbett himself. Where so much auto-biography was to be obtained, it would have been presumptuous to have substituted a narrative in the third person, which while it made the pictures more tame, would also have detracted from their graphic character. As the book stands almost wholly the production of Cobbett, the reader has the implied assurance that it must be interesting.

We have little to add, save that no labour has been spared in the collection of the details, and that we have stowed away in the volume as much as it will contain—selecting our matter with a view to render the cargo less elaborate than complete.

When it has been necessary to speak in the third person, we have confined ourselves closely to the relation of facts, without broaching opinions, and the only original views of our own which we have presented to the reader, will be found in the *seventh* chapter, where we have



sought to deduce from Cobbett's private character evidences and inferences that might apply to his public career ;—and in our general dissertation upon his life, his character, his vicissitudes, his motions, and his acts, at the end of the volume, which if it so please the reader, it is entirely at his discretion to leave unperused. It is nevertheless, part of a wise philosophy to speculate upon the minds and actions of remarkable public men. Accordingly we have subjoined Hazlitt's essay on the character of Cobbett, and the opinions of some of his most able contemporaries since his death.

LIFE OF WILLIAM COBBETT

THE LIFE  
OF  
WILLIAM COBBETT.

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CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION TO COBBETT'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY—HIS  
BIRTH—ASPERSIONS WHICH INDUCED HIM TO PUBLISH  
THE FIRST PART OF HIS OWN LIFE.

At a grand public dinner given in the heart of the city of London, by its merchants and traders, to the Right Honourable Sir Robert Peel, immediately after his secession from the office of prime minister, that distinguished individual, in the course of a memorable speech, made the following remarks:—"If circumstances may appear to have elevated some of us above the rest, to what, I venture to ask, is that elevation owing?—It is owing to nothing

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else but to the exercise, either on our own part or the part of our immediate forefathers, of the love of order—of industry—of integrity in commercial dealings, which have, hitherto, secured to every member of the middle classes of society the opportunities of elevation and distinction in this great community.”

At such a moment, and in the immediate circle then gathered around the statesman, these striking observations applied well to his own case—the case of a cotton-spinner’s son, sent for by his sovereign, from Rome, to be made prime minister of his country;—but to the memory of the million will occur the name of another man to whom their application is still more powerfully forcible—whose life and conduct illustrate them with a more personal conviction—whose elevation was, indeed, founded upon their innate principle, unassisted by the possession of wealth—and that man was WILLIAM COBBETT!

His history is an episode in the history of his country, and his mind for a period formed a portion of hers. Upon the canvas whereon the characters and events of his times shall be depicted, he will stand forth in strange and



strong contrast to every other portrait and scene. In aspect—in position—in costume—in recollections engendered, and associations called up—in peculiarity of place and power—in depth of colour—determination of spirit, and the wildness of untempered will, he will be alone amongst his contemporaries; with them, and yet away from them—the wonder, if not the admiration of the gazers on. No more remarkable man has yet lived, in any age or nation.

But let us not commence our biography with a dissertation upon the nature of a mind and character, which afford of themselves so interesting a development in progress, and which will present in their career so many future opportunities for speculation and philosophy.

The first sphere in which Cobbett is found moving is that of a ploughboy;—the last, a Member of Parliament, representing the people from whom he sprung! It will be our duty in the following pages to trace the steps by which he attained to the latter elevation. The ladder was of his own construction, and he soon mounted to the top. There was sure footing, too, in all the progress; for Cobbett was no Icarus to fly with wings that would have melted in the sun!



About the birth of William Cobbett, there is a question as to the date; he has himself fixed it at the 9th March, 1766; but his son, in giving an account of his death, imagines it to have taken place three years anterior. "He never appeared to us," says Mr. John Cobbett, "to be certain of his own age, we had some time ago procured an extract from the register of Farnham parish, in which it appears that the four sons of my grandfather, George, Thomas, William, and Anthony, were christened on the 1st of April, 1763, and, as Anthony was the younger son, and William was the third, we infer that he was born one year before he was christened, that is, on the 9th of March, 1792. He might, therefore, have been older, but not much."

For thirty years this extraordinary person must have filled different stations in society, acquiring in each a celebrity in itself as remarkable as it was rapidly attained, before men could have learned any particulars of his early life, save in those snatches of egotism which a self-admiration—or rather, perhaps, an admiration of the means and principles by which he was rising into greatness—continually prompted him to introduce into his works. During all



this time, too, the many egotistical passages in his writings applied rather to his performances than to his history, and he was oftener boasting of what he had done than giving us information of what he had been. The most that men seemed to be able to gather about him was, "that the acute and powerful writer who was then one of the most valuable and earnest supporters of the Government, had risen from the station of a common soldier in the ranks of the British army." A few of his enemies, however, originated some tale of scandal, which they put in connexion with the military epoch of his early life, implying an undergone disgrace, the calumny of which its object was no more inclined to suffer, than the disgrace itself. He accordingly wrote and published, under the title of "The Life and Adventures of Peter Porcupine, with a full and fair Account of all his Authoring Transactions," his own Memoirs up to that period; and upon its title-page he printed the following motto from Shakspeare—  
"Now you lying varlets you shall see how plain a tale will put you down."

Cobbett was at this time in America; the year was 1796, and he must have been about



thirty-four years old. His pen was in its full force and vigour—his principles were the Conservative principles of that day. It was by his frequent lashing of revolutionary doctrines and a pervading *sans-culottism*—lashing them as fiercely and almost as eloquently as Burke—that his power and value stood confessed and acknowledged by the government. The American democracy he scouted, and, in the heart of that turbulent country, he had the courage to pour forth vituperatives against it, which made him enemies without number, and even endangered his life. As we have said, it was these enemies who soon circulated slander respecting him, and it was this slander that he sought at once to rebut and annihilate, by giving a true account of his life. As in America he had written under the signature of Peter Porcupine, so he now affixed that appellation to his new memoirs.

It may be well at once to state to our readers, that in narrating the history of Cobbett's life in these pages, we shall seize every opportunity of inserting portions of autobiography from his own pen. His works—the whole of which are now before us, and which

we have carefully read, and we hope no less carefully studied—are rich in valuable episodes of this description, and nothing, however savouring of vanity and self-love, which this strange and enterprising man has written of himself, is either without interest or devoid of moral. The whole of his account of his early life has an especial charm about it, occasionally whetted by the bitterness with which he placed parts of his own conduct in contrast with that of others for whom he fulfils Johnson's character of a "good hater."

It will be our duty, however, before we place Cobbett's recital of his own adventures before the reader, to exhibit "Paul Hedgehog's History of Peter Porcupine," the last of the scandals that immediately preceded its publication. This "History," published in the form of a Letter to a Mr. Bache, the Editor of the American "Aurora," we here subjoin:—

“FOR THE ‘AURORA.’

“HISTORY OF PETER PORCUPINE.

“MR. BACHE:

“As the people of America may not be informed who Peter Porcupine is, the celebrated



manufacturer of *lies*, and retailer of *filth*, I will give you some little account of this pestiferous animal. This wretch was obliged to *abscond* from his darling OLD ENGLAND, to avoid being turned off into the other world before what he supposed his time. It may be well imagined that in a land of liberty, and flowing with milk and honey, his *precipitate retreat* could not have been owing to any offence committed against the government, very honourable to himself. Gnawed by the worm that never dies, his own wretchedness would ever prevent him from making any attempt in favour of human happiness. His usual occupation at home was that of a *garret scribbler*, excepting a little *night business* occasionally to supply unavoidable exigencies: Grub-street did not answer his purposes, and being scented by certain tipstaffs for something more than scribbling, he took a *French leave* for France. His evil genius pursued him here, and *as his fingers were as long as ever*, he was obliged as suddenly to leave the republic, which has now drawn forth all his venom for her attempt to do him *justice*. On his arrival in this country, he figured some time as a *pedagogue*, but as this employment

scarcely furnished him salt to his porridge, he having been literally without hardly bread to eat, and not a second shirt to his back, he resumed his old occupation of scribbling, having little chance of success in the other employments which drove him to this country. His talent at *lies* and *Billingsgate rhetoric*, introduced him to the notice of a certain foreign agent, who was known during the revolution by the name of *traitor*. This said agent has been seen to pay frequent visits to Peter. To atone for his transgressions in the mother country, as well as to get a little more bread to eat than he had been accustomed to, he enlisted in the cause of his gracious majesty. From the extreme of poverty and filth, he has suddenly sprouted into at least the appearance of better condition; for he has taken a house for the sale of his large poison at the enormous rent of *twelve hundred dollars a-year*, and has *paid a year's rent in advance!* The public will now be enabled to account for the overflowings of his gall against the republic of France, and all the republicans of this country, as well as his devotion to the cause of tyranny and of kings. From the frequency of visits paid him by the



agent already mentioned, and his sudden change of condition, *secret service money* must have been liberally employed; for his zeal to make atonement to his mother country seems proportioned to the magnitude of his offence, and the *guineas* advanced. As this *fugitive felon* has crept from his hole, his *quills* will now become harmless; for hitherto they have only excited apprehension, because the beast who shot them was concealed. I have a number of anecdotes respecting him that I will soon trouble you with, for the amusement of the public. This statement will convince Peter that I know him well, and that I have only disclosed a part of the truth.

“PAUL HEDGEHOG.”

Such and so virulent were the aspersions which assailed Cobbett in America, and which he punished with an iron and unsparing hand. In fact, it might fairly, we think, be said of him, that the man never encountered him with his favourite weapon, the pen, who did not come off the worse for the engagement. In the present instance, after a fair quantum of mud, which Cobbett was not only coarsely fond of throwing,

but well knew how to make stick, we find him writing thus. "Let the propagators of all these falsehoods be who they may, I am much obliged to them for giving me this opportunity of publishing the true history of my life and adventures, a thing that I was determined to do whenever a fair occasion offered, and which never could have been so well timed as at the moment when I am just stepping into a situation where I may probably continue for the rest of my life."

In this last supposition Cobbett was mistaken; his situation changed, and with it all the principles and prospects of his existence; but his autobiography still remains a sparkling and pleasant record of his "early years."

We shall present it to our readers in the strong simplicity of his own diction, not unaccompanied by occasional reflections of our own, nor in the meanwhile can we close our first chapter entirely without remark.

It is the introduction of a person who has long and lately lived with us—who has now passed from us, and—for the great dead leave behind them an enduring reputation—who can never be forgotten in this land. On our readers, at



this early stage of the task which we have undertaken, we would strongly urge the fact that Cobbett's career is worthy to be watched with higher aims and a deeper attention than commonly depend upon the *mere* interest which is excited by the life of a man who has been a popular author and a busy politician. There is a peculiar moral pervading the events and changes of Cobbett's strange history, that should be brought home to, and instruct the heart. We see a stern, nervous, masculine mind flinging off the trammels of ignorance and low birth, as the serpent sheds its skin; rising into a new renown, imbibing native principles, strong on the side of order and industry, the means by which it had become self-educated and self-dependent, and defending and promulgating those principles with unheard of vigour, surpassing intelligence, convincing perspicuity, and a homely but heart-seeking force that was eloquent in its very roughness; and, if we may borrow a simile from the remembrance of its agricultural origin, dug its way, not as a spade in the flower-garden, but with the power of a plough in the field! Up to this point we beg our readers to watch narrowly the workings of

the mind of William Cobbett—up to this point his autobiography will carry them—and then they will have before them the sudden and hurricane-like change which altered his principles, reversed his opinions, and sent him beating and battling upon a new path. From that moment, and in the events of his after career, let them search out a moral—for it may be found there—of wisdom, of philosophy, and truth!



## CHAPTER II.

COBBETT'S ORIGIN—HIS EARLY HOME—CONTRASTS HIMSELF WITH DR. FRANKLIN—HIS FATHER AND FAMILY—HIS RELIGION AND POLITICS.

LET it be premised by the reader that at the time when Cobbett first put forth the account of his early career, he was dwelling, as it were, in the half-way house of life—he had touched the middle epoch of existence: his judgment was well matured, his experience had been laboriously acquired, his principles were yet unchanged; his prejudices as strong as love, which is strong as death; and his courage such, that in the heart of a new republic he was fighting the battle of monarchy against republicanism! He then hated the name of democracy, and bitterly reviled its advocates; and, though he was far from being ashamed of

his own origin, and proudly rejoiced in his own self-elevation, yet he respected the aristocracy of a pedigree, and bowed before nobility of birth. Thus is it that we find him in the year 1797, commencing his own auto-biography.

“To be descended from an illustrious family certainly reflects honour on any man, in spite of the *sans-culottes* principles of the present day. This is, however, an honour that I have no pretensions to. All that I can boast of in my birth is, that I was born in Old England—the country from whence came the men who explored and settled North America—the country of Penn, and of all those to whom this country is indebted.”

In this very first sentence there is a bitterness,—an insinuated sneer—that, in modern times, and in spite of the progress of liberal opinions, would not be tolerated in the same land in which it was written. It is immediately followed by a homely account of Cobbett's origin:—

“With respect to my ancestors, I shall go no further back than my grandfather, and for this plain reason—that I never heard talk of any prior to him. He was a day-labourer;



and I have heard my father say that he worked for one farmer from the day of his marriage to that of his death, upwards of forty years. He died before I was born; but I have often slept beneath the same roof that sheltered him, and where his widow dwelt for several years after his death. It was a little thatched cottage, with a garden before the door. It had but two windows; a damson-tree shaded one, and a clump of filberts the other. Here I and my brothers went every Christmas and Whitsuntide to spend a week or two, and torment the poor old woman with our noise and dilapidations. She used to give us milk and bread for breakfast, an apple-pudding for dinner, and a piece of bread and cheese for our supper. Her fire was made of turf cut from the neighbouring heath; and her evening light was a rush dipped in grease."

No man could paint rural life—not Crabbe, for he was too stern—not even Goldsmith, nor Bloomfield—like Cobbett, and this is one of his quiet pictures, but he has kept down the tints and humbled the colouring with a careful humility that, however, conceals a purpose which is soon curiously developed.



It is an especial characteristic of Cobbett's writings, that he is perpetually illustrating from himself. With his enemies he puts other men's false words or deeds in contrast with some recorded instance of his own truth; and with his friends, he often exhibits a point in his own conduct as a land-mark for the direction of theirs. This is a propensity which, as applied to the individual of whom we are writing, cannot, we think, be directly characterized by the word egotism; for, although Cobbett was an egotist, it was not in such matters as these where he most seemed one. We are not an admirer of Hazlitt's general criticisms, but there is justice in what he has said of Cobbett on this head.

“He does not talk of himself for lack of something to write about; but because that some circumstance had happened to himself which is the best possible illustration of the subject; and he is not the man to shrink from giving the best possible illustration of the subject, from a squeamish delicacy. He likes both himself and his subject too well. He does not put himself before it, and say, ‘admire me first,’ but places us in the same situation with

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himself, and makes us see all that he does. There is no blind-man's-buff, no conscious hints, no awkward ventriloquism, no testimonials of applause, no abstract, senseless self-competency, no smuggled admiration of his own person by proxy; it is all plain and above-board. He writes himself plain William Cobbett, strips himself quite as naked as any body would wish—in a word, his egotism is full of individuality."

We shall now see an illustration of this, and also of the reason of Cobbett's appearing to out-humble humility in the picture of his grandmother's cottage. He wants to make it, by force of contrast, the means of humbling another—one to whose politics he was then violently opposed, and yet a person no whit less illustrious than himself; *viz.*, the famous Dr. Franklin.

"How much better is it thus to tell the naked truth, than to descend to such miserable shifts as Dr. Franklin has had recourse to, in order to persuade people that his forefathers were men of wealth and consideration. Not being able to refer his reader to the Herald's Office for proofs of the fame and antiquity of his family, he appeals to the etymology of his



name, and points out a passage in an obsolete book, whence he has the conscience to insist on our concluding that, in the Old English language, *Franklin* meant *a man of good reputation and of consequence*. According to Dr. Johnson, a *Franklin* was what we now call a *gentleman's steward or land-bailiff*,—a personage one degree above a bum-bailiff, and that's all.

“ Every one will, I hope, have the goodness to believe that my grandfather was no philosopher. Indeed, he was not. He never made a lightning-rod, nor bottled up a single quart of sunshine, in the whole course of his life. He was no almanack-maker, nor quack, nor chimney-doctor, nor soap-boiler, nor ambassador, nor printer's-devil: neither was he a deist; and all his children were born in wedlock. The legacies he left were, his scythe, his reep-hook, and his flail; he bequeathed no old and irrecoverable debts to an hospital; he never *cheated the poor during his life, nor mocked them at his death*. He has, it is true, been suffered to sleep quietly beneath the green sward: but if his descendants cannot point to his statue over the door of a library, they have

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not the mortification to hear him daily accused of having been a whoremaster, a hypocrite, and an infidel."

This is sledge-hammer writing, it is a specimen of the manner in which its author deals with an enemy. He never forgets a foe, and in this single instance of hatred the reader will find many allusions in the progress of his auto-biography. We turn now to an account of his father, in whom we trace many qualities and characteristics that have been perpetuated in the son.

"My father, when I was born, was a farmer. The reader will easily believe, from the poverty of his parents, that he had received no very brilliant education; he was, however, learned for a man in his rank of life. When a little boy, he drove the plough for two-pence a day; and these, his earnings, were appropriated to the expenses of an evening school. What a village schoolmaster could be expected to teach, he had learnt; and had, besides, considerably improved himself in several branches of the mathematics; he understood land-surveying well, and was often chosen to draw the plans of disputed territory; in short, he had the reputa-

tion of possessing experience and understanding, which never fails, in England, to give a man in a country-place some little weight with his neighbours. He was honest, industrious, and frugal; it was not, therefore, wonderful, that he should be situated in a good farm, and happy in a wife of his own rank, liked, beloved, and respected.—So much for my ancestors, from whom, if I derive no honour, I derive no shame.”

This last passage but one is the only allusion we can find in all Cobbett's works to his mother;\* a fact which has the more surprized us, as in his “Advice to Young Men,” in his “Cottage Economy,” in every book that he has yet written, applying to the morals of the heart—all those affections which are so immediately derived from, and so intimately connected with that first and dearest of human ties, are fostered, developed, and encouraged with an earnestness that does honour to his heart. From his father, he passes at once to speak of his brothers.

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\* Except in his Address to the Reformers on the Coventry Election.



“ I had (and I hope I yet have) three brothers : the eldest is a shop-keeper, the second a farmer ; and the youngest is in the service of the Honourable East India Company,—a private soldier, perhaps, as I have been, in the service of the king. I was born on the 9th of March, 1762 : the exact age of my brothers I have forgotten ; but I remember having heard my mother say, that there was but three years and three-quarters difference between the age of the oldest and that of the youngest.”

By this account which Cobbett gives of his own age, and which, as we have already stated, differs from that published by his son, he would appear to have been only sixty-nine years old when he died, instead of seventy-three. We know not how many, or if any of his brothers are now living.

It was, perhaps, Cobbett's happiest reminiscence that he was in early days trained to habits of industry—industry was certainly the groundwork of his fame. Mere genius, without it, would not have enabled him to have accomplished the most useful purposes of his pen. Without it, he could never have perfected those valuable projects of plain education which,



from their wide influence, have almost become national in their effects. By the same power of industry and its concomitant perseverance, he conquered nearly all the difficulties that beset his career—and in allusion to the impossibility of having so succeeded without industry, he says, “there may have been natural genius, but genius alone—not all the genius in the world could, without *something more*, have conducted me through these perils.” In his autobiography he alludes to this *something more* with great satisfaction, as follows:—

“A father like our’s, it will be readily supposed, did not suffer us to eat the bread of idleness. I do not remember the time when I did not earn my own living. My first occupation was driving the small birds from the turnipseed, and the rooks from the pease. When I first trudged a-field, with my wooden bottle and my satchel swung over my shoulders, I was hardly able to climb the gates and stiles; and, at the close of the day, to reach home was a task of infinite difficulty. My next employment was weeding wheat, and leading a single horse at harrowing barley. Hoeing pease followed; and hence I arrived at the honour of



joining the reapers in harvest, driving the team, and holding the plough. We were all of us strong and laborious; and my father used to boast, that he had four boys, the eldest of whom was but fifteen years old, who did as much work as any three men in the parish of Farnham. Honest pride and happy days !”

And this honest pride, and the memory of those happy days never forsook him. Often in his works does he allude to his early occupations, and his early home—pluming himself, as it were, like a phœnix that has risen from its ashes, and loving the very obscurity of his origin, because it had since become an evidence of the capacities of his mind. Thirty-two years afterwards, when making his “Year’s Journey in America,” he writes again under the influence of homely recollections, of the habits of his youthful days.

“Early habits and affections,” he says, “seldom quit us while we have vigour of mind left. I was brought up under a father whose talk was chiefly about his garden and his fields. From my very infancy—from the age of six years, when I climbed up the side of a steep sand rock and there scooped me out a plot of



four feet square to make me a garden, and the soil for which I carried up in the bosom of my little blue smock-frock, (a hunting-shirt) I have never lost one particle of my passion for these healthy and rational and heart-cheering pursuits."

With the exception of the above "little plot" to make him a garden, and the mere mention that he was born in the village of Farnham, we had for a long while no description of the scene—the home—the *locale* of Cobbett's youth—but suddenly in his travels in Philadelphia this thinking man—not generally and seldom correctly a metaphysician—is plunged into a philosophical disquisition by a simple question relative to the place, in the midst of which he is betrayed into describing his return to his early home, and that in a strain not unlike nor inferior to some parts of the "Deserted Village." This we deem the proper stage of his memoirs, at which to lay the picture before the reader,—“The question,” he writes, “eagerly put to me by every one in Philadelphia, is, ‘Don't you think the city greatly improved?’ They seem to me to compound augmentation with improvement. It always was a



fine city since I first knew it, and it is very greatly augmented. It has, I believe, nearly doubled its extent and numbers of houses since the year 1799. But after being for so long a time familiar with London, every other place appears little. After living within a few hundred yards of Westminster-hall and the Abbey-church and the bridge, and looking from my own windows into St. James's-park, (Oh! Reader, measure the difference between even *this* interval and the days of his grandmother's humble cottage) all other buildings and spots appear mean and insignificant.

“I went to-day to see the house I formerly occupied. How small! It is always thus: the words *large* and *small* are carried about with us in our minds, and we forget real *dimensions*. The idea, *such as it was received*, remains during our absence from the object. When I returned to England, in 1800, after an absence from the country parts of it, of sixteen years, the trees, the hedges, even the parks and woods, seemed so *small*! It made me laugh to hear little gutters, that I could jump over, called *Rivers*! The Thames was but a ‘*creek*!’ But when, in about a month after



my arrival in London, I went to *Farnham*, the place of my birth, what was my surprise! Every thing was become so pitifully *small*! I had to cross, in my post-chaise, the long and dreary heath of Bagshot. Then, at the end of it, to mount a hill, called Hungary-hill; and from that hill I knew that I should look down into the beautiful and fertile vale of Farnham. My heart fluttered with impatience, mixed with a sort of fear, to see all the scenes of my childhood; for I had learnt before, the death of my father and mother. There is a hill, not far from the town, called Crooksbury-hill, which rises up out of a flat, in the form of a cone, and is planted with Scotch fir-trees. Here I used to take the eggs and young ones of crows and magpies. This hill was a famous object in the neighbourhood. It served as the superlative degree of height. 'As high as Crooksbury-hill' meant, with us, the utmost degree of height. Therefore, the first object that my eyes sought was this hill. I could not believe my eyes! Literally speaking, I, for a moment, thought the famous hill removed, and a little heap put in its stead; for I had seen in New Brunswick, a single rock, or hill of solid rock,



ten times as big, and four or five times as high ! The post-boy, going down hill, and not a bad road, whisked me, in a few minutes to the Bush Inn, from the garden of which I could see the prodigious sand hill where I had begun my gardening works. What a nothing ! But now came rushing into my mind, all at once, my pretty little garden, my little blue smock-frock, my little nailed shoes, my pretty pigeons, that I used to feed out of my hands, the last kind words and tears of my gentle and tender-hearted and affectionate mother ! I hastened back into the room. If I had looked a moment longer, I should have dropped."

From this the reader, if he have an atom of fancy, may imagine what is here only reflected through the memories of childhood—a picture of William Cobbett's home !

From this we return at once to the account of his boyhood—

“ I have some faint recollection of going to school to an old woman, who, I believe, did not succeed in learning me my letters. In the winter evenings, my father learnt us all to read and write, and gave us a pretty tolerable knowledge of arithmetic. Grammar he did not per-



fectly understand himself, and, therefore, his endeavours to learn us that, necessarily failed; for though he thought he understood it, and though he made us get the rules by heart, we learnt nothing at all of the principles.”

In this sentence we perceive a desire on the part of the writer to impress upon his reader's mind, that he has to thank himself for *all* he knows—even the commonest rudiments of common knowledge. His father failed in his attempts to instil grammar—no great marvel we allow—but then the old school-mistress could not *even succeed in teaching him his letters*. From his *alpha, beta*, he must needs be self-taught; and here we catch a glimpse of a peculiar and very pardonable vanity.

The next two sentences also give us a farther insight into Cobbett's character. They mean a philosophy—they imply—by the order in which they follow the topic of education—his conviction that every man should have a religious and political creed; so naturally does he turn at once to religion and politics.—Hear him—

“Our religion was that of the church of England, to which I have ever remained attached; the more so, perhaps, as it bears the name of my country.”



Although this was written when Cobbett was a conservative, we believe he died in the same faith; but his notions upon religious points grew more peculiar and less orthodox after the change in his political sentiments. The habit of privately hating, and publicly declaring the corruptions of the church, naturally contributes to alienate the affections from it; and Cobbett's unceasing attacks upon the clergy might have diminished the earnestness of his devotion to their creed; although it never led him out of the pale of christianity into deism\*—the common land-mark of belief (if we may judge by their writing) of the leaders of the extreme radical party in this country.

The next sentence should seem one of the most remarkable in his writings, for the reason that it expresses a decided opinion that the want of political knowledge is no barrier, but rather the reverse, to the happiness of the lower classes; a doctrine which, whether true or false, he has subsequently laboured more than thirty years practically to overthrow.

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\* After his change of principles, even he disclaimed the knowledge of Paine's "Religious Doctrines."



“As to politics,” he remarks, “we were like the rest of the country-people in England; that is to say, we neither knew nor thought any thing about the matter. The shouts of victory, or the murmurs of a defeat, would now and then break in upon our tranquillity for a moment: but I do not remember ever having seen a newspaper in my father’s house; and, most certainly, that privation did not render us less industrious, happy, or free.”

He next proceeds to give us an insight into his parent’s politics, after this ignorance of public affairs had begun to be dispersed in his native village, by the events of the American war:—

“After, however, the American war had continued for some time, and the cause and nature of it began to be understood—rather misunderstood—by the lower classes of the people of England, we became a little better acquainted with subjects of this kind. It was well known, that the people were, as to numbers, nearly equally divided in their opinions concerning that war, and their wishes respecting the result of it. My father was a partisan of the Americans. He used frequently to dis-



pute on the subject with the gardener of a nobleman who lived near us. This was generally done with good humour over a pot of our best ale; yet the disputants sometimes grew warm, and gave way to language that could not fail to attract our attention. My father was worsted without doubt, as he had for his antagonist a shrewd and sensible old Scotchman, far his superior in political knowledge; but he pleaded before a partial audience; we thought there was but one wise man in the world, and that that one was our father. He who pleaded the cause of the Americans had an advantage, too, with young minds; he had only to represent the king's troops as sent to cut the throats of a people, our friends and relations, merely because they would not submit to oppression, and his cause was gained."

To this the writer adds a truism, remarkable as having proceeded from his pen, but which he has, himself, often proved with a success that conveys his reliance on its force. "*Speaking to the feelings,*" he says, "*is ever sure to succeed on the uninformed.*"—He then continues:—

"Men of integrity are generally pretty ob-



stinate in adhering to an opinion once adopted. Whether it was owing to this, or to the weakness of Mr. Martin's arguments, I will not pretend to say; but he never could make a convert of my father; he continued an American, and so staunch a one, that he would not have suffered his best friend to drink success to the king's arms at his table. I cannot give the reader a better idea of his obstinacy in this respect, and of the length to which this difference of sentiment was carried in England, than by relating the following instance:—

“ My father used to take one of us with him every year to the hop-fair at Wey-hill. The fair was held at Old Michaelmas-tide; and the journey was to us a sort of reward for the labours of the summer. It happened to be my turn to go there the very year that Long Island was taken by the British. A great company of hop-merchants and farmers were just sitting down to supper, as the post arrived, bringing in the Extraordinary Gazette which announced the victory. A hop-factor from London took the paper, placed his chair upon the table, and began to read with an audible voice. He was opposed: a dispute ensued; and my father

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retired, taking me by the hand, to another apartment, where we supped with about a dozen others of the same sentiments. Here Washington's health, and success to the Americans, were repeatedly toasted; and this was the first time, as far as I can recollect, that I ever heard the general's name mentioned. Little did I dream then that I should ever see the man, and still less, that I should hear some of his own countrymen reviling and execrating him.

“ Let not the reader imagine, that I wish to assume any merit from this mistaken prejudice of an honoured and beloved parent. Whether he was right or wrong, is not worth talking about. That I had no opinion of my own is certain; for had my father been on the other side, I should have been on the other side too, and should have looked upon the company I then made a part of, as malcontents and rebels.”

Upon reading this last sentence, the reader may, perhaps, ask the question, “ Then why interrupt the even tenor of Cobbett's history to supply us with details of his humble parent's politics ? ” We answer, simply because Mr.



Cobbett *did* afterwards—though his father *did not*—think on the other side; because he did afterwards denounce such a company as that of which he then made a part, as malcontents and rebels; and because he himself thus terminates the paragraph:—

“ I mention these circumstances merely to show that I was not ‘nursed in the lap of aristocracy,’ and that I did not imbibe my principles or prejudices, from those who were the advocates of blind submission. If my father had any fault, it was not being submissive enough; and I am much afraid, my acquaintance have but too often discovered the same fault in his son.”

It is thus clearly proved (and it was important that his biography should prove it) that his early imbibed politics—imbibed under his father’s roof and eye—were anything but in common with his after loyalty, and that he became a supporter of a limited monarchy and a defender of the English constitution by the convictions of self-chosen reason, self-directed observation, and reflective thought—not by inheritance, education, prejudice, or young pursuits.



To resume ; in striking again into the path of Cobbett's history, we shall agree with himself, that it would be as useless as unenterprising to dwell upon the occupations and sports of a country-boy ; to lead the reader to fairs, cricket-matches, and hare-hunts. We shall, therefore, come at once to the epoch, when the accidents happened, which gave a turn to his future life and at last brought him to the United States. The narration of these events shall form the subject of another chapter.

## CHAPTER III.

COBBETT LEAVES HIS HOME—HIS WISH TO BECOME A SAILOR—HIS ESCAPE—HE BECOMES AN ATTORNEY'S CLERK—LEAVES HIS OFFICE, AND ENLISTS IN THE ARMY.

WILLIAM COBBETT, Admiral of the Blue !— There is no such name in the navy list, but there *might*—and but for an accident, we might almost say, *would* have been; so sure are we that Cobbett would have distinguished himself for good or for evil—at a battle of the Nile, or a mutiny at the Nore—in either service of his country, and in any sphere of life. His will, whichever way it went, would have won its goal. Let the reader glance at a few of his youthful vicissitudes.

It is towards autumn—the year 1782—take his age at his own standard, and he is now sixteen. In England, families do not group to-



gether like negroes in the West Indies on one estate. They divide, and, since the birth of emigration, they have scattered themselves as far off as the forests of the New World. In Ireland the blood of the Burkes yearns towards its kin with "bumper hospitality," and Englishmen generally have a hearty welcome for such of their relatives as are unoffending, and do not positively beg. Young Cobbett is on his way to the domicile of a relation in the vicinity of Portsmouth. He arrives, and from the top of Portsdown he, for the first time, beholds the sea—

"Without a mark, without a bound,  
That runneth the earth's wild regions round,  
That plays with the clouds, that mocks the skies,  
Or like a cradled creature lies."

With the fresh impulse and the warm ardour of youth, he at once longs to become a sailor. He would since have us believe that our young men all have a natural anxiety to be, like their native island, among the billows which they first behold. "It would seem," he says, "that instinct leads them to rush upon the bosom of the waters." But it was not nature, who in the mighty sea exhibits one of her most sublime



forms, that alone attracted the young traveller—the achievements of industry and the triumphs of art, associating themselves with his youthful notions of his country's pre-eminence and glory, were matters that still more powerfully affected the mind and claimed the admiration of William Cobbett; in them at least he found a sympathy with the elements of his own nature, and their attractive power was at once acknowledged. Hear his own confessions upon this point.

“But it was not,” he says, “the sea alone that I saw: the grand fleet was riding at anchor at Spithead. I had heard of the wooden walls of Old England; I had formed my ideas of a ship, and of a fleet: but what I now beheld so far surpassed what I had ever been able to form a conception of, that I stood lost between astonishment and admiration. I had heard talk of the glorious deeds of our admirals and sailors, of the defeat of the Spanish armada, and of all those memorable combats, that good and true Englishmen never fail to relate to their children about a hundred times a year. The brave Rodney's victories over our natural enemies, the French and Spaniards, have long been the theme



of our praise, and the burden of our songs. The sight of our fleet brought all these into my mind; in confused order, it is true, but with irresistible force. My heart was inflated with national pride. The sailors were my countrymen; the fleet belonged to my country; and surely I had my part in it, and in all its honours: yet these honours I had not earned; I took to myself a sort of reproach for possessing what I had no right to, and resolved to have a just claim, by sharing in the hardships and dangers."

In the fulfilment of this somewhat Quixotic purpose, a purpose, however, which he at once, with characteristic decision set himself to effect, he was frustrated by an accident which can no way be so well detailed as in his own words.

"I arrived at my uncle's late in the evening, with my mind full of my seafaring project. Though I had walked thirty miles during the day, and consequently was well wearied, I slept not a moment. It was no sooner daylight, than I arose, and walked down towards the old castle, on the beach of Spithead. For a sixpence given to an invalid, I got permission to go upon the battlements: here I had a closer view of the



fleet, and at every look my impatience to be on board increased. In short, I went from the castle to Portsmouth, got into a boat, and was in a few minutes on board the Pegasus man-of-war.

“The captain had more compassion than is generally met with in men of his profession: he represented to me the toils I must undergo, and the punishment the least disobedience or neglect would subject me to; he persuaded me to return home; and I remember he concluded his advice with telling me, that it was better to be led to church in a halter, to be tied to a girl that I did not like, than to be tied to the gangway, or, as the sailors call it, married to *Miss Roper*. From the conclusion of this wholesome counsel, I perceived that the captain thought I had eloped on account of a bastard. I blushed, and that confirmed him in his opinion; but I declare to the reader that I was no more guilty of such an offence than any other gentleman who is constitutionally virtuous.

“I in vain attempted to convince Captain Berkeley that choice alone had led me to the sea: he sent me on shore, and I at last quitted Portsmouth; but not before I had applied to



the Port Admiral, Evans, to get my name enrolled among those who were destined for the service. I was, in some sort, obliged to acquaint the Admiral with what had passed on board the Pegasus; in consequence of which my request was refused, and I happily escaped, sorely against my will, from the most toilsome and perilous profession in the world."

But if in the navy Cobbett had escaped Charybdis, yet it was his destiny in the army to encounter Scylla. The blessing of being a sailor was denied to him, but the time arrived when his majesty at one and the same moment gave him the sum of one shilling and an admission to another branch of the service. Meanwhile, the interval which elapsed between the two adventures, was oddly enough diverted with the occupation of a lawyer's clerk. From his escape from the sea, up to his enlistment in a regiment of the line, we shall suffer him to pursue his own autobiography. It would appear that the sight of the fleet at Spithead had entirely unfitted him for the further pursuit of agriculture as the business of life.

"I returned once more to the plough, but I was spoiled for a farmer. I had, before my



Portsmouth adventure, never known any other ambition than that of surpassing my brothers in the different labours of the field ; but it was quite otherwise now ; I sighed for a sight of the world ; the little island of Britain seemed too small a compass for me. The things in which I had taken the most delight were neglected ; the singing of the birds grew insipid ; and even the heart-cheering cry of the hounds, after which I had formerly used to fly from my work, bound o'er the fields, and dash through the brakes and coppices, was heard with the most torpid indifference. Still, however, I remained at home till the following spring, when I quitted it, perhaps, for ever.

“ It was on the 6th of May, 1783, that I, like Don Quixote, sallied forth to seek adventures. I was dressed in my holiday-clothes, in order to accompany two or three lasses to Guildford fair. They were to assemble at a house about three miles from my home, where I was to attend them ; but, unfortunately for me, I had to cross the London turnpike road. The stage-coach had just turned the summit of a hill, and was rattling down towards me at a merry rate. The notion of going to London never en-



tered my mind till this very moment, yet the step was completely determined on before the coach came to the spot where I stood. Up I got, and was in London about nine o'clock in the evening.

“ It was by mere accident that I had money enough to defray the expenses of this day. Being rigged out for the fair, I had three or four crown and half-crown pieces (which most certainly I did not intend to spend), and a few shillings and half-pence. This, my little all, which I had been years in amassing, melted away, like snow before the sun, when touched by the fingers of the innkeepers and their waiters. In short, when I arrived at Ludgate-hill, and had paid my fare, I had about half-a-crown in my pocket.

“ By a commencement of that good luck, which has hitherto attended me through all the situations in which fortune has placed me, I was preserved from ruin. A gentleman, who was one of the passengers in the stage, fell into conversation with me at dinner; and he soon learnt that I was going I knew not whither, nor for what. This gentleman, was a hop-merchant in the borough of Southwark; and, upon closer

enquiry, it appeared that he had often dealt with my father at Wey-hill. He knew the danger I was in; he was himself a father, and he felt for my parents. His house became my home; he wrote to my father, and endeavoured to prevail on me to obey his orders, which were to return immediately home. I am ashamed to say that I was disobedient. It was the first time I had ever been so, and I have repented of it from that moment to this. Willing would I have returned; but pride would not suffer me to do it. I feared the scoffs of my acquaintances more than the real evils that threatened me.

“ My generous preserver, finding my obstinacy not to be overcome, began to look out for employment for me. He was preparing an advertisement for the newspaper, when an acquaintance of his, an attorney, called in to see him. He related my adventure to this gentleman, whose name was Holland, and who, happening to want an understrapping quill-driver, did me the honour to take me into his service; and the next day saw me perched upon a great high stool, in an obscure chamber in Gray's Inn, endeavouring to decipher the crabbed draughts of my employer.



“ I could write a good plain hand, but I could not read the pot-hooks and hangers of Mr. Holland. He was a month in learning me to copy, without almost continual assistance, and even then I was but of little use to him ; for, besides, that I wrote a snail's pace, my want of knowledge in orthography gave him infinite trouble ; so that for the first two months I was a dead weight upon his hands. Time, however, rendered me useful ; and Mr. Holland was pleased to tell me, that he was well satisfied with me, just at the very moment when I began to grow extremely dissatisfied with him.

“ No part of my life was wholly unattended with pleasure, except the eight or nine months I passed in Gray's Inn. The office (for so the dungeon where I wrote was called) was so dark, that on cloudy days we were obliged to burn candles. I worked like a galley-slave from five in the morning till eight or nine at night, and sometimes all night long. How many quarrels have I assisted to foment and perpetuate between those poor innocent fellows, John Doe and Richard Roe ! How many times (God forgive me !) have I set them to assault each other with guns, swords, staves, and pitch-



forks, and then to answer for their misdeeds before our Sovereign Lord the King, seated in his court of Westminster! When I think of the *said*s and *so-forth*s, and the counts of tautology that I scribbled over; when I think of those sheets of seventy-two words, and those lines two inches apart, my brain turns.—Gracious heaven! if I am doomed to be wretched, bury me beneath Iceland snows, and let me feed on blubber; stretch me under the burning line, and deny me thy propitious dew; nay, if it be thy will, suffocate me with the infected and pestilential air of a democratic club-room; but save me from the desk of an attorney!

“ Mr. Holland was but little in the chambers himself. He always went out to dinner, while I was left to be provided for by the *laundress*, as he called her. Those gentlemen of the law, who have resided in the Inns of Court in London, know very well what a *laundress* means. Ours was, I believe, the oldest and ugliest of the sisterhood. She had age and experience enough to be lady abbess of all the nuns in all the convents in an Irish town. It would be wronging the Witch of Endor to compare her to this hag, who was the only creature who



deigned to enter into conversation with me. All except the name, I was in prison, and this weird sister was my keeper. Our chambers were, to me, what the subterranean cavern was to Gil Blas; his description of the dame Leonarda exactly suited my laundress; nor were the professions, or rather the practice, of our masters altogether dissimilar.

“ I never quitted this gloomy recess, except on Sundays, when I usually took a walk to St. James's-park, to feast my eyes with the trees, the grass, and the water. In one of these walks, I happened to fix my eyes on an advertisement on the walls, inviting all loyal and spirited young men, who had a mind to gain riches and glory, to repair to a certain rendezvous, where they might enter his majesty's marine service, and have the peculiar happiness and honour of being enrolled in the Chatham division. I was not ignorant enough to be the dupe of this morsel of military bombast; but a change was what I wanted; besides, I knew that marines went to sea, and my desire to be on that element had rather increased than diminished by my being penned up in London. In short, I resolved to join this glorious corps;

and to avoid all possibility of being discovered by my friends, I went down to Chatham, and enlisted into the marines, as I thought, but the next morning I found myself before a captain of a marching regiment. There was no retreating; I had taken a shilling to drink his majesty's health, and his further bounty was ready for my reception.

“When I told the captain (who was an Irishman, and has since been an excellent friend to me), that I thought myself engaged in the marines. ‘By Jasus! my lad,’ said he, ‘and you have had a narrow escape.’ He told me that the regiment into which I had been so happy as to enlist, was one of the oldest and boldest in the whole army, and that it was at that moment serving in that fine, flourishing, and plentiful country, Nova Scotia! He dwelt on the beauties and riches of this terrestrial paradise, and dismissed me perfectly enchanted with the prospects of a voyage thither.”

From this time William Cobbett assumes a responsible, although a humble station in the world, in his capacity of a private soldier: a capacity in which he first began the task of self-education, which was the primary cause of

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his self-advancement. The military episode of his life contained much of the promise of fruits afterwards produced—it is a singular history of rapid success—the causes of which convey a striking moral; while the tale would excite interest, even if related of a more remarkable man. We shall make it the subject of our next chapter.

## CHAPTER IV.

WILLIAM COBBETT A SOLDIER—HIS SELF-EDUCATION  
AND ASSIDUOUS INDUSTRY—HIS PROMOTION—SUBSE-  
QUENT SERVICE AND DISCHARGE—HE BRINGS A  
CHARGE AGAINST HIS OFFICERS.

In the few succeeding chapters of autobiography which will bring to a termination the domestic history of Cobbett, we shall leave unbroken the strong yet simple tenor of his own narrative, and then venture upon a dissertation of our own upon the moral and philosophical lessons which they inculcate, and upon those remarkable points which bear upon and illustrate the character of the man. It will naturally be expected by our readers that the more original portions of this biography will be that which involves a survey of Cobbett's career as a writer and a politician. At the same time, it must be confessed, that he had elevated himself

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to that pinnacle of fame, if not of greatness, which has identified him with the principles of some, the instruction of others, the love of many and the partizanship of more; thus associating the feelings of millions with his name, and justly entitling himself to have excited in his favour all that interest about his domestic life, which is usually quickly awakened and eagerly fed by the biographers of celebrated public men. We have, therefore, prepared to make it a separate portion of the work—to record it, not on account of its intrinsic interest, but in its philosophical relations to Cobbett's character, both in formation and elucidation—and in so doing we should account ourselves presumptuous were we to place it before the reader in any other than his own words. When we come to speak of him politically, we will use our own language, and bear the onus of our own opinions; and even those points of character which his domestic history develops we will freely comment upon when that history is at an end. In the meanwhile, although the narrative will be Cobbett's own, let not the reader imagine that its arrangement in these pages has been unaccompanied with labour to



ourselves!—to obtain the mere matter, we have carefully waded through voluminous piles of books—we have gathered from them and classed in order, all those sketches and episodes of autobiography which Cobbett has flung in illustration over the whole field of his writings, and we now present them to our readers with the added charm of connexion of subject—an unbroken chain, in every line of which they will discover an attractive power, and in the whole survey the workings of a giant mind.

In the present chapter we promised the history of William Cobbett's military career. He has thus recorded it with his own pen:—

“ I enlisted early in 1784 ; and as peace had then taken place, no great haste was made to send recruits off to their regiments. I remained upwards of a year at Chatham, during which time I was employed in learning my exercise, and taking my turn in the duty of the garrison. My leisure time, which was a very considerable portion of the twenty-four hours, was spent, not in the dissipations common to such a way of life, but in reading and study. In the course of this year I learnt much more than I had ever done before. I subscribed to a circulating



library at Brompton, the greatest part of the books in which I read more than once over. The library was not very considerable, it is true; nor in my reading was I directed by any degree of taste or choice. Novels, plays, history, poetry, all were read, and nearly with equal avidity.

“ Such a course of reading could be attended with very little profit; it was skimming over the surface of every thing. One branch of learning, however, I went to the bottom with, and that the most essential branch too—the grammar of my mother tongue. I had experienced the want of a knowledge of grammar during my stay with Mr. Holland: but it is very probable that I never should have thought of encountering the study of it, had not accident placed me under a man whose friendship extended beyond his interest. Writing a fair hand procured me the honour of being copyist to General Debeig, the commandant of the garrison. I transcribed the famous correspondence between him and the Duke of Richmond, which ended in the good and gallant old colonel being stripped of the reward bestowed on him for his long and meritorious servitude

“ Being totally ignorant of the rules of grammar, I necessarily made many mistakes in copying, because no one can copy letter by letter, nor even word by word. The colonel saw my deficiency, and strongly recommended study. He enforced his advice with a sort of injunction, and with a promise of reward in case of success.

“ I procured me a Lowth's Grammar, and applied myself to the study of it with unceasing assiduity, and not without some profit; for though it was a considerable time before I fully comprehended all that I read, still I read and studied with such unremitting attention, that at last I could write without falling into any very gross errors. The pains I took cannot be described; I wrote the whole grammar out two or three times; I got it by heart; I repeated it every morning and every evening; and when on guard, I imposed on myself the task of saying it all over once, every time I was posted sentinel. To this exercise of my memory I ascribe the retentiveness of which I have since found it capable; and to the success with which it was attended I ascribe the perseverance that has led to the acquirement of the little learning of which I am master.”



In another of his works, written many years afterwards, Cobbett describes the circumstances of privation and difficulty under which this task of self-education was achieved.

“ I learned grammar,” he says, “ when I was a private soldier, on the pay of sixpence per day. The edge of my berth, or that of the guard-bed, was my seat to study in ; my knapsack was my book-case ; a bit of board, lying on my lap, was my writing-table ; and the task did not demand any thing like a year of my life. I had no money to purchase candle or oil ; in winter time it was rarely that I could get any evening light but that of *the fire*, and only my *turn* even of that. And if I, under such circumstances, and without parent or friend to advise or encourage me, accomplished this undertaking, what excuse can there be for *any youth*, however poor, however pressed with business, or however circumstanced as to room or other conveniences ? To buy a pen or a sheet of paper I was compelled to forego some portion of food, though in a state of half-starvation ; I had no moment of time that I could call my own ; and I had to read and to write amidst the talking, laughing, singing,



whistling, and brawling of at least half a score of the most thoughtless of men, and that, too, in the hours of their freedom from all control. Think not lightly of the *farthing* that I had to give, now and then, for ink, pen, or paper! That farthing was, alas! a *great sum* to me! I was as tall as I am now; I had great health and great exercise. The whole of the money, not expended for us at market, was *twopence a week* for each man. I remember, and well I may! that upon one occasion I, after all absolutely necessary expenses, had, on a Friday, made shift to have a halfpenny in reserve, which I had destined for the purchase of a *red herring* in the morning; but, when I pulled off my clothes at night, so hungry then as to be hardly able to endure life, I found that I had *lost my halfpenny!* I buried my head under the miserable sheet and rug, and cried like a child."

Cobbett was rewarded, and the colonel kept his word; but he ascribes the promotion that followed his exertions, more than any thing, to regularity, early rising, and the grand secret of husbanding time.

"To this, more than to any other thing,



I owed my very extraordinary promotion in the army. I was *always ready*: if I had to mount guard at *ten*, I was ready at *nine*: never did any man or any thing wait one moment for me. Being, at an age *under twenty years*, raised from corporal to serjeant-major *at once*, over the heads of thirty serjeants, I naturally should have been an object of envy and hatred; but this habit of early rising and of rigid adherence to the precepts which I have given you, really subdued these passions, because every one felt that what I did he had never done, and never could do. Before my promotion a clerk was wanted to make out the morning report of the regiment. I rendered the clerk unnecessary; and, long before any other man was dressed for the parade, my work for the morning was all done, and I myself was on the parade, walking, in fine weather, for an hour, perhaps. My custom was this—to get up, in summer, at daylight, and in winter at four o'clock; shave, dress, even to the putting of my sword-belt over my shoulder, and having my sword lying on the table before me, ready to hang by my side. Then I ate a bit of cheese, or pork, and bread. Then I prepared my report, which



was filled up as fast as the companies brought me in the materials. After this I had an hour or two to read, before the time came for any duty out of doors, unless when the regiment or part of it went out to exercise in the morning. When this was the case, and the matter was left to me, I always had it on the ground in such time as that the bayonets glistened in the *rising sun*, a sight which gave me delight, of which I often think, but which I should in vain endeavour to describe. If the *officers* were to go out, eight or ten o'clock was the hour, sweating the men in the heat of the day, breaking in upon the time for cooking their dinner, putting all things out of order and out of humour. When I was commander, the men had a long day of leisure before them: they could ramble into the town or into the woods; go to get raspberries, to catch birds, to catch fish, or to pursue any other recreation, and such of them as chose, and were qualified, to work at their trades. So that here, arising solely from the early habits of one very young man, were pleasant and happy days given to hundreds."

Another sentence upon this part of his life



displays the value which Cobbett set upon intellectual powers, as giving a superiority not to be acquired by influence or rank.

“How often,” he says, “did I experience this, even long before I became what is called an author! The *adjutant*, under whom it was my duty to act when I was a sergeant-major, was, as almost all military officers are, or, at least *were*, a very illiterate man, perceiving that every sentence of mine was in the same form and manner as sentences in *print*, became shy of letting me see pieces of *his* writing. The writing of *orders*, and other things, therefore, fell to me; and thus, though no nominal addition was made to my pay, and no nominal addition to my authority, I acquired the latter as effectually as if a law had been passed to confer it upon me.”

Cobbett gives the following account of his promotion:—

“There is no situation,” he remarks, “where merit is so sure to meet with reward as in a well-disciplined army. Those who command are obliged to reward it for their own ease and credit. I was soon raised to the rank of corporal—a rank which, however contemptible it



may appear in some people's eyes, brought me in a clear twopence *per diem*, and put a very clever worsted knot upon my shoulder, too.

“ As promotion began to dawn, I grew impatient to get to my regiment, where I expected soon to bask under the rays of royal favour. The happy day of departure at last came ; we set sail from Gravesend, and, after a short and pleasant passage, arrived at Halifax, in Nova Scotia. When I first beheld the barren, not to say hideous, rocks at the entrance of the harbour, I began to fear that the master of the vessel had mistaken his way ; for I could perceive nothing of that fertility that my good recruiting captain had dwelt on with so much delight.

“ Nova Scotia had no other charm for me than that of novelty. Every thing I saw was new ; bogs, rocks, and stumps, musquitoes, and bull-frogs : thousands of captains and colonels without soldiers, and of squires without stockings or shoes. In England I had never thought of approaching a squire without a most respectful bow ; but in this new world, though I was but a corporal, I often ordered a squire to bring me a glass of grog, and even to take care of my knapsack.



“ We stayed but a few weeks in Nova Scotia, being ordered to St. John’s, in the province of New Brunswick. Here, and at other places in the same province, we remained till the month of September, 1791, when the regiment was relieved and sent home.

“ We landed at Portsmouth on the 3d of November; and on the 19th of next month I obtained my discharge, after having served not quite eight years, and after having, in that short space, passed through every rank, from that of private to that of serjeant-major, without being disgraced, confined, or even reprimanded.

“ At length, after having served eight years in the army, during seven of which I was a non-commissioned officer, I obtained my discharge; and what the nature of that discharge was, will appear from the following testimonial :—

“ “ By the Right Hon. Lord Edward Fitzgerald, commanding the 54th regiment, of which Lieutenant-General Frederick is colonel :—

“ “ These are to certify, that the bearer hereof, William Cobbett, serjeant-major in the aforesaid regiment, has served honestly and faithfully for the space of eight years,

nearly seven of which he has been a non-commissioned officer, and of that time he has been five years serjeant-major to the regiment ; but, having very earnestly applied for his discharge, he, in consideration of his good behaviour, and the services he has rendered the regiment, is hereby discharged. Given under my hand and the seal of the regiment, at Portsmouth, this 29th day of December, 1791.

“ ‘ EDWARD FITZGERALD.’ ”

“ I shall here add the orders issued in the Garrison of Portsmouth on the day of my discharge :—

“ ‘ *Portsmouth, 19th Dec. 1791.* ”

“ ‘ Serjeant-major Cobbett having most pressingly applied for his discharge, at Major Lord Edward Fitzgerald's request, General Frederick has granted it. General Frederick has ordered Major Lord Edward Fitzgerald to return the serjeant-major thanks for his behaviour and conduct during the time of his being in the regiment ; and Major Lord Edward adds his most hearty thanks to those of the general.’ ”

And to this Cobbett triumphantly adds, in allusion to a report which we hinted at in our first chapter :—

“ After having laid these two pieces before my reader, I beg him to recollect what has been stated of me in several quarters. The American papers most flagitiously asserted, that I



was flogged in my regiment for thieving, and afterwards deserting. Such are the falsehoods to which my opponents have had recourse: I hope, therefore, that it will hence appear, that there could be no reasonable objection to my character down to the date of my dismissal."

It would appear that there is a signification in the words "down to the date of my dismissal," beyond what the reader would conceive they were intended to express; they are abrupt—as though the writer had suddenly encountered in the path of memory, some unpleasant recollection with which he declined to grapple, and therefore stopped short. The supposition is heightened by the fact, that one Benjamin Franklin, in a slight sketch of Cobbett, has the following story recorded against him:—

"Immediately on obtaining his discharge from the army," says this writer, "he brought charges against four officers of the regiment, and obtained a trial by court-martial. The charges were that they had embezzled stores of the regiment, and had made false returns as to the musters; in short, that they had made dishonest gains from the regimental resources. Very great interest was excited on the subject



at the time. One of the officers, the lieut.-colonel, died before the investigation came on. The court was directed to be held at Portsmouth, but Mr. Cobbett petitioned that it might be held in London, on the ground that his personal safety was in question at Portsmouth, and that the soldiers whom he required as witnesses would, in their garrison, be too much under the influence of the accused. Mr. Cobbett entered upon the accusation with such vigour, that the court, at his request, was fixed at the Horse-Guards. In his statement to the commander-in-chief, he said, 'if my accusation is without foundation, the authors of cruelty have not devised the tortures I ought to endure. Hell itself, as painted by the most fiery bigot, would be too mild a punishment for me.' The officers, as soon as they heard of the accusation, boldly challenged investigation; a Captain Powell, in particular, begged that the court-martial might be granted to hear every charge, trivial or not trivial, that Mr. Cobbett could bring against them. Forty-seven witnesses were brought up from the regiment at Portsmouth, and the court-martial was fixed for the 24th of March, 1792. On the day of trial, no

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accuser appeared. Lest an accident might have befallen him, the court adjourned to the 27th. Every inquiry was set up for Mr. Cobbett, but he was missing; and no one, not even his landlady, where he had lodged, in Felix-street, Lambeth, could give any account of him. Such an investigation as could be made without an accuser, was made, and the court judged—‘that the said several charges against these officers respectively are, and every part thereof is totally unfounded, and the court does, therefore, most honourably acquit the said Captain Richard Powell, Lieutenant Christopher Seton, and Lieutenant John Hall, of the same.’ The law officers of the crown were consulted as to an indictment of the accuser; but as no one was concerned with him there was no conspiracy. The officers accused had no remedy but in individual actions, and the accuser had no property against which to proceed.”

This is a grave circumstance, to which we find no trace of allusion in any of Cobbett's subsequent writings. In character, the only other point in his career to which it bears resemblance, and which alone justifies the suspicion that he might have been guilty of such an



act, is his celebrated and ill-judged motion in the House of Commons against Sir Robert Peel. But of that anon. Meanwhile it is fair that we should mention one fact which tells in Cobbett's favour, and against the above ill-odoured report. He was not dismissed till near the end of December 1791, the court-martial is named as having been fixed for the 24th of March 1792, and that is the month in which Cobbett tells us that he arrived in France. An American paper, however, has charged him with taking French leave for France, after following garrett-scribbling in London; and were this true, the court-martial would seem to afford a reason for absconding. But again, when we reflect that he was scarcely three months in England altogether, and that within the period he had got married, and must naturally have spent his time principally with his wife, it at once occurs that he could have had little leisure for bringing court-martials against his officers, and less motive since he was no longer in the army and under their command. Add to this, he seems to have been well treated, makes no complaints of harshness or injustice, but, on the contrary, has the following sentence in his

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autobiography :—“ I was always sober, and regular in my attendance ; and, not being a clumsy fellow, *I met with none of those reproofs, which disgust so many young men with the service.*”

Thus we have recorded the only points which tell in favour against this report, but there can (we regret to say) be no doubt of its truth ; Cobbett did bring the the charges against his officers, and did not appear to substantiate them.\*

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\* See note at the end of the volume.

## CHAPTER V.

COBBETT'S ACCOUNT OF HIS WIFE—HIS CONDUCT AND HIS COURTSHIP—HER DEPARTURE FOR ENGLAND, AND HIS APPROACH TO INFIDELITY IN HER ABSENCE—A REMARKABLE ACT OF FEMALE VIRTUE.

AT the conclusion of the foregoing chapter, we have mentioned the fact of Cobbett's having married during his brief stay in this country. His bride, at the time of his arrival in England, was a servant of all work in a private family ; but he had first met her in Nova Scotia, when stationed there with his regiment ; and his union with her here was the crowning of their attachment, the fulfilment of a promise mutually made in the New World. Cobbett's description of his courtship is interesting and characteristic.

“ When I first saw my wife, she was *thirteen years old*, and I was within a month of *twenty-*



*one.* She was the daughter of a serjeant-major of artillery, and I was the serjeant-major of a regiment of foot, both stationed in forts near the city of St. John, in the province of New Brunswick. I sat in the same room with her for about an hour, in company with others, and I made up my mind that she was the very girl for me. That I thought her beautiful is certain, for that I had always said should be an indispensable qualification; but I saw in her what I deemed marks of that sobriety of *conduct* of which I have said so much, and which has been by far the greatest blessing of my life. It was now dead of winter, and, of course, the snow several feet deep on the ground, and the weather piercing cold. It was my habit, when I had done my morning's writing, to go out at break of day to take a walk on a hill, at the foot of which our barracks lay. In about three mornings after I had first seen her, I had, by an invitation to breakfast with me, got up two young men to join me in my walk; and our road lay by the house of her father and mother. It was hardly light, but she was out on the snow, scrubbing out a washing-tub. 'That's the girl for me,' said I, when we had got out



of her hearing. One of these young men came to England soon afterwards; and he, who keeps an inn in Yorkshire, came over to Preston, at the time of the election, to verify whether I were the same man. When he found that I was, he appeared surprised; but what was his surprise, when I told him that those tall young men, whom he saw around me, were the *sons* of that pretty little girl that he and I saw scrubbing out the washing-tub on the snow in New Brunswick, at day-break in the morning!

“From the day that I first spoke to her, I never had a thought of her ever being the wife of any other man, more than I had a thought of her being transformed into a chest of drawers; and I formed my resolution at once, to marry her as soon as we could get permission, and to get out of the army as soon as I could. So that this matter was, at once, settled as firmly as if written in the book of fate. At the end of about six months, my regiment, and I along with it, were removed to FREDERICTON, a distance of a *hundred miles*, up the river of ST. JOHN; and, which was worse, the artillery were expected to go off to England a year or two before our regi-



ment! The artillery went, and she along with them."

During the absence of this girl, to whom he had plighted his faith, Cobbett had nearly been betrayed into the infidelity of marrying another. How he was tempted—how he escaped—form a strange but truly interesting episode in his history, which we at once, and with no small pleasure, introduce to the reader from his own pen. Independent of its being one of the most striking and beautiful pieces of descriptive composition—descriptive, we mean, of the emotions of the heart—as well as of subjects of external nature—it exhibits one of the strongest strongholds of Cobbett's character—the possession of a self-reasoning morality—proving itself more powerful than the most alluring seductions of a strange—and but for infidelity—a not unvirtuous love.—He begins thus:—

“The province of New Brunswick, in North America, in which I passed my years from the age of eighteen to that of twenty-six, consists in general of heaps of rocks, in the interstices of which grow the pine, the spruce, and various sorts of fir-trees, or, where the woods have been

burnt down, the bushes of the raspberry or those of the huckleberry. The province is cut asunder lengthwise, by a great river, called the St. John, about two hundred miles in length, and, at half way from the mouth, full a mile wide. Into this main river run innumerable smaller rivers, there called CREEKS. On the sides of these creeks the land is, in places, clear of rocks; it is, in these places, generally good and productive; the trees that grow here are the birch, the maple, and others of the deciduous class; natural meadows here and there present themselves; and some of these spots far surpass in rural beauty any other that my eyes ever beheld; the creeks, abounding towards their sources in water-falls of endless variety, as well in form as in magnitude, and always teeming with fish, while water-fowl enliven their surface, and wild-pigeons, of the gayest plumage, flutter, in thousands upon thousands, amongst the branches of the beautiful trees, which, sometimes, for miles together, form an arch over the creeks.

“ I, in one of my rambles in the woods, in which I took great delight, came to a spot at a very short distance from the source of one of



these creeks. Here was every thing to delight the eye, and especially of one like me, who seem to have been born to love rural life, and trees and plants of all sorts. Here were about two hundred acres of natural meadow, interspersed with patches of maple-trees in various forms and of various extent; the creek (there about thirty miles from its point of joining the St. John) ran down the middle of the spot, which formed a sort of dish, the high and rocky hills rising all round it, except at the outlet of the creek, and these hills crowned with lofty pines: in the hills were the sources of the creek, the waters of which came down in cascades, for any one of which many a nobleman in England would, if he could transfer it, give a good slice of his fertile estate; and in the creek, at the foot of the cascades, there were, in the season, salmon the finest in the world, and so abundant, and so easily taken, as to be used for manuring the land.

“ If nature, in her very best humour, had made a spot for the express purpose of captivating me, she could not have exceeded the efforts which she had here made. But I found something here besides these rude works of



nature; I found something, in the fashioning of which, *man* had had something to do. I found a large and well-built log dwelling-house, standing (in the month of September) on the edge of a very good field of Indian corn, by the side of which there was a piece of buckwheat just then mowed. I found a homestead, and some very pretty cows. I found all the things by which an easy and happy farmer is surrounded: and I found still something besides all these; something that was destined to give me a great deal of pleasure and also a deal of pain, both in their extreme degree, and both of which, in spite of the lapse of forty years, now make an attempt to rush back into my heart.

“Partly from misinformation, and partly from miscalculation, I had lost my way; and, quite alone, but armed with my sword and a brace of pistols, to defend myself against the bears, I arrived at the log-house in the middle of a moonlight night, the hoar-frost covering the trees and the grass. A stout and clamorous dog, kept off by the gleaming of my sword, waked the master of the house, who got up, received me with great hospitality, got me



something to eat, and put me into a feather-bed, a thing that I had been a stranger to for some years. I, being very tired, had tried to pass the night in the woods, between the trunks of two large trees, which had fallen side by side, and within a yard of each other. I had made a nest for myself of dry fern, and had made a covering by laying boughs of spruce across the trunks of the trees. But unable to sleep on account of the cold; becoming sick from the great quantity of water I had drank during the heat of the day, and being, moreover, alarmed at the noise of the bears, and lest one of them should find me in a defenceless state, I had roused myself up, and crept along as well as I could. So that no hero of eastern romance ever experienced a more enchanting change.

“ I had got into the house of one of those Yankee loyalists, who, at the close of the revolutionary war (which, until it had succeeded, was called a rebellion) had accepted of grants of land in the king's province of New Brunswick; and who, to the great honour of England, had been furnished with all the means of making new and comfortable settlements. I was suffered to sleep till breakfast-time, when I found



a table, the like of which I have since seen so many in the United States, loaded with good things. The master and the mistress of the house, aged about fifty, were like what an English farmer and his wife were half a century ago. There were two sons, tall and stout, who appeared to have come in from work, and the youngest of whom was about my age, then twenty-three. But there was *another member* of the family, aged nineteen, who (dressed according to the neat and simple fashion of New England, whence she had come with her parents five or six years before,) had her long light-brown hair twisted nicely up, and fastened on the top of her head, in which head were a pair of lively blue eyes, associated with features of which that softness and that sweetness, so characteristic of American girls, were the predominant expressions; the whole being set off by a complexion indicative of glowing health, and forming, figure, movements, and all taken together, an assemblage of beauties, far surpassing any that I had ever seen but *once* in my life. That *once* was, too, *two years ago*; and, in such a case and at such an age, two years, two whole years, is a long, long



while ! It was a space as long as the eleventh part of my then life ! Here was the *present* against the *absent* : here was the power of the *eyes* pitted against that of the *memory* : here were all the senses up in arms to subdue the influence of the thoughts : here was vanity, here was passion, here was the spot of all spots in the world, and here were also the life, and the manners, and the habits, and the pursuits that I delighted in ; here was every thing that imagination can conceive, united in a conspiracy against the poor little brunette in England ! What, then, did I fall in love at once with this bouquet of lilies and roses ? Oh ! by no means. I was, however, so enchanted with *the place* ; I so much enjoyed its tranquillity, the shade of the maple trees, the business of the farm, the sports of the water and of the woods, that I stayed at it to the last possible minute, promising, at my departure, to come again as often as I possibly could ; a promise which I most punctually fulfilled.

“ Winter is the great season for jaunting and *dancing* (called *frollicking*) in America. In this province the river and the creeks were the only *roads* from settlement to settlement.



In summer we travelled in *canoes* ; in winter in *sleighs* on the ice or snow. During more than two years I spent all the time I could with my Yankee friends : they were all fond of me : I talked to them about country affairs, my evident delight in which they took as a compliment to themselves : the father and mother treated me as one of their children ; the sons as a brother ; and the daughter, who was as modest and as full of sensibility as she was beautiful, in a way to which a chap much less sanguine than I was would have given the tenderest interpretation ; which treatment I, especially in the last-mentioned case, most cordially repaid.

“ It is when you meet in company with others of your own age that you are, in love matters, put most frequently to the test, and exposed to detection. The next door neighbour might, in that country, be ten miles off. We used to have a frolic, sometimes at one house and sometimes at another. Here, where female eyes are very much on the alert, no secret can long be kept ; and very soon father, mother, brothers and the whole neighbourhood looked upon the thing as certain, not excepting herself,



to whom I, however, had never once even talked of marriage, and had never even told her that I *loved* her. But I had a thousand times done these by *implication*, taking into view the interpretation that she would naturally put upon my looks, appellations, and acts; and it was of this that I had to accuse myself. Yet I was not a *deceiver*; for my affection for her was very great: I spent no really pleasant hours but with her: I was uneasy if she showed the slightest regard for any other young man: I was unhappy if the smallest matter affected her health or spirits: I quitted her in dejection, and returned to her with eager delight: many a time, when I could get leave but for a day, I paddled in a canoe two whole succeeding nights, in order to pass that day with her. If this was not love, it was first cousin to it; for as to any *criminal* intention I no more thought of it, in her case, than if she had been my sister. Many times I put to myself the questions: 'What am I at? Is not this wrong? *Why do I go?*' But still I went.

“Then, further in my excuse, my *prior engagement*, though carefully left unalluded to by both parties, was, in that thin population, and



owing to the singular circumstances of it, and to the great talk that there always was about me, *perfectly well known* to her and all her family. It was matter of so much notoriety and conversation in the province, that General Carleton (brother of the late Lord Dorchester), who was the governor when I was there, when he, about fifteen years afterwards, did me the honour, on his return to England, to come and see me at my house in Duke-street, Westminster, asked, before he went away, to see my *wife*, of whom *he had heard so much* before her marriage. So that here was no *deception* on my part : but still I ought not to have suffered even the most distant hope to be entertained by a person so innocent, so amiable, for whom I had so much affection, and to whose heart I had no right to give a single twinge. I ought, from the very first, to have prevented the possibility of her ever feeling pain on my account. I was young, to be sure ; but I was old enough to know what was my duty in this case, and I ought, dismissing my own feelings, to have had the resolution to perform it.

“ *The last parting* came ; and now came my just punishment ! The time was known to

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every body, and was irrevocably fixed ; for I had to move with a regiment, and the embarkation of a regiment is an *epoch* in a thinly settled province. To describe this parting would be too painful even at this distant day, and with the frost of age upon my head. The kind and virtuous father came forty miles to see me just as I was going on board in the river. *His* looks and words I have never forgotten. As the vessel descended, she passed the mouth of *that creek* which I had so often entered with delight ; and though England, and all that England contained, were before me, I lost sight of this creek with an aching heart.

“ On what trifles turn the great events in the life of man ! If I had received a *cool* letter from my intended wife ; if I had only heard a rumour of any thing from which fickleness in her might have been inferred ; if I had found in her any, even the smallest, abatement of affection ; if she had but let go any one of the hundred strings by which she held my heart : if any of these, never would the world have heard of me. Young as I was ; able as I was as a soldier ; proud as I was of the admiration and commendations of which I was the object ;



fond as I was, too, of the command, which at so early an age, my rare conduct and great natural talents had given me; sanguine as was my mind, and brilliant as were my prospects: yet I had seen so much of the meannesses, the unjust partialities, the insolent pomposity, the disgusting dissipations of that way of life, that I was weary of it: I longed exchanging my fine laced coat for the Yankee farmer's homespun, to be where I should never behold the supple crouch of servility, and never hear the hectoring voice of authority again; and, on the lonely banks of this branch-covered creek, which contained (she out of the question) every thing congenial to my taste and dear to my heart, I, unapplauded, unfeared, unenvied and uncalumniated, should have lived and died."

In spite of this narrative, and the momentary unfaithfulness of heart which it implies, Cobbett gave many proofs of his real affection towards the young girl to whom he had engaged himself; not the least striking of which he thus mentions. His betrothed is on the eve of her departure from America with her father's regiment of artillery for this country.

"I was aware, that, when she got to that



gay place, Woolwich, the house of her father and mother, necessarily visited by numerous persons not the most select, might become unpleasant to her, and I did not like, besides, that she should continue to *work hard*. I had saved a *hundred and fifty guineas*, the earnings of my early hours, in writing for the paymaster, the quartermaster, and others, in addition to the saving of my own pay. *I sent her all my money*, before she sailed; and wrote to her to beg of her, if she found her home uncomfortable, to hire a lodging with respectable people: and at any rate, not to spare the money, by any means, but to buy herself good clothes, and to live without hard work until I arrived in England; and I, in order to induce her to lay out the money, told her that I should get plenty more before I came home."

This was generous—and by the virtue of Cobbett's bride it was also just. It was a fine trait of character in Cobbett—it was responded to with still nobler self-forbearance in the girl he loved.

She had departed, and Cobbett's regiment remained four years longer in America (two years beyond its original destination). It was



during these four years that the adventure of the heart occurred to him which has been detailed above. At their expiration, he found himself at home and discharged. What then?— why thus, he remarks :—

“ I found my little girl *a servant of all work* (and hard work it was), *at five pounds a year*, in the house of a Captain Brisac ; and, without hardly saying a word about the matter, she put into my hands, *the whole of my hundred and fifty pounds unbroken !*”

A rare and beautiful instance of female goodness, and in humble life ; but we must let Cobbett append his own reflections.

“ Need I tell the reader what my feelings were ? Need I tell kind-hearted English parents what effect this anecdote *must* have produced on the minds of our children ? Need I attempt to describe what effect this example ought to have on every young woman who shall do me the honour to read this book ? Admiration of her conduct, and self-gratulation on this indubitable proof of the soundness of my own judgment, were now added to my love of her beautiful person.

“ Now, I do not say that there are not many



young women of this country who would, under similar circumstances, have acted as my wife did in this case; on the contrary, I hope, and do sincerely believe, that there are. But when *her age* is considered; when we reflect, that she was living in a place crowded, literally *crowded* with gaily-dressed and handsome young men, many of whom really far richer and in higher rank than I was, and scores of them ready to offer her their hand; when we reflect that she was living amongst young women who put upon their backs every shilling that they could come at; when we see her keeping the bag of gold untouched, and working hard to provide herself with but mere necessary apparel, and doing this while she was passing *from fourteen to eighteen years of age*; when we view the whole of the circumstances, we must say that here is an example, which, while it reflects honour on her sex, ought to have weight with every young woman whose eyes or ears this relation shall reach."

## CHAPTER VI.

## REFLECTIONS UPON THE FOREGOING CHAPTERS—COBBETT'S PRIVATE CHARACTER A KEY TO HIS PUBLIC CAREER.

LET us see what sort of insight the foregoing chapters will give us into Cobbett's mind—what inferences they should leave in our own. The domestic history of public men can be only more useful or curious than that of private individuals, in proportion as it affords a key to the qualities which influence their public actions; for it is quite certain that on the turbulent highway of politics, or in the quiet of the domestic hearth, the heart is the true thermometer whose impulses, like the quicksilver, indicate the degrees of good or evil in our nature; and, as no man was ever idolized in his quiet circle that had not some friends



abroad, so he who proves himself a bad man in his own house, will never be esteemed a good one in the larger family of the world. Our powers of usefulness and popularity are as much limited or enlarged by the action of the qualities of the heart, as our corporeal frames are influenced by the changes of air and climate. Hence, if we penetrate the disposition of a man by its private indications, we have a fair clue to his public character. "The fire-side," says an old Roman proverb, "is often the key to the forum,"—a sentence which, if it means any thing, elucidates the position we have just laid down, and upon the principles of which we would have our readers seek in Cobbett's domestic history, the parallel features to his public career.

It must be remembered that at the period when and where we have just left Cobbett (the year 1792), he is but twenty-six years old—the history we have given is the history of early youth carried up to early manhood:—that part which is narrated by himself—which is vivid with the recollections of his own impressions, is the fairest, because the most indulgent standard by which to judge of the man.



What, then, by his own account, were the qualities of Cobbett's boyhood?

He was the son of a labourer—trained to the plough; his days of work spent in the broad fields, his holidays in his grandmother's humble cottage; his home-evenings in such poor knowledge as his father could give him, and his nights in happy, thoughtless, dreamless, unambitious sleep. But if the nights of the farmer's boy are visionless, they are also short. Young Cobbett was taught to rise early, though he has never asserted that he went early to bed. But he has said "a father like ours did not suffer us to eat the bread of idleness;" and again "I do not remember the time when I did not earn my own living." He was then *industrious* and *independent*. Industry and independence are the two first features of Cobbett's boyhood, and his public life is one long episode of industry unwearied, and independence without restraint. Turn we to the next trait.

Until he was fifteen the boy Cobbett was no more or less than a country boor; he was not romantic—he did not make poetry, like Bloomfield, as he followed the plough; he did not live like Tytreus—*sub tegmine fagi*—and de-



dicating himself to the muse. He appears to have no boast of himself during this period; and that of his father which is recorded of him, is not ultra-intellectual; it is simply that "he could do as much work as any man." With this, as the *maximum* of acquisition, he seems to have been content, until chance takes him to Portsmouth, and he beholds the sea. In his instant anxiety, immediate resolution, and speedy attempt to enrol himself as a sailor, he proves himself to be subject to the domination of a sudden impulse, and in his expressed determination to share the dangers and hardships of his countrymen at sea, he exhibits that innate longing for distinction which is called, and is *ambition*. Publicly he has been the creature of impulse; his changes of situation—of country—of opinions—of politics—and, above all, the circumstances under which they took place, testify it beyond a doubt. Publicly he has been ambitious, as all his labours, and all their results confirm.

The boy Cobbett is going to a fair, but, acting under impulse, spends his fairing-money in coach-hire, and starts for London. When there, and not far short of destitute, he is



ordered home by his father, whom he disobeys. He is persuaded by his patron to go back, but he remains. He gives as his reason for not returning—the scoffs of his companions. He is, therefore, *disobedient, wilful, and proud*; and again, in these three qualities, be they bad or good, we are furnished with three more of the elements of Cobbett's public mind. His works are so many records of public disobedience, public wilfulness, and public pride.

Fortune rescues young Cobbett from beggary in London, to commit him to the tender mercies of the law. He is rendered to the drudgery of an attorney's office, and there he labours long and arduously; he performs extreme duty—he discovers his own educational imperfections, and begins to educate himself; yet, with the chance of a profession before him, by the exercise of the very qualities which he was then displaying, he suddenly quits his place and prospects to enlist, as he believes, in the marines. In the attorney's office he exhibited perseverance—in leaving it an impatience of confinement and control. Have not *perseverance* and *impatience of control* been two of his most striking public characteristics?



Cobbett is in the army, where his more youthful qualities of labour and perseverance, and impulse and ambition, continue to develop themselves, to which, in young manhood, he adds the virtue of *sobriety*. But it will be seen that his mind more expanded as he grew older, and that in his military sphere his labour, his perseverance, and his sobriety, were all made subservient aids to his ambition. By their exercise then he obtained promotion—by their exercise since in public he obtained fame!

At that early period, in the choice of a wife, besides *impulse* and *will*, he proves the possession of strong perceptive *judgment*. It is *impulse* when he says, "I sat in the same room with her for about an hour, and I made up my mind that she was the girl for me." It is *will* when he adds "From the day I first spoke to her I never had a thought of her becoming the wife of another man. I formed my resolution at once, to marry her." And it was *judgment*, appreciating industry, which chose her because she had risen before the lark, and was "out on the snow, scrubbing a washing-tub."

When this "good girl" leaves him to return



to England, the young man gives her one hundred and fifty guineas, his hard earnings, to preserve her from the chances of want in his absence. His having saved a hundred and fifty guineas evidenced *frugality*—his giving them, *generosity*—and the reason of his giving them, *foresight*. Cobbett always has been, in public doctrine, and private practice, frugal, generous, and a considerer of the future.

During the absence of his plighted bride, Cobbett approached, but did not complete infidelity. He, however, displayed whimsicality, versatility, inconsistency—which you will—one or all; and this quality, characterize it how you please, certainly runs through his public career. That he was not unfaithful in the instance we have named, was the effect of *moral reasoning power* and *strong common sense*, both gifts which he has often publicly exercised for the good of the community.

These, then, are the early indications of his nature, as displayed from boyhood to the age of twenty-six. We trace in Cobbett's conduct evidences of *industry, independence, impetuosity* (considered as the force of impulse), *ambition, disobedience, obstinacy, pride, perse-*



*verance, impatience of control, sobriety, the power of will, judgment, frugality, generosity, foresight, moral reasoning power, and strong common sense.* Take these together, and the good prevails over the bad. Still the *melée* is an odd one; but depend upon it, that all the elements we have named were mixed and moulded in the crucible of William Cobbett's mind.

We have deduced these inferences from his own narrative of his early private life, and we pray the reader to apply them philosophically by the test of his own moral system—to his after public writings and political deeds. So shall he get at truth.

## CHAPTER VII.

COBBETT IN AMERICA—HE TAKES TO AUTHORSHIP—  
COMMENCES THE "PORCUPINE" PAPERS—HIS AFFAIRS  
WITH HIS BOOKSELLER—DECLINES TO WRITE LONGER  
FOR HIM.

WE now draw near to that period of Cob-  
bett's life when he first commenced the business  
of author and politician. A few trifling adven-  
tures, however, intervene. We have already  
stated that immediately after his marriage Cob-  
bett embarked for France, and arrived there in  
March, 1792. In that country he spent six  
months—six, he declares, of the happiest months  
of his life. It would appear that he was well  
treated, for he says, "I should be the most  
ungrateful monster that ever lived, were I ever  
to speak ill of the French people in general."  
And then, reverting to the strong political bias  
of his mind, he adds, "I found the people



among whom I lived—*excepting those who were already blasted with the principles of the accursed Revolution*—honest, pious, and kind to excess.” And immediately after this follows another remarkable sentence:—“ I have not room here to go into an inquiry into the causes that have led these people to become the passive instruments of a set of tyrants, such as the world never saw before, but I venture to predict that sooner or later they will return to that form of government under which they were happy, and under which alone they can ever be so again.”

Cobbett would have stayed more than six months in France, but for the progress of political events :

“ I did intend to stay in France till the spring of 1793, as well to perfect myself in the language, as to pass the winter at Paris. But I perceived the storm gathering ; I saw that a war with England was inevitable ; and it was not difficult to see what would be the fate of Englishmen in that country, where the rulers had laid aside even the appearance of justice and mercy. I wished, however, to see Paris, and actually hired a coach to go thither : I was



even on the way, when I heard at Abbeville that the king was dethroned, and his guards murdered. This intelligence made me turn off towards Havre-de-Grace, whence I embarked to America."

Cobbett's determination of settling in the United States had been formed before he had procured his discharge from the British army. His anxiety to see a country which had so long been the theatre of a famous war first prompted his inclination; the Abbé Raynal's vivid and captivating descriptions of America gave it a new impetus; and the political events which drove him out of France, at a time when he had no great wish to return to his own country, led him at once to the effecting of his purpose.

He landed at New York in the month of October, taking with him a letter of recommendation from the American ambassador at the Hague to Mr. Jefferson, the American secretary of state, the result of which was thus communicated to Cobbett, on the 5th of November following, a date which implies that he had been in no hurry to present the original credential:—

H



" SIR :

" *Philadelphia, Nov. 5, 1792.*

" In acknowledging the receipt of your favour of the 2d inst., I wish it were in my power to announce to you any way in which I could be useful to you. Mr. Short's assurances of your merit would be a sufficient inducement to me. Public offices in our government are so few, and of so little value, as to offer no resource to talents. When you shall have been here some small time, you will be able to judge in what way you can set out with the best prospect of success; and if I can serve you in it, I shall be very ready to do it.

" I am, Sir, your very humble servant,

" TH. JEFFERSON.

" W. Cobbett, Esq."

Cobbett never took advantage of the offer contained in this letter, which, however, he says was thankfully received.

Young—unassisted—a stranger in another country, and with no prospect but the fruit of his own exertions before him, William Cobbett is about to start anew in the world. Let us watch his rise and progress—his early struggles and his late success.

It is fair to suppose that, with the exception of a little money which he might have amassed as serjeant-major of his regiment, during the last four years of his sojourn in Nova Scotia, the hundred and fifty guineas which his exem-



plary young bride had kept for him in England, must have made the sum of the little capital with which he had to commence his new career. A great deal of this, too, must have already been swallowed up by the expenses of his marriage, a journey to—and six months residence in—France, and the costs of his voyage to New York; so that we have every reason to believe that his means must have been exceedingly scanty during the first period of his sojourn in the United States.

This supposition is somewhat confirmed by the fact of his having taken to authorship, although not until after so long a period that we are puzzled to know how Cobbett and his young wife had subsisted in the meanwhile. Perhaps we have underrated the amount of his savings while serjeant-major of his regiment. But Cobbett himself claims the merit of taking up the pen on other ground than that of pecuniary necessity. He lays it at the door of patriotism.

“In the month of July 1794,” he says, “the famous Unitarian doctor, Fellow of the Royal Society, London, *Citizen* of France, and Delegate to the GRANDE CONVENTION NATIONALE



landed at New York. His landing was nothing to me nor to anybody else; but the fulsome and consequential addresses sent him by the pretended patriots, at once calculated to flatter the people here, and to degrade his country and mine, was something to me. *It was my business, and the business of every man who thinks that truth ought to be opposed to malice and hypocrisy.*"

The person to whom Cobbett here alludes, and whom he soon set himself to attack, was a man of no small notoriety—the celebrated Dr. Priestley, then, and afterwards, remarkable for his writings on the side of the prevalent opinions in favour of democracy.

With an assault upon this individual, embodied in a pamphlet which he called "The Tartuffe Detected; or, Observations on the Emigration of a Martyr to the Cause of Liberty," Cobbett commenced his career as an author: a career, since made memorable by the exhibition of every versatility of talent, every sign of activity; by the dissemination of useful knowledge and the purest moral principles; and, again, in contradiction, by the spread of dangerous doctrines, whole volumes of invec-



tive, ever-changing opinions, and the most vigorous papers that have ever been read or written, upon all sides of all kinds of political questions.

And how was this career began?—Nearly like that of most of the lovers and ornaments of literature who were striving to turn their talents into meat and drink. Cobbett was living in Philadelphia, and he went to a Mr. Carey, a bookseller in that city. “Mr. Carey,” he says, “received me as booksellers generally receive authors (I mean authors whom they think to get but little by); he looked at the title from top to bottom, and then at me from head to foot. ‘No, my lad,’ says he, ‘I don’t think it will suit.’” This was enough for Cobbett: more indignant at being called “my lad,” than discouraged with the reception he had met with, he immediately repaired to a rival bookseller of the name of Bradford, whom he abstained from visiting at first, on account of the rooted hatred which he knew that person to retain against Great Britain. His pique, however, had conquered this objection, and “the next day,” he says, “I went to him to know his determination. He hesitated—wanted to know if I could



not make it a little more popular, adding, that unless I could, he feared that the publishing of it would endanger his windows. More popular I could not make it—I never was of an accommodating disposition in my life.”

After some parley, however, Cobbett consented to modify the title, rejecting “*The Tartuffe Detected*,” and retaining the “*Observations on the Emigration of a Martyr, &c.*” Upon this Mr. Bradford consented to publish the pamphlet under an arrangement which Cobbett thus describes:—

“The terms on which Mr. Bradford took the ‘*Observations*,’ are what booksellers call *publishing it together*. I beg the reader, if he foresees the possibility of his becoming author, to recollect this phrase well. Publishing it together is thus managed: the bookseller takes the work, prints it and defrays all expenses of paper, binding, &c., and the profits, if any, are divided between him and the author. Long after the ‘*Observations*’ were sold off, Mr. Bradford tendered me an account (undoubtedly a very just one) of the sales. According to this account my share of the profits, my share only, amounted to the sum of *one shilling and seven-*



*pence-halfpenny* currency of the State of Pennsylvania, or about elevenpence-three-farthings sterling quite entirely clear of all deductions whatsoever."

It will readily be seen that our young writer would never have made his fortune at such work as this; which seems to beat the poorest state of the poorest authorship in this country. Cobbett, however, with a shrewdness natural to him, rather conceived a disgust at the system of dividing profits, than to the new calling which he had chosen; he did not, therefore, cease to write, but he ceased to "*publish together.*" Ever afterwards his arrangements with Mr. Bradford assumed a new character. "When a pamphlet," he says, "was ready for the press, we made a bargain for it, and I took his note of hand payable in one, two, or three months." This was something like business.

The "Observations" formed the first of that celebrated series of papers to which Cobbett affixed the signature of *Peter Porcupine*, and which he afterwards continued under different heads to an extent which enabled him to gather them into twelve volumes, in which form they were republished in this country in May, 1801.



Those pamphlets which immediately succeeded the "Observations," and which he still published with—or rather sold to—Mr. Bradford, were as follows: "A Bone to Gnaw for the Democrats," in two parts, "A Kick for a Bite," "Plain English, Addressed to the people of the United States," "The New Year's Gift," and "The Prospect from the Congress Gallery." The copyrights of each of these produced their author the annexed prices:—

	Dollars.	Cents.
Bone to Gnaw, 1st Part.....	125	0
Kick for a Bite.....	20	0
Bone to Gnaw, 2d Part.....	40	0
Plain English.....	100	0
New Year's Gift.....	100	0
Prospect, &c.....	18	0
	<hr/>	
	403	0

A sum which, taking the dollar at the value of four shillings sterling, (it might have been worth a little more or less) would amount to a little more than eighty pounds of English money, or about thirteen pounds a pamphlet, which would even now be considered a fair remuneration to the author for a well-selling pamphlet in this country. That these early



emanations of Cobbett's masculine intellect, were, however, unusually successful, may be inferred from the fact that after they had passed through a number of editions, their author sought to re-purchase them, and offered the publisher as much as he had given for the original copyright, before a single copy had been printed, and this offer was *refused*—a clear proof that the tracts were worth more than they were sold for—even after a large sale had, in the nature of things, deteriorated from their value by leaving less room for a supply.

With the last of the above pamphlets, "The Prospect from the Congress Gallery," terminated all transactions between Cobbett and Mr. Bradford, and the cause of the breach between them, throws too much light upon a point in our author's disposition, to be omitted in these pages. The title of the pamphlet implies its connexion with the debates of the American congress; and after its appearance, Cobbett proposed making a mere collection of the debates, with here and there a note by way of remark. It was his intention to publish it at the end of the session, in one volume, but Mr. Bradford, doubtful of its success in this



form, determined on publishing it in numbers. The following sentence, written by Cobbett, will show how the matter terminated, and is besides eminently characteristic of the writer.

“ The first number, as it was called (but not by me) was published, and its success led Mr. Bradford to press for a continuation. His son offered me, I believe, a hundred dollars a number, and I should have accepted it, had it not been for a word that escaped him during the conversation. He observed that their customers would be much disappointed, for that his father had *promised a continuation, and that it should be made very interesting.* This slip of the tongue opened my eyes at once. *What, a bookseller undertake to promise that I should write, and that I should write to please his customers, too!—No! if all his customers—if all the congress, with the president at their head, had come and solicited me—nay, had my life depended upon a compliance, I would not have written another line!*”

Thus then terminated the first epoch in Cobbett's life as an author; it was remarkable in the beginning; it was characteristic at the close. It was also an evidence of what he was to be.



Six short pamphlets, written by a self-educated young stranger, who had been trained to arts of war and not of scholarship, in a new republic, had created him a fame! His first production was a bitter vituperation, treading on the heels of slander, of a man whom he thought had vilified *his* country; the second was a direct attack upon democracy, penned in the most democratic of the United States; and all the rest had in them the elements of opposition to the adopted principles and growing institutions, in the midst of which he lived. But they all displayed talent, they all aimed at some given mark, and sent the arrow home; they were all the handiwork of a smith who first inflamed the irons he was to strike, and then crushed them at a blow—they gave *birth* to enemies, but they gave *strength* to his political power and reputation—for his enemies he did not care, for his power and reputation, as applied to politics, he anxiously *did*. We have more to say about all this, but for the present, we must be content that the chapter exhibits to the reader, how, as a writer and a politician, William Cobbett began his career.



## CHAPTER VIII.

ATTACKS UPON COBBETT ON ACCOUNT OF HIS WRITINGS  
—HIS TRIUMPHS—HIS LETTERS OPENED AT THE POST  
OFFICE—PROSECUTED FOR A LIBEL—THE JURY THROW  
OUT THE BILL.

THE pamphlets which Cobbett had published with the American bookseller, Bradford, had made a great stir in Philadelphia, and other parts of the United States. They had given him a fame which was at first bestowed upon one who wrote anonymously, but which he determined to avow and cope with, by assuming a corresponding position in society, and taking upon himself along with the responsibility of his writings, the character of bookseller and publisher in the city; from whence he dealt out his oracles as from a lion's mouth. His quarrel with his publisher, and consequent separation, had caused that respected individual to pen the following laconic epistle:—

“ Sir,—Send me your account and a receipt for the last publication, and your money shall be sent you by—Yours,

“ Philadelphia, April 22, 1796. THOMAS BRADFORD

Cobbett answered this in his own hard-hitting, home-seeking style; but his real substantial reply—his *argumentum ad hominem*—was the assuming of the responsibility at which we have hinted above, the opening of a shop in the month immediately following that very April. He himself mentions this fact as follows:—

“ In the spring of the year 1796, I took a house in Second-street, Philadelphia, for the purpose of carrying on the bookselling business, which I looked upon as being at once a means of getting money, and of propagating writings against the French. I went into my house in May, but the shop could not be gotten ready for some time; and, from one delay and another, I was prevented from opening till the second week in July.

“ Till I took this house, I had remained almost entirely unknown, as a writer. A few persons did, indeed, know that I was the person, who had assumed the name of Peter Porcupine; but the fact was by no means a matter of notoriety. The moment, however,



that I had taken a lease of a large house, the transaction became the topic of public conversation, and the eyes of the democrats and the French, who still lorded it over the city, and who owed me a mutual grudge, were fixed upon me.

“ I thought my situation somewhat perilous. Such truths as I had published, no man had dared to utter, in the United States, since the rebellion. I knew that these truths had mortally offended the leading men amongst the democrats, who, could, at any time, muster a mob quite sufficient to destroy my house, and to murder me. I had not a friend, to whom I could look with any reasonable hope of receiving efficient support; and, as to the *law*, I had seen too much of republican justice, to expect anything but persecution from that quarter. In short, there were, in Philadelphia, about ten thousand persons, all of whom would have rejoiced to see me murdered; and there might, probably, be two thousand, who would have been very sorry for it; but not above fifty of whom would have stirred an inch to save me.

“ As the time approached for opening my shop, my friends grew more anxious for my



safety. It was recommended to me, to be cautious how I exposed, at my window, any thing that might provoke the people; and, above all, not to put up any *aristocratical portraits*, which would certainly cause my windows to be demolished.

“ I saw the danger; but also saw, that I must, at once, set all danger at defiance, or live in everlasting subjection to the prejudices and caprice of the democratical mob. I resolved on the former; and, as my shop was to open on a Monday morning, I employed myself all day on Sunday, in preparing an exhibition, that I thought would put the courage and the power of my enemies to the test. I put up in my windows, which were very large, all the portraits that I had in my possession of *kings, queens, princes, and nobles*. I had all the English ministry; several of the bishops and judges; the most famous admirals; and, in short, every picture that I thought likely to excite rage in the enemies of Great Britain.

“ Early on the Monday morning, I took down my shutters. Such a sight had not been seen in Philadelphia for twenty years. Never since the beginning of the rebellion, had any one



dared to hoist at his window the portrait of George the Third.

“In order to make the test as perfect as possible, I had put up some of the ‘*worthies of the revolution,*’ and had found out fit companions for them. I had coupled *Franklin* and *Marat* together; and, in another place, *M’Kean* and *Ankerstrom.*”

Those who know any thing of the madness which characterizes party-spirit in all colonies, those who under General Darling may have dwelt in New South Wales, who during the struggle between British and French influences may have lived in Canada, or those who have resided in any of the West India Islands during the agitation of the Slave Emancipation question, will be able to imagine the degree of “*furor*” excited in a state newly rescued from colonization—just merged into the democracy which is called independence—by this reckless violation of its prejudices, and its revolutionary enthusiasm, by William Cobbett, the avowed, carnate, living impersonation and embodiment of that same Peter Porcupine, who had already given them “*Bones to Gnaw,*” and “*A Kick for a Bite.*”



It at once became a question of murder or manslaughter in the community, and threatenings and danger hung over the author, loyalist, and enemy of the French. These began to manifest themselves in various ways, directly and indirectly. The first positive promise of mischief came indirectly; it was forwarded in a letter to Cobbett's landlord, and was worded after the following fashion:—

“ To Mr. John Olden, Merchant, Chesnut-street.

“ A certain William Cobbett, *alias* Peter Porcupine, I am informed is your tenant. This daring *scoundrel*, not satisfied with having repeatedly traduced the people of this country, vilified the most eminent and patriotic characters among us and *grossly* abused our allies, the French, in his detestable productions, has now the astonishing effrontery to expose those very publications at his window for sale, as well as certain prints indicative of the prowess of our enemies the British and the disgrace of the French. Calculating largely upon the moderation, or rather *puccellanimity* of our citizens, this puppy supposes he may even *insults* us with impunity. But he will ere long find himself dreadfully mistaken. 'Tho his miserable publications have not been hitherto considered worthy of notice, the late *manifestation* of his impudence and enmity to this country will not be passed over. With a view, therefore, of preventing your feeling the blow designed for him, I now address you. When the time of retribution arrives, it may not be convenient to discriminate between the innocent and the guilty. Your property therefore may suffer. For

I



depend upon it brick walls will not skreen the rascal from punishment when once the business is undertaken. As a friend, therefore, I advise you to save your property by either compelling Mr. Porcupine to leave your house or at all events oblige him to cease exposing his abominable productions, or any of his courtley prints at his window for sale. In this way only you may avoid danger to your house and perhaps save the rotten *carcase* of your tenant for the present.

“ July 16th, 1796.

“ A HINT.”

Immediately upon this threatening hint followed a number of squibs, or rather missiles, mighty in invective and unsparing of abuse. They came out like hornets that had had their nest disturbed, they stung in all directions; sundry sheets and reams of paper in particular, and perhaps less than anything else, the equanimity of Cobbett. Porcupine was now a name and a mark for vengeance in the city of Philadelphia. There were the “ Roaster for Peter Porcupine,” “ The Blue Shop,” “ Porcupine in Print,” “ The History of a Porcupine,” “ A Pill for a Porcupine,” “ The Impostor Detected,” and so on through a generation of the species, as though the quills of a thousand porcupines had been employed upon the annihilation of one.

Cobbett had the courage to despise these



threats, although they were far from despicable; but as a young man he had also the vanity to rejoice in them. He speaks of them with triumph at the very time of their occurrence:—

“Dear father, when you used to set me off to work in the morning, dressed in my blue smock frock and woollen spatterdashes, with my bag of bread and cheese and bottle of small beer swung over my shoulder on the little crook that my old god-father Boxall gave me, little did you imagine that I should one day become so great a man as to have my picture stuck in the windows, and have four whole books published about me in the course of one week.”

“Thus” (writes Cobbett), “begins a letter which I wrote to my father yesterday morning, and which, if it reaches him, will make the old man drink an extra pot of ale to my health. Heaven bless him! I think I see him now, by his old-fashioned fire-side, reading the letter to his neighbours. ‘Ay, ay,’ says he, ‘Will will stand his ground wherever he goes.’—And so I will, father, in spite of all the hell of democracy.”



After this little spurt of ambition, he continues in a strain of self-congratulation:—

“When I had the honour to serve King George, I was elated enough at the putting on of my worsted shoulder-knot, and, afterwards, my silver-laced coat; what must my feelings be, then, upon seeing half a dozen authors, or doctors, or the devil knows what, writing about me at one time, and ten times that number of printers, bookbinders, and booksellers, bustling, running, and flying about in all directions, to announce my fame to the impatient public? What must I feel upon seeing the newspapers filled from top to bottom, and the windows and corners of the houses placarded with a ‘Blue Shop for Peter Porcupine,’ a ‘Pill for Peter Porcupine,’ ‘Peter Porcupine Detected,’ a ‘Roaster for Peter Porcupine,’ a ‘History of Peter Porcupine,’ a ‘Picture of Peter Porcupine?’ The public will certainly excuse me if, after all this, I should begin to think myself a person of some importance.”

Thus lifted by the force of public execration, no less than by the lever of his own talent, into a dangerous importance, Cobbett



had yet the courage to preserve the tone of his principles in his writings—and he gave his pen no rest. He continued writing boldly, virulently, well. His works were all attacks, and most of them were personalities; but their strong bias was always against democracy, and in favour of moral and political order. “Their great object,” he says, in speaking of his enemies, “is to silence me, but I am sorry to tell them it is all in vain; for I am one of those whose obstinacy increases with opposition.” This was a proposition of which Cobbett was now almost daily demonstrating the truth.

Having once got so far as the six pamphlets we have mentioned, and a few more, and having followed them up, after the attacks made upon him, with the account of his early life, to which we have continually recurred, he now changed and divided according to whim the subject of the Porcupine papers, although he still retained the signature of Peter Porcupine as his *nom de guerre*. The second series of pamphlets which he penned under this *sobriquet*, he published periodically, with the title of the “Political Censor.” These comprised some of the best and bitterest essays



that have been written by Cobbett before or since. His slashing and unmerciful "Life of Paine" was among the most notorious; but he chiefly delighted in writing down French revolutionary principles—French tyranny—French republican laws—and to break through the outworks, and demolish the fortifications of all those principles in politics which the Americans were so freely and not unnaturally deriving from such sources. In directing himself towards this goal Cobbett cared not by what route he travelled; he was no respecter of persons, and neither great reputation nor an unrivalled popularity, could keep a man without the pale of his slaughter-house. Priestly—Franklin—Washington—Adet—the leading members of congress—the judges of Pennsylvania—and the democrats of elsewhere—he attacked them all alike—with argument—with invective—with a terrible exposure of their motives and their acts—and, we are bound to add, with an unflinching recklessness of all consequences. We shall dwell upon the character and merits of all these writings of Cobbett's in America, when we come to speak of their republication in this country; we are not



yet standing on fair ground for criticism, while the subsequent incidents of his life in the United States remain undetailed.

Those who know anything—and who is there that does not?—of Cobbett's political career in this country, will readily surmise that, looking at the course he was pursuing in the teeth of national prejudices and existing authorities, he was not long in calling down upon his head the whole vengeance of the laws. Public and private prosecutions, few in number it is true, but inveterate in character, began to beset him, and he felt himself, possibly with more exultation than fear of danger, a marked man. As a preliminary to a more tangible mode of attack, his enemies busied themselves in seeking out fresh and fresh ground of slander against him; above all, they accused him of being a British agent—a spy, in the pay of Pitt—and instanced his advocacy of English institutions, and his persecutions of republicanism, as arguments to the proof. But as yet they had failed in getting anything that they could lay hold of against him; and, in their efforts to sting, they went so far as to break open his letters. This event happened in October, 1797, and Cobbett took



occasion to prevent its recurrence, by the following notice in his publication :—

“ THURSDAY, 26th OCTOBER.

“ REPUBLICAN POST-OFFICE.—This is to notify the post-masters and others, between this place and New York, inclusive; that if the next package, brought me by the English packet, come to my hands *broken open*, and I am not able to discover the person who may break it open, it is my resolution to prosecute the postmaster-general.—I have no objection to people talking about *liberty* and the *rights of man* as long as they please, but I do not like that they should proceed so far in the practice of them as to ransack what comes under seal to my address.

“ WM. COBBETT.”

After this notice his enemies opened no more letters, but they continued on the watch for the moment when he should commit himself into their power by some written indiscretion. Meanwhile there were not wanting anonymous incitations to attack Cobbett by other means. Among other modes of annoyance, inflammatory publications were by no means rare. We find one of those signed “ AN AMERICAN ” with the following pleasant termination.

“ While I am a friend to the *unlimited* freedom of the press, when exercised by an *American*, I am an implacable foe to its prosti-



tution to a *foreigner*, and would at any time assist in hunting out of society any meddling foreigner, who should dare to interfere in our politics. I hope the *apathy* of our brethren of Philadelphia will no longer be indulged, and that an *exemplary vengeance* will soon burst upon the head of such a presumptuous fellow. *Justice, honour, national gratitude*, all call for it.—May it *no longer be delayed.*”

Cobbett's remarks upon this are very characteristic. He says,—“ A publication like this, the direct and avowed object of which was, to instigate the *free men* to devastation and *murder*, should, one would think, have been noticed by the magistrates, particularly under the eye of a *chief justice*, whom we shall by and by see so zealous and so watchful. But, no: it attracted the attention of no one, or at least no one took any measures to prevent the intended assault. My house and my family might have been burnt to ashes: we might all have been dragged into the street and murdered; and I sincerely believe not so much as a constable would have held up his staff to arrest the assassins. We were, however, prepared for their reception. We should not have fallen unrevenged. Some



of their souls would have taken their departure from my door-way on their journey to hell.”

Cobbett, however, escaped these instigations of private malice, that after all were never elevated either in tone or consequences above mere bullying, and continued his career with unabated vigour. However, his hour was at hand—it awaited him in one of the prosecutions at which we have hinted, although not in that whose history we are now about to detail.

For sometime past Cobbett had dropped the “Political Censor,” which he had only published from time to time, and brought out a daily paper, which he called “Porcupine’s Gazette.” His motive in starting this publication may be gathered from the following sentence:—

“When I undertook to publish a daily paper, it was with the intention of annihilating, if possible, the intriguing, wicked, and indefatigable faction which the French had formed in this country. I was fully aware of the arduousness of the task, and of the inconvenience and danger to which it would expose both me and mine. I was prepared to meet the rancorous vengeance of enemies in the hour of their triumph, and the coolness of friends in the hour



of my peril ; in short, to acquire riches seemed to me quite uncertain ; and to be stripped of every farthing of my property seemed extremely probable ; but, let what would happen, I was resolved to pursue the object which I had in contemplation, so long as there remained the most distant probability of success."

He continues thus :—

"Among the dangers which presented themselves to me, those to be apprehended from the severity of the law appeared the most formidable ; more especially as I happened to be situated *in the State of Pennsylvania*, where the government, generally speaking, was in the hands of those, who had (and sometimes with great indecency) manifested an uniform partiality for the *sans-culotte* French, and an uniform opposition to the ministers and measures of the federal government. These persons I knew I had offended by the promulgation of disagreeable truths ; and, therefore, it was natural that I should seek for some standard as a safe rule for my conduct with respect to *the liberty of my press*."

The design expressed in the last sentence, Cobbett did not successfully fulfil ; he, indeed,



adopted a standard, but it will be seen that it was anything but a safe rule.

Some time in the month of August, 1797, the Spanish minister in America, Don Carlos Martinez d'Trujo applied to the federal government to prosecute Cobbett for certain matters published in "Porcupine's Gazette," of the 17th July of that year against himself and his master, Charles IV., King of Spain. The American government consented, and Cobbett was bound over to appear in the Federal District Court in the following April. His prosecutor, however, succeeded in getting the trial transferred to the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania, where Cobbett would be judged by Chief Justice M'Kean, one of those "men in authority" to whom he had shewn so little favour. Accordingly we soon find that he was not treated by the justice with any very pleasant ceremony as he proceeds to tell us in the following narration:—

"The trifling circumstances attending an arrest and giving bail," he remarks, "are scarcely worth relating: but, sometimes, trifling circumstances serve to convey a more correct idea of the character of the parties concerned in a



transaction, and to guide the reader to a more just appreciation of their motives, than the longest and most laboured general account of their conduct.

“The sheriff (whose civility and candour I have every reason to applaud) came to my house for *the first time* at twelve o'clock; and he was ordered to have me before the Judge *at half-past one*. Thank God I am not versed in arrests; but, I believe, this is the first time that a man prosecuted for a libel was pinned down to the short space of *an hour and a half* to prepare for going out and to procure himself bail. The English reader (for this pamphlet shall be read in England) will observe, that this government of Pennsylvania is that which is everlastingly boasting of the *mildness* and *humanity* of its laws.

“I was not so destitute of friends as, perhaps, the judge expected I was. Bail was procured, and we were before him at the appointed time.

“He asked us to sit down. I seated myself on one side of the fire, and he on the other. After he had talked on for some time to very little purpose (at least, as to the effect his talk



produced on me), he showed me certain newspapers, asked me if *I had printed and published them?* To this I replied, *that the law did not require me to answer any questions in that stage of the business; and that, therefore, I should not do it.* At this reply, though a very prudent and a very proper one, 'he waxed exceeding wroth.' He instantly ordered me to get off my chair, and stand up before him, although he himself had invited me to sit down, which species of resentment excited in my mind no other sentiment than that which I dare say it has already excited in the mind of the reader."

This shew of temper, however, on the part of the judge in the above stage of the business, appears to have been only a sort of preliminary evidence of his dislike to Cobbett, which was afterwards more injuriously, and most shamefully exercised from the bench, when the trial came on, in his charge to the jury, which, as we have read it, is one of the most partial and disgraceful emanations of judicial malice, it ever fell to our lot to peruse. Fortunately for Cobbett, however, it failed in its intended effect; the jury were unbiassed by it and returned the



bill. This we believe is the only instance (except one) among his many trials for libel, in which Cobbett achieved anything like a triumph.

It is amusing to find the author immediately after his victory, giving tongue to such a sentence as the following.

“ It hardly ever becomes a man to say much of his private character and concerns ; but, on this occasion, I trust I shall be indulged for a moment. I will say, and I will make that saying good, whoever shall oppose it, that I have never attacked any one, whose private character is not, in every light in which it can possibly be viewed, as far beneath mine as infamy is beneath honour. Nay, I defy the city of Philadelphia, populous as it is, and respectable as are many of its inhabitants, to produce me a single man, who is more sober, industrious, or honest ; who is a kinder husband, a tenderer father, a better master, a firmer friend, or (though last not least) a more zealous and faithful subject.

“ Most certainly it is unseemly in any one to say thus much of himself, unless compelled to it by some public outrage on his character ; but, when the accusation is thus made notori-



ous, so ought the defence. And I do again and again repeat, that I fear not a comparison between my character and that of any man in the city; no, not even with that of the very judge who held me to be the worst of miscreants. His honour is welcome, if he please, to carry this comparison into *all* the actions of our lives, public and *domestic*, and to extend it beyond ourselves to *every branch of our families.*”

Thus terminated his first law adventure in the United States; but not his hatred towards Judge M'Kean, whom Cobbett ever afterwards continued to pursue with a fierce and unrelenting vengeance.

## CHAPTER IX.

MORE ENEMIES AND MORE ATTACKS—COBBETT AND DOCTOR RUSH, THE AMERICAN SANGRADO—A SECOND TRIAL FOR LIBEL—CHARGE OF THE CHIEF JUSTICE—ITS EFFECT ON THE JURY—RESULT OF THE TRIAL.

WE turn from the account of his first prosecution, and of his numerous self-entailed persecutions, and almost wonder to find Cobbett still remaining in America. He seems to have had a fondness for the heat of turmoil, a delight in witnessing the bursting of the big and little bubbles which he was perpetually raising upon the surface of society in the United States, and of the state of Philadelphia in particular. There he continued a citizen and bookseller, making money by the eternal evolutions of his porcupine quills; annihilating character, devastating reputations, and keeping public men upon a *qui vive* worthy of an

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Argus. After his trial, the Judge M'Kean could seldom have retired to rest so sleepy as not to have been able to vent a curse upon William Cobbett; and Judge M'Kean was not the only man, among the mighty of the republic, who would have felt a pleasure in paying him a similar compliment. His small enemies too, as he would himself have called them, thickened around him like young hornets, and many and most ludicrous were their modes of endeavouring to sting. We have here a little episode of the sort of vengeance they employed, which we cannot choose but lay before our readers, prefaced and followed by one single characteristic sentence from Cobbett's own pen.

“*Cut-throat Letter.*—I yesterday received the following cut-throat letter through the penny-post; and I lay it before the world, that they may judge of the temper and character of my enemies.

‘*A Friend to America, but an Enemy to bloody England.*

‘PORCUPINE,

‘You infernal ruffian, it is my full intention, when, or wherever I meet you, to give you one of the greatest lambastings ever you got, my reason for doing so, you

vagabond, is for writing and speaking, in such a disgraceful manner as you do against the *greatest* and *chief heads* of our city.—How dare you, you corporal, or any other British subject or slave, have the impudence to speak to a freeman? I think its too great an honour conferred on you, to be permitted to tread on this *blessed ground*, for fear of contaminating it, as you have in a great measure done already by your hell-fire paper, and the blackguard scurrilous pieces it contains.

‘ Believe me, you infernal ruffian, it is my full intention to give you a damned whipping when I meet you.

‘ When you publish this, take care of the streets and alleys you walk in.’

“ This is to inform this infamously *free man*, that I know he is a base scoundrel, and that he no more dares attack me, than he dares to go to any country where there is a gallows.”

The last sentence proves how little Cobbett was to be intimidated. He continued writing and fighting with a laborious perseverance of which Hercules might have been proud, nor must the reader imagine that he had not a strong party, even in America, in his favour. The old spirit of loyalty was not altogether extinguished by the birth of a new republic, and among those who owned allegiance to the new institutions there were not wanting many think-



ing men who appreciated the value of Cobbett's exertions to stem the torrent of impure democracy and confine the spread of Jacobinism and infidelity. We are confirmed in this opinion by the publicly-pronounced approval of the *Boston Commercial Gazette* of September 1798. Speaking of Cobbett's publication, the editors remark,—“ With regard to *Porcupine's Gazette*, it has been of great service ; the editor nobly and manfully came forward, at a time when our prejudices in favour of France was beyond all bounds, and pointed out the danger that was to be apprehended, from the views of the government of that nation. He thereby exposed his property to destruction, and himself and family to assassination and massacre ; with all these he was threatened ; the Jacobins knew he told the truth, and therefore wanted to stop his mouth, or put him out of the way ; but he persevered, and still remains a scourge to them, and the supporter of social order, political liberty, good government, and undefiled religion. If these things do not entitle him to public patronage, it is hard to say what would.”

It cannot be denied, however, that Cobbett's writings were subject to all the mischief which



extreme virulence is certain to produce. His own judgment and political acumen gave to his works a power, a depth, and character which everywhere fixed and enhanced their value and their consequence; but his violent personal feelings and party hatred, urged him to say many personally unjustifiable things of some individuals, and many things of others which were not a whit less libellous for being true, inasmuch as he generally managed them so as to affect a man in his most vulnerable point—to traduce him, as it were, in the face of his daily bread, and to strike at that sort of reputation which his means of subsistence required should be maintained.

Of this sort was the libel, for which he at length suffered a severe punishing penalty, that eventually caused him to quit a country where he had achieved the strangest triumphs and scattered the bitterest gall.

In the year 1793, during the mortality pervading the city of Philadelphia, and other parts of the United States, from the effects of the yellow fever, a (perhaps on account of his celebrity we should say *the*) Doctor Rush distinguished himself, as he affirmed, by curing,—as



Cobbett declared, by killing,—a very large number of patients; he having, as he said, by skill,—as Cobbett said, by quackery,—a very extensive practice. This Doctor Rush, used to write a great deal in the newspapers, and numerous controversies took place between himself and many other persons besides Cobbett, so that he was, independent of his profession, a public man by authorship and loud repute. By and by, in 1797, in the fullness of Peter Porcupine's renown, the yellow fever again made its appearance in Philadelphia, the mortality was again excessive, the abilities of Doctor Rush were again called into play to diminish it, which he asserted that he effectually did; while Cobbett as earnestly laboured to set him up as a signal of fatality, a sort of Death's head and cross-bones in the land of disease. Cobbett had imbibed a hatred of this man's system, whom he at once dubbed a *Sangrado*, because he recommended excessive bleeding; and the reader will easily fancy Cobbett's peculiar manner of contending that "bleeding a man to death, no matter what the disease, could not be the proper method of saving his life." You may attack a man, whe-

ther by ridicule or invective, till you hate him, and we are by no means sure that this was not the case with Cobbett and Doctor Rush. The oftener he wrote against this person, the more violent he grew. Among ten thousand equally bitter sentences, we find the following recorded by him as coming from the mouth of Doctor Penne:—" *The mode of treatment advised by Doctor Rush cannot, in the yellow fever, fail of being certain death.*" All his squibs—all his pasquinades—all his serious papers, bearing upon the subject of doctors, or the yellow fever, exposed Doctor Rush, reminded the reader of Gil Blas, and made the physician's practice appear like a practical essay on the verb "to kill." There can be no doubt that all this was grossly, and effectually libellous. We say this without wishing to defend the Doctor. Undoubtedly there was much to ridicule in his system, and Cobbett has made him otherwise appear a very contemptible person; but for all that, he libelled him, and in a manner to diminish his practice as a doctor, and, therefore, to affect his means of subsistence.

The result of all this was, that Doctor Rush



brought his action against Cobbett, and rated the damages at a heavy sum. The circumstance promised evil, as there was every likelihood that Judge M'Kean, whom he had by this time converted into the bitterest of bitter enemies, would have the supreme felicity of trying the cause. Cobbett seems justly to have appreciated the danger of this fact, as he endeavoured to avert it by petitioning to have the cause removed to the Circuit Courts, in order that it might be tried before another judge. The following is a copy of his petition:—

“ *Benjamin Rush v. William Cobbett.*

“ Supreme Court of Pennsylvania, Case Dec. Term, No. 3.

“ To the Honourable the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania.

“ The Petition of William Cobbett, the Defendant in the above action, an alien, and a subject of the King of Great Britain, humbly sheweth,

“ That he is sued in the action above mentioned, in which the matter in dispute exceeds the sum or value of five hundred dollars, exclusive of costs; that he is desirous to remove the said cause for trial into the next Circuit Court of the United States, to be holden for the district of Pennsylvania, and hath good and sufficient security, ready,

here in Court, to engage for his entering in said Circuit Court, on the first day of its session, a copy of the process in the said action, agreeably to the act, entitled, 'An Act to establish the Judicial Courts of the United States,' and also for his appearing in the said Circuit Court. He therefore prays the Honourable the Court, that security may be taken for the purpose aforesaid, and that the said cause may be removed to the said Circuit Court of the United States accordingly.

"*Philadelphia, 30th Dec., 1797.* " WILLIAM COBBETT.

"William Cobbett, being duly sworn, saith that the facts within stated are true.

"*30th Dec. 1797.* " WILLIAM COBBETT."

We shall subjoin Cobbett's own account of the success which this petition met when it came on for hearing before Judge M'Kean himself:—

"Its consideration," he says, "was put off to the next session, which was held in March 1798. But before I proceed to relate the fate of it, I cannot help remarking on the sensations which its presentation produced on the court and the auditory. It was towards the evening of the last day of the session, when Mr. Thomas, albeit unused to the modest mood, stole up gently from his seat, and in a faint and trembling voice, told the Bashaw M'Kean, that he



had a petition to present in behalf of William Cobbett. For some time he did not make himself heard. There was a great talking all round the bar; Levi, the lawyer, was reading a long formal paper to the judges, and the judges were laughing over the chit-chat of the day. Amidst the noisy mirth that surrounded him, there stood poor Thomas, with his papers in his hands, like a culprit at school, just as the boys are breaking up. By and by, one of those pauses, which frequently occur in even the most numerous and vociferous assemblies, encouraged him to make a fresh attempt. 'I present,' says he, 'may it please your Honours, a petition in behalf of William Cobbett.' The moment the sound of the word *Cobbett* struck the ear of M'Kean, he turned towards the bar, and having learnt the subject of the petition, began to storm like a madman. A dead silence ensued. The little scrubby lawyers (with whom the Courts of Pennsylvania are continually crowded) crouched down for fear, just like a brood of poultry, when the kite is preparing to pounce in amongst them; whilst hapless Thomas, who stood up piping like a straggled chicken, seemed already to feel the talons of



the judicial bird of prey. He proceeded, however, to read the petition, which being very short, was got through with little interruption. When he came to the words, '*subject of his Britannic Majesty,*' M'Kean did, indeed, grin most horribly, and I could very distinctly hear, '*Insolent scoundrel!*'—'*damned aristocrat!*'—'*damned Englishman!*' &c. &c. from the mouths of the sovereign people. But neither these execrations, nor the savage looks that accompanied them, prevented me from fulfilling my purpose. I went up to the clerk of the court, took the book in my hand, and holding it up, that it might be visible in all parts of the hall, I swore, in a voice that every one might hear, that I preserved my allegiance to my king; after which I put on my hat, and walked out of court, followed by the admiration of the few, and by the curses of the many.

“The consideration of the petition was, as I before observed, postponed till March term; which gave kite M'Kean time to ruminate on the novel adventure. On the one hand, was a violation of the constitution and laws of the general government; on the other, the escape of his prey. ‘Of two evils,’ says the proverb,



‘choose the least ;’ and kite M‘Kean chose on this occasion, just as any other kite would have chosen. When the Court met, he did, indeed, listen for about an hour to a sort of contention, which Thomas and Hopkinson called *law argument*, and which was full as edifying, though not quite so entertaining, as the disputes with which I had frequently been delighted, between Punchinello and the Devil. While the lawyers were *arguing*, the judges were engaged in a conversation, which, from the marks of risibility apparent on their countenances, seemed to be much more diverting than the contest between the puppets of the bar. When, therefore, this pleasant conversation was over, M‘Kean, turning his head towards Hopkinson, bawled out : ‘*Ha’nt you most done ?*’ This put an end to the *law argument* in a moment. No showman, with the help of his wire, ever produced more ready or more implicit obedience ; and kite M‘Kean now hastened to put an end to the farce, by declaring, without the least hesitation, without consulting his associates, and without giving any reason whatever for his decision, *that the petition of William Cobbett should not be granted.*”



Having failed in this petition, we shall presently see what was the result, as the trial certainly came on under very disadvantageous circumstances.

“At the next term,” (he writes after the failure of the petition), “September, 1798, I was served with a jury list, which I struck; but the trial was put off. I was served with another jury list at December term, 1798; with another at March term, 1799; with another at September term, 1799; and at every term, though the juries were always struck by me, and though I was always ready, the trial was put off. At last, on the 13th December, 1799, it was resolved to bring it to issue. The moment I saw the *jury list*, ‘Ah!’ said I, to a friend that happened to be with me, ‘the action of Rush is to be tried this time.’ We looked over the list again and again, and, after the most mature consideration, we could find but seven men out of the forty-eight, whom we thought fit to be trusted on the trial; but, as I had the power of rejecting no more than twelve, there were left, of course, twenty-nine whom I disapproved of, to the seven whom I approved of; and, as every one of these seven was struck



off by Rush, there remained not a single man on the jury in whose integrity I had the slightest confidence."

But Cobbett, thus unfortunate in his jury, had a still greater misfortune to contend with, in the impossibility which occurred of his being present at the trial. It had long been surmised that his old enemy, Judge M'Kean, would be raised to the Governorship of Pennsylvania; an event which, if ever it should occur, Cobbett had as long promised should cause his retirement from that State, where, he contended, liberty would no longer be protected, even if it did not cease altogether to exist, under the jurisdiction of such a man. The expected occurrence had now taken place—the Judge was appointed Governor—and Cobbett had proceeded to make his word good, by immediately quitting Pennsylvania and repairing to New York. The trial seems to have been wilfully suspended till his departure.

"Indeed," he says, "it was known that my books, furniture, &c. &c. were already sent off to New York; but I remained in the neighbourhood of the city (where I was seen every day), in order to be present at the trial, if it

should come on. On the 7th of December there was no prospect of the cause being brought to trial ; on the 8th, therefore, I came off for New York, where my affairs required my presence. On the 11th my correspondent wrote me that the cause was put off to another court ; but, the *very next day*, it was all at once resolved to bring it to trial immediately. This sudden change was produced by an advertisement of mine, signifying *my arrival at New York, and my resolution to drop the publication of Porcupine's Gazette*. Sure, therefore, of all the advantages to be derived from my absence, and relieved from all apprehensions on the score of my future writings, the dastardly wretches at last ventured on the execution of their long meditated revenge !”

In other words, the trial came on—it was ably argued on both sides—the speeches of the counsel being, as is the wont in America, sufficiently interlarded with personalities ; and, at its conclusion, Mr. Justice Shippen, who heard the cause (and whom Cobbett mentions as looking for honour and emoluments to the patronage of M<sup>r</sup> Kean, and as being in other respects



under his influence), delivered the following sentences in his charge to the jury.

“ GENTLEMEN,

“ THIS is an action brought by the plaintiff against the defendant for writing, printing, and publishing, divers scandalous libels, to defame and vilify him. The defendant has pleaded that he is not guilty;—his counsel, however, have acknowledged the publication of the papers, which otherwise it would have been incumbent on the plaintiff to prove. The question, therefore, will be, whether they amount in law to defamatory libels, or not?

“ The charges laid against the defendant in the declaration are various; but they may be reduced in substance to the following:—That he repeatedly calls the plaintiff a quack—an empiric; charges him with intemperate bleeding, injudiciously administering mercury in large doses in the yellow fever; puffing himself off; writing letters and answering them himself; styling him the Sampson of medicine; charging him *with murdering his patients, and slaying his thousands, and tens of thousands.*



“ The counts laid in the declaration are fully proved by the publications, which are certainly libellous. In what manner do the defendant’s Counsel repel these proofs? Not by justifying the truth of the matters charged against Dr. Rush, *which, on the contrary, they have repeatedly acknowledged to be false*, but by analyzing the several allegations in the newspapers, and from thence drawing a conclusion that no intentional personal malice appears, which they say is the essence of the offence. Malice rests in the heart, and is only to be judged of by the words and actions of the party; the words themselves import malice, and in that case the proof lies on the defendant to show the innocence of his intentions; if he has done that to your satisfaction you will acquit him: but this is chiefly founded on the allegation that the attack was meant to be made on Dr. Rush’s system, and not on the man; *it unfortunately appears that not the least attempt is made to combat the Doctor’s arguments with regard to the system itself*, but the attack is made merely by gross scurrilous abuse of the Doctor himself. Added to this, one of the witnesses proves a declaration made by the

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defendant, *that if Dr. Rush had not been the man he should never have meddled with the system.*

“Another ground of defence is of a more serious nature, as it leads to an important question on our constitution—it is said that the subject of dispute between the plaintiff and defendant was a matter of public concern, as it related to the health and lives of our fellow-citizens, and that, by the words of our constitution, every man has a right to discuss such subjects in print. The liberty of the press, Gentlemen, is a valuable right in every free country, and ought never to be unduly restrained; but when it is perverted to the purposes of private slander, it then becomes a most destructive engine in the hands of unprincipled men. The utmost purity and integrity of heart is no shield against the shafts and arrows of malice conveyed to the world by printed publications. Verbal slander may be frequently very injurious; but slander in writing, or print, being more generally disseminated and more durable in its effects, is consequently infinitely more pernicious and provoking. Our state constitution of 1790 contains certainly very general words with relation



to the right of a citizen to print his thoughts, and offer them to the consideration of the public ; but it at the same time guards against the generality of the privilege, by expressly declaring, that every person availing himself of the liberty of the press, should be responsible for the abuse of that liberty ; thus securing to our citizens the invaluable right of reputation against every malicious invader of it.

“ Printed publications attacking private character, are considered with great reason by the law as a very atrocious offence, from its evident tendency to the breach of the public peace—if men find they can have no redress in our courts of justice for such injuries, they will naturally take satisfaction in their own way, involving perhaps their friends and families in the contest, and leading evidently to duels, murders, and perhaps to assassinations.

“ The principal subject of consideration with the Jury will be what damages they are to assess. On this subject you are the *ALMOST uncontrollable judges—it is your peculiar province:—The Court have indeed the power to order a new trial where damages are excessive ; but in cases of torts and injuries of this*



*kind, the law books say the damages must be so outrageously disproportionate to the offence, as at first blush to shock every person who hears of it, before the Court will order a new trial.*

“ Every one must know that offences of this kind have for some time past too much abounded in our city; *it seems high time to restrain them—that task is with you, Gentlemen. To suppress so great an evil, it will not only be proper to give compensatory, but exemplary damages; thus stopping the growing progress of this daring crime—at the same time the damages should not be so enormous as absolutely to ruin the offender.*

“ I hope no party considerations will ever have place in this Court, in the administration of justice—and I entreat you, Gentlemen, to banish them, in considering this subject, entirely from your breasts.”

Upon this charge the jury came to their decision; and the result of the trial will be best communicated, and best understood by the reader through Cobbett's advertisement, announcing a new publication to be called the “Rushlight,” in allusion to his plaintiff's name, conduct, and system of practice, after the dis-



continuation of Porcupine's Gazette, which the reader will have already discovered that he had abandoned.

“When I determined to discontinue the publication of “Porcupine's Gazette,” I intended,” he says, “to remain, for the future, if not an unconcerned, at least a silent spectator of public transactions and political events; but the unexpected and sweeping result of a law-suit, since decided against me, has induced me to abandon my lounging intention. The suit to which I allude, was an action of slander, commenced against me in the autumn of 1797, by Doctor Benjamin Rush, the noted bleeding physician of Philadelphia; it was tried on the 14th of December last, when ‘the uprightly enlightened, and impartial republican Jury’ assessed, as damages, *five thousand dollars*; a sum surpassing the aggregate amount of all the damages assessed for all the *torts* of this kind, ever sued for in these States, from their first settlement to the present day. To the five thousand dollars must be added, the costs of suit, the loss incurred by the interruption in collecting debts in Pennsylvania, and by the sacrifice of property taken in execution, and



sold by the sheriff at public auction in Philadelphia, where a great number of books in sheets (among which was a part of the new edition of Porcupine's Works) were sold, or rather given away, as waste paper; so that, the total of what has been, and will be, wrested from me by Rush, will fall little short of *eight thousand dollars*.

“To say that I do not feel this stroke, and very sensibly too, would be great affectation; but, to repine at it, would be folly, and to sink under it cowardice. I knew an Englishman in the Royal Province of New Brunswick, who had a very valuable house, which was, I believe, at that time, nearly his all, burnt to the ground. He was out of town when the fire broke out, and happened to come home just after it had exhausted itself. Every one, knowing how hard he had earned the property, expected to see him bitterly bewail its loss. He came very leisurely up to the spot, stood about five minutes looking steadily at the rubbish, and then, stripping off his coat, ‘*Here goes,*’ said he, ‘*to earn another!*’ and immediately went to work, raking the spikes and bits of iron out of the ashes. This noble-spirited man

I have the honour to call my friend; and if ever this page should meet his eye, he will have the satisfaction to see, that, though it may not be possible for me to follow, I, at least, remember his example.

“In the future exertions of my industry, however, pecuniary emolument will be, as it always has been with me, an object of secondary consideration. Recent incidents, amongst which I reckon the unprecedented proceedings against me at Philadelphia, have imposed on me the discharge of a duty, which I owe to my own country as well as this, and the sooner I begin the sooner I shall have done.”

In pursuance of this determination, Cobbett started the “Rushlight,” which he continued to conduct with rancorous hostility to all his personal enemies, and more particularly the Judges, Jury, and Plaintiff, on the matter which so altered his pecuniary circumstances. This hostility he did not cease to exercise even long after his retirement from America, which almost immediately took place.



## CHAPTER X.

COBBETT IN ENGLAND—THE “REGISTER” BEGUN—  
CONDUCT OF MR. PITT—PEACE OF AMIENS—COB-  
BETT’S WINDOWS BROKEN BY THE MOB—RINGLEADER’S  
TRIED AND PUNISHED—COBBETT’S ATTACKS ON THE  
ADDINGTON ADMINISTRATION—TRIED FOR LIBELS ON  
THE IRISH GOVERNMENT—CONVICTION AND FINE.

ON his return from America, Cobbett com-  
menced the publication of a daily paper called  
the “Porcupine.” It contained some articles of  
extraordinary talent and energy, one especially,  
which was read from every pulpit in the king-  
dom; and for which Mr. Windham declared  
in his place in the House of Commons, the  
author deserved a statue of gold. The career  
of this paper was not long, and on its discon-  
tinuance he commenced his far-famed “Weekly  
Register,” which for upwards of thirty years  
was the vehicle of his opinions and his feelings.  
In the course of its long progress, the character

of the work underwent great changes, as did its plan and arrangement. It originally comprized a report of the Parliamentary Debates, but this was dropped at the end of the fourth volume. One main object of the work was to collect together all public papers, and other official documents to whatever nation relating. This for some time was carefully adhered to; but latterly, state papers formed a very subordinate part of the "Register." From the first it was the magic power of the Editor's pen, which imparted to the "Register" its principal value, and gained for it its unrivalled popularity.

About the time of commencing the "Register," Cobbett began business as a bookseller in Pall Mall. But trade, it may be believed, occupied a very small share of his attention. He was steeped to the lips in politics; and at this time enjoyed in a high degree, the confidence of some of the most eminent men of the day. Windham was his first and firm friend. Pitt stood aloof, and refused to meet the author of the "Register" at Windham's table. This superciliousness Cobbett resented, indeed, he was not of a temper to submit to it tamely; and it has been said, that the unseasonable



*hauteur* of this distinguished statesman, was the cause of the great change which subsequently took place in Cobbett's political views. At this time, however, he was conservative in heart and soul. He denounced the idea of peace with regicide France, with as much earnestness as Mr. Burke had formerly employed in the same cause, and the conclusion of the treaty of Amiens called forth his unqualified reprobation. The illumination which took place on this occasion called forth from Cobbett one of those manifestations of opinion, from which he was never withheld by any considerations of prudence and expediency. Amidst the blaze of light which spoke the universal joy at the return of peace, his house in Pall Mall was shrouded in the most anti-pacific darkness. The mob, who on such occasions parade the streets and issue their mandates for lighting up, assembled in front of his house, and demanded the usual testimony of rejoicing. But Cobbett with that dogged independence which was so remarkable a feature in his character, refused to save his windows at the expence of his principles. It happened that an adjoining house was under repair, and a large pile of bricks

was collected in the street. So ready a supply of ammunition offered to the mob, already fully prepared for mischief, was a temptation too strong to be resisted. The bricks were quickly transferred to the hands of the votaries of peace, and as quickly discharged from thence against Cobbett's windows. His own account of the transaction is marked by that mixture of surliness, and domestic affection, which is so often presented in his writings.

“ In the same degree that I perceived that the illumination was to be *compulsory*, I became resolute not to submit to the degradation, and, therefore, it was with great mortification, that on the very evening before the proclamation, I saw my wife actually confined in that situation, which above all others, requires comfort and tranquility. I wrote immediately to Lord Pelham, informed him of this untoward circumstance, but at the same time, expressed my resolution not to illuminate my house. His lordship, with a condescension, which I shall ever remember with gratitude, assured me, that he had given orders to Sir Richard Ford to protect from violence myself, my family, and my premises ; and, if such violence was not op-



posed with as complete success as I could wish, no fault is, I am fully persuaded, to be attributed to the magistrates or officers, charged with the execution of his lordship's orders.

“ On Thursday, about noon, I began to grow apprehensive of the consequences of resistance. To hazard the life of her, who had been my companion and my support through all the storms I had endured ; to whose gentleness, prudence, and fortitude, I owed whatever I enjoyed of pleasure, of fortune, or of reputation ; to make this sacrifice was no longer to be thought of, and I had made up my mind to yield, when she bravely determined to be removed to the house of a friend rather than her husband should submit to the mandates of a base and hireling mob. This removal had not taken place many hours, before I had reason to congratulate myself upon it. A numerous and boisterous rabble, coming from Cockspur-street, began to assault the house, at about half-past nine o'clock. Mr. Graham (one of the Bow-street magistrates) with his officers, used their utmost exertions to prevent violence, but in vain. The attack continued, with more or less fury, for about an hour and a half, during

which time a party of horse-guards were called in to the aid of the civil power. Great part of the windows were broken; the sash frames of the ground floor almost entirely demolished; the panels of the window-shutters were dashed in; the window-frames broken in several places; the door nearly forced open; and much other damage done to several parts of the house.

“Six of the villains were apprehended; namely, Charles Beloe (son of the Rev. W. Beloe), a *clerk in the General Post Office*; Charles Wagstaff, another *clerk in the General Post Office*; John Harwood, a sort of amanuensis to the Rev. W. Beloe; John Parnell, an *Excise officer*; Samuel Wise, a servant to a brush-maker at Aldgate; William Harvey, nothing at all. One of the two latter, I forget which, has been admitted to bail; the other five are in jail, and are to have a second hearing on Tuesday next at twelve o'clock.”

Three of the parties were brought to trial, at the General Quarter Sessions for the County of Middlesex, held at Clerkenwell, on Wednesday, the 14th of July, 1802. Evidence as to the alleged facts being heard on one side, and evidence as to character on the other, Mr.



Conant, who presided on this occasion, summed up, and concluded by telling the jury, that they had nothing to do with the general character or conduct of either of the parties ; that however excellent the life and conversation of the prisoners might be, they were answerable for their transgressions of the law ; and however *perverse* the conduct of the prosecutor, he was still under the protection of the law.

The jury, after a few minutes consultation, gave their verdict of *guilty* against all the prisoners, but recommended them to the mercy of the Court.

Mr. Silvester, the Counsel for the prisoners, then asked Mr. Cobbett “ if he would join in the recommendation ? ” To which the latter replied “ Certainly not, sir ; I came here to ask for *justice*, and not for *mercy* . ”

After a very short deliberation, Mr. Conant sentenced the two prisoners, Beloe and Wagstaff, to pay a fine of *thirty pounds* each, and Harwood a fine of *ten pounds*. Each of the three prisoners were required to enter into recognizances to keep the peace for the space of two years.

From this time Cobbett continued the un-

compromising opponent of the Addington Administration. There was more in this than at first strikes the eye of the casual observer. Cobbett, indeed, was opposed to many of their measures upon *principle*, and his opposition was strengthened by the wrongs which he conceived himself to have suffered during their rule; but his natural temperament must ever have rendered him the opponent of an Administration conducted on such a system as that of which Mr. Addington was the head. It was a system of compromise and trimming of balancing between conflicting parties, in the vain hope of being able to secure some share of the approbation of all. It was utterly impossible that such a system could find an advocate in William Cobbett. Through all his lengthened life—through all the fleeting changes of his political opinions, he never was a trimmer. Whatever opinions he at any given time espoused, he maintained them with all his might. He cared not who might be offended—he sought to conciliate none. He spared not those who differed from him only on a few points, any more than those who were opposed to him altogether. He shewed no more tolera



tion to those who dissented from his opinions on minor matters, than to those who were at issue with him on questions of the highest moment.

Some articles which appeared in the "Register" during the year 1803, drew upon the editor the unwished-for attention of the Attorney-General. The alleged libels were upon the Earl of Hardwick, then holding the office of Lord Lieutenant of Ireland; Lord Redesdale, the Lord Chancellor of that kingdom; Mr. Justice Osborne, one of the Judges of the Court of King's Bench, Dublin; and Mr. Marsden, Under Secretary of State for Ireland. The trial came on before Lord Ellenborough and a Special Jury, upon the 24th of May, 1804. The crown appeared by the formidable array of six counsel, whose future fortunes were all so remarkable as to justify us in giving them a passing notice. They consisted of the Attorney General, Mr. Perceval, who subsequently became Prime Minister; the Solicitor General Gibbs, who died Chief Justice of the Common Pleas; Mr. Dallas, who succeeded him on the same elevated seat; Mr. Erskine, who during the short-lived Fox and Grenville administra-



tion held the great seal. Mr. Abbott many years afterwards Lord Tenterden and Chief Justice of the King's Bench ; and Mr. Garrow, who less fortunate than his coadjutors, was content to seek a retreat from the labours of the bar in the seat of a *puisne* Baron of the Exchequer. Mr. Cobbett was defended by Mr. Adams and Mr. Richardson. The speech of Mr. Perceval was in the usual strain of those delivered upon such occasions. He disclaimed any impartial regard for the individual character of the persons against whom the asperity of the "Register" had been directed, and alleged that he was induced to prosecute solely because such articles were calculated to bring the entire government of Ireland into contempt. The articles in question appeared in the form of letters from correspondents, but they evince much of the vigour and peculiar talent of Cobbett himself. The classical allusion on which one of the attacks is based, might create some doubt as to the authorship ; but for this they might with safety have been ascribed to the pen of him to whom the "Register" owed its existence and the larger portion of its matter.

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The attack upon Lord Hardwicke commences thus :—

“ *Equo ne credite Teuceri*, was the advice which, in a dangerous moment, Laocoon gave to the Trojans. It will be remembered that the *equus*, against which that sagacious adviser cautioned his countrymen, was a wooden one. His countrymen did not regard Laocoon. They received the *wooden* representative of wisdom. They approached it as if it possessed authority and power. Its *wooden* head towered above their houses. But, though the machine itself was innoxious wood, the credulous Trojans found its hollow head and exalted sides were nothing less than receptacles for greedy speculators and blood-thirsty assassins. The ingenious author of the story did not mean to confine the lesson which it inculcates, to the tale of Troy alone. He meant to take advantage of that easy metaphorical expression, which, by the common assent of mankind, has moulded itself into most languages, and by which a certain species of head (which the moderns, by various moral experiments, have ascertained to be a non-conductor of ideas) has been denominated a *wooden* head. He meant to caution



future nations not to put trust or confidence in the apparent innocence of any such wooden instrument; and not to suffer themselves to be led to exalt it into consequence, or to pay it any respect. He meant to tell them that any people, who submitted to be governed by a *wooden* head, would not find their security in its supposed innoxiousness, as its hollowness would soon be occupied by instruments of mischief."

The following passage is a happy specimen of the talent displayed in the article. The writer represents himself as ignorant of the character of Lord Hardwicke and desires to know something about him:—

“Inquiry and research are the duty and the resource of the ignorant, and therefore I did inquire. The result of no small attention bestowed in this pursuit was, that I discovered, of our viceroy, that he was in rank an earl; in manners a gentleman; in morals a good father and a kind husband; and that he had a good library in St. James’s-square. Here I should have been for ever stopped, if I had not, by accident, met with one Mr. Lindsay, a Scotch parson, since become (and I am sure it must be

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by Divine Providence, for it would be impossible to account for it by secondary causes) Bishop of Killaloo in Ireland. From this Mr. Lindsay, I further learned, that my Lord Hardwicke was celebrated for understanding the modern method of fattening a sheep as well as any man in Cambridgeshire."

Subsequently he asks of Lord Hardwicke,—  
“What? Is he one of the tribe of the Hobarts, Westmorelands, and Camdens? Is he one of that tribe, who have been sent over to *us* to be trained up here into politicians, as they train the surgeon’s apprentices in the hospitals, by setting them at first to bleed the pauper patients? Is this a time for a continuation of such wanton experiment? The gift of Lord Hardwicke to us, at such a period, cannot be compared to any thing else than the prank of Falstaff upon Prince Hal at the battle of Shrewsbury, when the knight handed over his *pistol* to the prince. For indeed, Sir, by the present to us of Lord Hardwicke, that sentence has been proved to us in a bloody truth, which Falstaff said in a good-humoured jest—‘here’s what will sack a city.’”

The Shakspearian allusion in this passage is



not much in Cobbett's way, but the apprentice practising on the pauper patients bears strong evidence of his hand.

The trial was rendered memorable by the testimonies which it called forth to the loyalty of Cobbett. Mr. Adam described him as "a good father, an excellent husband, a virtuous subject of the king, and one who has uniformly in all his conduct, public and private, in this country and abroad, endeavoured to uphold the true constitution of England, as by law established—a person who is ardently attached to the monarchical frame of this government, and who has repeatedly stepped forward, to the certain loss of his fortune and the risk of his life, to defend the interests of England abroad, and to support the true spirit of the British constitution, and the honour and interests of Britain, at home."

Various witnesses were called on the part of the defendant. Mr. Liston, the British minister to the United States, declared him to be "a zealous defender of the principles of the constitution in all its branches."

Lord Henry Stewart pronounced him "a man the most devotedly attached to the king, the



royal family, and to every branch of the constitution."

Mr. Windham bore similar testimony, as did Lord Minto. Mr. Yorke said, "he knew him to be a zealous supporter of the monarchy and the constitution."

Mr. John Reeves, Secretary to the Constitutional Association, said, "I see Mr. Cobbett very frequently. Generally two or three times a week. I conceive him to be a strong defender of the king and constitution, as by law established."

Lord Ellenborough, who had been attorney-general under the Addington administration, and had just been elevated to the bench, summed up decidedly against the defendant, and the jury returned a verdict of guilty. Here the proceedings terminated, and Cobbett was committed to the King's Bench until he was brought up for judgment, when his punishment was a fine of five hundred pounds.



## CHAPTER XI.

COBBETT'S TRIAL FOR A LIBEL ON MR. PLUNKETT, AND ITS RESULT—HE CHANGES PRINCIPLES AND BECOMES A RADICAL—OLD FRIENDS FALL AWAY FROM HIM—HE WRITES A MUTINOUS LIBEL—IS TRIED, FINED HEAVILY, AND COMMITTED TO NEWGATE—HIS DEFENCE AGAINST THE CHARGE OF LOVE OF BASE LUCRE—VINDICATION OF HIS ATTACHMENT TO THE ARMY—ESTABLISHMENT OF A TWOPENNY REGISTER—THE SIX ACTS—COBBETT'S FLIGHT TO AMERICA.

Two days after the foregoing trial, an action for damages instituted against Cobbett by Mr. Plunkett, Solicitor-General for Ireland, (now Lord Plunkett) was tried at Westminster. The alleged libel in this case was part of the same article that formed the subject of the former trial. The most bitter part was the following:—

“ If any one man could be found, of whom a young but unhappy victim of the justly offended laws of the country, had, in the moment of his conviction and sentence, uttered the fol-



lowing apostrophe:—‘ That viper, whom my father nourished ! He it was from whose principles and doctrines, which now, by their effects, drag me to my grave ; and he it is who is now brought forward as my prosecutor, and who, by an unheard-of exercise of the prerogative, has wantonly lashed with a speech to evidence the dying son of his former friend, when that dying son had produced no evidence, had made no defence, but, on the contrary, acknowledged the charge, and submitted to his fate.’ Lord Kenyon would have turned with horror from such a scene, in which, although guilt was in one part to be published, yet in the whole drama justice was confounded, humanity outraged, and loyalty insulted.”

The jury in this case was the same as in the former one. Lord Ellenborough summed up in the same unfavourable tone, and a verdict for the plaintiff was recorded with five hundred pounds damages. It is remarkable that these trials passed over without any comment from Cobbett. He published his own reports of them, and there let the matter rest. Many years afterwards, indeed he took ample vengeance upon the father of all the Hannibals.



From this period a gradual change may be discerned in the tone of Cobbett's political disquisitions. He commenced his series of attacks upon the funding system, and other indications of altered views became perceptible. He begun a course of letters to Mr. Pitt on the causes of the decline: in one of them he thus speaks of himself:—

“ What, for instance, induced me, when so far distant from my country, voluntarily to devote myself to her cause? Her commerce? I neither knew nor cared any thing about it. Her funds? I was so happy as hardly to understand the meaning of the word. Her lands? I could, alas! lay claim to nothing but the graves of my parents. What, then, was the stimulus? What was I proud of? It was the name and fame of England. Her laws, her liberties, her justice, her might; all the qualities and circumstances that had given her renown in the world, but above all her deeds in arms, her military glory. Had she then been, as she now is, bereft of the principal symbols of that glory; had she then been, as she now is, dishonoured in the eyes of the world, a by-word and a reproach amongst the nations, very



different, indeed, situated as I was, must have been my feelings and my conduct; and, even now, did I entertain the thought of her sinking into a mere money-mart, a mere workshop, or a factory for traders; did I not hope, did I not, as I do, confidently hope (the causes of her decline first swept away) to see her regain her former greatness, it would, with me, be a matter of perfect indifference, who owned her soil, or who eat the produce."

His descent was now rapid; his old friends gradually fell off from him, and he acquired new ones of a different character. Sir Francis Burdett, from being the victim of his bitter invective, suddenly became the object of his admiration and panegyric, and he was, ere long, enrolled among the foremost of radical reformers. Such was his courage, and he pursued with characteristic energy till the year 1809, when he again attracted the notice of his majesty's attorney-general. The office was at that time held by Sir Vickery Gibbs, a man possessing far more of law than of the milk of human kindness. The libel appeared in the "Register" of the 10th of July, and related to the flogging of some men in the local militia,



at Ely, in Cambridgeshire. To render the subsequent proceedings intelligible, it will not be necessary to quote it. The information was tried on the 15th of June, 1810, by a special jury, and Cobbett was found guilty. On the 9th of July he was brought up for judgment, and sentenced to be imprisoned for two years, to pay a fine of a thousand pounds to the King, and at the expiration of the two years to give security for his good behaviour for seven years, himself in three thousand pounds, and two securities in one thousand each.

His "Register" of the 14th of July is dated from Newgate. It thus commences:—

“After having published seventeen volumes of this work, embracing the period of eight years and a half, during which time I have written with my own hand nearly two thousand articles upon various subjects, without having, except in one single instance, incurred even the threats of the law, I begin the Eighteenth Volume in a prison. In this respect, however, I only share the lot of many men, who have inhabited this very prison before me; nor have I the smallest doubt, that I shall hereafter be enabled to follow the example of those men.



On the triumphing, the boundless joy, the feasting and shouting of the speculators, or public robbers, and of all those, whether profligate or hypocritical villains, of whom I have been the scourge, I look with contempt, knowing very well, feeling in my heart, that my situation, even at this time, is infinitely preferable to theirs; and, as to the future, I can reasonably promise myself days of peace and happiness, while continual dread must haunt their guilty minds; while every stir, and every sound, must make them quake for fear. *Their* day is yet to come."

This is quite in the usual tone which he assumed in speaking of his opponents.

In praying for judgment the attorney-general had charged him with writing for base lucre. The manner in which he meets this charge, affords abundant evidence of the vanity of the author, the pride of the man, and the dexterous skill of the advocate:—

"Upon the second assertion, that I had written the publication in question for gain's sake; that I had *amassed wealth*, made a *fortune* by libelling; and that, I had, in short, in my writings, been actuated by a



craving after *base lucre*; upon this, the first observation to make, is, that it contains a beautiful compliment to the people of this country, and comes in with peculiar fitness close after the assertions that their *good sense* prevented the mischiefs which the publication was calculated to excite, and that *they* even called upon the court to punish me. No: the people of this country were so sensible, so discerning, so loyal, and held libelling in such abhorrence, that they were not to be excited to sedition by me; and, in a minute afterwards, to publish libels is, in this country, the way to *make a fortune*. The *army*, too, abhorred this work of libelling, and even called upon the court to punish me for it; and yet, but only a minute before, there was great danger of my creating disaffection in the army, of throwing every thing into confusion, and of producing the destruction of 'Social Order and our Holy Religion,' as John Bowles has it. The attorney-general was in a difficulty. It would not do to say, that my writing had *no effect* upon either the people or the army; it would not do to say that what I wrote dropped still-born from the press, or, that it made no impression upon any



body ; it would not do to say this, and yet it was paying me too great a compliment to suppose that I had the power of inducing any body to think or to feel with me ; therefore, I was, in one and the same speech, represented as a most *mischievous* and a most *insignificant* writer.

“ But to return to the charge of writing for ‘ *base lucre,*’ I think the public will have perceived, that there was nothing *original* in this part of the attorney-general’s speech ; for, the charge had, in all forms of words, been long before made by the basest of my calumniators, by the vile wretches, who notoriously use their pens and their pencils for pay, and who do not, like me, look for remuneration to the *sale* of their works to the public. The idea of my having ‘ *amassed wealth,*’ arose in the first place, perhaps, from the envy of the worst and most despicable part of those, who wished to live by the press, but who did not possess the requisite talents to insure success in their endeavours, and at the same time preserve their independence ; or, who were so deficient in point of industry, as to render their talents of no avail ; and who, therefore, resorted to that



species of traffic, which exposed them to my lash. Such men would naturally hate me. Such men would naturally wish for my destruction. Such men would naturally stick at no falsehood, at no sort or size of calumny against a man, whose success was at once an object of their envy and the means of their continual annoyance. But, from a person in the situation of attorney-general one might have expected a little more caution in speaking of the character and motives of any man.

“ Let me, before I come to any particular case, first ask why the gains of a writer or of a book or newspaper proprietor are to be called ‘*base lucre*,’ any more than the gains of any other description of persons. Milton and Swift and Addison received money for their works; nay, Pope received more, perhaps, than all of them put together, and wrote, too, with ten times more severity and more personality than I ever did; and yet no one ever thought, I believe, of giving to his gains the name of ‘*base lucre*.’ This is a most sweeping blow at the press. Let no one connected with it, in any way whatever, imagine that his pecuniary



possessions or his estate, if he has gained one, will, or can, escape the application of this liberal charge. The fortunes of Mr. Walter and Mr. Perry, and Mr. Stuart, and Mr. Longman, and Mr. Cadell, and of all the rest of them, are all to be considered as '*base lucre.*' Base lucre is the fruit of the industry and talents of every man who works with his pen; and those whose business it is to inform and instruct mankind, are either to be steeped in poverty, or to be regarded as sordid and base hunters after gain. Dr. Johnson, if now living, must at this rate, be liable to be charged with hunting after '*base lucre,*' for he really lived by the use of his pen. Paley also sold his writings, and so, I dare say, did Locke; and why not, then, impute baseness to them on this account? It is notorious, that thousands of priests and even bishops have sold their writings, not excepting their sermons; and is not that hunting after '*base lucre?*' It is equally notorious that lawyers are daily in the habit of selling reports of cases and other writings appertaining to their profession; and what can their gain thereby be called, then, but '*base*



lucre?' Burke sold his writings as well as Paine did his; nay, the former, for many years, and being a member of the Honourable House all the while, actually wrote for pay in a periodical work, called the "Annual Register;" and, of course, he sought therein after 'base lucre.' Base lucre it was, according to this doctrine, that set Malone to edit Shakespeare, and that induced Mr. Tooke to write his "Divisions of Purley;" and, in short, every writer, whether upon law, physic, divinity, politics, ethics, or any thing else, if he sell the productions of his pen, is exposed to this new and hitherto unheard-of charge."

He then proceeds to vindicate his disinterestedness by his conduct as a journalist:—

"After these general observations, it is hardly necessary for me to say much upon my particular case, it being impossible that the reader should not have already perceived clearly, that the charge of seeking after 'base lucre' is quite inapplicable to me. But, I cannot, upon such an occasion, refrain from stating some facts, calculated to show the injustice and falsehood of this charge, when preferred against me as proprietor of a public print. I have now been,

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either in America or England, sole proprietor of a public print for upwards of fourteen years, with the intermission of about a year of that time, and I never did upon any occasion whatever, take money or money's worth, for the insertion or the suppression of any paragraph or article whatsoever, though it is well known, that the practice is as common as any other branch of the business belonging to newspapers in general. Many hundreds of pounds have been offered to me in this way, as my several clerks and agents can bear witness; and, had I hankered after '*base lucre*,' the reader will readily believe, that I should have received all that was so offered. From the daily newspaper, which I published after my return to England, I excluded all quack advertisements, because I looked upon them as indecent and having a mischievous tendency, and because to insert them appeared to me to be assisting imposture. These advertisements are, it is well known, a great source of profit to the proprietors of newspapers; and, if I had been attached to '*base lucre*,' should I have rejected my share of that profit? I lost many hundreds of pounds by my daily newspaper, which failed,



not for want of readers, but solely because I would not *take money* in the same way that other proprietors did. Whether this were wise or foolish is now of no consequence; but, the fact is, at any rate, quite sufficient to repel the charge of seeking after 'base lucre.'"

This conduct he contrasts with that of others:—

"From my out-set as a writer, to the present hour, I have always preferred principle to gain. In America the king's minister made, and not at all improperly, offers of service to me, on the part of the ministry at home. The offer was put as of service to any relations that I might have in England, and my answer was, that if I could *earn any thing myself* where-with to assist my relations, I should assist them, but that I would not be the cause of their receiving any thing out of the *public purse*. Mr. Liston, then our minister in America, can bear testimony to the truth of this statement, and was this the conduct of a man, who sought after 'base lucre?' Is this the conduct which is now fashionable among those, who call themselves 'the *loyal*,' and the '*king's friends*?' Do *they* reject offers of the public purse? Do

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*they* take care to keep their poor relations out of their own earnings or property, or do they throw them, neck and heels, upon the public to be maintained out of the taxes, as a higher order of paupers? I have acted up to my professions. I have, at this time, dependent upon me, for almost every thing, nearly *twenty children* besides my own. I walk on foot, where others would ride in a coach, that I may have the means of yielding them support; that I may have the means of preventing every one belonging to me from seeking support from the public, in any shape whatever. Is this the fashion of 'the *loyal*?' Do 'the *loyal*' act thus? Do *they* make sacrifices in order that their poor relations may not become a charge to the public? Let that public answer this question, and say to whom the charge of seeking after 'base lucre' belongs.

"I wonder whether it has ever happened to the attorney-general to reject the offer of *two services of plate*, tendered him for the successful exertion of *his* talents? This has happened to me, though the offer, on each occasion, was made in the most delicate manner, though the service had been already performed, though



the thing was done with, and the offer could not have a prospective view, and though the service had been performed without any previous application. I wonder whether Sir Vicary Gibbs did ever reject an offer of this sort? And I do wonder, how many there are amongst the whole tribe of 'learned friends,' who have, or ever will have to accuse themselves of such an act? Yet has he the assurance to impute my writings to motives of '*base lucre.*' The truth is, that I am hated by the pretended 'loyal,' because I am proof against all the temptations of base lucre. I have spoken of the offer made me, while in America. Upon my return home the ministers made me other offers, and, amongst the rest, they offered me a share of *the True Briton newspaper*, conducted and nominally owned by Mr. Herriot. I, who was what the country people call a *green-horn*, as to such matters, and who was gull enough to think, that it was *principle* that actuated every writer on what I then deemed the right side; I was quite astonished to find, that the *Treasury* was able to offer me a share in a newspaper. I rejected the offer in the most delicate manner that I could; but, I



never was forgiven. I have experienced, as might have been expected, every species of abuse since that time; but, I did not, I must confess, expect ever to be accused of writing for 'base lucre.' This is a charge, which, as I shewed upon the trial, originated with the very scum of the press, and had its foundation in the worst and most villainous of passions."

He rises into an indignant strain in asserting his right to all that his industry and talent had gained, and ends with one of those explosions of almost ferocious feeling, of which his writings supply so many:—

"In general it is a topic of exultation, that industry and talent are rewarded with the possession of *wealth*. The great object of the teachers of youth, in this country, seems always to have been the instilling into their minds, that *wealth* was the sure reward of industry and ability. Upon what ground, then, is it that the '*amassing of wealth*,' the '*making of a fortune*,' by the use of industry and talents, is to be considered as meriting reproach in *me*? The fact is not true. I have not *amassed wealth*, and have not *made a fortune*, in any fair sense of those phrases. I do not possess a



quarter part as much as I should, in all probability, have gained, by the use of the same degree of industry and ability, in trade or commerce. But, if the fact were otherwise, and if I rode in a coach and four instead of keeping one pleasure horse, and that one only because it is thought necessary to the health of my wife; if I had really a fortune worthy of being so called, what right would any one have to reproach me with the possession of it? I have been labouring seventeen years, since I quitted the army. I have never known what it was to enjoy any of that which the world calls pleasure. From a beginning with nothing I have acquired the means of making some little provision for a family of *six children* (the remains of *thirteen*), besides having, for several years, maintained almost wholly, three times as many children of my relations. And, am I to be reproached as a lover of '*base lucre*,' because I begin to have a prospect (for it is nothing more) of making such provision? And, am I now, upon such a charge, to be stripped in one way or another, of the means of making such provision? Was it not manly and brave for the attorney-general, when he knew that I



should not be permitted to answer him, to make such an attack, not only upon me but upon the future comfort of those who depended upon me for support? Verily, *this* is not to be forgotten presently. As long as I or my children are able to remember, *this* will be borne in mind; and, I have not the smallest doubt of seeing the day, when Sir Vicary Gibbs, and those who belong to him, will not think of any such thing as that of reproaching us with the possession of our own earnings."

His egotism breaks out in the following passage:—

"One cannot, however, help observing how very finely all these things agree with the notion, now and occasionally heretofore endeavoured to be propagated, that I am *a person not worthy of notice*. This notion agrees admirably with all that the public has seen and heard for the last twelve months, during which time there has been more written and printed against me individually than would, if collected together, make twenty thick quarto volumes; and (melancholy to relate!) without producing the loss of one of my friends, the falling off of one of my readers, or the robbing



me of one wink of my sleep, while my enemies, if upon any occasion they dare shew themselves, become objects of public hatred and scorn ; and I solemnly declare, that I would rather commit the horrid and cowardly act of suicide, than change names and characters with the very best, or rather, the least bad, of all those enemies, whether I look amongst the young or the old, amongst the profligates or the hypocrites, amongst the daring robbers or the sly and smooth cheaters.”

The same strain is continued in the ensuing paragraph, in which, too, he manifests his usual contempt for those branches of knowledge in which he was himself deficient.

“ My readers know that, besides the ‘ Political Register,’ I have undertaken and am carrying on three other publications, namely, ‘ The Parliamentary History,’ ‘ The Parliamentary Debates,’ and the ‘ State Trials ;’ and, under the present circumstances, I think it will not be deemed egotistic if I say something about them. These works, particularly the former and the latter, so far from being undertaken with a hope of merely *gaining money*, were undertaken with the *certainty of sinking money* for



some time, at least ; probably for many years, and possibly for ever. They were works which, though absolutely necessary to the completing of our political libraries, none of the booksellers in London, though many of them are possessed of ten times my pecuniary means, would venture to undertake. After long waiting they promise profit ; but, it must be evident to every man at all acquainted with the matter, that '*base lucre*' could form no part of the object with which they were undertaken. I have heard others applauded for their *public spirit* in encountering what have been called *great national works*. What a clutter was made in this way about large editions of Shakespeare and Milton, which were, at last, got rid of by the means of a *Lottery*, authorized by Act of Parliament. The terms *liberality* and *munificence* were given to the undertakers of those works ; but, was there any thing in them of *national utility* worthy of being compared with these works of mine ? I have encountered these works, unaided by any body ; I shall ask the Honourable House for no lottery to carry them through ; I trust solely to their real *intrinsic merit* for their success ; and, if they



do succeed, shall I therefore be accused of seeking after 'base lucre?' This work, of which I now begin the *Eighteenth Volume*, has had nothing to support it but its own merits. Not a pound, not even a pound in paper money, was ever expended upon advertising it. It came up like a grain of mustard seed, and, like a grain of mustard seed it has spread over the whole civilized world. And why has it spread more than other publications of the same kind? There have not been wanting imitations of it. There have been some dozens of them, I believe. Same size, same form, same type, same heads of matter, same title, all but the word expressing my name. How many efforts have been made to tempt the public away from me, while not one attempt has been made by me to prevent it. Yet all have failed. The changeling has been discovered, and the wretched adventurers have then endeavoured to wreak their vengeance on me. They have sworn that I write badly; that I publish nothing but trash; that I am both fool and knave. But, still the readers hang on to me. One would think, as Falstaff says, that I had given them love powder. No: but I have given them as great



a rarity, and something full as attractive; namely, *truth in clear language*. I have stripped statement and reasoning of the foppery of affectation; and, amongst my other sins, is that of having shown, of having proved beyond all dispute, that very much of what is called '*learning*' is imposture, quite useless to any man whom God has blessed with brains. The public, however much in many cases some of them dissent from my opinions, will never be persuaded that my views are *inimical to my country*, or have any *dishonourable object*. Nothing will ever persuade *any man*, be he who he may, sincerely to believe this. There are many who will pretend to believe it; but they will not believe it at bottom, and they will read on. The public has perceived in me a sort of conduct towards my adversaries, which they never witnessed in any other public writer. They have seen that I always insert, and give publicity to, whatever is sent in answer to myself. This is a proof of my love of truth ten thousand times stronger than any professions, however strong. It is a *speaking fact*, which is always the thing to produce the most impression. The '*Register*' has created in Eng-



land, and, even in other countries, a new taste in reading, and an entirely new set of notions upon political matters; and, can it be possible, that any one is to be persuaded that such an effect is to be produced by mere *libelling*? No: nor will any one believe, that it is to be produced by a mind bent upon '*base lucre*.' If '*base lucre*' had been my principal object, or, indeed, if it had been a considerable object with me, I never should have written with effect; because to write with effect, one's mind must be *free*, which it never can be if the love of gain be uppermost. Besides, how inconsistent is this charge of '*base lucre*' with the charge of *seditious intentions*? The two things are absolutely incompatible with one another; for, if insurrection and confusion were to take place, all the works above mentioned, all the numerous volumes of those works, whence my profits are to come, if they come at all, would, at once, cease to be of any more use than so many square bits of wood. For a man, who has real property, to wish for the annihilation of those laws, by which alone that property is secured to him, is not very likely; for a man, who, like me is planting trees and sowing



acorns, and making roads and breaking up wastes, to wish for the destruction of order and law and property is still less likely; but, for a man, the chief part of whose property consists of what must of *necessity* become mere waste-paper in case of a destruction of order and law, for such a man to wish for such destruction is utterly out of belief, and quite *impossible* if he be a seeker after 'base lucre.'"

The charge of being influenced by motives of base lucre, was one which evidently annoyed him. For months afterwards, we might say for years, he occasionally recurred to it. The imputation was, indeed, one of those so frequently thrown out by counsel, without any thing to justify them. Cobbett had no passion for the accumulation of money.

Another assertion made by the attorney-general, and which Cobbett repelled with much indignation, was, that "the army, against whom the libel was in a peculiar manner directed, called on the court for justice against its traducer." His early military associations had caused him to view the profession with partiality. The fact that he had himself been a soldier is referred to with much frankness,



and assigned as a reason for regarding the army with affection. He says:—

“To the army, to every soldier in it, I have a bond of attachment quite independent of any *political* reasonings or considerations. I have been a soldier myself, and for no small number of years, at that time of life when the feelings are most ardent and when the strongest attachments are formed. ‘Once a soldier always a soldier,’ is a maxim, the truth of which I need not insist on to any one who has ever served in the army for any length of time, and especially if the service he has seen has embraced those scenes and occasions where every man, first or last, from one cause or another, owes the preservation of his all, health and life not excepted, to the kindness, the generosity, the fellow-feeling of his comrades.”

Shortly afterwards, he adds—

“Of this military feeling I do not believe that any man ever possessed a greater portion than myself. I was eight years in the army, during which time I associated less with people out of the army than any soldier that I ever knew. This partiality I have always retained. I like soldiers, as a class in life, better than



any other description of men. Their conversation is more pleasing to me; they have generally seen more than other men; they have less of vulgar prejudice about them; to which may be added, that, having felt hardships themselves, they know how to feel for others."

As a proof of his possession of this military virtue, he relates the following story:—

" Lover as I am of '*base lucre*,' no soul in distress was ever sent empty from my door, be the cause of that distress what it might. But, to soldiers, and their wives and children; to every creature bearing the name or mark or sign of military service about it, I, nor any one belonging to me, ever omitted to shew particular marks of compassion and kindness. I wish the public could now pass in review before them all the unfortunate soldiers that have come to my door and those who have been to the door of the man who has called me the '*traducer*' of the army. Would to God that this exhibition could take place, and that an inquiry could be made as to the reception that each had met with! I should not be afraid of the comparison, though he represents me as the *enemy of the army*; as a man whom



*the army calls upon the judges to punish.* Late in October, or early in November last, returning home in the dusk of the evening, I found our village full of soldiers. There were about *five hundred* men (a number nearly equal to the whole population of the parish), who had arrived at Portsmouth, last from Portugal; many of whom had been at the battle of Talavera, and had served in both the arduous and fatal campaigns in Spain; and most of whom had suffered either from sickness or from wounds actually received in battle. These men, who had *landed at Portsmouth that same morning*, had marched *eighteen miles* to Botley, where they found for their accommodation *one small inn and three public-houses*. All the *beds* in the whole village, and in the whole parish to its utmost limits, including the bed of every cottager, would not have lodged these men and their wives and children, and all the *victuals* in the parish would not, of course, have furnished them with a single meal, without taking from the meals of the people of the parish. The stables, barns, and every other place, in which a man could lie down out of the way of actual rain, were

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prepared with straw. Every body in the village was ready to give up all his room to these people, whose every garment, and limb, and feature, bespoke the misery they had undergone. It was rather unfortunate that both myself and my wife were from home when they arrived in the village, or I should have lodged a company or two of the privates at least. I found the greater part of them already gone to their straw lodging, and, therefore, I could do nothing for them, but I brought two of the officers (the commanding officer and another) to my house, not having spare beds for any more, upon so short a notice. The next day, which happened to be a Sunday, the whole of the officers, thirteen or fourteen in number, lived at my house the whole of the day; and of all my whole life, during which I have spent but very few unpleasant days, I never spent so pleasant a day as that. After a lapse of sixteen years, I once more saw myself at table with nothing but soldiers; nothing but men in red coats; and I felt so happy at being able to give them proofs of my attachment. I never, upon any occasion, so much enjoyed, never so sensibly felt, the benefits of having been industrious and



economical. My guests, on their part, soon found that they were at home, and gave full scope to that disposition to gaiety which prevails amongst soldiers, and particularly after long-endured hardships. It was the first whole day of their being in England from the time they had quitted it; and certain I am, that not a man of them has since seen a happier. On the Monday morning, before day-light, my whole family, children and all, were up to prepare them a breakfast and to bid them farewell; and, when they left us, the commanding officer, who was a modest and sensible Scotsman, observed, that he had in his life *heard* much of English hospitality, but that, at Botley, he had *seen* and *felt* it. Now, this was no more than what it was my duty to do towards these gentlemen, some of whom had been wounded, and all of whom had greatly suffered in *their* endeavours, at least, to serve their country, while I and my family had been living at home in ease, comfort, and security; and, it was a duty peculiarly incumbent upon me, who had been a soldier myself, and who knew to what hardships they had been exposed by sea as well as by land. There might, too,



perhaps, if the workings of my heart could have been nicely analysed, be something of vanity in my motives, though I do not believe that there was. But, at any rate, I think I may defy even the devil, in whatever character he may choose to appear, to ascribe this action to *enmity to the army*; or to a disposition, or a feeling towards the army, that would lead me to *traduce* them."

Cobbett suffered the whole term of imprisonment to which he had been sentenced, and this incarceration he never forgot or forgave. It increased the bitterness of his feelings against the party who had the means of inflicting it. On his liberation, his activity seemed to have received a fresh stimulus. He sought for every possible means of annoying those who sate at the helm of the state. He reduced the price of his "Register," and called into existence that "Twopenny Trash," which ultimately led the government to procure the passing of the much talked of Six Acts. He always asserted that these Acts were passed for the express purpose of silencing him. He did not, however, wait for their operation, but made a timely flight to America.



## CHAPTER XII.

COBBETT AGAIN IN AMERICA—HIS RESIDENCE IN LONG ISLAND—CONTINUES THE REGISTER—VARIOUS ACCOUNTS OF HIM IN TRAVELLER'S TOURS—FEARON'S VISIT TO COBBETT—HE REPUDIATES FEARON'S STATEMENTS—THE SIX ACTS ARE REPEALED—COBBETT RETURNS TO ENGLAND.

WE now find Cobbett once more in America—and in a position, and with principles remarkable for their strange and startling contrast to those which he maintained during his former residence in the United States; and it was also curious that as the effects of one prosecution had, in earlier life, driven him from America, so the dread of another had now hurried him back. We have already mentioned the immediate cause of his leaving England; but for the purposes of this biography it will be better that we repeat it in his own words. The Power of Imprisonment Law was passed immediately pre-



vious to his departure, and he speaks of that enactment as follows:—

“ The principal ministers at this time were, Liverpool (Jenkinson), First Lord of the Treasury; Eldon (John Scott), Lord Chancellor; Sidmouth (Addington), Secretary of State for the Home Department; Castlereagh (Stewart), for the Foreign Department; Ellenborough (Law), Chief Justice of the King’s Bench. Sidmouth, when he brought in this horrible bill, rested the necessity of it on the fact, that the *cheap publications* were exciting the people to sedition; that they were read, not only in every town and house, but in every hamlet, every cottage, and every hovel; and that *therefore* this *Power of Imprisonment Law* was necessary to the safety of the state. When Lord Holland observed, that if the authors of the *cheap publications* put forth anything of a *treasonable* or *seditions* nature, or anything hostile to good morals, there were *already laws* to punish them, that it was the business of the law-officers to *enforce* these laws, and that there was no need for this new and violent outrage on the constitution of our fathers, for putting into the hands of the ministers this absolute



and terrible power over the bodies of all the people: when Lord Holland made these observations, Sidmouth answered, that all the *cheap publications* had been *laid before the law-officers*, but that, so *crafty* were the writers become, that the law-officers had been able to find *nothing to prosecute with any chance of success!*

“ Upon this ground this tremendous law was passed, and I, whose *cheap publications* had produced the terrific effect, must have been blind indeed, not to see that a *dungeon* or *silence*, was my doom. I chose *neither*; and, therefore, I took my body, and the bodies of my family, *across the Atlantic.*”

Cobbett remained in America till the latter end of the year 1819. A part of the interval of his stay in that country he travelled with a view to the acquirement of agricultural information, and the result of his labour or leisure, call it which you will, was the publication of the work which he entitled “ A Year’s Residence in America.” Meanwhile he was otherwise industrious. He continued to annoy the ministry at home by the regular publication of his wide-spreading twopenny Register. This



he composed in America and regularly transmitted to England, where its sale became unparalleled in the history of political literature.

While in the United States, after his travelling tour, Cobbett resided in a place called "Long Island," a cheerful and pleasant home, which the composition of his "Register," and the excitement attendant upon its publication in England, relieved of the irksomeness and restless longing after action, so commonly the companions of an ambitious man in exile. There is no doubt, however, but that Cobbett had the same yearning which the banished of all lands are everywhere recorded to have felt towards their native country. On the 21st of April, 1818, we find him writing thus from "over the seas."

"I myself am bound to England for life. My notions of allegiance to my country; my great and anxious desire to assist in the restoration of her freedom and happiness; my opinion that I possess in some small degree, at any rate, the power to render such assistance; and above all the other considerations, my unchangeable attachment to the people of England, and espe-



cially those who have so bravely struggled for our rights: these bind me to England."

Whilst in Long Island, personally, Cobbett was yet, by his writings and renown, in the very presence of his own countrymen. Emigrants sent home accounts of him, and men who visited the locality in the course of their tours returned home with his name in their journals, and a description of his looks, habits, and pursuits, commonly increased the interest of books of travels in America. Amongst other notable or unknown visitors to Cobbett, was an individual of the name of Fearon, of whom the following note stands in our author's journal of the 22nd of August, 1817.

"A Mr. Fearon came this morning and had breakfast with us. Told us an odd story about having slept in a black woman's hut last night for sixpence, though there are excellent taverns at every two miles along the road. Told us a still odder story about his being an envoy from a *host of families* in London, to look out for a place of settlement in America; but he took special care *not to name* any one of those families, though we asked him to do it. We took him, at first, for a sort of *spy*. William thinks he is a



shopkeeper's clerk ; I think he has been a tailor. I observed that he carried his elbow close to his sides, and his arms, below the elbow, in a horizontal position. It came out that he had been with Buchannan, Castlereagh's consul at New York ; but it is too ridiculous ; such a thing as this cannot be a spy ; he can get access nowhere but to taverns and boarding-houses."

Mr. Fearon afterwards published his tour in this country, and, in his turn, gave the following account of Cobbett :—

“ Upon arriving at Mr. Cobbett's gate, my feelings, in walking along the path which led to the residence of this celebrated man, are difficult to describe. The idea of a person self-banished leading an isolated life in a foreign land ; a path rarely trod, *fences in ruins, the gate broken, a house mouldering to decay*, added to much awkwardness of feeling on my part, calling upon an entire stranger, produced in my mind feelings of thoughtfulness and melancholy. I would fain almost have returned without entering the wooden mansion, imagining that its possessor would exclaim, ‘ What intruding fellow is here coming to break in upon my pursuits ?’



“ But these difficulties ceased almost with their existence. A female servant (an English woman) informed me that her master was from home, attending at the county court. Her language was natural enough for a person in her situation; she pressed me to walk in, being quite certain *that I was her countryman*; and she was so *delighted to see an Englishman*, instead of those *nasty guessing Yankees*. Following my guide through the kitchen, (the floor of which, she asserted, was *imbedded with two feet of dirt when Mr. Cobbett came there*—it had been previously in the occupation of *Americans*.) I was conducted to a front parlour, which contained but a *single chair* and several trunks of sea-clothes, Mr. Cobbett’s first question on seeing me was, ‘Are you an American, Sir?’ then, ‘what were my objects in the United States? was I acquainted with the friends of liberty in London? how long had I left?’ &c. He was immediately familiar. I was pleasingly disappointed with the general tone of his manners. Mr. Cobbett *thinks meanly of the American people*, but spoke highly of the economy of their government. He does not advise persons in respectable cir-



cumstances to emigrate, even in the present state of England. In his opinion a family who can barely live upon their property, will more consult their happiness by not removing to the United States.

“He almost *laughs at Mr. Birkbeck's* settling in the western country. This being the first time I had seen this well-known character, I viewed him with no ordinary degree of interest. A print by Bartolozzi, executed in 1801, conveys a correct outline of his person. His eyes are small, and pleasingly good-natured. To a French gentleman present, he was attentive; with his sons, familiar; to his servants, easy; but to all, in his tone and manner, resolute and determined. He feels no hesitation in praising himself, and evidently believes that he is eventually destined to be the Atlas of the British nation. Of his faculty in relating anecdotes he gave many amusing instances. My impressions of Mr. Cobbett are, that those who know him, would like him, if they can be content to submit unconditionally to his dictation. ‘Obey me, and I will treat you kindly; if you do not, I will trample on you,’ seemed visible



in 'every word and feature.' He appears to feel, in its fullest force the sentiments,

'I have no brother, am like no brother,  
I am myself alone.'

Although there was some justice mingled with the absurdity of the above description, Cobbett could not forgive, could not abstain from revenging himself upon the author, and that in his often-adopted style of hard-hitting coarseness. He writes from Long Island, as soon as he hears of Fearon's book, an article which he commences with a bitter adducement of the evidence of his housekeeper, Mary Churcher, against the personal appearance of the gentleman who had made free with his own. It is quite in the "kick for a bite style."

"It is unlucky for this blade," he begins, "that the parties are *alive*. First, let the '*Englishwoman*' speak for herself, which she does in these words:—'I remember that about a week after I came to Hyde Park in 1817, a man came to the house in the evening, when Mr. Cobbett was out, and that he came again the next morning. I never knew or asked what countryman he was. He came to the back-door. I first



gave him a chair in a back room ; but as he was a slippery-looking young man, and as it was growing late, my husband thought it was best to bring him down into the kitchen, where he staid till he went away. I had no talk with him. I could not know what condition Mr. Cobbett found the house in, for I did not come here till the middle of August. I never heard whether the gentleman that lived here before Mr. Cobbett was an American or not. I never in my life said a word against the people or the country. I am very glad I came to it ; I am doing very well in it ; and have found as good and kind friends amongst the Americans, as I ever had in all my life.

‘ MARY ANNE CHURCHER.’ ”

And upon this he resumes the discussion on his own account, in a manner little flattering to the unfortunate Mr. Fearon.

“ Mrs. Churcher puts me in mind, that I asked her what sort of a *looking* man it was, and that she said he looked like an *exciseman*, and that Churcher exclaimed : ‘ Why, you fool, they don’t have any excisemen and such fellows here.’ I never was at a *county court* in Ame-



rica in my life. I was out *shooting*. As to the *house* it is a better one than he ever entered, except as a lodger, or a servant, or to *carry home work*. The *path*, so far from being *trackless*, was as beaten as the highway. The gentleman who lived here before me was an *Englishman*, whose name was *Crow*. But only think of *dirt, two feet deep* in a kitchen! All is false. The house was built by Judge Ludlow; it is large and very sound and commodious. The avenues of trees before it, the most beautiful that I ever saw. The orchard, the fine shade and fine grass all about the house; the abundant garden, the beautiful turnip-field, the whole a subject worthy of admiration, and not a single drawback. A hearty, unostentatious welcome from me and my sons. A breakfast such probably as this fellow will never eat again. I leave the public to guess, whether it be likely, that I should give a chap like this my *opinions* about *government* or *people*! Just as if I did not know the *people*. Just as if they were *new* to me! The man was not in the house *half an hour* in the morning. Judge, then, what he could know of my manners and character. He was a long time afterwards at



New York. Would he not have been here a *second time*, if I had been familiar enough to relate *anecdotes* to him? Such blades are not backward in renewing their visits whenever they get but a little encouragement. He, in another part of the extracts that I have seen, complains of the *reserve* of the *American ladies*. 'No *social intercourse*,' he says, 'between the *sexes*,' that is to say, *he* could find none! I'll engage he could not, amongst the *whites*, at least. It is hardly possible for me to talk about the public affairs of England, and not to talk of some of my own acts; but is it not monstrous to suppose, that I should *praise myself* and show that I believed myself destined to be the *Atlas of the British nation*, in my conversation of a few minutes with an utter stranger, and that too, a blade whom I took for a decent tailor, my son William for a shopkeeper's clerk, and Mrs. Churcher, with less charity, for a slippery young man, or, at best, for an excise-man? As I said before, such a man can know nothing of *the people* of America. He has no *channel* through which to *get at them*—and indeed, *why* should he? Can he go into the families of people at home? Not he, indeed,



beyond his own low circle. Why should he do it here then? The black woman's hut, indeed, he might force himself into with impunity; sixpence would insure him a reception there; but it would be a shame, indeed, if *such a man* could be admitted to unreserved intercourse with *American ladies*. Slippery as he was, he could not slide into their good graces, and into the possession of their fathers' soul-subduing dollars; and so he is gone home to curse the 'NASTY GUESSING AMERICANS.'

The above passage, coupled with Fearon's description—the fact of the continuation of the "Register" in England, and a reference to the budget of published agricultural information which Cobbett gathered during his absence from this country, will sufficiently show the *locale* of his habitation and the manner of his life during his self-banishment in the United States. In the year 1819, the act which had driven him into retirement was repealed, and Cobbett again returned to his native land.



## CHAPTER XIII.

COBBETT ARRIVES AT LIVERPOOL—BRINGS WITH HIM THE BONES OF TOM PAINE—HE IS FORBIDDEN TO ENTER MANCHESTER—HE ARRIVES IN LONDON—DINNER AT THE CROWN AND ANCHOR—FAILURE OF HIS PROJECT ABOUT PAINE'S BONES—COBBETT'S QUARREL WITH SIR FRANCIS BURDETT—THE STORY OF THE TWO THOUSAND POUNDS—COBBETT'S DEFENCE IN THAT MATTER.

COBBETT arrived at Liverpool from New York, by the Hercules, in November, 1819, bringing with him, as the most precious gift which he could bestow upon his country, the bones of the man who, a few years before, had been the object of his fiercest attacks. He had denounced Tom Paine as a rebel, alike to his God and his king. But to the remains of that man he now rendered homage, nearly as profound as ever was paid by pious Catholic to the relics of departed saints.

The amount of baggage which he had brought



with him was considerable, and the examination at the Custom-house occupied much time; the bones of Paine were deposited in a wooden box, and on its being opened, Cobbett said, "There, gentlemen, are the mortal remains of the immortal Thomas Paine!" The curiosity of the Custom-house officers was, of course, soon gratified, and the precious deposit was again in Cobbett's possession.

From Liverpool Cobbett intended to proceed to Manchester, where his anticipated visit seemed to have inspired the local authorities with considerable alarm. The boroughreeve posted bills enjoining the well-disposed inhabitants to remain within doors, and keep their children and servants at home. A number of special constables were sworn in, and the peace of the town was further guaranteed by the presence of a troop of the 15th hussars, a body of infantry, and two field pieces. It was said that the boroughreeve also sent a communication to Cobbett, to the effect that if he attempted to enter the town in procession, he should feel it his duty to resist it, as likely to disturb the peace of the town. Cobbett informed the messenger that no answer was ne-



cessary, but he deemed it prudent to forego his intended visit, and retire to Warrington.

The remainder of his provincial progress was not distinguished by anything remarkable. His arrival in London was celebrated by a dinner at the Crown and Anchor, of which the following report is extracted from the "Times," of the 4th of December, 1819:—

"A dinner was yesterday given at the Crown and Anchor, by the friends of Cobbett, in honour of the return of that demagogue to his native country. The number that assembled amounted to about five hundred. About six o'clock Cobbett entered the room accompanied by Hunt and other reform worthies. The run-a-gate was received with enthusiasm."

To this mention of the entertainment the "Times" adds some jests, such as were then fashionable against this white-hatted assembly. The scene and the company on this occasion, were very different to those by which Cobbett had been surrounded during the blaze of his early reputation. He now, too, began to feel that his importation of Paine's bones was a blunder. He dilated largely on their value, but he awakened no sympathy either in his



hearers or his readers. The mention of this anatomical treasure seemed to excite nothing but disgust in the more serious, while it called forth the ridicule of those who were disposed to treat the matter with greater levity. A report was raised that Cobbett had made a grievous mistake, and instead of the bones of Paine, had brought away those of an old negro who was buried near him, and whether it was so or not, it served to cast ridicule upon the whole business. An attempt was made to get up a dinner on Paine's birth-day, but the demand for tickets was small, and, finally, the projector was saved the mortification that awaited him had the festival taken place, by the refusal of the landlord of the tavern where it was to have been held, to lend his house for such a purpose.

There can be little doubt that Cobbett was greatly disappointed at the result of his researches into the sepulchre. He continued, however, at intervals, to refer to the bones as a treasure beyond all price, and to express his intention of rendering them some signal marks of honour. A magnificent public funeral was to take place, but not until the arrival of a season, when "twenty waggon-load of flowers,"



could be procured to strew the path of the dead. A splendid monument was to be erected to this "noble of nature," as Cobbett now called Paine, and in addition to these funereal and monumental honours, locks of the hair of the deceased patriot were to be distributed among his admirers, as appropriate memorials of the man whom Cobbett now "delighted to honour!" These "love-locks" were to be placed in gold rings, but to secure the precious relic from the dishonesty or the waggery of goldsmiths, the hair was never to be out of the possession of Cobbett until it was fairly soldered up in the rings: which operation was to be performed in his presence. These rings were to be sold to all who were willing to become purchasers, and the charge was to be one guinea beyond the value of the gold and workmanship. This was to be the profit of him who had rescued these honoured bones from the hands of the Americans. The scheme, however, proved an abortion. No rings were ever made, and the presumption is that none were ever demanded. What became of the hair or the bones is unknown, as for some years before his death, Cobbett was altogether silent about them.



This experiment upon the public taste was decidedly injurious to Cobbett's reputation. He disclaimed all approval of Paine's theological opinions, and on one occasion denied that he had ever read the works which contain them. But the necessity of making this disclaimer proved that he had placed himself in a situation which demanded the exercise of all his unquestioned talents to enable him to save his own character from sinking with that of the men with whom he had chosen to associate his fame. A writer of inferior power would have been irretrievably ruined by such a step. Cobbett's vast resources, combined with his unparalleled energy and perseverance, enabled him to bear up against the torrent of public opinion which on this occasion, at least, set decidedly against him.

We now turn to the mention of some facts which bear, in no small degree, upon Cobbett's character and circumstances about this time.

Cobbett had, since his change of politics in 1805, advocated the principles of Sir Francis Burdett; he had mixed himself up with his elections for Westminster, with all the influence of his person, and all the power of his pen;



and those very elections are the subjects of some of his most fervid and pungent essays: From being the partizan, he became the friend of Sir Francis, and a personal as well as political intimacy strongly existed between them; and when Cobbett came out of the prison of Newgate, Sir Francis was the chairman of a dinner that was given him at the Crown and Anchor; from that chair he proclaimed him in these very words; "pre-eminent alike in talent and in virtue, always found at his post, that post the foremost, and always labouring with zeal, and with effect."

This intimacy between the two renowned radicals of the time, was maintained until the month of February, 1817, when it was suddenly cut short, and no intercourse afterwards took place between them, even up to the time of Cobbett's death.

During the existence of the friendship, however, Cobbett had received from Sir Francis, whether as a loan, whether as a gift, whether for any stipulated purpose, the sum of two thousand pounds, which were never afterwards repaid; a fact which has always been flung by his enemies in Cobbett's teeth, as a positive



stain upon his character, which they would suffer no explanation of his to wipe away. Even on the day after his death the "Times" newspaper made an allusion to the circumstance, and implied that Sir Francis Burdett could throw more light upon the nature of Cobbett's transactions in money matters than might altogether redound to his credit. Beyond this the "Times" did not go, but it was evident that it held its peace rather upon the *De mortuis nil nisi bonum* principle, than on account of any disbelief of the fraudulent conduct of Cobbett. As a set-off against these observations, and without pretending to any personal knowledge on the subject, we shall presently allow Cobbett to defend himself. Let us, however, premise, that Cobbett had fairly turned round upon Sir Francis, with a hatred violent in proportion to his former partizanship, and the attack which he then began upon Westminster's Glory has even been continued up to the last years of his life, with a perseverance at once unceasing and vindictive. Sir Francis returned some of these assaults with interest, and then began the many imputations about the two thousand pounds. "But," (writes Cobbett), "he him-



self never, for one moment, regarded any part or portion of this transaction as being dishonest on my part. He was angry : he had carried his liberty-doctrine so far, and in some respects too far, that he began to wish that he could stop a little short of that which he had so long professed in his more giddy days. Though he had a great opinion of me, he was displeased with me, because I would not let him stop ; because I would pull him along, or push him along, or else assail him. This was the fact ; and then he said and wrote, while he was angry, that which he did not think, and which he never could have thought."

Cobbett was at this time in Long Island, and his "Registers," which contained his attacks upon Sir Francis, were forwarded to this country, so that it was in his absence that the aspersions about the money were first thrown out. At various periods of his political life, however, they were revived in the daily journals with considerable bitterness ; and after Cobbett became a member of parliament the "Morning Chronicle" reverted to them in a spirit approaching to fierceness. It was on this occasion that Cobbett published in his "Register" (October,



1833), the defence which comes in most opportunely here ; as, besides treating upon the question at issue, it throws a light upon the state of his affairs at the time, and opens a clue to the embarrassments that succeeded.

“ Having mentioned the affair of Burdett, I will here, for about the hundredth time, expose the infamous lie which has been circulated, and is still circulated, with regard to that affair. Let it be a loan, which it was not ; but, let it be a loan. I owed it him, then ; and, the story is, that I, owing it him, wrote to him from America, to say ‘ that I would not pay him.’ Now the senselessness of this lie, one would think, would cause it to be universally disbelieved. I was attacking him at the time ; I was accusing him distinctly of having abandoned the reformers in the months of February and March, 1817 ; I was laying it upon him with a heavy hand. I was telling him that I would bring him down, though it might cost me about ten years to do it ; and, at this time, I was writing to him, and acknowledging the debt, and telling him that I would never pay him ! This is a thing not to be believed of a sane person. I was in Long Island, to be sure ;



but a power-of-attorney and a writ would have stripped me of every thing that I possessed in that country, down to the very bed that I lay in. But, as if this were not daring enough, I came to England in a year and a half after I had told him that I never would pay him. And I came to London, too, at about the end of that year and a half. What! came across the sea on purpose to put myself within his reach, after having stirred up his animosity, and declared that I never would pay him! The fact is, I knew that what he had said in his anger he never would swear; and, therefore, I was sure that he never would commence a suit against me for that money. Very soon, however, after my arrival, he had an opportunity of swearing, if he chose; for I became a bankrupt, of which he was duly informed, of course; to prove his debt, he must swear to the debt; but, though invited so to do, by Mr. Brown, he never did it; and the truth is, that never would he have said a word about the matter, had it not been for his anger at the attacks which I had made on him.

“ But, did I, then, never tell him that I would not pay him? Verbally, this is im-



possible, because he and I were very intimate until the month of February, 1817, and we never have spoken together from that time to this. Was it writing? then he has the letter; and then he can produce it; but I will state the substance of the contents of the letter alluded to, and then the reader will see the peg upon which has been hung this abominable lie; and a member of parliament, whom I will not now name, will be cautious how he again makes allusion to any thing resting on such a foundation. In Long Island, about the spring of 1818, having had time then to learn all the waste, the spoliation, the total annihilation of all my property in England of every description, I wrote a circular letter to all those to whom I owed money in England, amongst whom I included the baronet. I had been driven away from what was then become really an enormous income. Sidmouth and Castle-reagh's Power of Imprisonment Bill had been passed; my choice lay between flight and a dungeon; the laws of personal liberty were abrogated as far as related to me. In writing the above circular letter, I made observations of this sort:—'That the laws of civil society



made it incumbent on men to pay the debts which they had contracted in that society ; but that, if a partial tyranny arose, depriving a portion of the society of the power of pursuing the calling which they had pursued while the debt was contracted ; and if the society, as a whole, were either unwilling or unable to abate such tyranny ; then that society had no right to demand the payment of debts due from those who had been prescribed by that tyranny, any more than you have a right to demand of a man the performance of a foot-race which he has contracted to perform, you having first given your assent to the cutting off of one of his legs.' But after having stated this doctrine, I expressly told him in that same letter, that, in his case, I would waive every such right of refusal ; and that, as soon as I was able, I would satisfy his claim to the last penny, and that no exertion on my part should be wanting for the purpose of effecting that object. If this be not a true statement of the substance of the letter, let him produce the letter.

“ However, at last came the bankruptcy ; and then the creditor was paid at any rate, as far as



the law could pay him. As I said before, he never came to prove his debt, and I was sure he never would; and I owe him nothing now, unless he have some peculiar privilege to set aside the effects even of a bankruptcy."

Here Cobbett pauses to allude to the compliment uttered of him by Sir Francis, at the Crown and Anchor, on his emerging from Newgate, and in reflecting upon that compliment, and the baronet's subsequent change of tone respecting him, he yet contends that there was no change of opinion, for he says:—

"I do not accuse him of 'inconsistency;' I do not set up that cuckoo-cry against him; he thought what he said at the time when he uttered the words; and, though age and other circumstances may have a good deal changed him, if he were now on his death-bed, he would say the same thing."

He then reverts to the charges about their money-transactions as follows:—

"But the best answer to all these most atrocious calumniators, and to the vile hypocrites who pretend to believe them, is his own conduct with regard to me since 1822. About 1823 or 1824, I think it was, there was a sub-



scription proposed, to raise a sum of money to defray the expense of an election to put me into Parliament. This was talked of most in Norfolk. Upon that occasion he wrote to Richard Gurney to say that he would subscribe five hundred pounds towards the fund, and that he did not care who knew it. This was told me by Mr. Withers, of Holt, and by Mr. Spalding, of Stoke Holy Cross; I have mentioned the thing before in print, and it never has been contradicted by him or by any body else. In 1826, when the election for Preston was coming on, and when a subscription was again proposed for that purpose, he offered again to subscribe, and by letter to Colonel Johnstone, who was then a member of parliament. Just before Sir Thomas Beevor and I set off to Preston, Colonel Johnston left us at a house, somewhere about Dover-street, I think it was, while he went to ask the baronet the amount of the sum that he intended to subscribe; because upon that depended the scale of our operations. Colonel Johnstone brought us back word that he would subscribe, but that he did not name the sum; but told us distinctly that he had told him that he would subscribe



towards that election. He did not do it, it is true ; but this does not at all mend the matter with regard to him, nor make it worse with regard to me ; for here was a second declaration, that he was ready to subscribe to put me into that House of Commons where I now am without any subscription at all. So that here he is caught, somehow or the other, in a dilemma : either he did not think me a dishonest man, or he was ready to give his money to put a dishonest man into Parliament. It was the former. I do not wish to blacken him so much as to inculcate the belief that it was the latter. When he acted hostile to me, it was from anger, and unjust anger too ; for he should have reflected, that if I were going too far, the fault was his, and not mine. Before I dismiss this proposition, I must observe, that though the subscription for the election for Preston amounted, I believe, to more than seventeen hundred pounds, I did not escape quite clear out of that ; and if I add this to the other sums of hard money which I have expended really and truly in the cause of Parliamentary Reform, and if the public acknowledge any debts on that score, I have expended, out of my own earnings, more than all

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that I have received, the two thousand pounds of Burdett included."

This, then, is Cobbett's own defence of a transaction which by many has been thought to sully his integrity, and by all his enemies quoted in support of their assertions that he was a lover of gold—the mammon worshipper, under the patriot's mask. We cannot, within the confined limits of this little book, pursue this subject further. The controversies between Cobbett and Sir Francis Burdett must be familiar to all the readers of his "Register," if not to all the world, and the mere mention of them will be sufficient here.

In the remarks we have printed Cobbett has alluded to the beginning of his embarrassments. It will be seen, that immediately after his arrival they were increased by fines and damages for libels in which his pen had run riot during his absence, but which he had regularly transmitted to do their mischief where it was intended to be worked.



## CHAPTER XIV.

COBBETT'S EMBARRASMENTS AND TRIALS AT LAW—  
CLEARY VERSUS COBBETT—WRIGHT VERSUS COBBETT  
—DAMAGES—PROPOSED SUBSCRIPTION TO PUT COB-  
BETT INTO PARLIAMENT—HIS ADDRESS TO THE ELEC-  
TORS OF COVENTRY—THE COVENTRY ELECTION AND  
COBBETT'S DEFEAT.

NOT to disguise the truth, Cobbett arrived in England an embarrassed, and, in fact, in his worldly circumstances a ruined man; but prudence at no time formed an ingredient in his character, and he now added to his existing embarrassments by commencing a daily newspaper—a fearful undertaking for a man without capital, and which ended as might have been expected. After a career of about two months during the best part of the newspaper year, it was relinquished with considerable loss. To this act of his own was added the attacks of his enemies, who welcomed his arrival in his own country with those compliments of which John



Doe and Richard Roe are the bearers. A Mr. Cleary, an *attaché* of Major Cartwright, opened the campaign. This gentleman had taken a prominent part in an election for Westminster, which had taken place while Cobbett was out of the country, and having obtained possession of a letter written by Cobbett, in which an unfavourable opinion was expressed of Hunt, one of the candidates to whom Cleary was opposed, he read it publicly on the hustings. The production of this letter was peculiarly *mal à propos*, as Cobbett was at that time lauding Hunt and his principles in the highest terms.

Cobbett on learning the use which had been made of his letter, openly declared that it was a forgery, and that Cleary was concerned in forging it. For this, Cleary commenced an action in the Court of King's Bench, which was tried before Chief Justice Abbott, on the 3rd of December, 1820. Mr. Brougham led for the plaintiff, Cobbett defended himself. Witnesses were called to prove the facts of the case, and among them, Mr. John Wright, the defendant's former partner and Mr. William Adams, a carrier in Westminster and an active member of the once famous committee of that city.



Cobbett's cross-examination of the latter gentleman, as to the circumstances of what was called the rump committee, was marked by his characteristic talent, and long formed a favourite topic for those who were politically opposed to it. His treatment of the plaintiff was in the same style. It will be impossible to quote the whole of his attack upon that gentleman, but a short specimen will shew its style and spirit :—

“ They had been told that Mr. Cleary was a student of law and intended to be called to the bar. On hearing this, he must confess that he had felt considerable alarm. Extremely scarce as lawyers now were—considering how difficult it was to get law either for love or money—to have deducted but one member from so valuable a profession, was a thought which would long continue to interrupt his enjoyments. His only consolation, if he had indeed committed the horrible crime—a crime held in detestation even among poachers—of crushing a lawyer in the egg was, that it had been forced upon him in self-defence.”

The plaintiff's estimate of the value of his reputation differed widely from that of the



jury. The damages were laid at three thousand pounds, the jury gave only forty shillings.

Cobbett's law-suits generally came upon him in shoals. On the 11th of December, less than a week after the former trial, an action brought against him by Wright, his former partner, was tried in the same court. The connexion between Cobbett and Wright was of old standing, and lasted through many years. It began when Cobbett was a bookseller in Pall Mall, under the auspices of "the Crown, the Bible, and the Mitre." Wright had been connected with him in various literary speculations of great extent—"The Parliamentary Debates," the "State Trials," and the "Parliamentary History." He had also assisted him in reviving and bringing out the "Register." Mr. Scarlett, on the occasion of this trial, stated a circumstance which, if true, is a very curious piece of literary history: that at the very time that Cobbett was directing all his energies to write down the paper system, his numerous speculations were supported by accommodation paper to the amount of 60,000*l.* or 70,000*l.* This paper was negotiated by Wright, and in consequence of such an extensive and intricate system, the



accounts between the parties got into such a state, that, to use Cobbett's expression, "the devil himself could not unravel them." Out of the vain attempts to effect a satisfactory settlement of their accounts a mortal enmity arose between Cobbett and Wright, which was kept up by fresh acts of irritation on both sides. The proceedings instituted by Wright charged the defendant with three distinct libels. One of them related to the letter read on the Westminster hustings by Cleary. The others, to various imputations of fraud contained in different paragraphs of the "Register." With regard to the first, Cobbett attempted to justify himself by alleging that the whole of the letter had not been read, and that mutilation is as bad as forgery. But the most remarkable feature of the case, was that of the defendant calling his two sons, William and John, to prove, that while their father was in America, they were in the habit of making alterations in the articles which he transmitted for publication, and that they had actually made most material alterations in the "Register" which contained the libels. Mr. Scarlett, in reply, animadverted upon the defendant's conduct in pulling for-



ward his "infant sons" to shelter himself. In a subsequent "Register" Cobbett made himself very merry on the subject of his "infants" of six feet high.

Mr. Wright was more fortunate than Mr. Cleary. He obtained a verdict with a thousand pounds damages.

These were very inauspicious circumstances under which to commence a new career, but the active mind of William Cobbett, amidst all the harrassing effects of litigation, found means to keep his mind at liberty for active political warfare.

Thus, during all this time, while in these private matters the trials and decisions were going against him, he busied himself with working out the purposes of his ambition. There can be no doubt but that this always fed his mind with a desire to become one of the representatives of the people in the Commons' House. His life was essentially political, and so vigorously, so industriously political too, that he looked upon a seat in parliament as *the* natural epoch in it that must come to pass, and which his self-confidence, his pride, and the belief in his own power all combined to hasten.



Accordingly, the very first general election that took place after his arrival,—the election of 1820,—he made a bold stroke for admission into the legislature by becoming a candidate for the representation of COVENTRY. He had several engines at work : besides his “Register,” he had started (for we cannot say established) an evening paper, which he called “Cobbett’s Evening Post,” and in which he did not fail to advocate and advance his claims to a seat in parliament ; not only by political writing, but, practically, in the shape of appeals to the purses as well as the principles of his friends. He published an address to the reformers on the subject of raising a sum of money to defray the expences attending his election ; and in this document (bearing date 5th of February, 1820), he gives a long account of his life and writings, his industry, and his exertions for the public. This *morceau* of autobiography is rarely characteristic and exceedingly interesting, and the following portion of it, it would be the worst sin of omission not to quote.

“At eleven years of age my employment was clipping of box edgings and weeding beds of flowers in the garden of the Bishop of Win-



chester, at the castle of Farnham, my native town. I had always been fond of beautiful gardens; and a gardener who had just come from the king's gardens at Kew, gave such a description of them as made me instantly resolve to work in these gardens. The next morning, without saying a word to any one, off I set with no clothes, except those upon my back, and with thirteen halfpence in my pocket. I found that I must go to Richmond, and I accordingly went on, from place to place inquiring my way thither. A long day (it was in June) brought me to Richmond in the afternoon. Two-penny worth of bread and cheese and a penny worth of small beer, which I had on the road, and one halfpenny that I had lost somehow or other, left three-pence in my pocket, with this for my whole fortune, I was trudging through Richmond, in my blue smock frock and my red garters tied under my knees, when staring about me, my eyes fell upon a little book in a bookseller's window, on the outside of which was written, 'Tale of a Tub; price three-pence.' The title was so odd, that my curiosity was excited. I had the three-pence, but then I could have no supper. In I



went, and got the little book, which I was so impatient to read, that I got over into a field at the upper corner of Kew-gardens, where there stood a hay-stack. On the shady side of this I sat down to read; the book was so different from anything that I had ever read before: it was something so new to my mind, that though I could not at all understand some of it, it delighted me beyond description; and it produced what I have always considered a sort of birth of intellect. I read on till it was dark without any thought about supper or bed. When I could see no longer, I put my little book in my pocket, and tumbled down by the side of the stack, where I slept till the birds in Kew-gardens awaked me in the morning; when off I started to Kew, reading my little book. The singularity of my dress, the simplicity of my manners, my confident and lively air, and, doubtless, his own compassion besides, induced the gardener, who was a Scotsman, I remember, to give me victuals, find me lodging, and set me to work. And it was during the period that I was at Kew, that the present king and two of his brothers laughed at the oddness of my dress, while I was sweeping the grass-plot round the



foot of the pagoda. The gardener seeing me fond of books, lent me some gardening books to read; but these I could not relish after my 'Tale of a Tub,' which I carried about me wherever I went, and when I, at about twenty years old, lost it in a box that fell overboard in the Bay of Funday in North America; the loss gave me greater pain than I have ever felt at losing thousands of pounds.

"Those of you who are mothers will want nothing but the voluntary impulse of your own hearts, to carry your mind back to the alarm, the fears and anxieties of my most tender mother. But if I am 'an extraordinary man,' as I have been called by some persons, who ought to have found out a different epithet, I was a still more extraordinary boy. For, though I never returned home for any length of time, and never put my parents to a farthing in expence, after the time above mentioned, I was always a most dutiful son, never having, in my whole life, wilfully and deliberately disobeyed either my father or my mother. I carried in my mind their precepts against *drinking* and *gaming*; and I have never been drunk, and have never played at any game in my life.



When in the army I was often tempted to take up the cards ; but the words of my father came into my mind, and rescued me from the peril. I entered the army at sixteen, and quitted it at twenty-five. I never was once even accused of a fault of any sort. At nineteen I was promoted to serjeant-major from a corporal, over the heads of nearly fifty serjeants. While my regiment was abroad I received the public and official thanks of the governor of the province for my zeal in the king's service ; while no officer in the regiment received any thanks at all. When I quitted the army at Portsmouth I had a discharge, bearing on it, that I had been discharged at my own request, *and in consequence of the great services I had rendered the king's service in that regiment.*

“ In 1792 I went to the United States of America. There I became a writer.

“ Driven again across the Atlantic, to avoid a dungeon, deprived of pen, ink, and paper, I still adhered faithfully to my beloved, though oppressed and miserable country.

“ I have seven children, the greater part of whom are fast approaching the state of young men and young women. I never struck one



of them in anger in my life; and I recollect only one single instance in which I have ever spoken to one of them in a really angry tone and manner. And, when I had so done, it appeared as if my heart was gone out of my body. It was but once, and I hope it will never be again. Are there many men who can say as much as this? To my servants I have been the most kind and indulgent of masters, and I have been repaid, in general, by their fidelity and attachment.

“As to myself, all the world must know that I have no value for money, otherwise than as it conduces to objects like this. I am aware that it will be said, that if I had been careful of my *own* money, this appeal to *you* would not have been necessary.

“No extravagance, of any sort, have I ever indulged in. In my whole life I never spent one evening away from my own home, and without some part, at least, of my family, if I was not at a distance from that home: except at about ten public dinners, I have never, during the twenty-eight years that I have been married, eat a meal or drunk a drop in a public house of any description, except upon a jour-



ney, or at a temporary lodging. I have never indulged in extravagance of any kind; and as to my wife, though she is, doubtless, equalled by many, in point of prudence and economy no one ever excelled her."

Cobbett then winds up with other matters more immediately connected with the cause of reform, and an appeal upon the point at issue—the subscription which he proposed to raise.

There is no doubt but that the tone and tenor of such a document was calculated to insure success to a great extent. Numerous contributions were immediately sent. One gentleman, whose name Cobbett has not allowed to transpire, subscribed as much as five hundred pounds; and others of his admirers lent assistance according to their means.

Thus encouraged, Cobbett was sanguine enough to believe that matters were in a fair train, and he at once published the following Address to the Electors:—

“ TO THE FREEMEN AND ELECTORS OF  
COVENTRY.

“ *London, Jan. 31st, 1820.*

“ GENTLEMEN :

“ The time is now approaching when you will have an opportunity of choosing men to represent you in the House



of Commons, and I offer myself to you as one of those men. This I did previous to the last election. I was then absent; but if you had chosen me, I would have been at my post as punctually as either of the gentlemen whom you then chose.

“The justice, and, indeed, the necessity of extending the right of suffrage all over the kingdom, has been proved so clearly, that the enemies of reform, quite unable to answer arguments, have resorted to those means by which truth is kept from the eyes and ears of men. But you have no cause to complain of a want of power to exercise this right; and, therefore, seeing that you possess the power, I will not suppose that you want the inclination to exercise it for the good of your country in general.

“Gentlemen: Those of you who happen not to believe that my intentions are good, and that my ability to give effect to those intentions is not such as to induce you to prefer me before another, will, of course, not think this application worth your notice; but, if you should think that my intentions are good, and that my ability to serve the country at this critical, and even awful period, is greater than that of any other man that shall offer himself to you, give me leave to express a hope that you will, upon this interesting occasion, give proof that your public virtue is superior to every temptation by which you may be assailed.

“We ought, gentlemen, upon all occasions to consider, when we are about to act, what is the nature of our engagements as to that action; and, also, what may be the effect of our conduct. A voter at an election, under the present circumstances of the country, is invested with a *trust*; a trust which he exercises for his neighbours as well



as for himself. Those persons whom the voters choose make the laws, and the laws affect every man, woman, and child in the community. You, in fact, assist, therefore, in producing every oppression which may fall upon the country, unless you, by your vote, take every precaution in your power in order to put into parliament such men, if you can find them, as will do everything in their power, and every thing that can be done by man to prevent the passing of oppressive laws!

“ My countrymen, look at the situation of this miserable country! Look at the sorrows that afflict her! Look at the perishing hundreds of thousands that beg, cry for food, and starve by inches! Look at the pangs that shake the bosom of your country! Look at the perils that surround her; and look at the future degradation, which, without a change of system, awaits her as surely as the hand of death awaits every one of us! Can you, with this afflicting spectacle before you, and still more, with this heart-rending prospect, go from the election, without having performed your duty according to your consciences, and lay your heads calmly down upon your pillow?

“ The question, in such a case for every man to put to himself is, not whether he has done the best for himself; but whether he has done his best for his suffering country; that is to say, whether he has obeyed the commands of the Gospel, and has done towards others as he would that others should do unto him. No man is justified in balancing his interests against his duty—if duty agree with interest, its well; but, if not, conscience commands us to disregard interest as much as it commands us to disregard every other invitation to flagrant iniquity.

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“ However, gentlemen, I hope it is wholly unnecessary for me to employ any further argument upon the subject. Your city was famed in very ancient times for its attachments to those rights and liberties, to gain and maintain which, our forefathers bled so profusely. I have main hopes that the same spirit animates the children of the men of that celebrated city, who dared, in the days of the worst of tyrants, to shew their friendship openly for the men whom those tyrants most dreaded.

“ I point out to your rejection, no gentleman in particular; and I beg you to believe that, while I stand pledged (as I most solemnly do) never to receive a farthing of the public money in any shape, as long as I live, I have no ambition to gratify.”

As soon as this address obtained circulation, a public meeting of Cobbett's friends was called (Feb. 7), at the Eagle tavern, City-road, for the purpose of considering of measures to make his election sure; and Mr. Hunt—that same Hunt whom he afterwards called the “ fool liar,” “ the Preston Dunghill cock,” and other equally pleasing appellations—presided in the Chair.

The result of the proceedings was the call of a second meeting, which took place on the following Wednesday, in the assembly rooms at the Jacob's Well, Barbican, where numerous



resolutions were passed in favour of Cobbett, his subscription, and his election to the post of the "People's Representative."

Upon the strength of these proceedings, Cobbett made his entry into Coventry on the 28th of February, 1820, and continued canvassing actively till the 1st of March following, the day on which the election commenced. But Cobbett's presence operated against the peace—he never *did* fulfil exactly the character of a peace-worker—and the excitement which prevailed began to exceed the usual agitation of election contests. In fact the tide had set against him, and powerful as he was, he had no force to stem its violence. On the fourth day of the election, March the 12th, the contest closed as far as he was concerned—(the riots making its continuation dangerous)—after he had polled three hundred and fifty-two votes.

Such was the result of Cobbett's first ambitious effort to enrol himself among the legislators of his country.



## CHAPTER XV.

COBBETT'S CONDUCT IN REGARD TO QUEEN CAROLINE—  
SUBSEQUENT THEMES FOR HIS "REGISTER"—HIS  
SECOND ATTEMPT TO ENTER PARLIAMENT—THE  
PRESTON ELECTION—COBBETT'S DEFEAT—HIS OWN  
ACCOUNT OF HIS ENTRY INTO AND DEPARTURE FROM  
PRESTON.

COBBETT was one of the most devoted adherents of the queen through the whole of the proceedings, which, during their continuance, occupied so large a share of public attention, as almost to cast every other subject into oblivion. He went out to Shooter's-hill to meet her on her approach to London, and boasted of having waved a laurel bough over her head. Her advisers were, however, no favourites with him, and while he maintained HER cause with a devotion worthy of a son of chivalry, he made no secret of the contempt and aversion which he felt for Brougham, Denman, and Lushington. Her death left him at liberty to resume



the topics on which he had formerly loved to dwell, and the mischiefs and the miseries of a paper currency, again formed the standing dish which he presented to his readers. The admonition, "get gold," was repeated more frequently and with increased earnestness. He commenced, too, a series of papers which rank among the most delightful of the sound productions of his pen—his "Rural Rides,"—which have given pleasure alike to friend and foe, and extorted praise from both.

In 1822 the suicide of Lord Londonderry gave a new turn to his pen. His "Register" of the 17th of August in that year, is addressed to "Joseph Swan," imprisoned by the magistrates of Cheshire for some political offence. It commences thus :—

"Castlereagh has cut his own throat and is dead. Let the sound reach you in the depth of your dungeon, and let it convey consolation to your suffering soul."

The "Register" of the following week is addressed to "the boroughmongers," on the same subject. The elevation of Mr. Canning on the death of his former opponent, also called forth Cobbett's ire, and the "Register" exhibited a



series of letters headed "Mr. Canning at School." About the same time an extraordinary proposal for paying off the national debt by the appropriation of part of the property of every landholder for that purpose, which had received the approval of Mr. Ricardo, led him to address that gentleman. Parson Malthus was also honoured with a share of his notice, and anti-populationists handled with his usual severity. The present Earl of Ripon, then a member of the House of Commons, was also heavily chastised under the name of "Prosperity Robinson."

In 1826 Cobbett again made an attempt to enter parliament. The borough chosen for this experiment was Preston. Cobbett's Lancashire admirers were always numerous, and in Preston the right of suffrage, even under the unreformed system, was almost universal. On the 8th of February, a meeting was held at the Freemason's tavern to forward this object. Sir Thomas Beevor, a Norfolk baronet, took the chair. The meeting was so numerous, that it was found necessary to adjourn to Lincoln's-Inn-Fields. Here a number of resolutions were carried, the most important of which expressed the in-



tention of the meeting to enter into a subscription to support Cobbett's pretensions to a seat in parliament. This subscription ultimately amounted to a considerable sum. On the 20th of March Cobbett commenced his "Register" with an address to the electors of the borough of Preston, and an address from the reformers of Preston to him follows. He had previously gone down to the borough, and was actively engaged in all the bustle of an electioneering struggle, for which he was so well calculated. He represents himself on this occasion to have been absent from his house at Kensington only six days—to have travelled four hundred and sixty miles—perambulated the entire town of Preston twice, and slept during the period rather less than twenty-four hours. As at a later period he described himself to be always either "at work or asleep," it may be presumed, in a matter where he felt so much interest, his activity during his working hours was extraordinary. On the 29th he again made his entry into Preston, accompanied by his four sons and a numerous retinue of friends. He went through the usual preliminaries to the election contest; canvassed actively, spoke often, and at length;



abused his opponents, and, in his own strange fashion, lauded himself and the cause which he was advocating. He remained in Preston, or went backwards and forwards during a whole month, and several "Registers" were filled with an account of the fatiguing exertions which he had to undergo. The limits of this work will not allow of our entering upon the details of the occurrences which marked the progress of the election; but the reader shall have the leading facts. The contest was severe, fierce, violent, and personal to a degree unparelled even in the history of election excitement. There were four candidates,—Mr. (now Lord) Stanley, Mr. Wood, Mr. Barrie, and Cobbett. Those to whom Cobbett was most opposed were Messrs. Stanley and Wood, against whom, in nearly all his addresses, he entered into personalities, which, to our mind, are unjustifiable between gentlemen, even on occasions of acrimonious contention.

Personalities, however, do not carry votes and Cobbett was defeated. At the close of the poll the numbers were:—

Stanley.....	3044	Barrie.....	1657
Wood.....	1982	Cobbett.....	995



Of these the plumpers stood as follows :—

Cobbett . . . . .	451	Barrie . . . . .	71
Wood. . . . .	92	Stanley . . . . .	36

Thus, then, was William Cobbett defeated in his second attempt to enter parliament, a result little in accordance with his sanguine expectations, and presenting in itself a strange contrast to the account which he gives of his entrance into the city, for whose representation he had become a candidate.

“On the 29th, we passed through Manchester, Bolton, Chorley, and other villages to Preston. At Bolton, the people met us with flags and banners and green boughs. They became a great multitude before we got through the town, and I shortly addressed them from the window of the inn where we changed horses. The people assembled in a large multitude at Chorley, and at another hamlet a little further on towards Preston. When we came within about two miles of Preston, we were met by flags, banners, and a band of music, and by an immense multitude of people, many of them carrying green boughs.

“As we proceeded on, the people came flocking from the hamlets and detached houses ;



and we found the sides of the road, that is to say, the banks which are very deep and sloping along here, covered with people. At some distance from Preston, they were in groups rather than lines. The sloping grounds at this side of the road were from thirty to forty feet deep. On these slopes, you beheld closely packed groups of women and girls, from one to four or five hundred in a group, all in their best clothes—all delighted; the gayest and most enchanting sight that eyes ever beheld. As we approached Preston, the shelving grounds became not the station of groups, but they were covered altogether with people. See me, then, in an open carriage, standing upon the seat with my hat off, and see these immense multitudes of people; behold their eager looks, their inexpressible satisfaction, the demonstrations of their joy; see their faces and hear their shouts, and then ask yourselves whether there must not have been some reason for all this; whether any other man in the kingdom could have drawn forth such demonstrations? Here was no plan—no contrivance to get people together—not a penny, nor a pint of beer given to any body. All was purely voluntary. We proceeded on, deafen-



ing the town with shouts, till we got near the Castle inn, which was my quarters, and which is situated on one side of the Market-square. We wished to drive in at the gateway, but that was found to be impossible. I, therefore, jumped out upon some men's shoulders, and they carried me safe into the inn, from the window of which I made my speech, and then my good and kind conductors departed for the night. It was towards the close of the evening when we entered Preston; the weather was fair—the sun was just setting—the air was mild—every thing in nature was beautiful, and the beauty of the groups of women far surpassed anything that I had ever beheld in my life. The women, being the most beautiful here that I ever saw; their vivacity distinguishes them greatly from the women of the south or the west; all appears to be energy with them; and judge of my happiness to receive smiles from so many thousands of beautiful faces, and to hear blessings upon me from so many thousands of pairs of beautiful lips.

“Such was my entrance, the entrance of me, a stranger in the land.”

So much for Cobbett's entrance into Preston.



After he had left it a rejected candidate, and the lowest on the poll, he yet contended that he was numerically the real representative of the town; and this is gravely attempted to be proved in a description of his departure:—

“The election” (he writes) “ended on Monday, the 26th June. I stayed at Preston during the 27th, until about eight in the evening. At that hour I addressed the people at the usual place. There were from ten to fifteen thousand assembled. At the conclusion of my speech, I said that the whole town was there assembled, and, therefore, I called upon them to signify by a shew of hands whether they would still wish to have me for their member. Never was there such a shew of hands—never approbation so unanimous, cheers so cordial, and honour so great.”

Cobbett was followed a long way out of Preston with the cheers of the multitude, and he states that he returned to his home *through forty miles of huzzas, from the lips of a hundred and fifty thousand people!*



## CHAPTER XVI.

COBBETT, HIS BOOKS AND LABOURS UP TO THE YEAR  
1829—AGRICULTURAL TOURS—MR. TREVOR CHARGES  
HIM WITH INCITING THE LABOURERS TO INCEN-  
DIARISM—HE IS PROSECUTED BY THE WHIG GOVERN-  
MENT—HIS TRIAL AND TRIUMPH.

DEFEATED in his prospects at Preston, Cob-  
bett returned with fresh assiduity to his political  
writings. Whatever he penned always pos-  
sessed the importance of entailing a conse-  
quence—he worked out some purpose—he pro-  
duced an effect—often dangerous, sometimes  
beneficial to the community—always dangerous  
—but rarely beneficial to himself. His per-  
sonal adventures, however, during the years  
immediately following the events detailed in  
in our last chapter, were not marked by any  
features of peculiar public interest. Notwith-  
standing in the interval, he published one or  
two of his most valuable books. He made



tours through different parts of the country with a view to its agricultural improvement, from the fruits of his observations, and he published the journal which he kept of them under the title of "Rural Rides." He also wrote and published his "Advice to Young Men," a book full of principles of lofty virtue, and maxims of enduring truth. In a small compass it affords the purest guide to a proper regulation of the mind, for the fulfilment of all the social duties, and no man can act up to its contents, without being a worthy, an useful, and a respectable member of society. This excellent book was printed in the year 1829, up to which time, he gave in his preface, the following account of what his life had taken him through:—

"Talk of rocks, and breakers, and quagmires, and quick-sands," says he, "who has ever escaped from so many as I have? Thrown (by my own will, indeed,) on the wide world, at a very early age, without money to support, without friends to advise, and without book-learning to assist me; passing a few years dependent solely on my own labour for my subsistence; then becoming a common soldier, and



leading a military life, chiefly in foreign parts, for eight years. Quitting that life after—really for me, high promotion, and with, for me, a large sum of money (about 150*l.*); marrying at an early age, going at once to France to acquire the French language; thence to America, passing eight years there, becoming bookseller and author, and taking a prominent part in all the important discussions of the interesting period from 1793 to 1799, during which there was, in that country, a continued struggle carried on between the English and the French parties: conducting myself, in the even active part I took in that struggle, in such a way as to call forth marks of unequivocal approbation from the government at home. Returning to England in 1800; resuming my labours here, suffering during these twenty-nine years (this was written in 1829), two years of imprisonment, heavy fines, three years self-banishment to the other side of the Atlantic, and a total breaking of fortune, so as to be left without a bed to lie on; and, during these twenty-nine years of troubles and of punishments, writing and publishing, every week of my life, whether in exile or not, eleven



weeks only excepted, a periodical paper, containing more or less of matter worthy of public attention; writing and publishing during the same twenty-nine years, a grammar of the French, and another of the English language; a work on the Economy of the Cottage; a work on Forest Trees and Woodlands; a work on Gardening; an account of America; a book of Sermons; a work on the Corn-plant; a History of the Protestant Reformation; all books of great and continued sale, and the *last*, the book of unquestionably the greatest circulation in the whole world, the Bible only excepted; having, during these same twenty-nine years of troubles and embarrassments without number, introduced into England the manufacture of straw-plat; also several very valuable trees; having introduced, during the same twenty-nine years, the cultivation of the corn-plant, so manifestly valuable as a source of food; having, during the same period, always (whether in exile or not) sustained a shop of some size, in London; having, during the whole of the same period, never employed less, on an average, than ten persons, in some capacity or other, exclusive of printers, bookbinders, and others,



connected with papers and books; and having, during these twenty-nine years of troubles, embarrassments, prisons, fines, and banishments, bred up a family of seven children to man's and woman's state. If such a man be not, after he has survived and accomplished all this, qualified to give advice to a young man, no man is qualified for that task."

In the above passage when Cobbett speaks of being without a bed to lie on, he alludes to his bankruptcy, which took place soon after his last arrival from America, when his effects, as is usual in cases of insolvency, as a matter of course went for the benefit of his creditors. In again recurring to the much that he had done, he draws a faithful picture of his mode of living, attributing his power to perform the labours he had undergone, to sobriety and the clock-work regulation of his habits.

"Who, what man, ever performed a greater quantity of labour than I have performed? What man ever did so much? Now, in a great measure, I owe my capability to perform this labour to my disregard of dainties. Being shut up two years in Newgate, with a fine on my head of a thousand pounds to the king, for

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having expressed my indignation at the flogging of Englishmen under a guard of German bayonets, I ate, during one whole year, one mutton chop every day. Being once in town, with one son (then a little boy) and a clerk, while my family was in the country, I had during some weeks nothing but legs of mutton; first day, leg of mutton boiled or *roasted*; second, *cold*; third, *hashed*; then, leg of mutton *boiled*; and so on. When I have been by myself, or nearly so, I have *always* proceeded thus: given directions for having *every day the same thing*, or alternately as above, and every day exactly at the same hour, so as to prevent the necessity of any *talk* about the matter. I am certain that, upon an average, I have not, during my life, spent more than *thirty-five minutes a day at table*, including all the meals of the day. I like, and I take care to have, good and clean victuals: but, if wholesome and clean, that is enough. If I find it, by chance, *too coarse* for my appetite, I put the food aside, or let somebody do it, and leave the appetite to gather keenness. But the great security of all is, to eat *little* and to drink nothing that *intoxicates*. He that eats till he is *full* is little better than a



beast ; and he that drinks till he is *drunk* is quite a beast.

“Some poet has said, that that which is given in *charity* gives a blessing on both sides ; to the giver as well as the receiver. But I really think that if, *in general*, the food and drink given came out of food and drink, *deducted* from the usual quantity swallowed by the giver, the *blessing* would be still greater and much more certain. I can speak for myself, at any rate. I hardly ever eat more than *twice* a day ; when at home, never ; and I never, if I can well avoid it, eat any meat *later than about one or two o'clock in the day*. I drink a little tea, or milk and water, at the usual tea-time (about seven o'clock) ; I go to bed at eight, if I can ; I write or read from about four to about eight, and then, hungry as an hunter, I go to breakfast, eating *as small a parcel* of cold meat and bread as I can prevail upon my teeth to be satisfied with. I do just the same at dinner time. I very rarely taste *garden-stuff* of any sort. If any man can show me that he has done, or can do *more work*, bodily and mentally united, I say nothing about *good health*, for of that *the public* can

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know nothing—but I refer to *the work*: the public know, they see, what I can do, and what I actually have done, and what I do; and when any one has shown the public that he has done, or can do more, then I will advise my readers, to attend to him on the subject of diet and not to me.”

So much for Cobbett's mode of life and the labours it enabled him to achieve, during twenty-nine years of a stirring and changing public career. But to pass from domestic incidents to politics.

In 1829, and during the years thirty and thirty-one, the tide of events in Europe gave a more impassioned tone to his writings than they had for some time exhibited. He had the revolutions abroad—the reform bill at home—and the fearful spirit of incendiarism through the agricultural districts, to write about all at once. Nor did the greatness of the several themes exhaust his powers—his spirit hurried on, and each subject as the other was dismissed, came like a fresh supply of oil to brighten and perpetuate the flame.

He wrote about the regeneration of France, and here was a stimulus to indignation; he



passed to talk of boroughmongers and corruption, and here the stimulus increased; but when he leaped from the rotten boroughs into the green fields—peered over burning barns and corn-ricks, and sought the cause of the incendiarism in the distress and despair of the class of men, from whom he, William Cobbett, had sprung, the stimulus waxed stronger than mere indignation; and, in giving it expression, he nearly swelled it into sedition against a government, which he had always regarded with an avenging hate.

The Whigs, indeed, fastened upon it at once as matter for prosecution, and Cobbett was for the eighth time in his life brought into a court of law upon a charge of libel.

The matter began to be agitated in December, 1830. Mr. Trevor having risen in the House of Commons, where in good set terms, as Cobbett says, he charged him with sedition in inciting the agricultural labourers to acts of incendiarism. Ministers, however, persuaded him to withdraw his resolution; an adjournment of parliament took place, and everybody believed that the affair had blown over, or, at all events, would not be pushed to a trial.



The Whigs, however, with great imprudence, amongst numerous other press prosecutions, revived it in 1831, and on the 7th of July, in that year, Cobbett was indicted before Lord Tenterden and a special jury, for "the publication in the 'Weekly Political Register' of the 11th of December last, of a libel, with intent to raise discontent in the minds of the labourers in husbandry, and to incite them to acts of violence, and to destroy corn-stacks, machinery, and other property."

Shortly after nine o'clock, the defendant entered the court, accompanied by his sons, his attorney, and a few friends, all of whom took their seats below the bar.

The gallery was previously filled with spectators, who warmly greeted the defendant when he entered the court, but the tumult was immediately quelled. Cobbett, however, turned round to the crowd, and exclaimed, "If truth prevails we shall beat them."

The case was soon begun:—the counsel for the crown were Sir Thomas Denman, attorney-general; Mr. Gurney and Mr. Wightman, and the solicitor, Mr. Maule, of the treasury. Mr. Faithful was solicitor to the defence,



which Cobbett was of course present to conduct in person.

Mr. Wightman opened the pleadings with a mention of the nature of the indictment, and the attorney-general then rose to address the court. Cobbett greatly annoyed him in the course of his speech by repeated interruptions, insisting to be dubbed a *labourer*, as he was so called in the indictment. Lord Tenterden even interfered and said, "If you will not sit down, sir, I must try the cause in your absence;" to which Cobbett replied, "Unless the attorney-general call me a labourer, I must protest every time."

Sir Thomas Denman's speech grew the more severe as he became nettled by the interruptions. He argued his case with bitterness and pressed his charges with acrimony; he not only sought justice, but in exhorting the jury to abjure mercy he almost asked for vengeance

The whole speech was worthy of the government, whose authority it was intended to enforce.

Cobbett now rose to reply; and his speech, long, lucid, and vigorous, occupied an interval of six hours. The following will be found to



contain its leading points ; to obtain which, we have been at all the labour of abbreviation.

“ My lord, and gentlemen of the jury :—The feeble attempt of the attorney-general to prove by his speech that this is a libel, is rendered altogether nugatory by the agreeable twaddle of his friend, Mr. Gurney, who has taken the trouble to cause extracts to be read from the ‘ Register ’ which must convince you that I had no such intention as that imputed to me in publishing the article in question. The charge which the attorney-general has attempted to fasten upon me is false and groundless from the beginning to the end. You may, perhaps, suppose, gentlemen, that this trial began to-day—no such thing ! I wish to impress this particularly on your minds. It began so long ago as the 16th of December last, and has been going on, with little intermission ever since. On the 16th of December last the trial began at Westminster, among the six hundred and fifty-eight gentlemen who are so fond of attacking me on all occasions ; one of whom, on the day I have mentioned, chose to assail me with peculiar virulence, and to call for some public and monstrous punishment upon me. This is what they



have been doing ever since the 16th of December almost every night, with the exception of the last, when they were too busy with another matter. The night before, however, Mr. Bruce, one of the six hundred and fifty-eight, thought proper to make a direct attack, pointing attention to me, and urged the house to believe that there would be no peace for the country if such persons as 'Cobbett and Taylor' were not effectually put down. Thus, I have been continually assailed with slanderous calumny and falsehood; and as Lord Plunkett has truly observed, there is something very adhesive in calumny uttered in this house of six hundred and fifty-eight. The noble and learned lord made a speech the other day in the House of Lords on the occasion of an accusation being preferred against him by one of the six hundred and fifty-eight, a false accusation I suppose, and in that speech he remarked, that however unfounded calumny might be, yet there was, in the nature of the place whence it proceeded, something which made it very sticky and adhesive; very hard to rub off; but the two parties, the Whigs and the Tories, the factions to which I have been so long opposed, have thought nothing of making



false statements against me in either of their houses, statements which have been re-echoed by the hydra mouths of the three hundred newspapers under their influence. I have been regularly tried twice over on the present charge. I have been tried in the House of Commons since the 16th of December, and I feel that it is impossible for any jury to be able to come to an impartial decision in this case, unless I remove from their minds the falsehoods which have been so long propagated against me. The law says, that if a jury be called on to try a man a second time for the same matter, it is a good ground of challenge. Now this Whig government have, by the prettiest management imaginable, tried to make the whole country a jury, and I might say a packed one, for the purpose of obtaining a verdict against me before they came here. First, Mr. Trevor brought the case forward in the shape of a resolution, which he proposed in the House of Commons; but, it was said on the part of the government, that it was not right to come to any thing like a decision in that house, and, therefore, the resolution was withdrawn. The trial was then transferred to the county of Sussex, in order to



keep up the ball during the recess of seven weeks. From the county of Sussex it came back to the parliament again, where it was kept alive until the night before last, and then after a decision was come to by the six hundred and fifty-eight, and judgment almost pronounced, the government have thought proper to bring the case into this court, and thinking it impossible that you should not have imbibed those prejudices which they have raised, they expect to make you the instruments for effecting their purposes of vengeance.”

After arguing at great length upon the lenity shewn by the government to certain publications in the Whig interest, and their severity against himself, he thus proceeds :—

“ I saw, not many years ago, imputed to a person, towards whom I should wish to be as tender as possible, a speech comparing the late king to *Nero*, and calling the present king a *royal slanderer*. That is imputed to a person who is never above one hundred miles from Sir Thomas Denman, and is circulated through all the papers. You observe that both factions always take care to screen those who favour their own sentiments. They never complain of any



insults offered to the king; they can tolerate insults against kings and queens; but if you touch their faction, and particularly in pecuniary concerns, particularly in respect to the money they take from the public, they are like tigers, as you will see by and by. Now, gentlemen, this is my great crime. I have been endeavouring for twenty-five years to prevent them from taking money out of your pockets, and putting it into their own; and you will see that this faction is more greedy than any other. Why, gentlemen, to touch the faction in that way, what is it, but to take a lamb out of the jaws of a half-starved wolf! They have been so long out of office that they are lank, absolutely lank, lean and greedy. To attempt to prevent them from filling their pockets, to attempt to prevent them from getting as much money as possible—what is it? Why, it is certain destruction to the man who attempts it, and that destruction they intend to bring upon me to-day, for endeavouring to deprive them of their pelf, if you, gentlemen, do not stand between me and my would-be destroyers.

“This will suffice to shew that there must be some other motive than that of necessity for



prosecuting me. It cannot be the danger of these writings, it cannot be the seditious tendency of these writings; it cannot be that, it must be something more. With regard to judges, with regard to members of parliament, with regard to the reigning king, the Whigs have connived at all that has been said through their own organs, but you will see them open-mouthed when their own faction is touched, unless the people come and say 'Get out of the way.'

“And now, with all the sincerity of my heart I declare to you, that, though this is a day of joy to me, because it is a day destined to wipe away all the foul calumnies that this Whig Administration have heaped upon me; though it is a day of joy to me on my own account, yet I confess that, for my country, for my king, for the name of Englishman, I feel the greatest sorrow and shame that can exist in the heart of any man; because I shall be compelled to detail to you the transactions of this government, of this Whig Administration, connected with this protracted, plotted, contrived, persecution against me.”

He then relates the circumstances of the fires



at Battle, in Sussex, the confessions of Goodman, and comments strongly upon the confessions not being corroborated by others who were at the meeting.

“ But this Goodman told a lie, and because he belied *me*, they spared him ! If they had executed him, it would have been a proof that they did not believe his accusation against me ; but, because the attorney-general did not put a stop to the calumnies affecting my character ; because he had plotted this prosecution against me, Goodman was pardoned. Here was mercy arising out of malignity ; here was one of the highest prerogatives of the crown prostituted, for the purpose of propagating calumnies against one of his Majesty's most faithful subjects.” (A loud burst of applause followed the delivery of this sentence.)

After many other observations, he thus proceeded :—

“ I have here a declaration signed by one hundred and three persons, belonging to fourteen different parishes in Sussex, the parish of Battle being one ; persons who were present at my lecture, and who have voluntarily come forward to sign the declaration, among whom



you will perhaps not be a little astonished to find the name of the prosecutor of Goodman himself, who was present at the lecture, and whose barn Goodman burned."

This declaration contradicts the confession of Goodman.

"When it was found that the statement of Goodman was false, he was hurried out of the country. Fortunately, however, I have here a letter written by Goodman, on board the transport ship at Portsmouth, and addressed to his brother-in-law; and, on comparing the orthography of this letter with that of the pretended confessions made in order to implicate me in his crime, it will be manifest that the latter are fabrications of the Whigs and their parson. It is very remarkable that in his genuine letter the spelling is, with very few exceptions, correct. In the letter, too, he writes uniformly with the capital *I*, whereas, in the pretended confession, he as invariably makes use of a small *i*, and then, observe, what does he say to his brother? I will read it to you."

(Mr. Cobbett here read from a letter extracts which related to the fate of the writer, and which he distinctly attributes to his own bad



courses, and his own bad conduct. This letter produced a marked impression.) Gentlemen, there is not a word here about ‘ Mr. *Cobbitt* and his *lectures*.’ ”

He next argued at great length upon the beneficial tendency of the article, and thus concludes :

“ The Whigs know that my intention was not bad. This was a mere pretence to inflict pecuniary ruin on me, or cause me to die of sickness in a jail ; so that they may get rid of me, because they can neither buy nor silence me. It is their fears which make them attack me, and it is my death they intend. In that object they will be defeated, for, thank heaven, you stand between me and destruction. If, however, your verdict should be—which I do not anticipate—one that will consign me to death, by sending me to a loathsome dungeon, I will with my last breath, pray to God to bless my country and curse the Whigs, and I bequeath my hatred to my children and the labourers of England.”

When Cobbett had concluded, he sat down amidst loud acclamations from the spectators in the gallery, which it was with great diffi-



culty the officers could suppress. Bursts of applause, too, had often interrupted him in the progress of his speech, and it was only by threats from Lord Tenterden, to have the court cleared, that silence could be obtained. Cobbett next called his witnesses, amongst whom he had subpoenaed Lords Grey, Melbourne, Durham, Palmerston, and Goderich, the Earl of Radnor, and the Marquis of Blandford, with a view to examine them on the cause of *Goodman's pardon*, but his questions were not allowed. Lords Brougham and Radnor were, however, examined on other points. The rest of Cobbett's evidence was principally as to character, and as on a former trial, a number of noblemen gave testimony that he was a loyal and attached subject, so did many respectable gentlemen now come forward to express their belief that he was not a man likely to seek to produce among the labourers the seditious excitement with which he was charged.

The attorney-general replied at great length, and after Lord Tenterden had summed up, the jury retired, it being five minutes past six o'clock; at half-past seven o'clock Mr. Cobbett

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retired from the court. Lord Tenterden remained in attendance until near ten, when the jury not having returned, his lordship left the court, having previously instructed the proper officer to record the verdict. No verdict was given, however, during the night; and at a little before nine o'clock, on Friday morning, Lord Tenterden having arrived at the Guildhall, the jury sent his lordship the following note:—

‘ The King against Cobbett.

“ The jury in this cause, after mature consideration, cannot agree to a verdict, six being of one opinion, and six of another, they, therefore, respectfully solicit the court to grant their discharge.”

Lord Tenterden sent for the jury, and upon their appearing in court, he told them he had received such a communication, and asked them if it came from them. Upon their answering in the affirmative, his lordship said, “ Then gentlemen, you are discharged.”

Thus ended this memorable trial, Cobbett's only truly great legal triumph, and a triumph it was in every sense of the word. It must have humbled the Whigs with a deep and bitter



humiliation, while it increased the power of the most active and vigorous of their enemies. The decision of the jury was everywhere approved, Cobbett everywhere congratulated.

All the press, except the hired ministerial prints, from the ultra-Tory *Standard*, to the ultra-Radical *True Sun*, rejoiced in the victory which had been achieved. Nor did Cobbett fail to pursue it. The letters signed WILLIAM COBBETT, *Labourer*, and directed to Lord DENHAM, *Chief Judge*, are dreadful evidences of his unrelenting hatred. And there is not another member of the Whig administration, from Cupid Palmerston to Chancellor Brougham, who has not had his memory refreshed with cutting sarcasms, stinging severity, and sticking personalities, ever and anon calling back to his pained, but vivid recollection, the trial and the triumph of William Cobbett.



## CHAPTER XVII.

COBBETT'S TOUR TO SCOTLAND—HIS PROGRESS THROUGH THE NORTH—HIS MANCHESTER LECTURES—GENERAL ELECTION AFTER THE REFORM BILL—COBBETT A CANDIDATE FOR THE REPRESENTATION OF MANCHESTER—HIS DEFEAT—AND RETURN FOR OLDHAM.

FROM the time of his trial, in 1831, up to the passing of the Reform Bill in 1832, Cobbett's time was almost equally divided between the three several occupations of writing, traveling, and lecturing. In his "Register" he was making a great battle for reform; but he was not satisfied with the reform of the Whigs, nor do we think he would have been with any, save a measure of his own passing. He, however, cried out for a sweeping radical reform, and although among the radicals the Russell bill was welcomed, and accepted as a first step: Cobbett was obstinate in his rejection of it even as such. Meanwhile he went about the country



abusing the Whigs; he made a tour through the north to Scotland, and at the populous radical towns was received with deputations and addresses from the people. In all these he was congratulated as the man who had most aided in bringing about a parliamentary reform; although repeated allusions were made to the faults of the measure on account of which Cobbett had denied it his own approbation. During this time he published vivid descriptions of Scotland in his "Register," and afterwards a small volume, giving an account of his tour. This is a book full of rough, stern, picturesque painting.

Cobbett's great business in his travels, speeches, public address, and Register articles, at this time, was to prepare the people for the elections under the new bill. He sent and printed letters to almost all the constituencies in the kingdom; these followed each other with quick succession, and Cobbett was never more actively busy than during this epoch of strong political excitement. His lectures, more particularly those which he delivered at Manchester, were most numerous attended, and the admiration of him by the million seemed to in-



crease and develop itself whenever he went among them.

Meanwhile the time for the elections approached, and Cobbett's hopes of getting a seat in parliament were doubtless secretly revived. He had been exhorting the great constituencies to return radicals, and it was not a dream in his philosophy that they should forget himself. Nor, as events proved, was this in the nature of things. The general election commenced in December 1832, and Cobbett received an invitation to become a candidate to represent *Manchester*. This he accepted, but almost immediately afterwards was presented with a similar invitation from *Oldham*. This he accepted also, his reason being, to use his own words, because "the people knowing how difficult it would be to carry an election for *Manchester* by mere voluntary support, came to the resolution to *secure* my return for *Oldham*." He nevertheless adds, that had the *Oldham* invitation arrived first, he should have accepted that and rejected the other from *Manchester*.

As it was, however, he stood the beginning of the contest at the latter place, and *Oldham* being only eight miles distant from *Manchester*,



Cobbett went backwards and forwards during the elections, which both took place at the same time. He was, however, first present at Manchester on the day of nomination. He gives a reason besides the precedence of the invitation for this: "Even," he says, "if Manchester had not been entitled to priority in this respect, there was the important circumstance that at Manchester there were four rival candidates to meet face to face—four men of great weight on such an occasion, each with numerous and opulent supporters, whereas, at Oldham, there were none but perfectly insignificant opponents, and there was my intended colleague a thousand times more than a match for all those opponents put together."

"For these reasons," continues Cobbett, "I was at the opening of the election for Manchester, where having obtained an immense majority upon the *view*—having obtained the decision of the *public* at Manchester—having upon those hustings seen hooted off that very Mr. Sharpe (as nominator of Mr. Lloyd or Mr. Hope) who was the boroughreeve that forbade me to enter Manchester on my return from America in 1819—having seen him hooted off by the people



of that same town while they rent the air with shouts for the man who was forbidden to enter Manchester on pain of bayonets and bullets—having witnessed this, and having seen those low, dirty people the Shuttleworths and Dyers, and even Mr. Heywood the late county member (because he took a part in them) hooted and scoffed, and not suffered to convey an articulate sound to the public—having seen these things, and having by my conduct on the occasion convinced my opponents that I had no designs which were not just and fair, I went off to Oldham, there to remain until I should return to Manchester a member of parliament.”

But although Cobbett had left the city, the election poll-books were far from presenting a shabby catalogue of Cobbettites. He himself asserts, that “The election for Manchester was doubtless greatly influenced by the decision at Oldham, which was known at the former place by twelve o’clock on the last polling day. So that after that it was naturally to be expected that the electors of Manchester, who intended to vote for me, would either transfer their votes to the candidate that they liked next best, or that they would not vote at all. Yet, in spite of



this, the close of the poll on the second day was as follows :—

Phillips .....	2923
Thompson.....	2069
Lloyd.....	1832
Hope.....	1560
COBBETT .....	1305

This result considering the above-questioned circumstance, alone was sufficiently honourable to me. Not one single pint of beer or glass of gin had been given to any human being on my part—no attorney, and no attorney's clerk had been employed, and not a single person hired, I believe, to do any one thing connected with my election.”

Contrasted with his failure at Manchester, however, palliated as it is by the above remarks, stands Cobbett's singular success in the neighbouring town of Oldham, also a very populous place. At the election for this place, Cobbett and Mr. Fielden stood together as colleagues, and opposed to them were a Mr. Bright, a Mr. Burge, and a Mr. Stephen. On the close of the first days' poll, the numbers were for

Mr. Fielden.....	670
Mr. Cobbett.....	642
Mr. Bright.....	153
Mr. Burge .....	101
Mr. Stephen .....	3



The three latter gentlemen having, the same evening, announced their intention to resign—the contest terminated. The next morning the sheriff's declared Mr. Fielden and his colleague to be duly elected, and William Cobbett was now a member of parliament. He had attained the goal of thirty-two years of intense, emulating ambition.

“At this election,” writes Cobbett, “not one single farthing's worth of victuals or drink was given to anybody for any services whatsoever. The committee, composed of sensible and sober manufacturers and tradesmen, paid for the printing that they had done, and paid all the expenses of the hustings, polling places, clerks, &c. They paid also for the entertainment of the candidates at the hotel: and even the carriages to and from Manchester, that I went in, I found paid for; and not a man nor woman in this excellent town, attempted to obtain from us either money, drink, or any promise to do anything for them in their private concerns. This was *purity of election*, indeed. It is an honour, indeed, to represent a people like this. Neither of us ever canvassed in any shape or form, either individually or collec-



tively ; neither of us ever asked the people to give us a vote ; but we contented ourselves with saying, that if they chose us to represent them we would be their true representatives to the utmost of our power.

“ Of one thing we are both of us particularly proud ; and that is, that the people had the good sense—that sense of their own worth, and our rights—to scorn to attempt to *chair* us, or to drag us through the streets. In my address to them on my return, I besought them not to think of imitating the slaves of the boroughmongers. I besought them not to tarnish the honour which they had conferred on us, in their character of freemen, by putting themselves in the attitude of slaves, and carrying us, or dragging us through the streets ‘ Now,’ said I, ‘ my friends, I shall come down from the hustings, and the first hand-loom weaver I meet with, I shall take by the arm and walk with him up to the hotel from which I came.’ I did this, Mr. Fielden did the same ; and thus, in this appropriate manner we closed this election, which ought to become an example to every borough and every county in the kingdom. Not a disturbance of any sort



—not a blow given in anger; scarcely any abusive words from one person to another; not a single drunken man to be seen about the streets; much singing, much playing music, much joy, much triumph; but all was peace and decorum, from the beginning to the end. In the words of Queen Margaret, when she had, by a body of her adherents, at the manifest risk of their lives, and with the loss of many of those lives, been rescued from the hands of her deadly enemies; in her words I say of the people of Oldham, ‘These are Lancastrians, *indeed!*’”



## CHAPTER XVIII.

COBBETT A MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT—HIS VISIT TO IRELAND—HIS SPEECH ON THE ADDRESS—MOTION RELATIVE TO SIR ROBERT PEEL—DISSOLUTION OF PARLIAMENT—COBBETT'S SECOND RETURN FOR OLD-HAM—CONDUCT ON THE MALT-TAX QUESTION—HIS DEATH—A PUBLIC FUNERAL.

COBBETT was now in Parliament. The attainment of this object had long been the object of his fondest ambition, and this master wish was at length gratified. He devoted himself to his new duties with the energy by which through life he had been characterized, and with the single exception of a political tour to Ireland, he suffered no other public engagement to occupy his mind. That tour was undertaken, as he stated, for the purpose of seeing with his own eyes the state of things, in a country which had afforded so fertile a field for political controversy. Upon Ireland he exercised those unrivalled powers of observation



which he possessed, and the results were communicated to the public in his well-known letter to Marshall, a labourer upon his farm. His reception in the sister island was cordial and even enthusiastic. Among the numerous invitations which he received, was a very pressing one from O'Connell, to Derynaine Abbey. This he declined, on the plea of want of time, but he promised, at a future period, to make a second journey to Ireland, for the express purpose of visiting the great agitator at his family seat. Looking at the language formerly exchanged between the parties, the intention of fulfilling this promise, may, perhaps, be regarded as doubtful, for Cobbett was not a man readily to forget the offences of a scurrilous adversary. If such intention really existed it is now one among the many cherished by the departed member, which death has interposed to prevent being carried into effect.

Cobbett did not wait long for an opportunity to address the house, for on the 7th of February, 1833, he appears among the honourable members who delivered their opinions on the usual motion for an address in an answer to the king's speech. He personally addressed



himself to the affairs of Ireland—the Whigs and political economists did not escape without severe castigation—and Mr. Macauley was selected as the especial object of his censure. On the bringing up of the report he again spoke at length, and when interrupted by the usual expressions of parliamentary impatience, “Question, question,” “Divide, divide,” he declared that a division should not take place for two hours unless he was allowed to explain his reasons to the house. This threat, as the character of the man afforded a presumption that it was not an idle one, secured to him the attention he required.

His parliamentary career displayed little of that originality which was looked for from the versatile author of the “Political Register,” and was on the whole marked by a calmness and moderation little to be expected. The great stain upon his conduct, as a member of the legislature, was his motion for an address to his majesty, praying him to dismiss Sir Robert Peel from the privy council. The absurd ground for this motion was the alteration of the currency made under the auspices of the right honourable baronet. A motion more frivolous,



more absurd, and with pain, it must be added, more disreputable to its author, was never made within the walls of either house of parliament. On the change in the currency, opinions have differed, and will continue to differ. But the honourable motives of Sir Robert Peel have never been questioned by any but Mr. Cobbett, and to inflict a severe mark of disgrace upon a distinguished statesman for a line of conduct conscientiously adopted in the discharge of his duty to the crown and country, would have been an act of injustice which few men, it may be hoped, in any station, would have dared to recommend. When Sir Robert Peel rose to address the house he was received with the most deafening cheers, which lasted upwards of a quarter of an hour. The division—for the motion was actually pressed to a division—was equally triumphant in his favour. In a house of three hundred and two members, four only were found to vote with Mr. Cobbett, leaving two hundred and ninety-eight to ratify the triumph of Sir Robert Peel. This unhappy step unquestionably destroyed Cobbett's influence both within and without the house.

He continued, however, to attend with great



regularity, and occasionally to take part in the debates. At the general election, which followed Sir Robert Peel's accession to the helm of power, he was again returned for Oldham, and resumed his duties in the new parliament without any reason to believe that his mortal career was approaching to an end. The motion of the Marquis of Chandos, on the malt tax, called forth all the interest which he was accustomed to take in agricultural questions. He remained in his place during the whole of the debate, and, as he stated, intended to answer at length the arguments of the advocates for the continuance of the tax, but was prevented by a sudden attack of a peculiar disease of the throat to which he was subject. From the effects of this evening, it is supposed that he never entirely recovered. He at length became seriously ill, but no apprehensions were entertained by the public, at least as to any fatal result. The news of his death burst on the great mass of his readers somewhat unexpectedly in the following communication from his eldest son, which was the first article in the "Register" of the 20th of June:—

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“ Clifford's Inn, Friday Morning, June 19, 1835.

“ It is my mournful duty to state, that the hand which has guided this work for thirty-three years has ceased to move ! The readers of the “ Register ” will, of course, look to this number for some particulars of the close of my poor father's life ; but they will, I am sure, be forgiving if they find them shortly stated. A great inclination to inflammation of the throat had caused him annoyance from time to time, for several years, and, as he got older, it enfeebled him more. He was suffering from one of these attacks during the late spring, and it will be recollected, that when the Marquis of Chandos brought on his motion for the repeal of the malt-tax, my father attempted to speak, but could not make his voice audible beyond the few members who sat round him. He remained to vote on that motion, and increased his ailment ; but on the voting of supplies on the nights of Friday, the 15th, and Monday, the 18th of May, he exerted himself so much, and sat so late, that he laid himself up. He determined, nevertheless, to attend the house again on the evening of the Marquis of Chandos's motion on agricultural distress, on the



25th of May, and the exertion of speaking and remaining late to vote on that occasion were too much for one already severely unwell. He went down to his farm early on the morning after this last debate, and had resolved to rest himself thoroughly and get rid of his hoarseness and inflammation. On Thursday night last he felt unusually well, and imprudently drank tea in the open air ; but he went to bed apparently in better health. In the early part of the night he was taken violently ill, and on Friday and Saturday was considered in a dangerous state by the medical attendant. On Sunday he revived again, and on Monday gave us hope that he would yet be well. He talked feebly, but in the most collected and sprightly manner, upon politics and farming ; wished for ' four days' rain' for the Cobbett-corn and the root crops ; and, on Wednesday, he could remain no longer shut up from fields, but desired to be carried round the farm ; which being done, he criticised the work that had been going on in his absence, and detected some little deviation from his orders, with all the quickness that was so remarkable in him. On Wednesday night he grew more and more feeble,



and was evidently sinking ; but he continued to answer with perfect clearness every question that was put to him. In the last half-hour his eyes became dim ; and at ten minues after one, P.M., he leaned back, closed them as if to sleep, and died without a gasp. He was seventy-three years old.

“ JOHN M. COBBETT.”

Such were the last days of this remarkable man.

#### FUNERAL OF WILLIAM COBBETT.

The funeral of this gentleman took place at Farnham, on the 27th of June, at half-past two o'clock. To this town, which is thirty-eight miles from London, many of those desirous of attending the funeral repaired in the first instance. As, however, the procession did not make its appearance there until twenty minutes past two o'clock, full time was allowed to all those desirous of inspecting the native town of this celebrated man, and of visiting the spot on which he was born, and which his own descriptions, his character, and his fame, have invested



with so deep and lively an interest. Scarce any of those, too, who had come the entire way from the farm of the deceased, failed, after they had seen his remains deposited in the grave, to go to see the house in which he was born. This house is situated at the southern extremity of the town. It is, and was as long as can be recollected, a public-house, and has borne the sign and gone by the name of the "Jolly Farmer." It is evidently a long time built, and is of considerable size. It has lately undergone a good many alterations, and some addition has been made to it in the rear; but the present owner, apparently with no small degree of pride, ushers the visitor into the front room, and points out one corner of it as that where the cupboard was placed from which "Cobbett himself" said he got his bread and cheese when a boy. Immediately at the back of the house lies an exceedingly steep sand rock, which is now partly planted. This rock commands a full view of the town and the surrounding country; and as his love for agricultural occupations was implanted by early habit and association, it is scarcely too much to infer that he imbibed the taste for that richness and beauty in English scenery which



he always professed, from the prospect which this rock affords.

The funeral procession quitted Normandy-farm at twelve o'clock. This farm is in the parish of Ash; a small and rather neat farm-house, with barns and other offices immediately about it, situated in a remote neighbourhood, between the two main London roads—the Bagshot-road and the Guildford-road—was the one in which this eminent man closed his life. It stands on Normandy-green, which is a small common, being a continuation of that immense waste called Bagshot-heath; it may be said, indeed, to be the southern extremity of that heath, for not half a mile south of the farm-house it ends, and you begin to mount the side of the ridge, in ascending which the first object of curiosity is Great Warnborough, whence the unfortunate but enterprising Morris Birkbeck went forth to the prairies of North America. In this secluded spot, miles from any great road, and free from all intrusion, surrounded by everything that was truly rustic and homely, Mr. Cobbett appears to have indulged in his fancy for that simple mode of life in which he was born and nursed; from which he was impelled by chance



or fate, but to which he seems to have leaned with delight during the whole of his life. The spot on which he first conceived the idea of mounting the coach, and coming to London, is close by. The scenes of his boyish days are scarcely out of sight of the house ; and " Crooksbury-hill," which he describes with so much enthusiasm in the first chapter of " The Year's Residence," shows its head a few miles to the west, and close to Farnham ;—

" And, as the hare, whom hounds and horns pursue,  
Pants to the place from whence at first he flew,"

he wrote of it and spoke of it as his resting-place from the vexations and the bustle of his active and eventful life, as his last earthly abode.

The body had been inclosed in a leaden coffin, with the inscription, " William Cobbett, born March 9, 1762 ; died 18th June, 1835." The hearse, in which it was conveyed to the burial place, was followed by three mourning-coaches, in which we observed the four sons of the deceased, Mr. John Leech, late member for the county, Mr. Fielden, M.P. (Mr. Cobbett's colleague), Mr. E. Leech, Captain Donnellan,



and other particular friends. It was joined at intervals by parties in chaises, on foot, and on horseback, at the different little greens or corners of by-roads that it passed. Drawn up on the side of one of these we observed Mr. O'Connell, and Mr. Harvey, whose carriage took its place in the procession; and shortly after, at another turning, it was joined by that of Mr. Williams, M.P., and Mr. Wakly, M.P. The train increased as it went on; and by the time it reached Farnham, thousands of labourers, with their wives and children, in their smock-frocks and straw hats, joined it. The street of the town was thronged, and every window seemed to have its party. The ceremony of interment was, of course, the usual one. The coffin, after the service was read over it, was lowered into a brick vault securely formed, and in a part of the churchyard where a headstone, with the inscription, "George Cobbett, 1760," indicates the grave of the unconscious grandfather of this celebrated political writer. Three large stone flags were placed over the coffin with a view to greater security.



## CHAPTER XIX.

COBBETT'S CHARACTER AND CONDUCT AS A HUSBAND—  
HIS OWN ACCOUNT OF HIS MATRIMONIAL LIFE.

HAVING closed our account of Cobbett's earthly career, it will be our duty to exhibit him in his domestic character in the several lights of a husband, a father, and a member of society;—apart from all political friendship and animosities—and rather amid the prosperities or the afflictions of his life. In these pages the reader has all along, we hope, been taking Cobbett's history of himself, not ours of him, and acting upon the same principles which has tempted us to render this work characteristic rather than critical by adopting auto-biography in lieu of biography in the third person; we shall, in what remains to be said of our remark-



able subject—still bring forward his own views of his conduct towards his wife, his children, and mankind. We commence with the history of his matrimonial career as fairly deserving precedence :—

“ I never,” he says, “ *dangled* about at the heels of my wife ; seldom, very seldom, ever *walked out*, as it is called, with her ; I never ‘ *went a walking*’ in the whole course of my life ; never went to walk without having some *object* in view other than the walk ; and, as I never could walk at a slow pace, it would have been *hard work* for her to keep up with me ; so that, in the nearly forty years of our married life, we have not walked out together, perhaps, twenty times. I hate a *dangler*, who is more like a footman than a husband. It is very cheap to be kind in *trifles* ; but that which rivets the affections is not to be purchased with money. The great thing of all, however, is to prove your anxiety at those times of peril to her, and for which times you, nevertheless, wish. Upon those occasions I was never from home, be the necessity for it ever so great : it was my rule, that every thing must give way to that.”

Cobbett immediately proceeds to illustrate



his conduct upon this last point with the following striking anecdote:—

“ I began my young marriage days in and near Philadelphia. At one of those times to which I have just alluded, in the middle of the burning hot month of July, I was greatly afraid of fatal consequences to my wife for want of sleep, she not having, after the great danger was over, had any sleep for more than forty-eight hours. All great cities, in hot countries, are, I believe, full of dogs; and they, in the very hot weather, keep up, during the night, a horrible barking and fighting and howling. Upon the particular occasion to which I am adverting, they made a noise so terrible and so unremitted, that it was next to impossible that even a person in full health and free from pain should obtain a minute's sleep. I was, about nine in the evening, sitting by the bed: ‘ I do think,’ said she, ‘ that I could go to sleep *now*, if it were not *for the dogs*.’ Down stairs I went, and out I sallied, in my shirt and trowsers, and without shoes and stockings; and, going to a heap of stones lying beside the road, set to work upon the dogs, going backward and forward, and keeping them at two or three hundred yards’



distance from the house. I walked thus the whole night, barefooted, lest the noise of my shoes might possibly reach her ears; and I remember that the bricks of the causeway were, even in the night, so hot as to be disagreeable to my feet. My exertions produced the desired effect: a sleep of several hours was the consequence; and, at eight o'clock in the morning, off went I to a day's business, which was to end at six in the evening."

Again—

"Women are all patriots of the soil; and when her neighbours used to ask my wife whether *all* English husbands were like hers, she boldly answered in the affirmative. I had business to occupy the whole of my time, Sundays and week-days, except sleeping hours; but I used to make time to assist her in the taking care of her baby, and in all sorts of things: get up, light her fire, boil her tea-kettle, carry her up warm water in cold weather, take the child while she dressed herself and got the breakfast ready, then breakfast, get her in water and wood for the day, then dress myself neatly, and sally forth to my business. The moment that was over I used to hasten back to



her again ; and I no more thought of spending a moment *away from her*, unless business compelled me, than I thought of quitting the country and going to sea. The *thunder* and *lightning* are tremendous in America, compared with what they are in England. My wife was, at one time, very much afraid of thunder and lightning ; and as is the feeling of all such women, and, indeed, all men too, she wanted company, and particularly her husband, in those times of danger. I knew well, of course, that my presence would not diminish the danger ; but, be I at what I might, if within reach of home, I used to quit my business and hasten to her, the moment I perceived a thunder-storm approaching. Scores of miles have I, first and last, *run* on this errand, in the streets of Philadelphia ! The Frenchmen, who were my scholars, used to laugh at me exceedingly on this account ; and sometimes, when I was making an appointment with them, they would say, with a smile and a bow, ‘ *Sauve la tonnere toujours, Monsieur Cobbett.* ’ ”

The last instance of Cobbett's anxiety upon these delicate occasions, occurred under the distressing circumstances of his Newgate impri-



sonment. He narrates this fact with great bitterness :—

“ In the year 1809, some English local militiamen were *flogged*, in the Isle of Ely, in England, under a guard of *Hanoverians*, then stationed in England. I, reading an account of this in a London newspaper, called the “ Courier ” expressed my indignation at it in such terms as it became an Englishman to do. The Attorney-General, Gibbs, was set upon me ; he harassed me for nearly a year, then brought me to trial, and I was, by Ellenborough, Grose, Le Blanc, and Bailey, sentenced to *two years’ imprisonment* in Newgate, to pay a fine to *the king* of a *thousand pounds*, and to be held in heavy bail for *seven years* after the expiration of the imprisonment ! Every one regarded it as a sentence of *death*. I lived in the country at the time, seventy miles from London ; I had a farm on my hands ; I had a family of small children, amongst whom I had constantly lived ; I had a most anxious and devoted wife, who was, too, in that state, which rendered the separation more painful ten-fold. I was put into a place amongst *felons*, from which I had to rescue myself at the price of *twelve guineas a week*



for the whole of the two years. The *king*, poor man ! was, at the close of my imprisonment, not *in a condition* to receive the *thousand pounds* ; but his son, the present king, punctually received it ‘ *in his name and behalf* ;’ and he keeps it still.

“ The sentence, though it proved not to be one of *death*, was, in effect, one of *ruin*, as far as then-possessed property went. But this really appeared as nothing, compared with the circumstance, that I must now have *a child born in a felons’ jail*, or be absent from the scene at the time of the birth. My wife, who had come to see me for the last time previous to her lying-in, perceiving my deep dejection at the approach of her departure for Botley, resolved not to go ; and actually went and took a lodging as near to Newgate as she could find one, in order that the communication between us might be as speedy as possible ; and in order that I might see the doctor, and receive assurances from him relative to her state. The nearest lodging that she could find was in Skinner-street, at the corner of a street leading to Smithfield. So that there she was, amidst the incessant rattle of coaches and butchers’ carts,



and the noise of cattle, dogs, and bawling men ; instead of being in a quiet and commodious country-house, with neighbours and servants and everything necessary about her. Yet, so great is the power of the mind in such cases, she, though the circumstances proved uncommonly perilous, and were attended with the loss of the child, bore her sufferings with the greatest composure, because, at any minute she could send a message to, and hear from, me. If she had gone to Botley, leaving me in that state of anxiety in which she saw me, I am satisfied that she would have died ; and that event taking place at such a distance from me, how was I to contemplate her corpse, surrounded by her distracted children, and to have escaped death, or madness, myself ? If such was not the effect of this merciless act of the government towards me, that amiable body may be well assured that I have *taken and recorded the will for the deed*, and that as such it will live in my memory as long as that memory shall last."

But although Cobbett in the above sentence alludes to the comforts which his wife would have enjoyed at Botley in the attention of ser-



vants, &c., yet it would appear that his "good thrift" did not allow of these conveniences or luxuries in early life until his circumstances warranted the indulgence.

"Till I had a second child," he says, "no servant ever entered my house, though well able to keep one; and never, in my whole life, did I live in a house so clean, in such trim order, and never have I eaten or drunk, or slept or dressed, in a manner so perfectly to my fancy, as I did then. I had a great deal of business to attend to, that took me a great part of the day from home, but, whenever I could spare a minute from business, the child was in my arms; I rendered the mother's labour as light as I could; any bit of food satisfied me; when watching was necessary, we shared it between us; and that famous Grammar for teaching French people English, which has been for thirty years, and still is, the great work of this kind, throughout all America, and in every nation in Europe, was written by me, in hours not employed in business, and, in great part, during my share of the night-watchings over a sick, and then only child, who, after lingering many months, died in my arms.

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“ This was the way that we went on: this was the way that we *began* the married life; and surely, that which we did with pleasure no young couple, unendowed with fortune, ought to be ashamed to do.”

We could not conclude this chapter with a higher compliment to Mrs. Cobbett, than that which is conveyed by her husband in the following sentence:—

“ I have had all the numerous and indescribable delights of home and children, and, at the same time, all the bachelor’s freedom from domestic cares: and to this cause, far more than to any other, my readers owe those labours, which I never could have performed, if even the slightest degree of want of confidence at home had ever once entered into my mind.”



## CHAPTER XX.

COBBETT'S CHARACTER AND CONDUCT IN HIS FAMILY AS  
A FATHER—HIS TREATMENT OF HIS CHILDREN, AND  
SYSTEM OF EDUCATION.

OUR next theme is Cobbett's character of a father—his fondness for—his education of—his duties towards his children. These matters will be eminently developed in the following passages selected from various parts of Cobbett's works, every way interesting, and in all respects deserving the deepest attention:—

“Now, proceeding to relate,” he writes, when speaking of the early education of his family, “what was, in this respect, my line of conduct, I am not pretending that *every* man, and particularly every man living in a *town*, can, in all respects, do as I did in the rearing up of children. But, in many respects,

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any man may, whatever may be his state of life. For I did not lead an idle life; I had to work constantly for the means of living; my occupation required unremitting attention; I had nothing but my labour to rely on; and I had no friend, to whom, in case of need, I could fly for assistance: I always saw the possibility, and even the probability, of being totally ruined by the hand of power; but, happen what would, I was resolved, that, as long as I could cause them to do it, my children should lead happy lives; and happy lives they did lead, if ever children did in this whole world.

“ The first thing that I did, when the fourth child had come, was to *get into the country*, and so far as to render a going backward and forward to London, at short intervals, quite out of the question. Thus was *health*, the greatest of all things, provided for, as far as I was able to make the provision. Next, my being *always at home*, was secured as far as possible; always with them to set an example of early rising, sobriety, and application to something or other. Children, and especially boys, will have some out-of-doors pursuits; and it was my duty to



lead them to choose such pursuits as combined future utility with present innocence. Each his flower-bed, little garden, plantation of trees; rabbits, dogs, asses, horses, pheasants, and hares; hoes, spades, whips, guns; always some object of lively interest, and as much *earnestness* and *bustle* about the various objects as if our living had solely depended upon them. I made every thing give way to the great object of making their lives happy and innocent. I did not know what they might be in time, or what might be my lot; but I was resolved not to be the cause of their being unhappy *then*, let what might become of us afterwards. I was, as I am, of opinion, that it is injurious to the mind to press *book-learning* upon it at an *early age*: I always felt pain for poor little things, set up, before 'company,' to repeat verses, or bits of plays, at six or eight years old. I have sometimes not known which way to look, when a mother (and, too often, a father), whom I could not but respect on account of her fondness for her child, has forced the feeble-voiced eighth wonder of the world, to stand with its little hand stretched out, spouting the *soliloquy of Hamlet*, or some such thing. I



remember, on one occasion, a little pale-faced creature, only five years old, was brought in, after the *feeding* part of the dinner was over, first to take his regular half-glass of vintner's brewings, commonly called wine, and then to treat us to a display of his wonderful genius. The subject was a speech of a robust and bold youth, in a Scotch play, the title of which I have forgotten, but the speech began with 'My name is Norval: on the Grampian Hills my father feeds his flocks . . .' And this in a voice so weak and distressing as to put me in mind of the plaintive squeaking of little pigs when the sow is lying on them. As we were going home (one of my boys and I) he, after a silence of half a mile perhaps, rode up close to the side of my horse, and said, 'Papa, where *be* the *Grampian Hills*?' 'Oh,' said I, 'they are in Scotland; poor, barren, beggarly places, covered with heath and rushes, ten times as barren as Sherril Heath.' 'But,' said he, 'how could that little boy's father feed *his flocks* there, then?' I was ready to tumble off the horse with laughing."

Upon this subject—the considering of health as the "first good." Cobbett elsewhere lays a wise and earnest stress:—



“Every sensible father must know that the possession of riches do not, never did, and never can, afford even a chance of additional happiness, it is his duty to inculcate in the minds of his children to make no sacrifice of principle, of moral obligation of any sort, in order to obtain riches, or distinction; and it is a duty still more imperative on him, not to expose them to the risk of loss of health, or diminution of strength, for purposes which have, either directly or indirectly, the acquiring of riches in view, whether for himself or for them.

“With these principles immoveably implanted in my mind, I became the father of a family, and on these principles I have reared that family. Being myself fond of *book-learning*, and knowing well its powers, I naturally wished them to possess it too; but never did I *impose it* upon any of them. My first duty was to make them *healthy* and *strong*, if I could, and to give them as much enjoyment of life as possible. Born and bred up in the sweet air myself, I was resolved that they should be bred up in it too. Enjoying rural scenes and sports, as I had done, when a boy, as much as any one that ever was born, I was resolved, that they



should have the same enjoyments tendered to them. When I was a very little boy, I was, in the barley-sowing season, going along by the side of a field, near Waverly Abbey; the primroses and blue-bells bespangled the banks on both sides of me; a thousand linnets singing in a spreading oak over my head; while the jingle of the traces and the whistling of the ploughboys saluted my ear from over the hedge; and, as it were to snatch me from the enchantment, the hounds, at that instant, having started a hare in the hanger on the other side of the field, came up scampering over it in full cry, taking me after them many a mile. I was not more than eight years old; but this particular scene has presented itself to my mind many times every year from that day to this. I always enjoy it over again; and I was resolved to give, if possible, the same enjoyments to my children.

“To teach the children the habit of *early rising* was a great object; and every one knows how young people cling to their beds, and how loth they are to go to those beds. This was a capital matter; because, here were *industry* and *health* both at stake. Yet, I avoided *command*



even here ; and merely offered a *reward*. The child that was *down stairs* first, was called the *LARK for that day*; and, further, *sat at my right hand at dinner*. They soon discovered, that to rise early, they must *go to bed early*; and thus was this most important object secured, with regard to girls as well as boys. Nothing more inconvenient, and, indeed, more disgusting, than to have to do with girls, or young women, who lounge in bed: 'A little more sleep, a little more slumber, a little more folding of the hands to sleep.' Solomon knew them well: he had, I dare say, seen the breakfast cooling, carriages and horses and servants waiting, the sun coming burning on, the day wasting, the night growing dark too early, appointments broken, and the objects of journeys defeated; and all this from the lolloping in bed of persons who ought to have risen with the sun. No beauty, no modesty, no accomplishments, are a compensation for the effects of laziness in women; and, of all the proofs of laziness, none is so unequivocal as that of lying late in bed. Love makes men overlook this vice (for it is a *vice*), for a *while*; but, this does not last for life. Besides, *health* demands early rising: the management



of a house imperiously demands it ; but *health*, that most precious possession, without which there is nothing else worth possessing, demands it too. The *morning air* is the most wholesome and strengthening : even in crowded cities, men might do pretty well with the aid of the morning air ; but how are they to *rise* early, if they go to bed *late* ?

“ But, to do the things I did, you must *love home* yourself ; to rear up children in this manner, you must *live with them* ; you must make them, too, *feel*, by your conduct, that you *prefer* this to any other mode of passing your time. All men cannot lead this sort of life, but many may ; and all much more than many do. My occupation, to be sure, was chiefly carried on *at home* ; but, I had always enough to do ; I never spent an idle week, or even day, in my whole life. Yet I found time to talk with them, to walk, or ride, about *with them* ; and when forced to go from home, always took one or more with me. You must be good-tempered, too, with them ; they must like *your* company better than any other person’s ; they must not wish you away, not fear your coming back, not look upon your departure as a *holiday*. When



my business kept me away from the *scrabbling*-table, a petition often came, that I would go and *talk* with the group, and the bearer generally was the youngest, being the most likely to succeed. When I went from home, all followed me to the outer-gate, and looked after me, till the carriage, or horse, was out of sight. At the time appointed for my return, all were prepared to meet me; and if it were late at night, they sat up as long as they were able to keep their eyes open. This love of parents, and this constant pleasure *at home*, made them not even think of seeking pleasure abroad; and they, thus, were kept from vicious playmates and early corruption.

“This is the age, too, to teach children to be *trust-worthy*, and to be *merciful* and *humane*. We lived in a *garden* of about two acres, partly kitchen-garden with walls, partly shrubbery and trees, and partly grass. There were the *peaches*, as tempting as any that ever grew, and yet as safe from fingers as if no child were ever in the garden. It was not necessary to *forbid*. The blackbirds, the thrushes, the white-throats, and even that very shy bird the goldfinch, had their nests and bred up their young-ones, in



great abundance, all about this little spot, constantly the play-place of six children; and one of the latter had its nest, and brought up its young-ones, in a *raspberry-bush*, within two yards of a walk, and at the time that we were gathering the ripe raspberries. We give *dogs*, and justly, great credit for sagacity and memory; but the following two most curious instances, which I should not venture to state, if there were not so many witnesses to the facts, in my neighbours at Botley, as well as in my own family, will show, that *birds* are not, in this respect, inferior to the canine race. All country people know that the *skylark* is a very shy bird; that its abode is in the open fields: that it settles on the ground only; that it seeks safety in the wideness of space; that it avoids enclosures, and is never seen in gardens. A part of our ground was a grass-plat of about *forty rods*, or a quarter of an acre, which, one year, was left to be mowed for hay. A pair of larks, coming out of the fields into the middle of a pretty populous village, chose to make their nest in the middle of this little spot, and at not more than about *thirty-five yards* from one of the doors of the house, in which there were about twelve persons



living, and six of those children, who had constant access to all parts of the ground. There we saw the cock rising up and singing, then taking his turn upon the eggs; and by-and-by, we observed him cease to sing, and saw them both *constantly engaged in bringing food to the young ones*. No unintelligible hint to fathers and mothers of the human race, who have, before marriage, taken delight in *music*. But the time came for *mowing the grass*! I waited a good many days for the brood to get away; but, at last, I determined on the day; and if the larks were there still, to leave a patch of grass standing round them. In order not to keep them in dread longer than necessary, I brought three able mowers, who would cut the whole in about an hour; and as the plat was nearly circular, set them to mow *round*, beginning at the outside. And now for sagacity indeed! The moment the men began to whet their scythes, the two old larks began to flutter over the nest, and to make a great clamour. When the men began to mow, they flew round and round, stooping so low, when near the men, as almost to touch their bodies, making a great chattering at the same time;



but before the men had got round with the second swarth, they flew to the nest, and away they went, young ones and all, across the river, at the foot of the ground, and settled in the long grass in my neighbour's orchard.

“ The other instance relates to a house-marten. It is well known that these birds build their nests under the eaves of inhabited houses, and sometimes under those of door porches ; but we had one that built its nest *in the house*, and upon the top of a common door-case, the door of which opened into a room out of the main passage into the house. Perceiving the marten had begun to build its nest here, we kept the front door open in the day-time ; but were obliged to fasten it at night. It went on, had eggs, young ones, and the young ones flew. I used to open the door in the morning early, and then the birds carried on their affairs till night. The next *year* the marten came again, and had *another brood in the same place*. It found its *old nest* ; and having repaired it, and put it in order, went on again in the former way ; and it would, I dare say, have continued to come to the end of its life, if we had remained there so long, notwithstanding there



were six healthy children in the house, making just as much noise as they pleased.

“ Now, what *sagacity* in these birds, to discover that those were places of safety ! And how happy must it have made us, the parents, to be *sure* that our children had thus deeply imbibed habits the contrary of cruelty ! For, be it engraven on your heart, young man, that whatever appearances may say to the contrary, *cruelty* is always accompanied with *cowardice*, and also with *perfidy*, when that is called for by the circumstances of the case ; and that *habitual* acts of cruelty to other creatures, will, nine times out of ten, produce, when the power is possessed, cruelty to human beings. The ill-usage of *horses*, and particularly *asses*, is a grave and a just charge against this nation. No other nation on earth is guilty of it to the same extent. Not only by *blows*, but by *privation*, are we cruel towards these useful, docile, and patient creatures ; and especially towards the last, which is the most docile, and patient, and laborious of the two, while the food that satisfies it is of the coarsest and least costly kind, and in quantity so small ! In the habitual ill-treatment of this animal, which, in



addition to all its labours, has the milk taken from its young ones to administer a remedy for our ailments, there is something that bespeaks *ingratitude* hardly to be described. In a "Register" that I wrote from Long Island, I said, that amongst all the things of which I had been bereft, I regretted no one so much as a very diminutive *mare*, on which my children had all, in succession, learned to ride. She was become useless for them, and, indeed, for any other purpose; but the recollection of her was so entwined with so many past circumstances, which, at that distance, my mind conjured up, that I really was very uneasy, lest she should fall into cruel hands. By good luck she was, after a while, turned out on the wide world to shift for herself; and when we got back, and had a place for her to *stand* in, from her native forest we brought her to Kensington, and she is now at Barn-Elm, about twenty-six years old, and I dare say, as fat as a mole. Now, not only have I no moral *right* (considering my ability to pay for keep), to deprive her of life; but it would be *unjust* and *ungrateful* in me to withhold from her sufficient food and lodging



to make life as pleasant as possible while that life lasts.

Such was Cobbett's method of managing his children as regarded bodily health and the qualities of the heart. The next chapter will develop his system of moral education, and the elementary, though with him practical instruction of the mind.

Y



## CHAPTER XXI.

## DEVELOPMENT OF COBBETT'S SYSTEM OF FAMILY EDUCATION, CONTINUED AND CONCLUDED.

COBBETT'S education of his children, while it practically illustrates its own usefulness, forms a remarkable indication of his character. The readers will appreciate it in this double light, and survey the picture which he graphically paints for them, as presenting some of the features of his own mind in the relief of the canvass on which he depicts the embryo and formation of the minds of his offspring.

Men's circumstances are so various; there is such a great variety in their situations in life, their business, the extent of their pecuniary means, the local state in which they are placed, their internal resources; the variety in all these



respects is so great, that, as applicable to *every* family, it would be impossible to lay down any set of rules, or maxims, touching *every* matter relating to the management and rearing up of children.

“In giving an account, therefore,” writes Cobbett, “of *my own* conduct, in this respect, I am not to be understood as supposing, that *every* father *can*, or ought, to attempt to do *the same*; but while it will be seen, that there are *many*, and these the most important parts of that conduct, that *all* fathers may imitate, if they choose, there is no part of it which thousands and thousands of fathers might not adopt and pursue, and adhere to, to the very letter.

“I effected every thing without scolding, and even without *command*. My children are a family of *scholars*, each sex its appropriate species of learning; and, I could safely take my oath, that I never *ordered* a child of mine, son or daughter, *to look into a book*, in my life. My two eldest sons, when about eight years old, were, for the sake of their health, placed for a very short time, at a clergyman’s at Micheldever, and my eldest daughter, a little older, at a school a few miles from Botley, to avoid



taking them to London in the winter. But, with these exceptions, never had they, while children, *teacher* of any description; and I never, and nobody else, ever taught any one of them to read, write, or any thing else, except in *conversation*; and yet, no man was ever more anxious to be the father of a family of clever and learned persons.

“ I accomplished my purpose *indirectly*. The first thing of all was *health*, which was secured by the deeply-interesting and never-ending *sports of the field* and *pleasures of the garden*. Luckily these things were treated of in *books* and *pictures* of endless variety; so that on *wet days*, in *long evenings*, these came into play. A large, strong table, in the middle of the room, their mother sitting at her work, used to be surrounded with them, the baby, if big enough, set up in a high chair. Here were ink-stands, pens, pencils, India rubber, and paper, all in abundance, and every one scrabbled about as he or she pleased. There were prints of animals of all sorts; books treating of them: others treating of gardening, of flowers, of husbandry, of hunting, coursing, shooting, fishing, planting, and, in short, of every thing, with re-



gard to which *we had something to do*. One would be trying to imitate a bit of my writing, another *drawing* the pictures of some of our dogs or horses, a third poking over *Bewick's Quadrupeds*, and picking out what he said about them ; but our book of never-failing resource was the *French Maison Rustique, or Farm-House*, which, it is said, was the book that first tempted Duquesnois (I think that was the name), the famous physician, in the reign of Louis XIV., *to learn to read*. Here all the *four-legged animals*, from the horse down to the mouse, *portraits* and all ; all the *birds, reptiles, insects* ; all the modes of rearing, managing, and using the tame ones ; all the modes of taking the wild ones, and of destroying those that are mischievous ; all the various traps, springs, nets ; all the implements of husbandry and gardening ; all the labours of the field and the garden exhibited, as well as the rest, in plates : and, there was I, in my leisure moments, to join this inquisitive group, to read the *French*, and tell them what it meant in *English*, when the picture did not sufficiently explain itself. I never have been without a copy of this book for forty years, except during the



time that I was fleeing from the dungeons of Castlereagh and Sidmouth, in 1817; and, when I got to Long Island, the *first book I bought* was another *Maison Rustique*.

“What need had we of *schools*? What need of *teachers*? What need of *scolding* and *force*, to induce children to read, write, and love books? What need of *cards*, *dice*, or of any *games*, to ‘*kill time* ;’ but, in fact, to implant in the infant heart a love of *gaming*, one of the most destructive of all human vices? We did not want to ‘*kill time* :’ we were always *busy*. wet weather or dry weather, winter or summer, There was no *force* in any case; no *command*; no *authority*; none of these was ever wanted.

“I know of few greater misfortunes than that of breeding up things to be *school-boys all their lives*. It is not, that I have so many wonders of the world: it is that I have pursued a rational plan of education, and one that any man may pursue, if he will, with similar effects. I remember, too, that I myself had had a sportsman-education. I ran after the hare-hounds at the age of *nine or ten*. I have many and many a day left the rooks to dig up the wheat and peas, while I followed the



hounds; and have returned home at dark night, with my legs full of thorns and my belly empty, to go supperless to bed and congratulate myself if I escaped a flogging; I was *sure* of these consequences, but that had not the smallest effect in restraining me. All the lectures, all the threats, vanished from my mind in a moment upon hearing the first cry of the hounds, at which my heart used to be ready to bound out of my body. I *remembered* all this, I traced to this taste my contempt for card-playing and for all childish and effeminate amusements. And, therefore, I resolved to leave the same course freely open to my sons. This is *my plan* of education, others may follow what plan they please.

“ I have always encouraged my sons to pursue manly sports. They have, until the age of fourteen or fifteen, spent their time by day, chiefly amongst horses and dogs, and in the fields and farm-yards; and their candle-light has been spent chiefly in reading books about hunting and shooting, and about dogs and horses. I have supplied them plentifully with *books* and *prints* relating to these matters. They have *drawn* horses, *dogs*, and game,



themselves. These things, in which they took so deep an interest, not only engaged their attention, and wholly kept them from all taste for, and even all knowledge of *cards* and other senseless amusements; but, they led them *to read and write of their own accord*; and, *never in my life have I set them a copy in writing, nor attempted to teach them a word of reading.* They have learned to read by looking into books about dogs and game; and they have learned to write by imitating my writing, and by writing endless letters to me, when I have been from home, about their dogs and other rural concerns.

“ The book-learning *crept in* of its own accord, by imperceptible degrees. Children naturally want to be *like* their parents, and *to do what they do*; the boys following their father, and the girls their mother; and, as I was always *writing or reading*, mine naturally desired to do something in the same way. But, at the same time, they heard no talk from *fools or drinkers*; saw me with no idle, gabbling, empty companions; saw no vain and affected coxcombs, and no tawdry and extravagant women; saw no nasty gormandizing; and



heard no gabble about play-houses and romances, and the other nonsense that fit boys to be lobby-loungers, and girls to be the ruin of industrious and frugal young men.

“ We wanted no stimulants of this sort to *keep up our spirits* : our various pleasing pursuits were quite sufficient for that ; and the *book-learning* came amongst the rest of the pleasures, to which it was, in some sort, necessary. I remember that, one year, I raised a prodigious crop of fine *melons*, under hand-glasses ; and I learned how to do it from a gardening *book* ; or, at least, that book was necessary to remind me of the details. Having passed part of an evening in talking to the boys about getting this crop, ‘ Come,’ said I, ‘ now, let us *read the book*.’ Then the book came forth, and to work we went, following very strictly the precepts of the book. I read the thing but once, but the eldest boy read it, perhaps, twenty times over ; and explained all about the matter to the others. Why here was a *motive* ! Then he had to tell the garden-labourer *what to do* to the melons. Now, I will engage, that more was really *learned* by this single *lesson* than would have been learned



by spending, at this son's age, a year at school ; and he *happy* and *delighted* all the while. When any dispute arose amongst them about hunting or shooting, or any other of their pursuits, they, by degrees, found out the way of settling it by reference to some book ; and when any difficulty occurred, as to the meaning, they referred to me, who, if at home, *always instantly attended to them*, in these matters.

“ They began writing by taking words out of *printed books* ; finding out which letter was which, by asking me, or asking those who knew the letters one from another ; and by imitating bits of my writing, it is surprising how soon they began to write a hand like mine, very small, very faint-stroked, and nearly plain as print. The first use that any one of them made of the pen, was to *write to me*, though in the same house with them. They began doing this in mere *scratches*, before they knew how to make any one letter ; and as I was always folding up letters and directing them, so were they ; and they were *sure* to receive a *prompt answer* with most *encouraging* compliments. All the meddlings and teazings of friends, and, what was more serious, the pressing prayers of their



anxious mother, about sending them to *school*, I withstood without the slightest effect on my resolution. As to friends, preferring my own judgment to theirs, I did not care much ; but an expression of anxiety, implying a doubt of the soundness of my own judgment, coming, perhaps, twenty times a day from her whose care they were as well as mine, was not a matter to smile at, and very great trouble it did give me. My answer at last was, as to the boys, I want them to be *like me* ; and as to the girls, in whose hands can they be so safe as in *yours* ? Therefore my resolution is taken : *go to school they shall not.*

“ Nothing is much more annoying than the *intermeddling of friends*, in a case like this. The wife appeals to *them*, and *good breeding*, that is to say, *nonsense*, is sure to put them on *her side*. Then they, particularly the *women*, when describing the *surprising progress* made by their *own sons* at school, used, if one of mine were present, to turn to him, and ask, to what school *he went*, and what *he was learning* ? I leave any one to judge of *his* opinion of her ; and whether *he* would like her the better for that ! ‘ Bless me, so tall, and *not learned* any



thing *yet!* ‘Oh yes, he has,’ I used to say, ‘he has learned to ride, and hunt, and shoot, and fish, and look after cattle and sheep, and to work in the garden, and to feed his dogs, and to go from village to village in the dark.’ This was the way I used to manage with troublesome customers of this sort. And how glad the children used to be, when they got clear of such criticising people! And how grateful they felt to me for the *protection* which they saw that I gave them against that state of restraint, of which other people’s boys complained! Go whither they might, they found no place so pleasant as home, and no soul that came near them affording them so many means of gratification as they received from me.”

“In this happy state we lived, until the year 1810, when the government laid its merciless fangs upon me, dragged me from these delights, and *crammed me into a jail amongst felons*; This added to the difficulties of my task of *teaching*; for now I was snatched away from the *only* scene in which it could, as I thought, properly be executed. But even these difficulties were got over. The blow was, to be



sure, a terrible one ; and, oh God ! how was it felt by these poor children ! It was in the month of July when the horrible sentence was passed upon me. My wife, having left her children in the care of her good and affectionate sister, was in London, waiting to know the doom of her husband. When the news arrived at Botley, the three boys, one eleven, another nine, and the other seven, years old, were hoeing cabbages in that garden which had been the source of so much delight. When the account of the savage sentence was brought to them, the youngest could not, for some time, be made to understand what a *jail* was ; and, when he did, he, all in a tremor, exclaimed, ‘ Now I’m sure, William, that PAPA is not in a place *like that* ! ’ The other, in order to disguise his tears and smother his sobs, fell to work with the hoe, and *chopped about like a blind person*. This account, when it reached me, affected me more, filled me with deeper resentment, than any other circumstance. And, oh ! how I despise the wretches who talk of my *vindictiveness* ; of my *exultation* at the confusion of those who inflicted those sufferings ! How I despise the base creatures, the crawling



slaves, the callous and cowardly hypocrites, who affect to be '*shocked*' (tender souls!) at my expressions of *joy*, at the death of Gibbs, Ellenborough, Percival, Liverpool, Canning, and the rest of the tribe that I have already seen out, and at the fatal workings of *that system*, for endeavouring to check which I was thus punished! How I despise these wretches, and how I, above all things, enjoy their ruin, and anticipate their utter beggary! What! I am to forgive, am I, injuries like this; and that, too, without any *atonement*? Oh, no! I have not so read the Holy Scriptures; I have not, from them, learned that I am not to rejoice at the fall of unjust foes; and it makes a part of my happiness to be able *to tell millions of men* that I do thus rejoice, and that I have the means of calling on so many just and merciful men to rejoice along with me.

“Now, then, the *book-learning* was forced upon us. I had a *farm* in hand. It was necessary that I should be constantly informed of what was doing. I gave *all the orders*, whether as to purchases, sales, ploughing, sowing, breeding; in short, with regard to every thing, and the things were endless in number and variety,



and always full of interest. My eldest son and daughter could now write well and fast. One or the other of these was always at Botley ; and I had with me (having hired the best part of the keeper's house) one or two, besides either this brother or sister ; the mother coming up to town about once in two or three months, leaving the house and children in the care of her sister. We had a HAMPER, with a lock and two keys, which came up once a week, or oftener, bringing me fruit of all sorts of country fare, for the carriage of which, cost free, I was indebted to as good a man as ever God created, the late Mr. George Rogers, of Southampton, who, in the prime of life, died deeply lamented by thousands, but by none more deeply than by me and my family, who have to thank him, and the whole of his excellent family, for benefits and marks of kindness without number.

“ This HAMPER, which was always, at both ends of the line, looked for with the most lively feelings, became our *school*. It brought me a *journal of labours, proceedings, and occurrences*, written on paper of shape and size uniform, and so contrived, as to margins, as to admit of bind-



ing. The journal used, when my son was the writer, to be interspersed with drawings of our dogs, colts, or any thing that he wanted me to have a correct idea of. The hamper brought me plants, bulbs, and the like, that I might *see* the size of them ; and always every one sent his or her *most beautiful flowers* ; the earliest violets, and primroses, and cowslips, and blue-bells ; the earliest twigs of trees ; and, in short, every thing that they thought calculated to delight me. The moment the hamper arrived, I, casting aside every thing else, set to work to answer *every question*, to give new directions, and to add anything likely to give pleasure at Botley. *Every* hamper brought one ‘*letter*,’ as they called it, if not more, from every child ; and to *every* letter I wrote *an answer*, sealed up and sent to the party, being sure that that was the way to produce other and better letters ; for, though they could not read what I wrote, and though their own consisted at first of mere *scratches*, and afterwards, for a while, of a few words written down for them to imitate, I always thanked them for their ‘*pretty letter* ;’ and never expressed any wish to see them *write better* ; but took care to write in a very neat



and plain hand *myself*, and to do up my letter in a very neat manner.

“ Thus, while the ferocious tigers thought I was doomed to incessant mortification, and to rage that must extinguish my mental powers, I found in my children, and in their spotless and courageous and most affectionate mother, delights to which the callous hearts of those tigers were strangers. ‘ Heaven first taught letters for some wretch’s aid.’ How often did this line of Pope occur to me when I opened the little *spuddling* ‘ letters’ from Botley ! This correspondence occupied a good part of my time : I had all the children with me, turn and turn about ; and, in order to give the boys exercise, and to give the two eldest an opportunity of beginning to learn French, I used, for a part of the two years, to send them a few hours in the day to an Abbé, who lived in Castle-street, Holborn. All this was a great relaxation to my mind ; and, when I had to return to my literary labours, I returned *fresh* and cheerful, full of vigour, and *full of hope*, of finally seeing my unjust and merciless foes at my feet, and that, too, without caring a straw on whom their fall might bring calamity, so that my own

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family were safe ; because, say what any one might, the *community, taken as a whole*, had *suffered this thing to be done unto us*.

“ The paying of the work-people, the keeping of the accounts, the referring to books, the writing and reading of letters ; this everlasting mixture of amusement with book-learning, made me, almost to my own surprise, find, at the end of the two years, that I had a parcel of *scholars* growing up about me ; and, long before the end of the time, I had *dictated many Registers* to my two eldest children. Then, there was *copying out* of books, which taught *spelling correctly*. The calculations about the farming affairs forced arithmetic upon us : the *use*, the *necessity*, of the thing, led to the study. By-and-by, we had to look into the *laws* to know what to do about the *highways*, about the *game*, about the *poor*, and all rural and *parochial* affairs. I was, indeed, by the fangs of the government, defeated in my fondly-cherished project of making my sons farmers on their own land, and keeping them from all temptation to seek vicious and enervating enjoyments ; but those fangs, merciless as they had been, had not been able to prevent me from laying in for their lives a store of



useful information, habits of industry, care, sobriety, and a taste for innocent, healthful, and manly pleasures: the fangs had made me and them penniless; but, they had not been able to take from us our health or our mental possessions; and these were ready for application as circumstances might ordain.

“After the age that I have now been speaking of, *fourteen*, I suppose every one *became* a reader and writer according to fancy. As to *books*, with the exception of the *Poets*, I never bought, in my whole life, any one that I did not *want* for some purpose of *utility*, and of *practical utility* too. I have two or three times had the whole collection snatched away from me; and have begun again to get them together as they were wanted. Go and kick an Ant’s nest about, and you will see the little laborious, courageous creatures *instantly* set to work to get it together again; and if you do this ten times over, ten times over they will do the same. Here is the sort of stuff that men must be made of to oppose, with success, those who, by whatever means, get possession of great and mischievous power.

In another allusion, among the many, to the



circumstances which followed his imprisonment, he confirms the above interesting narrative in a passage with which we shall conclude this chapter.

“ While the Borough-tyrants had me in Newgate for two years, with a thousand pounds fine, for having expressed my indignation at their flogging of Englishmen, in the heart of England, under a guard of Hanoverian sabres, I received *volumes of letters* from my children; and, I have them now, from the *scrawl* of *three years*, to the neat and beautiful hand of thirteen. I never told them of any *errors* in their letters. All was well. The best evidence of the utility of their writing, and strongest encouragement to write again, was *a very clear answer from me*, in a very precise hand, and upon very nice paper, which they never failed promptly to receive. They have all written to me *before they could form a single letter*. A little bit of paper, with some ink-marks upon it, folded up by themselves, and a wafer stuck in it, used to be sent to me, and it was *sure* to bring the writer a very, very kind answer. Thus have they gone on. So far from being a *trouble* to me, they



have been all *pleasure* and *advantage*. For many years they have been so many *secretaries*. I have *dictated* scores of Registers to them, which have *gone to the press without my ever looking at them*. I dictated Registers to them at the age of *thirteen*, and even of *twelve*. They have, as to *trust-worthiness*, been grown persons, at eleven or twelve. I could leave my house and affairs, the paying of men, or the going from home on business, to them at an age when boys in England, in general, want servants to watch them, to see that they do not kill chickens, torment kittens, or set the buildings on fire.”



## CHAPTER XXII.

## COBBETT'S ANECDOTES OF HIMSELF.

IN selecting from Cobbett's works a number of anecdotes of himself, we present them to the reader as so many additional aids, whereby to form a correct judgment of his character—philosophically to develope which is the great object of this work.

## COBBETT AND THE AMANUENSIS.

“A young man, some years ago, offered himself to me, on a particular occasion, as an *amanuensis*, for which he appeared to be perfectly qualified. The terms were settled, and I, who wanted the job dispatched, requested him to sit down, and begin; but he, looking out of the window, whence he could see the church clock, said, somewhat hastily, ‘I cannot stop now,



sir, I must go to *dinner*!" "Oh!" said I, "you *must* go to dinner, must you! Let the dinner, which you *must* wait upon to-day, have your constant services, then: for you and I shall never agree." He had told me that he was in *great distress* for want of employment; and yet, when relief was there before his eyes, he could forego it for the sake of getting at his eating and drinking three or four hours, perhaps, sooner than I should have thought it right for him to leave off work. Such a person cannot be sent from home, except at certain times; he *must* be near the kitchen at three fixed hours of the day: if he be absent more than four or five hours, he is ill-treated. In short, a youth thus pampered is worth nothing as a person to be employed in business."

## COBBETT AGAINST MALTHUS.

"In riding once, about five years ago, from Petworth to Horsham, on a Sunday, in the afternoon, I came to a solitary cottage which stood at about twenty yards distance from the road. There was the wife with the baby in her arms, the husband teaching another child to walk, while *four* more were at play before them. I



stopped and looked at them for some time, and then, turning my horse, rode up to the wicket, getting into talk by asking the distance to Horsham. I found that the man worked chiefly in the woods, and that he was doing pretty well. The wife was then only *twenty-two*, and the man only *twenty-five*. She was a pretty woman, even for *Sussex*, which, not excepting Lancashire, contains the prettiest women in England. He was a very fine and stout young man. 'Why,' said I, 'how many children do you reckon to have at last?' 'I do not care how many,' said the man: 'God never sends mouths without sending meat.' 'Did you ever hear,' said I, 'of one Parson Malthus?' 'No, sir.' 'Why, if he were to hear of your works, he would be outrageous; for he wants an act of parliament to prevent poor people from marrying young, and from having such lots of children.' 'Oh! the brute!' exclaimed the wife; while the husband laughed, thinking that I was joking. I asked the man whether he had ever had *relief from the parish?* and upon his answering in the negative, *I took out my purse, took from it enough to bait my horse at Horsham, and to clear my turnpikes to Worth,*



*whither I was going in order to stay awhile, and gave him all the rest.* Now, is it not a shame, is it not a sin of all sins, that people like these should, by acts of the government, be reduced to such misery as to be induced to abandon their homes and their country to seek, in a foreign land, the means of preventing themselves and their children from starving? And this has been, and now is, actually the case with many such families in this same county of Sussex!"

## COBBETT IN GOOD SPIRITS.

“Scores of gentlemen have, at different times, expressed to me their surprise, that I was ‘*always in spirits* ;’ that nothing *pulled me down* ; and the truth is, that, throughout nearly forty years of troubles, losses, and crosses, assailed all the while by more numerous and powerful enemies than ever man had before to contend with, and performing, at the same time, labours greater than man ever before performed ; all those labours requiring mental exertion, and some of them mental exertion of the highest order ; the truth is, that, throughout the whole of this long time of troubles and of labours, I



have never known a single hour of *real anxiety*; the troubles have been no troubles to me; I have not known what *lowness of spirits* meant; have been more gay, and felt less care, than any bachelor that ever lived. ‘You are *always in spirits*, Cobbett!’ To be sure; for why should I not? *Poverty* I have always set at defiance, and I could, therefore, defy the temptations of riches; and, as to *home* and *children*, I had taken care to provide myself with an inexhaustible store of that ‘*sobriety*’ which I am so strongly recommending my reader to provide himself with; or, if he cannot do that, to deliberate long before he ventures on the life-enduring matrimonial voyage.”

#### COBBETT'S INCENTIVES TO LABOUR.

“I am sure that every one will say, without any hesitation, that a fourth part of the labours I have performed, never would have been performed, *if I had not been a married man*. In the first place, they could not; for I should, all the early part of my life, have been rambling and roving about as most bachelors are. I should have had *no home* that I cared a straw about, and should have wasted the far greater



part of my time. The great affair of home being *settled*, having the home secured, I had leisure to employ my mind on things which it delighted in. I got rid at once of all cares, all *anxieties*, and had only to provide for the very moderate wants of that home. But the children began to come. They sharpened my industry: they spurred me on. To be sure, I had other and strong motives: I wrote for fame, and was urged forward by ill-treatment, and by the desire to triumph over my enemies; but, after all, a very large part of my *nearly a hundred volumes* may be fairly ascribed to the wife and children."

## COBBETT UNGALLANT.

"A gentleman at whose house I was, about five years ago, was about to take a farm for his eldest son, who was a very fine young man, about eighteen years old. The mother, who was as virtuous and as sensible a woman as I have ever known, wished him to be 'in the law.' There were six or eight intimate friends present, and all unhesitatingly joined the lady, thinking it a pity that Harry, who had had 'such a good education,' should be *buried* in a



farm-house. 'And don't *you* think so too, Mr. Cobbett,' said the lady, with great earnestness. 'Indeed, Ma'am,' said I, 'I should think it very great presumption in me to offer any opinion at all, and especially in opposition to the known decision of the father, who is the best judge, and the only rightful judge, in such a case.' This was a very sensible and well-behaved woman, and I still respect her very highly; but I could perceive that I instantly dropped out of her good graces. Harry, however, I was glad to hear, went 'to be *buried* in the farm-house.'"

#### COBBETT AND HIS GARDENER.

"My gardener had once sowed, while I was from home, a piece of garden with the tall marrowfat pea, and had put the rows at about three feet apart. I saw them just after they came up. The ground was such as was very good, and which I knew would send the peas up very high; I told him to take his hoe and cut up every other row; but they looked so fine and he was so obstinate, that I let them remain, and made him sow some more at seven feet apart very near to the same place, telling



him that there never could be a pea there, and and that if it so turned out, never to attempt to have his own way again. Both the patches of peas were sticked in due time, they both grew very fine and lofty ; but his patch began to get together at the top, and just about the time that the pods were an inch long, there came a heavy rain, smashed the whole of them down into one mass, and there never was a single pea gathered from the patch, while the other patch, the single rows of which were seven feet apart, produced an uncommonly fine and lasting crop. The destroyed patch of peas was however of precious advantage ; for it made me the *master of my gardener*, a thing that happens to very few owners of gardens.”

#### COBBETT AND THE MUSHROOMS.

“ I once ate about three spoonful at table at Mr. Timothy Brown’s at Peckham, which had been cooked, I suppose, in the usual way ; but I had not long eaten them before my whole body, face, hands and all, was covered with red spots or pimples, and to such a degree, and coming on so fast, that the doctor who attended the family was sent for. He thought nothing



of it, gave me a little draught of some sort, and the pimples went away; but I attributed it then to the mushrooms. The next year, I had mushrooms in my own garden at Botley, and I determined to try the experiment whether they would have the same effect again; but, not liking to run any risk, I took only a tea-spoonful, or rather a French coffee-spoonful, which is larger than a common tea-spoon. They had just the same effect, both as to sensation and outward appearance! From that day to this I have never touched mushrooms, for I conclude that there must be something poisonous in that which will so quickly produce the effects that I have described, and on a healthy and hale body like mine; and, therefore, I do not advise any one to cultivate these things."

#### COBBETT AND ADDISON.

"When I read the works of Pope and of Swift, I was greatly delighted with their lashing of Dennis; but wondered, at the same time, why they should have taken so much pains in running down such a *fool*. By the merest accident in the world, being at a tavern in the woods of America, I took up an old book, in



order to pass away the time while my travelling companions were drinking in the next room; but, seeing the book contained the criticisms of Dennis, I was about to lay it down, when the play of 'Cato' caught my eye; and, having been accustomed to read books in which this play was lauded to the skies, and knowing it to have been written by Addison, every line of whose works I had been taught to believe teemed with wisdom and genius, I condescended to begin to read, though the work was from the pen of that *fool* Dennis. I read on, and soon began to *laugh*, not at Dennis but at Addison. I laughed so much and so loud, that the landlord, who was in the passage, came in to see what I was laughing at. In short, I found it a most masterly production, one of the most witty things that I had ever read in my life. I was delighted with Dennis, and was heartily ashamed of my former admiration of 'Cato,' and felt no little resentment against Pope and Swift for their endless reviling of this most able and witty critic. This, as far as I recollect, was the first *emancipation* that had assisted me in my reading. I have, since that time, never taken any thing upon trust: I have



judged for myself, trusting neither to the opinions of writers nor in the fashions of the day. Having been told by Dr. Blair, in his lectures on Rhetoric, that, if I meant to write correctly, I must 'give my days and nights to Addison,' I read a few numbers of the Spectator at the time I was writing my English Grammar: I gave neither my nights nor my days to him; but I found an abundance of matter to afford examples of *false grammar*; and, upon a reperusal, I found that the criticisms of Dennis might have been extended to this book too."

#### COBBETT AND THE TWO BEGGARS.

I have now been here (America) *twenty months*, and I have been visited by only two *beggars*. The first was an *Englishman*, and what was more to me, a *Surrey* man too; a native of Croydon. He asked me if I could *help* him to a quarter of a dollar; for, it is surprising how apt scholars they are. 'Yes,' said I, 'if you will *help* my men to do some work first.' He said that he could not do that, for he was *in a hurry*. I told him, that, if a man with a dollar a day, and pork for the tenth part of a dollar a pound, could not earn his living,



he ought to be hanged; 'however,' said I, 'as you are the first Surrey man I ever saw in America besides myself, if you be not hanged before this day week, and come here again, I will *help* you to a quarter dollar.' He came, and I kept my word. The second beggar was an *Italian*. This was a personage of '*high consideration*.' He was introduced to the side of my writing table. He behaved with a sort of dignified politeness, mixed with somewhat of reserve, as if he thought the person to whom he was addressing himself a very good sort of man, but of rank inferior to himself. We could not understand each other at first; but we got into *French*, and then we could talk. He having laid down his hat and being seated, pulled out a large parcel of papers, amongst which was a certificate from the *Secretary of State of his Majesty the King of Sardinia*, duly signed and countersigned, and sealed with a seal having the armorial bearings of that sovereign. Along with this respectable paper was an English translation of it, done at New York, and authenticated by the mayor and notary public, with all due formality. All the time these papers were opening, I was wondering what

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this gentleman could be. I read, and stared, and read again. I was struck not less by the novelty than the audacity of the thing. ‘So then,’ said I, breaking silence, ‘your sovereign, after taxing you to your ruin, has been graciously pleased to give you credentials to show, that he *authorizes you to beg in America*; and, not only for yourself but for *others*; so that you are an accredited ambassador from the beggars in Sardinia!’ He found he had got into *wrong hands*; and endeavoured to put *an end* to the negociation at once, by observing, that I was not *forced* to give, and that my *simple negative* was enough. ‘I beg your pardon, Sir,’ said I, ‘you have submitted your *case* to me, you have made an *appeal* to me; your statement contains reasons for my giving; and that gives me a right to shew, if I can, why I ought not to give.’ He then, in order to prevent all *reasoning*, opened his subscription, or begging-book, and said: ‘You see, Sir, others give!’—‘Now,’ said I, ‘you reason, but your reason is *defective*; for, if you were to shew me, that you had robbed all my neighbours without their resenting it, would it follow that I must let you rob me too?’—‘*Ah! par bleu,*’ said he



snatching up his credentials, ‘ *je vois que vous êtes un avare.*’—‘ *Ah ! by Old Nick, I see you are a miser.*’ And off he went ; not, however, before I had time to tell him to be sure to give my best respects to the King of Sardinia, and to tell his Majesty to keep his beggars at home.’

## COBBETT'S OLD COTTAGER

“ I found, living in two cottages, on the farm of Fairthorn, a widow and her daughters, and an old man and his wife. I let the widow remain rent free, and gave her wood to burn, as long as I had the farm. The old man paid me no rent ; when he died I had a head-stone put to his grave to record, that he had been an honest, skilful, and industrious labouring man ; and I gave his widow a shilling a week as long as I was at Botley. And yet the vile extortioners *cheered* and *applauded* Willis while he was representing me as *illiberal* and *oppressive* to dependents !

## COBBETT AND HIS DEPENDENTS.

“ My people, though *never* hired but by the *week*, lived with me for years ; and, indeed, no man that I recollect, ever quitted me by choice.

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Robinson, you know, was my gardener for years; Bob Hammond, who worked for me occasionally, has come up, three summers, to work for me at Kensington; Mr. Dean, who became my bailiff, lived in one of my cottages as long as the cottage was mine, has since kept my shop in London, is now a newsman in London, was with me through my tour in the counties last spring, is, *this very day*, managing my affairs at Barn-Elm in Surrey, and is become, as you know, a man of considerable property, which, as I know, is the just reward of his industry and fidelity. These facts are undeniable and notorious; and yet the *all-grasping*, the *extortioning vagabonds*, sat and *cheered* and *applauded* the stupid and malignant fellow, while he was calling me an ‘*oppressor of my miserable dependents.*’ ”—October, 1830.

#### COBBETT'S GRATITUDE AND COBBETT'S CORN.

“ I am now preparing bags of ears of this corn to be sent to a number of gentlemen. I request them to give them to such labouring men as they may choose. To Mr. Dedams, of Sutton Scotney, I have to make this request,



namely, that if I do not send him enough for the labourers of that little bunch of hard-working parishes, he will write to me for more ; for I have a particular desire to shew my regard for those parishes. I was once going on horseback across the country, through the villages from Winchester to Burghclere, and they having displeased me at the inn at Winchester, I had gone off, I and my little boy, without breakfast ; when I came to Stoke-Charity, I was in the true English mood of hunger and anger, and had just spoken in such an angry tone to him, that I was ashamed of myself the moment after. Going by a labourer's house in the outskirts of the village, I asked a woman with a child in her arms whether she could give me a crust of bread. She brought me out all they had, about a pound of bread and a quarter of a pound of cheese, and wanted me to take it as a gift. I took it with great eagerness, giving her, of course, the means of buying something more ; but, as I was dividing the bread and the cheese between Richard and me, I could not help reflecting on the sufferings of those poor people, and on what a shame it was for me, who lived in such abundance, to be out of tem-



per merely on account of that momentary want of food, when the contents of every inn and every public-house were at my command. If I could discover that labourer whose wife gave me the bread and cheese, he should have corn enough to plant an acre of ground. *To save postage*, and, also, to save the trouble of writing to Mr. Dedams, of Sutton Scotney, I request him to get a stout man or two to dig up immediately, *very deep* and clean, the whole of the piece of ground at the back of the cottage of the widow Mason, and to beg her to let it lie rough dug (*not smoothed at top*), and to assure her that I will go down to Bullington, at the proper season, and *plant the corn myself*. I will carry down seed. Mr. Dedams will please to give the men that dig the ground, half-a-crown a day each of them for their work, each of them also a pint of beer; but they must have good long spades, take *thin spits*, and *go deep*. They should leave the ground *rough*; and dig each of them six rods a day. I beg him to pay them, and I will pay him again; but the ground ought to be dug up *as soon as possible*. Some of the ears of corn will be found to have *lost some of their grains*, which



has been owing to their having been knocked about in the bags, or in the granary ; but a few will be enough to begin with."

COBBETT AND THE GUIDE WHO HAD LOST HIM HIS WAY.

"It was now but a step to my friend's house, where a good fire and a change of clothes soon put all to rights, save and except the *having come over Hindhead after all my resolutions*. This mortifying circumstance ; this having been *beaten*, lost the guide the *three shillings* that I had agreed to give him. 'Either,' said I, 'you did not know the way well, or you did : if the former, it was dishonest in you to undertake to guide me : if the latter, you have wilfully led me miles out of my way.' He grumbled ; but off he went. He certainly deserved nothing ; for he did not know the way, and he prevented some other man from earning and receiving the money. But, had he not caused me to *get upon Hindhead*, he would have had the three shillings. I had, at one time, got my hand in my pocket ; but the thought of having been *beaten* pulled it out again."



## COBBETT AND THE SANDHILL.

“ We went to Farnham in order that I might show my son the spot where I received the rudiments of my education. There is a little hop-garden in which I used to work when from eight to ten years' old ; from which I have scores of times run to follow the hounds, leaving the hoe to do the best that it could to destroy the weeds ; but the most interesting thing was, a *sand-hill*, which goes from a part of the heath down to the rivulet. As a due mixture of pleasure with toil, I, with two brothers, used occasionally to *desport* ourselves, as the lawyers call it, at this sand-hill. Our diversion was this : we used to go to the top of the hill, which was steeper than the roof of a house ; one used to draw his arms out of the sleeves of his smock-frock, and lay himself down with his arms by his sides ; and then the others, one at head and the other at feet, sent him rolling down the hill like a barrel or a log of wood. By the time he got to the bottom, his hair, eyes, ears, nose, and mouth, were all full of this loose sand ; then the others took their



turn, and at every roll, there was a monstrous spell of laughter. I had often told my sons of this while they were very little, and I now took one of them to see the spot. But, that was not all. This was the spot where I was receiving my *education*; and this was the sort of education; and I am perfectly satisfied that if I had not received such an education, or something very much like it; that, if I had been brought up a milksop, with a nursery-maid everlastingly at my heels; I should have been at this day as great a fool, as inefficient a mortal, as any of those frivolous idiots that are turned out from Winchester and Westminster School, or from any of those dens of dunces called colleges and universities. It is impossible to say how much I owe to that sand-hill; and I went to return it my thanks for the ability which it probably gave me to be one of the greatest terrors, to one of the greatest and most powerful bodies of knaves and fools, that ever were permitted to afflict this or any other country.”



## CHAPTER XXIII.

CONTEMPORARY OPINIONS OF WILLIAM COBBETT—  
 HAZLITT'S ESSAY—DR. GIFFORD IN THE STANDARD—  
 THE TIMES—THE CHRONICLE, AND THE ATLAS.

FROM "HAZLITT'S ESSAY."

People have about as substantial an idea of Cobbett as they have of Cribb. His blows are as hard, and he himself is as impenetrable. One has no notion of him as making use of a fine pen, but a great mutton-fist; his style stuns his readers, and he "fillips the ear of the public with a three-man beetle." He is too much for any single newspaper antagonist; "lays waste" a city orator or member of parliament, and bears hard upon the government itself. He is a kind of *fourth estate* in the politics of the country. He is not only unquestionably the most powerful political writer of the present day, but one of the best writers in the language. He speaks and thinks plain, broad, downright English. He might be said to have the clearness of Swift, the naturalness of Defoe, and the picturesque satirical description of Mandeville; if all such comparisons were not impertinent. A really great and original writer is like nobody but himself. In one sense, Sterne was not a wit, nor Shakspeare a poet. It is easy to describe second-rate talents, because they fall into a class, and enlist under a standard: but first-rate powers defy calculation or comparison, and can be defined only by themselves. They are *sui generis*, and make the class to which they belong. I have tried half a dozen times to describe Burke's style



without ever succeeding;—its severe extravagance; its literal boldness; its matter-of-fact hyperboles; its running away with a subject, and from it at the same time—but there is no making it out, for there is no example of the same thing any where else. We have no common measure to refer to; and his qualities contradict even themselves.

Cobbett is not so difficult. He has been compared to Paine; and so far it is true there are no two writers who come more into juxtaposition from the nature of their subjects, from the internal resources on which they draw, and from the popular effect of their writings, and their adaptation (though that is a bad word in the present case) to the capacity of every reader. But still if we turn to a volume of Paine's (his *Common Sense* or *Rights of Man*), we are struck (not to say somewhat refreshed) by the difference. Paine is a much more sententious writer than Cobbett. You cannot open a page in any of his best and earlier works without meeting with some maxim, some antithetical and memorable saying, which is a sort of starting-place for the argument, and the goal to which it returns. There is not a single *bon-mot*, a single sentence in Cobbett that has ever been quoted again. If any thing is ever quoted from him, it is an epithet of abuse or a nickname. He is an excellent hand at invention in that way, and has "damnable iteration in him." What could be better than his pestering Erskine year after year with his second title of Baron Clackmannan? He is rather too fond of *the sons and daughters of corruption*. Paine affected to reduce things to first principles, to announce self-evident truths. Cobbett troubles himself about little but the details and local circumstances. The first appeared to have made up his mind before-hand to certain opinions, and to try to find the most compendious and pointed expressions for them: his successor appears to have no clue, no fixed or leading principles, nor ever to have thought on a question till he sits



down to write about it; but then there seems no end of his matters of fact and raw materials, which are brought out in all their strength and sharpness from not having been squared or frittered down or vamped up to suit a theory—he goes on with his descriptions and illustration as if he would never come to a stop; they have all the force of novelty with all the familiarity of old acquaintance; his knowledge grows out of the subject, and his style is that of a man who has an absolute intuition of what he is talking about, and never thinks of any thing else. He deals in premises and speaks to evidence—the coming to a conclusion and summing up (which was Paine's *forte*) lies in a smaller compass. The one could not compose an elementary treatise on politics to become a manual for the popular reader; nor could the other in all probability have kept up a weekly journal for the same number of years with the same spirit, interest, and untired perseverance. Paine's writings are a sort of introduction to political arithmetic on a new plan: Cobbett keeps a day-book and makes an entry at full of all the occurrences and troublesome questions that start up throughout the year. Cobbett with vast industry, vast information, and the utmost power of making what he says intelligible, never seems to get at the beginning or come to the end of any question: Paine, in a few short sentences, seems by his peremptory manner "to clear it from all controversy, past, present, and to come." Paine takes a bird's eye view of things. Cobbett sticks close to them, inspects the component parts, and keeps fast hold of the smallest advantages they afford him. Or if I might here be indulged in a pastoral allusion, Paine tries to enclose his ideas in a fold for security and repose: Cobbett lets *his* pour out upon the plain like a flock of sheep to feed and batten. Cobbett is a pleasanter writer for those to read who do not agree with him; for he is less dogmatical, goes more into the common grounds of fact and argument to which all appeal, is more desultory and various, and appears



less to be driving at a previous conclusion than urged on by the force of present conviction. He is therefore tolerated by all parties, though he has made himself by turns obnoxious to all; and even those he abuses read him. The reformers read him when he was a Tory, and the Tories read him now that he is a reformer. He must, I think, however, be *caviare* to the Whigs.\*

If he is less metaphysical and poetical than his celebrated prototype, he is more picturesque and dramatic. His episodes, which are numerous as they are pertinent, are striking, interesting, full of life and *naïveté*, minute, double measure, running over, but never tedious—*nunquam sufflammandus erat*. He is one of those writers who can never tire us, not even of himself; and the reason is, he is always “full of matter.” He never runs to lees, never gives us the vapid leavings of himself, is never “weary, stale, and unprofitable,” but always setting out afresh on his journey, clearing away some old nuisance, and turning up new mould. His egotism is delightful, for there is no affectation in it. He does not talk of himself for lack of something to write about, but because some circumstance that has happened to himself is the best possible illustration of the subject and he is not the man to shrink from giving the best possible illustrations of the subject from a squeamish delicacy. He likes both himself and his subject too well. He does not put himself before it, and say—“admire me first”—but places us in the same situation with himself, and makes us see all that he does. There is no blindman’s-buff, no conscious hints, no awkward ventriloquism, no testimonies of applause, no abstract, senseless, self-complacency, no smuggled admiration of his own person by proxy; it is all plain and above-board. He writes himself plain William Cobbett, strips himself quite as naked as any body would wish—in a word, his egotism is full of individuality, and has room

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\* The late Lord Thurlow used to say that Cobbett was the only writer that deserved the name of a political reasoner.



for very little vanity in it. We feel delighted, rub our hands and draw our chair to the fire, when we come to a passage of this sort : we know it will be something new and good, manly and simple, not the same insipid story of self over again. We sit down at table with the writer, but it is to a course of rich viands, flesh, fish, and wild-fowl, and not to a nominal entertainment, like that given by the Barmecide in the Arabian Nights, who put off his visitors with calling for a number of exquisite things that never appeared, and with the honour of his company. Mr. Cobbett is not a *make-believe* writer. His worst enemy cannot say that of him. Still less is he a vulgar one. He must be a puny, common-place critic indeed, who thinks him so. How fine were the graphical descriptions he sent us from America : what a transatlantic flavour, what a native *gusto*, what a fine *sauce-piquante* of contempt they were seasoned with ! If he had sat down to look at himself in the glass, instead of looking about him like Adam in Paradise, he would not have got up these articles in so capital a style. What a noble account of his first breakfast after his arrival in America ! It might serve for a month. There is no scene on the stage more amusing. How well he paints the gold and scarlet plumage of the American birds, only to lament more pathetically the want of the wild wood-notes of his native land ! The groves of the Ohio that had just fallen beneath the axe's stroke "live in his description," and the turnips that he transplanted from Botley "look green" in prose ! How well at another time he describes the poor sheep that had got the tick, and had tumbled down in the agonies of death ! It is a portrait in the manner of Bewick, with the strength, the simplicity, and feeling of that great naturalist. What havoc he makes, when he pleases, of the curls of Dr. Parr's wig and of the Whig consistency of Mr. —— ! His Grammar, too, is as entertaining as a story-book. He is too hard upon the style of others, and not enough (sometimes) on his own.



As a political partisan, no one can stand against him. With his brandished club, like Giant Despair in the Pilgrim's Progress, he knocks out their brains ; and not only no individual, but no corrupt system could hold out against his powerful and repeated attacks, but with the same weapon, swung round like a flail, that he levels his antagonists, he lays his friends low, and puts his own party *hors de combat*. This is a bad propensity, and a worse principle in political tactics, though a common one. If his blows were straight forward and steadily directed to the same object, no unpopular Minister could live before him ; instead of which he lays about right and left, impartially and remorselessly, makes a clear stage, has all the ring to himself, and then runs out of it, just when he should stand his ground. He throws his head into his adversary's stomach, and takes away all inclination for the fight, hits fair or foul, strikes at every thing, and as you come up to his aid or stand ready to pursue his advantage, trips up your heels or lays you sprawling, and pummels you when down as much to his heart's content as ever the Yanguesian carriers belaboured Rosinante with their pack-staves. "*He has the back-trick simply the best of any man in Illyria.*" He pays off both scores of old friendship and new-acquired enmity in a breath, in one perpetual volley, one raking fire of "arrowy sleet" shot from his pen. However his own reputation or the cause may suffer in consequence, he cares not one pin about that, so that he disables all who oppose, or who pretend to help him. In fact, he cannot bear success of any kind, not even of his own views or party ; and if any principle were likely to become popular, would turn round against it to shew his power in shouldering it on one side. In short, wherever power is, there is he against it : he naturally butts at all obstacles, as unicorns are attracted to oak-trees, and feels his own strength only by resistance to the opinions and wishes of the rest of the world. To sail with the stream, to agree with the company, is not



his humour. If he could bring about a Reform in Parliament, the odds are that he would instantly fall foul of and try to mar his own handy-work ; and he quarrels with his own creatures as soon as he has written them into a little vogue—and a prison. I do not think this is vanity or fickleness so much as a pugnacious disposition, that must have an antagonist power to contend with, and only finds itself at ease in systematic opposition. If it were not for this, the high towers and rotten places of the world would fall before the battering-ram of his hard-headed reasoning ; but if he once found them tottering, he would apply his strength to prop them up, and disappoint the expectations of his followers. He cannot agree to any thing established, nor to set up any thing else in its stead. While it is established, he presses hard against it, because it presses upon him, at least in imagination. Let it crumble under his grasp, and the motive to resistance is gone. He then requires some other grievance to set his face against. His principle is repulsion, his nature contradiction : he is made up of mere antipathies, an Ishmaelite indeed without a fellow. He is always playing at *hunt-the-slipper* in politics. He turns round upon whoever is next him. The way to wean him from any opinion, and make him conceive an intolerable hatred against it, would be to place somebody near him who was perpetually dinning it in his ears. When he is in England, he does nothing but abuse the borough-mongers, and laugh at the whole system : when he is in America, he grows impatient of freedom and a republic. If he had staid there a little longer, he would have become a loyal and a loving subject of his majesty King George IV. He lampooned the French revolution when it was hailed as the dawn of liberty by millions : by the time it was brought into almost universal ill-odour by some means or other (partly no doubt by himself) he had turned, with one or two or three others, staunch Buonapartist. He is always of the militant, not of the triumphant party : so far



he bears a gallant shew of magnanimity ; but his gallantry is hardly of the right stamp. It wants principle : for though he is not servile or mercenary, he is the victim of self-will. He must pull down and pull in pieces : it is not his disposition to do otherwise. It is a pity ; for with his great talents he might do great things, if he would go right forward to any useful object, make thorough-stitch work of any question, or join hand and heart with any principle. He changes his opinions as he does his friends, and much on the same account. He has no comfort in fixed principles : as soon as any thing is settled in his own mind, he quarrels with it. He has no satisfaction but in the chase after truth, runs a question down, worries and kills it, then quits it like vermin, and starts some new game, to lead him a new dance, and give him a fresh breathing through bog and brake, with the rabble yelping at his heels, and the leaders perpetually at fault. This he calls sport royal. He thinks it as good as cudgel-playing or single-stick, or any thing else that has life in it. He likes the cut and thrust, the falls, bruises, and dry blows of an argument ; as to any good or useful results that may come of the amicable settling of it, any one is welcome to them for him. The amusement is over, when the matter is once fairly decided.

There is another point of view in which this may be put. I might say that Mr. Cobbett is a very honest man with a total want of principle, and I might explain this paradox thus. I mean that he is, I think, in downright earnest in what he says, in the part he takes at the time ; but in taking that part, he is lead entirely by headstrong obstinacy, caprice, novelty, pique or personal motive of some sort, and not by a stedfast regard for truth, or habitual anxiety for what is right uppermost in his mind. He is not a feed, time-serving, shuffling advocate (no man could write as he does who did not believe himself sincere)—but his under-

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standing is the dupe and slave of his momentary, violent, and irritable humours. He does not adopt an opinion "deliberately or for money;" yet his conscience is at the mercy of the first provocation he receives, of the first whim he takes in his head; he sees things through the medium of heat and passion, not with reference to any general principles, and his whole system of thinking is deranged by the first object that strikes his fancy or sours his temper. One cause of this phenomenon is perhaps his want of a regular education. He is a self-taught man, and has the faults as well as excellences of that class of persons in their most striking and glaring excess. It must be acknowledged that the editor of the "Political Register" (the *two-penny trash*, as it was called, till a bill passed the House to raise the price to sixpence) is not "the gentleman and scholar;" though he has qualities that, with a little better management, would be worth (to the public) both those titles. For want of knowing what has been discovered before him, he has not certain general landmarks to refer to, or a general standard of thought to apply to individual cases. He relies on his own acuteness and the immediate evidence, without being acquainted with the comparative anatomy or philosophical structure of opinion. He does not view things on a large scale or at the horizon (dim and airy enough perhaps)—but as they affect himself, close, palpable, tangible. Whatever he finds out is his own, and he only knows what he finds out. He is in the constant hurry and fever of gestation: his brain teems incessantly with some fresh project. Every new light is the birth of a new system, the dawn of a new world to him. He is continually outstripping and overreaching himself. The last opinion is the only true one. He is wiser to-day than he was yesterday. Why should he not be wiser to-morrow than he was to-day?—Men of a learned education are not so sharp-witted as clever men without it; but they know the ba-



lance of the human intellect better; if they are more stupid, they are more steady; and are less liable to be led astray by their own sagacity and the overweening petulance of hard-earned and late-acquired wisdom. They do not fall in love with every meretricious extravagance at first sight, or mistake an old battered hypothesis for a vestal, because they are new to the ways of this old world. They do not seize upon it as a prize, but are safe from gross imposition by being as wise and no wiser than those who went before them.

Paine said on some occasion—"What I have written, I have written"—as rendering any farther declaration of his principles unnecessary. Not so Mr. Cobbett. What he has written is no rule to him what he is to write. He learns something every day, and every week he takes the field to maintain the opinions of the last six days against friend or foe. I doubt whether this outrageous inconsistency, this headstrong fickleness, this understood want of all rule and method, does not enable him to go on with the spirit, vigour, and variety that he does. He is not pledged to repeat himself. Every new "Register" is a kind of new prospectus. He blesses himself from all ties and shackles on his understanding; he has no mortgages on his brain; his notions are free and unencumbered. If he was put in trammels, he might become a vile hack like so many more. But he gives himself "ample scope and verge enough." He takes both sides of a question, and maintains one as sturdily as the other. If nobody else can argue against him, he is a very good match for himself. He writes better in favour of reform than any body else; he used to write better against it. Wherever he is, there is the tug of war, the weight of the argument, the strength of abuse. He is not like a man in danger of being *bed-rid* in his faculties—he tosses and tumbles about his unwieldy bulk, and when he is tired of lying on one side, relieves himself by turning on the other. His shifting his point of

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view from time to time not merely adds variety and greater compass to his topics (so that the "Political Register" is an armoury and magazine for all the materials and weapons of political warfare), but it gives a greater zest and liveliness to his manner of treating them. Mr. Cobbett takes nothing for granted as what he has proved before; he does not write a book of reference. We see his ideas in their first concoction, fermenting and overflowing with the ebullitions of a lively conception. We look on at the actual process, and are put in immediate possession of the grounds and materials on which he forms his sanguine, unsettled conclusions. He does not give us samples of reasoning, put the whole solid mass, refuse and all.

———"He pours out all as plain  
As downright Shippen or as old Montaigne."

This is one cause of the clearness and force of his writings. An argument does not stop to stagnate and muddle in his brain, but passes at once to his paper. His ideas are served up, like pancakes, hot and hot. Fresh theories give him fresh courage. He is like a young and lusty bridegroom that divorces a favourite speculation every morning, and marries a new one every night. He is not wedded to his notions—not he. He has not one Mrs. Cobbett among all his opinions. He makes the most of the last thought that has come in his way, seizes fast hold of it, rumples it about in all directions with rough strong hands, has his wicked will of it, takes a surfeit, and throws it away.—Our author's changing his opinions for new ones is not so wonderful; what is more remarkable is his facility in forgetting his old ones. He does not pretend to consistency (like Mr. Coleridge); he frankly disavows all connexion with himself. He feels no personal responsibility in this way, and cuts a friend or principle with the same decided indifference that Antipholis of Ephesus cuts Ægeon of Syracuse. It is a hollow thing. The only time he ever grew romantic was in bringing over the



elics of Mr. Thomas Paine with him from America, to go a progress with them through the disaffected districts. Scarce had he landed in Liverpool when he left the bones of a great man to shift for themselves: and no sooner did he arrive in London than he made a speech to disclaim all participation in the political and theological sentiments of his late idol, and to place the whole stock of his admiration and enthusiasm towards him to the account of his financial speculations, and of his having predicted the fate of paper money. If he had erected a little gold statue to him, it might have proved the sincerity of this assertion: but to make a martyr and a patron-saint of a man, and to dig up "his canonised bones" in order to expose them as objects of devotion to the rabble's gaze, asks something that has more life and spirit in it, more mind and vivifying soul, than has to do with any calculation of pounds, shillings, and pence! The fact is, he *rattled* from his own project. He found the thing not so ripe as he had expected. His heart failed him: his enthusiasm fled, and he made his retractation. His admiration is short-lived: his contempt only is rooted, and his resentment lasting.—The above was only one instance of his building too much on practical *data*. He has an ill habit of prophesying, and goes on, though still deceived. The art of prophesying does not suit Mr. Cobbett's style. He has a knack of fixing names and times and places. According to him, the Reformed Parliament was to meet in March, 1818—it did not, and we heard no more of the matter. When his predictions fail, he takes no farther notice of them, but applies himself to new ones—like the country-people who turn to see what weather there is in the almanac for the next week, though it has been out in its reckoning every day of the last.

Mr. Cobbett is great in attack, not in defence: he cannot fight an up-hill battle. He will not bear the least punishing. If any one turns upon him (which few people



like to do) he immediately turns tail. Like an overgrown school-boy, he is so used to have it all his own way, that he cannot submit to anything like competition or a struggle for the mastery; he must lay on the blows, and take none. He is bullying and cowardly; a Big Ben in politics, who will fall upon others and crush them by his weight, but is not prepared for resistance, and is soon staggered by a few smart blows. Whenever he has been set upon he has slunk out of the controversy. The "Edinburgh Review" made (what is called) a dead set at him some years ago, to which he only retorted by an eulogy on the superior neatness of an English kitchen-garden to a Scotch one. I remember going one day into a bookseller's shop in Fleet-street to ask for the "Review;" and on my expressing my opinion to a young Scotchman, who stood behind the counter, that Mr. Cobbett might hit as hard in his reply, the North Briton said with some alarm—"But you don't think, sir, Mr. Cobbett will be able to injure the Scottish nation?" I said I could not speak to that point, but I thought he was very well able to defend himself. He however did not, but has borne a grudge to the "Edinburgh Review" ever since, which he hates worse than the "Quarterly." I cannot say I do.\*

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\* Mr. Cobbett speaks almost as well as he writes. The only time I ever saw him he seemed to me a very pleasant man—easy of access, affable, clear-headed, simple and mild in his manner, deliberate and unruffled in his speech, though some of his expressions were not very qualified. His figure is tall and portly. He has a good sensible face—rather full, with little grey eyes, a hard square forehead, a ruddy complexion, with hair grey or powdered; and had on a scarlet broad-cloth waistcoat with the flaps of the pockets hanging down, as was the custom for gentlemen-farmers in the last century, or as we see it in the pictures of members of parliament in the reign of George I. I certainly did not think less favourably of him for seeing him.



The following articles have been published since Cobbett's death:—

FROM THE "STANDARD."

We have to announce, to-day, the death of one of the most remarkable men whom England, fertile as our country has happily been in intellectual excellence, ever produced. William Cobbett, Esq., member of parliament for Oldham, expired yesterday at Normandy farm, in the county of Surry, in the 74th year of his age. The disease which has deprived the country of Mr. Cobbett, was an intestinal inflammation, of but a few days' continuance, and, we are gratified to learn, accompanied with little pain to distract a change made in a calm and resigned temper.

We but repeat upon his death what we have again and again confessed during his life-time, when we say that Mr. Cobbett was by far the first political writer of his age. No man has written so much upon public affairs, and we think no man has written so well. In the attributes of a severely correct, unaffected, clear, and vigorous style, Mr. Cobbett was wholly without a rival, we venture to affirm, since the day of Swift; nor did this necessary staple of good writing want the ornaments of copious and striking illustration, and strong and well-connected argument. From the immense magazine of Mr. Cobbett's voluminous compositions may, without difficulty, be collected samples of the highest eloquence to be found in our language; while it would be nearly impossible for the most malignant jealousy to winnow from the mass a single dull or feeble article! And, let it be remembered, that nearly all was improvisation; the labour of a mind constantly employed in pouring forth its thoughts, without, during forty years, a day's, perhaps an hour's opportunity for preliminary rumination, or subsequent review! This must have been a great mind; and, undoubtedly, Mr. Cobbett was a great man.



That the efforts of his genius were, during the last twenty-five years, too generally directed to evil purposes, we must be the last to dispute; but we deny that this misdirection is any impeachment of the eternal and universal truth of the proposition, that, without moral, there can be intellectual grandeur. In our imperfect nature, all is mixed good and evil; and we cannot expect in man those qualities which we most love and admire, without their associate defects of corresponding magnitude. Men of limited powers may be, and commonly are, also men of limited defect; but, beside, the natural tendency of all power to abuse—the constitution of mind, from which extraordinary vigour arises, has an original tendency to error. Great energy is ever, more or less, connected with a more or less impetuous violence; and the tendency of the imaginative faculty to seduce men into moral extravagance, and often into a practical extravagance of conduct, is a thread-bare common-place.

Of these unhappy failings of our mixed nature, Mr. Cobbett's history affords a remarkable example. Gifted with the most extraordinary powers of intellect, and the clearest original views of what is right and profitable to mankind—instinctively imbued, too, with generous and manly sympathies, more than half the deceased gentleman's life has been engaged in a course of at least questionable hostility to the institutions of his country, and in a bitter warfare with all around, of all parties, about which there can be no dispute. There was much in the circumstances of Mr. Cobbett's early life, and in the state of society in our age, to account for, and therefore to excuse this seeming paradox. Born a peasant in a day of wealth-idolatry, uneducated and plain in his tastes and attainments, amongst a people of much fallacious and artificial refinement, the son of the Farnham cottager would originally feel his own intellectual superiority a perpetual prompter to despise the system in which he moved. Through life, a laborious man



—uncharged with any expensive tastes or passions—and still, we fear, struggling to the close in narrow circumstances—he would find new reason, in his own experience, to condemn a state of society that awarded as chance should direct, or suppieness, the very brand of inferior intellect; should lead the golden prizes of affluence and attendant consideration, that ought to be the meed of genius and industry.

The pride of purse persecuted him in America, and persecuted him no less in England, as it persecutes us all, and will continue to persecute until, in the fulness of its cup, it shall be laid low. The purse-proud Americans were a democracy, and, therefore, in America, Mr. Cobbett was a royalist. In England the vice is impartially distributed amongst all classes of the wealthy, and, therefore, in England, Mr. Cobbett's resentment took a more definite, perhaps a more just direction, associating him, successively, with whatever party most unequivocally prosecuted the war against wealth. This, we believe, to be the solution of whatever seems inconsistent in the career of the deceased gentleman.

In his early education, too, and in the circumstances of his after-life, will be found enough to explain the temper, as they explain the direction of his political course. There is, undoubtedly, a discipline which strengthens the genius, while it polishes the manners, but this is a reasoning discipline; it is the regimen which, from childhood, teaches to control our passions and dispositions—not under the influence of fear, but from a sense of what is virtuous and becoming. Men trained in this discipline acquire an art of self-government which qualifies them to exercise any power that they may possess over others, with a gentleness and consideration for human weakness, which no teacher but the early liberalised self-love can impart. There is, however, a discipline of another kind, which often breaks, though not always, intellectual power, but which is sure to



unfit him who has been subject to it for the exercise of any power; this is the discipline of force. To this last discipline Mr. Cobbett was unfortunately subjected, during that whole period in which the formation of character is completed. There is no reasoning in the obedience of the farm-yard; there is no reasoning in the discipline of the barrack; and, up to his thirtieth year, we believe Mr. Cobbett suffered one or other of these forms of slavery. The very same cause which renders the harshly-reared orphan, a domestic tyrant—the foremast man, or the late private, a despotic officer—the military man of any class, a functionary almost too severe for civil life—the emancipated slave, the cruellest of slave-drivers; this same cause would naturally give to the polemics of a powerful disputant, all the intolerant asperity with which Mr. Cobbett's writings have been charged.

We think, too, that in most cases the charge has been exaggerated. We have no recollection of any instance in which Mr. Cobbett has dealt *much too severely* with an individual; and, in his position, it was impossible that he could deal too severely with the parties and orders with which he was, from time to time engaged. His first desertion of the Tory party has been ascribed to a gratuitous insult offered to him by Mr. Pitt, who, with a superciliousness that clouded his great qualities, affected so much aristocratic *morgue* as to decline the introduction of Mr. Wyndham's *protege*; Mr. Wyndham being a person of higher genealogical rank than Mr. Pitt, and the person proposed to be introduced, Mr. Cobbett, being the man who, after Mr. Burke, had done incomparably the most for preserving the institutions and the honour of England, more, we do not scruple to say, than had been done by Mr. Pitt himself, from his unaided exertions. This is the common version of Mr. Cobbett's abandonment of Tory politics. We believe it is a correct one; it is, undoubtedly, confirmed by the marked and disgraceful neglect of Mr.



Cobbett's services, during the interval from his return from America to the period of his change. A gentleman, placed in similar circumstances,—when we say a gentleman, we merely speak of free birth and liberal education,—would for a moment probably have felt, as Mr. Cobbett felt under this insult, if it was offered, and this indisputable neglect; but he would have made allowances for the vulgar weakness of the great. He would have known, that of all people, great men, and particularly great statesmen, are the most timid; and that if they bestow the favour of their countenance upon fops and fiddlers, players and buffoons, in preference to men of more laborious habits and more useful talent, and, it may be, of more moral worth, it is because they do not dare to anticipate the *fiat* of the vulgar public, in a case in which such anticipation might seem to commit them to sincerity and zeal in particular opinions.

A gentleman, too, even if he could not forgive Mr. Pitt, would have been too proud, were motives of conscience wanting, to allow that personal considerations should influence his political creed. This first error of his political life Mr. Cobbett owed, in part, at least, to the humble circumstances of his birth and education. He was not a man, however, to do anything by halves; having abandoned Tory politics, because he thought he saw the fruit of these politics in Mr. Pitt's ungrateful, arrogant, and contumelious conduct, Mr. Cobbett fell to the opposite side, to which he was otherwise naturally attracted by his hostility to overgrown wealth. We should reprint a whole library of his "Register" to shew with what indefatigable vigour he warred against the manufacturing, the commercial, and the financial systems of the empire, and all engaged in them. He seems to have had no original dislike to the aristocracy, or of the church; but the samples of the aristocracy with whom, as a liberal, he necessarily came in contact, early disgusted him with that order; and the church, forty years ago, was very different from what it had been



in the preceding century, and still more different from what, thank God, it now is. Indeed, the theory of right, into which Mr. Cobbett's long course of controversy had impelled him—a theory which almost limits the right of subsistence and enjoyment to those who exercise manual labour, marks out every possessor of property beyond the necessaries of life, whether that property be acquired or inherited, or its excess be above bare competency, the result of merit or chance; this theory naturally marks out the aristocracy and the clergy, as well as the capitalist, for bands of usurpers. We need not say how fallacious the theory is. Next to preventing a perpetuation of augmented wealth, through restraints upon its dissipation—the fatal error of our time—the duty of the legislator is, to maintain property not merely in security, but in reverence. Mr. Cobbett saw, however, that the unfortunate disposition of the time was to promote the augmentation of wealth in few hands, and to keep it in those hands; and he directed his shafts accordingly with indiscriminate violence against the guilty cause and the innocent effect. He was, indeed, under a particular difficulty in this matter. He had originally committed himself against a paper currency, by treating, as universal and permanent, its partial and temporary ill effects. He prophesied that such a currency could not be continued, and that a departure from it would necessarily lead to ruin. The first part of his prophecy was unhappily acted upon, and the acting upon it went a great way towards realising the second.

But we must not get into this controversy again; and we have already gone far beyond what we had intended. We shall, therefore, conclude with a repetition of the opinion with which we commenced—namely, that Mr. Cobbett was one of the greatest men whom England has ever produced; that, as his powers were vast, his instincts were good; and that, if he had faults, as he had many, the circumstances of his birth, education, and manner of life, and the treatment



he received from those who ought to have acted a different part, must bear the blame. He has left us, in his writings, some of the best models—a monument of industry unequalled, and of genius scarcely excelled.

Mr. Cobbett has left several children; among others, three sons, endowed, we believe, with a full share of the hereditary genius. It may be hoped that, as these gentlemen possess advantages of education, such as their father never enjoyed, the literary reputation of the family will be continued.

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FROM THE "TIMES."

Take this self-taught peasant for all in all, he was, perhaps, in some respects, a more extraordinary Englishman than any other of his time. "*Nitor in adversum*" was a motto to which none could lay equal claim with William Cobbett. Birth, station, employment, ignorance, temper, character in early life, were all against him. But he emerged from, and overcame them all. By masculine force of genius, and the lever of a proud, confident, and determined will, he pushed aside a mass of obstacles of which the least and slightest would have repelled the boldest or most ambitious of ordinary men. He ended by bursting that formidable barrier which separates the class of English gentlemen from all beneath them, and died a member of parliament, representing a large constituency which had chosen him twice.

Cobbett was by far the most voluminous writer that has lived for centuries. He has worked with incessant industry for more than forty years, without, we verily believe, the interruption of so much as a single week from languor of spirit, or even from physical weakness.

The first general characteristic of his style is, perspicuity unequalled and inimitable. A second, is homely, muscular vigour. A third is purity, always simple, and



raciness often elegant. His argument is an example of acute, yet apparently natural, nay involuntary, logic, smoothed in its progress and cemented in its parts by a mingled stream of torturing sarcasm, contemptuous jocularity, and fierce and slaughtering invective. His faults are coarseness, brutality, and tedious repetition. We must add, that the matter of this most forcible of writers rarely shews much inventive faculty; though his active and observing mind supplied abundance of illustration to his argument; and, when he happens to present an original view of any subject, it is almost invariably more eccentric and ingenious than just.

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FROM THE "MORNING CHRONICLE."

Cobbett was, perhaps, the greatest egotist that ever lived; and as everything that he did, and every sentence that he uttered, was important in his own estimation, he is the constant theme of his voluminous writings. It would be in vain to deny that William Cobbett was one of the most powerful writers that England has ever produced. He felt keenly and observed accurately, and he never failed to make a strong impression on his readers. As an advocate he was without an equal. In that first of requisites—the statement of a case—he particularly excelled. He instinctively seized on the circumstances which favoured the views he wished to support, and he seldom failed to produce the impression at which he aimed. What he could not effect by direct statement, he attained by inuendo. But, after all, Cobbett was not a wise man. We question if, in the whole course of his life, he ever set himself seriously down to discover the truth. He was a man of impulses. William Cobbett was the object towards which the thoughts of William Cobbett were continually directed. Hence the changes of opinion with respect to all subjects and all men. There is not, perhaps, a question which he has not by turns



advocated and opposed—there is not a man whom he has not by turns praised and abused. Hazlitt supposed this change of opinion was the result of a fickleness of disposition, and that without this fickleness we should also have been without his freshness. It is certain that it was always sufficient to be in the way of William Cobbett to incur enmity and become the object of his abuse. As a reasoner, in the proper sense of the word, Cobbett did not rank high. He never saw the whole of a subject, and his views were, therefore, always partial. But give him a special case, and he could make more of it than any man. His illustrations were peculiarly forcible, and whatever he had to describe, he described well. His "Rural Rides" contain, perhaps, the very best descriptions of English scenery that ever were written. His descriptions of rural life in Pennsylvania, when he left England in 1817, are also admirable. Being an accurate observer, his language was always graphic. His style was always racy and idiomatic. In his earlier productions he was somewhat declamatory, and indicated a familiarity with French writers. As he advanced in years his language and style became more Saxon.

Though Cobbett upon the whole was a good speaker, he was not a good debater, and therefore was not in his element in the House of Commons. He could get on well enough in a lecture, when he had all the talk to himself; but he could not bear opposition with temper, and he had not a command of resources sufficient for the exigencies of a discussion. What he might have been had he entered parliament at an earlier period of his life we know not; but he was evidently too old, at seventy years of age, to cut a figure as a ready speaker. He made one or two good speeches; but he repeated himself, and always made the same speech. To a certain extent, indeed, his "Register" was liable to a like charge of sameness; but his happy illustrations and descriptions made you forget that you had heard the same opinions repeated by him a hundred times before.



## FROM THE "ATLAS."

He was a great man for the occasion—he possessed consummate skill in appealing to the feelings that were stirred by the immediate event—but when he attempted an enlarged review of historical influences, or the application of first principles, he betrayed the real constitution of his mind, which was built up, bit by bit, without order, solid and heterogeneous. Whatever he undertook, he seemed to make clear: and it was this faculty of drawing out the core of the topic—be the use he made of it good or evil—that procured him those disciples who, without reference to his integrity, pinned their faith upon his assertions.

Had he, however, been a more philosophical politician, the uncertainty of his advocacy must have destroyed his weight. It was impossible that a man who fluctuated from one creed to another—who shifted his opinions as rapidly as the dolphin changes colour—who was a Tory with Pitt, and a Radical with Cartwright—who veered to all points of the compass with the instinct of the wind—could have exercised any permanent influence over his age. "His History of the Reformation" was one great distortion of a series of facts, mixed with some incontrovertible truths. Such was his whole career; and when he happened to have the most truth at his side, he seemed to be the most uneasy in his position, for he was always yearning for "bad distinction." He began with Pitt—fell back upon Paine—and may be said to have closed with Peel. How far posterity will be disposed to award to such a man the epithet of *great*, it would be idle to speculate. But we have too much faith in honesty and a consistent love of truth, to entertain a belief that even the loftiest powers can sanctify their violation. If Cobbett has gone down to the grave without the honours which his surpassing abilities ought to have commanded, the reason will be found in the inglorious uses to which, from first to last, he dedicated them.



## CHAPTER XXIV.

DISQUISITION UPON COBBETT'S CHARACTER AND CAREER  
—POEM BY THE AUTHOR OF "CORN-LAW RHYMES."

HAVING now given in detailed order the personal and public history of William Cobbett—having recorded it chiefly in the remarkable energy of his own voice and words—having followed him, after a timely though unexpected death, to a grave surrounded by public mourners—having shown by the eloquent evidence of his cotemporaries, adduced while he lived and after his departure, that he is gone beyond that grave into a land of posterity and fame, we take him now as the child of history, as one of the past, and proceed to consider his mind, his character, and his career, in relation to the truths which they convey, the moral which they inculcate, and the philosophy which they teach!

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*Nitor in adversum*, said the "Times" newspaper, should have been the motto of William Cobbett. But the sentence might have been rendered more complete.

—————"nec me qui cætera vincit  
Impetus."

The fact of his struggle against adversity remained undenied; but the journalist forgot to add, that circumstances which would have crushed others, left the mind of Cobbett unsubdued.

In this *will*, this determination not to be borne down, this love of living in an element of opposition, this finding in every new misfortune a spring of fresh and flowing energy, we solve the secret that preserved to Cobbett a certain share of greatness, in spite of changes and tergiversations of principle, and in the face of the inconsistencies and whimsicalities of his human nature. Thus Cobbett died a great man unquestionably; by some regretted, by many respected, and by all known. But he might have died a much greater man, by *more* regretted, and respected as *much* as known. Had Cobbett died a young man, in the fullness



of his early fame, the Newark motto would justly have graced his tombstone.—‘*Perissem ni perissem.*’ His after existence has proved the truth of this. He has perished by not perishing before;—not his name, but the unmixed glory that we should have attached to it—not his reputation, which must be lasting, but the value and lustre that it would have gathered from the consistency that would have kept it bright. However, a hundred great men have illustrated the same principle, and none more than Napoleon, in living after Waterloo.

Cobbett’s writings will cause him to stand out to the future historian of his country, as infinitely the most remarkable public man upon the canvas of events among which he moved, during forty-three years of startling vicissitude and changing fate. In all the annals of public proceedings, in peace or war, of this period, it will be impossible to disconnect him from the picture. Although a Proteus in changes of opinion, although presenting himself here and there in altered guise, although

———“*Per multas aditum sibi sœpe figuras  
Repperit.*”

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—his position metamorphosed, and his ground removed,—he is still present and present in the fore-ground too; and although great and honourable, and distinguished men, will be grouped and gathered in the same immortal painting, the figure of William Cobbett will yet be conspicuously observed. He will not be one of any depicted party, but he will be there, like the skeleton at the Egyptian feast, to remind all parties of his presence.

Cobbett all along his checquered career has performed a great mixture of good and evil. In his *nature*, the good certainly preponderated; in his *actions*, take them all in all, we fear the mischief had the greatest share. His mind had a strong and sound formation, but its faculties got diseased in the developement. This was a result of its want of right education; he managed it himself from what he learned from nature—he could not controul it by the philosophy that is to be gathered out of books. He could not kindle it into an useful admiration of the lore of others; he only taught it to exult in its own knowledge. It had no subduing power, no holy and glorious love of, and wonder at, the wisdom of ages, to humble its



presumptions with a pure and wholesome humility. It knew of, it mingled with the "PRESENT;" but could neither be guided nor governed by the morals of the "PAST." It was full of knowledge without learning, and therefore of spirit without controul.

Upon its earlier developements we shall not dwell here; we have exhibited them sufficiently in our seventh chapter, which the reader may observe as an introduction to this disquisition, but we shall take it from its public dawn, through all the sunshine and eclipses which its day presented, down to its sudden setting in the evening, in the sea of death!

Cobbett's career as a writer—the only character in which he will be recognized, for as an active politician, or as a member of parliament, he was nothing—began in America, marked by all the peculiarities of style which have since rendered it every where recognizable. He adopted the same means of argument—the same homely illustrations—the same *lucidus ordo*, and striking marshalling of arranged facts—the same battering-ram system of assault—the characteristic nickname founded on some known event—the coarse, yet hardly vulgar abuse—



the scurrilous personality—and the pervading vengeance of hatred, which, overcoming all other changes of his mind and opinions, have maintained themselves in their pristine vigour, *ab ovo usque ad mala*, from his first “Porcupine” down to his last “Register.” But the early energies of this school of composition were begun in a better atmosphere than that of misty confusion which hung over its later efforts. Cobbett was in the beginning imbued with the purest principles of political virtue. He wrote as a patriot because, out of his country, in a land where his country was hated and reviled, and where the bitterness of enmity was fresh against her; in a land where it was dangerous to be an Englishman, he supported his advocacy of England; he affirmed his loyalty to England’s king, and he upheld his opinions in favour of English monarchical institutions against republicanism—against Jacobinism—in the heart of America, and in the face of France! There was a moral courage in this that did him honour—a courage which he preserved in many other instances of his life. He likewise did great service to his country; in his efforts for her good he was something in the position of



Marcus Curtius in the chasm at Rome—America was a similar gulph of peril into which he had fairly plunged, only that fate did not require that it should close over his head. The twelve volumes of pamphlets and lives, and papers and essays, which he published separately there, and afterwards collected in this country, are preceded by a subscription list, at the head of which stands the name of the king, followed by a long retinue of his nobility, including many of his ministers, and winding up with a loyal muster-roll of attached subjects, lovers and defenders of the English constitution. Which of Cobbett's late productions could he have graced with such an appendix—a tribute as loud and lofty as the genius which it was intended to crown!

In England Cobbett continued in the same path, and let it always be remembered, that upon that path he had educated himself. The atmosphere of Harrow had not instilled,—the influences of Oxford had not confirmed him in the principles which he had chosen to adopt. He had brought himself up to them; and the fact of his having first imbibed them in the army, cannot be adduced as the reason which



begot his choice, since the commander who encouraged him to education, and promoted him as its reward, nay, who afterwards procured his discharge that he might more freely exercise it, was the unhappy Lord Edward Fitzgerald, whom no one will certainly accuse of too strong an attachment to the love of order, or the creed of conservatism. No—William Cobbett, with a mind that scorned to mould itself to opinions by any modern examples, and yet was utterly without the benefit of any ancient lore—thought for himself and by himself—gazed into the amphitheatre of events—drew his inferences with a clear head and a steady heart—reasoned with discretion, and finally decided with judgment, that the wisest and purest of governments was a limited monarchy; and the most virtuous and prudent course of politics for all men to adopt, was that which prescribed the union of church of state, loyalty to the monarch, and attachment to the constitution and the altars of the land.

Cobbett had educated himself to this belief, and up to a time in the same creed he lived and wrote and triumphed!

And we may remark that he must have deemed



it, at bottom—pure—for naturally he was a hater of corruption, and he never wrote for gold. We think we may fairly exculpate Cobbett from this charge—he has eloquently defended himself against it. No doubt he had raised his writings into a national importance—no doubt ministers thanked him for his services, and made overtures for their reward; but Cobbett accepted the thanks and refused the overtures. He was asked if government could be of any service to any branch of his family, and he replied, that if by his own industry he could assist his family he would; but, that he would accept nothing for them from any other source.

At this time, Cobbett must have worked upon principle, and for the sake of principle, and because he believed his principle good—above all danger, and beyond all price. He came to England and he continued so to work. He published in defence of the constitution, and virulently opposed the new inroads that were then advocated warmly without the senate, and occasionally earnestly recommended within. Above all, how did he come forward in the cause of his country upon the subject of her threatened invasion, by a man whom he much



resembled, Napoleon Buonaparte. His remarks were cherished as germs of a patriot's virtue, which ministers deemed it well to scatter over the land as seeds that must produce noble fruit. They were read from every pulpit of every Protestant church in Great Britain; they were adverted to in the senate by one of its best and chiefest ornaments, as entitling their author to have raised to his memory a statue of gold; they were praised by many Englishmen as superior to Burke, and Müller, the Swiss historian, pronounced them equal to Demosthenes!

Was not this honour—was not this fame? The national gratitude was now as a pedestal upon which William Cobbett stood. Noble basement! which a man should either erect into a column, or be content to rest. Cobbett, however, descended and took his station upon other ground.

“*L'on ne peut aller loin dans l'amitie, si l'on n'est pas disposé à se pardonner, les uns aux autres, les petits defauts.*” Cobbett, if he ever read knew not how to practise this maxim of La Bruyère—he forgave nobody his little faults when those faults operated against himself. He was now in his zenith of glory—he



might soon have become a member of parliament, and he would not have been long a member without becoming a minister ; his path was open, he had only to tread it steadily to arrive at ambition's goal. But this was not his doom—Windham asked him to dinner and invited Pitt—the supercilious statesman refused to meet the low-born but renowned writer who had done such service to the state. Cobbett was stung to the quick—stung into hatred and beyond forgiveness. In this instance he would have broken his neck over the maxim of La Bruyère, rather than not have proved its truth—

“ Intus et in jecore ægro  
Nascuntur domini.”

His passions had got the mastery over him, and when Cobbett imbibed a hatred, he became its victim. Because Pitt had offended him, he veered round to an absolute radicalism ; he did so gradually, but effectively. He was a conservative upon principle, but his vindictive spirit made him a radical out of hate. This tergiverse shifting of his opinions from a private pique, throws a light upon Cobbett's character ; it proves that his passions were stronger than his principles, and a thousand subsequent ac-



tions of his life prove the same thing. The point, however, is unfavourable to himself—it tells nothing to his credit, and it told nothing in his fortunes; but it has left a powerful moral lesson to society. There can be no doubt but that William Cobbett in his heart repented the change. In his heart he was a conservative up to his dying day; he was only a radical from necessity—he could not be a Whig, that was impossible, and he felt that he could not be a Tory, because birth-pride, and purse-pride, had began to persecute him; and to what ever persecuted him—his fierce and unrelenting vindictiveness forbade him to belong. He was aristocratic by nature, but he could not dwell amongst those from whom he had not sprung, and after his politics began to make him poor, he proudly knew that with whom he could not cope, he would not associate. He had placed an insuperable barrier between himself and his former principles, against which it would have been vain to struggle, and therefore he abandoned them gradually, and commenced fighting for a cause with which he held no common sympathies until he had written himself into a belief that it was a just cause, just as men who



have invented a particular story *à la Munchausen* for the entertainment of their friends—habituate themselves in the telling of it till they believe in its truth.

The prevailing crime of Cobbett's life—for it amounted almost to a crime—was this falling off, from mere personal motives, from his former friends. He knew men first for a little while to love them; they offended him, and he knew them all the rest of his life to hate them, and to be revenged upon them. This point in Cobbett's character has been well illustrated by a writer in "Fraser's Magazine":—

"Personal affront," he says, "always went far with Cobbett, who acted generally upon impulse. His inconsistencies may be, in most instances, traced to some offence, real or imagined, which he received from those who once had been the objects of his praise. Burdett, the saviour of England, was transformed to Burdett, the type of all that is mean and base; Waithman, the pride of the senate, became Waithman, the empty shopboy; Hunt, the patriot, degenerated to Hunt, the greatest of liars; O'Connell, the glory of Ireland, was at one time a vile vagabond, and so



forth. We are sorry to say, that kindness to him did not call forth a return as surely as did insult or neglect. There was, indeed, a harshness and cruelty about Cobbett which it is impossible to excuse. For an enemy he had no bowels of compassion. The Marquess of Londonderry fell by a calamity to which all men may be subject. In a moment of unwatched madness he died by his own hand; and ever after he was designated in the "Register" as Castlereagh who cut his throat at North Cray. Even an animal as low as one Bric, a hanger-on of O'Connell's, who was shot in a duel provoked by his own impertinence, was insulted, while yet unburied, in terms of the grossest contempt and ribaldry, for no greater crime than because, in a quarrel respecting the money to be paid by Roman Catholic Emancipation, got up between Cobbett and O'Connell, Bric, on the principle of adhering to the hand that fed him, had supported the latter. These are cruel things; and fifty other instances—the merciless abuse of Lord Picknose Liverpool, and, not long ago, of Mr. Justice Taunton, immediately after his death, suggest themselves to us at the moment—could be given, if they were worth searching



after. When Canning died, he wrote over him a funeral oration of withering intensity of censure; but this, though in some parts harsh, and in no part kindly timed, we are not inclined to blame."

The "Edinburgh Review," however, once gave a far more slashing exposition of Cobbett on this head, and there can be no doubt that he deserved it. It was done in a critical survey of the articles in his "Register," at the time that he was advocating the principles of Sir Francis Burdett, whom he had so often denounced as a traitor, and whom, since his friendship with him, he has taken especial pains to abuse. The difference was that Cobbett's first abuse of Burdett was the abuse of a Tory for going too far; and his second, that of a Radical for not going far enough. Cobbett's extreme talent and power made his political opinions readable; but his extreme tergiversation and inconsistency, rendered them almost altogether valueless. Yet his common sense often thrust him into truth, and the nature of his illustrations continually commanded conviction which he taught his readers to misapply, and thus we might gather from his Tory writ-



ings, wherewith to form a Radical creed and glean from his liberal lucubrations a fit superstructure for a Conservative code of laws.

In his works of politics, however, and all Cobbett's books, *were* works of politics, he had one great moral and virtuous aim in view—an aim which if he did not keep independent of his dislikes—he ever employed his dislikes to serve, and never reversed the subserviency. This was the promulgation of agriculture and the bettering of the condition of the agricultural labourers. In order to bring about this purpose he stuck at nothing: he tried all sorts and modes of experiments. Now he endeavoured to educate the labourers, and now he railed against all education;—now he abused the farmers for not paying their men, and now he recommended the old system of keeping them without pay;—now he exhorted them to order and allegiance, and now he lectured them to all but strike for wages. In his early life his enemies railed against him for keeping back liberal opinions among them, and in his latter days they prosecuted him for exciting them to sedition. But right or wrong, by this means or that, he was always battling for them, and for



what he believed to be their welfare. His "Cottage Economy" was calculated to produce useful and economical effects in the home of every cottager who knew how to read, and did read it. His introduction of the Cobbett corn, and of the straw-plat, proved that he sought to apply his own knowledge to industrious and useful purposes. His "Residence in America" was a book purely agricultural, and his "Rural Rides" are but so many evidences of his observance of the farmer's and the labourer's means; and his anxiety that all should work to one end, where the welfare of one class was so dependent upon the welfare of the other. Finally, his writings and his votes upon the malt tax prove, above all other arguments, his real and sincere wishes for agricultural prosperity; and when the labourers read in his son's first "Register" of his attendance in the House of Commons on the motion of the Marquis of Chandos—his earnest attention to the debate—his determined resolution, in spite of illness, to stay it out—the subsequent revival, in consequence, of his old disease,—and the last melancholy termination of that disease in death,—they will not but gratefully remember a long

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life of exertions in their behalf—they cannot but *most* gratefully feel, that for them and their interests—he lived and DIED.

In fact, it was this attachment of Cobbett to the soil, and to the tillers of the soil, from whom he sprung, that stamped him so effectually with the character of Englishman. His writings on domestic subjects, independent of politics, proved that he was English in heart and soul; and a writer in “Tait’s Magazine” infers, from the same source, that he was a genuine descendant of the old Saxon stock—in short the “last of the Saxons.” Marked indeed must have been the character which, in these days, could give rise to such an opinion.

Cobbett appears to us to have been in his domestic character an estimable man—he was a good father by the acknowledgment of his children. “My beloved father, my most kind and equally beloved father,” writes his eldest son. He was a good husband, as appears by his own account of his conduct after marriage in that most excellent of books, his “Advice to Young Men.” This work alone would entitle William Cobbett to be classed among the

“Inventus aut qui vitam excoluere per artes  
Quique sui memores alios fecere morendo.”



Its doctrines go towards increasing domestic comforts, and render its author deserving of a general good-will. Cobbett was strong of heart in the domestic affections: he loved his wife; he loved his children; he loved what he would have called "the people about him." There can be no doubt about it—all his writings testify it. In his family he was for peace; he only once, he declares, spoke with harshness to a single member of it; but out of it, *sæviti amor ferri*, the love of opposition, or rather of opposing, reigned predominant.

Cobbett's private life was decidedly good, in fact, an example; but his public career was questionable and contradictory. From the date of his first change it was rendered remarkable by perpetual change; he has praised and hated by turns almost every public man; he has done, and undone by inconsistency, almost every kind of public good and evil. In the House of Commons he failed upon his motion against the address; and most woefully, and most luckily, and most deservedly, did he fail in his design of addressing the King to remove Sir Robert Peel from the Privy Council. This attempt was for awhile a great draw back to

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his popularity. Sir Robert's triumph was complete, as was also Cobbett's humiliation: he had missed his aim; he had overshot his mark—*Sa boule étoit demeurée!*

Cobbett never shone in the House—he was no debater—he found in later days that level which Canning wished him to find in his time. His sad and lamentable inconsistency had spoiled his character in the Commons House,—however, he continued to maintain it abroad—and Sir Robert Peel was able to rise in the senate, of which he was a member, and to say (*par signe de mépris*) not only with impunity, but amid a burst of cheers, “that he would pay the same deference to what Cobbett had said, as if it had come from a *respectable* member.”

In literature, Cobbett acquired a far wider fame than he was in any way entitled to. He had no mercy upon bad grammarians, and he wrote a decent grammar, with a fair explanation of the subjunctive mood; but for the sake of appearing what he really was, quite English, he adopted homely modes of expression, and in the use of vulgar idioms, and the accepted vulgarities of conversation among the classes to whom he addressed himself, he defied all the



rules of grammar himself, with a desperate impunity that was only likely to pass harmless, because it was impossible that men could imitate his excellencies, and therefore unlikely that they should adopt his faults. His French grammar is a good key to the language of France, from whose writers he drew most of the scholarly knowledge which he possessed. Of his English books, "The Gardener," "The Advice to Young Men," "The Cottage Economy," "The Tour in Scotland," "The Rural Rides," &c., were excellent; for as we have elsewhere said, and as this very volume must illustrate, no man could paint rural life like Cobbett. But apart from this, apart from what he had seen and could describe naturally *from* nature, his other books were failures, and his widest spreading book, "The History of the Reformation," was worse than a failure—it was an imposition. But hear an eloquent contemporary upon his general literary qualifications—

"His style was his great charm. There was, no doubt, much in his matter; but the style set it off to the utmost advantage. It was clear, perspicuous, pure, thoroughly English,—English drawn from the wells of Saxon undefiled.



His argument, as the 'Times' well said, is an example of acute, yet apparently natural, nay, involuntary logic, smoothed in its progress and cemented in its parts by a mingled stream of torturing sarcasm, contemptuous jocularities, and fierce and slaughtering invective. We do not know any English writer precisely like him, and it would be useless to look to those of other lands. He somewhat resembles Swift; but Swift was graver, and dealt much in irony—a weapon little used by Cobbett. Something of the manner of Defoe may be traced in his descriptive parts; but, as a political writer, old Daniel was much heavier. Perhaps Franklin, whom he with justice used to call an old rogue, comes nearest to his manner, and Poor Richard certainly supplied many of his ideas upon life, manners, and domestic economy. Paine, also, whom he at one time denounced as a ruffian unworthy to live, and at another time set up as an idol for admiration, seems to have served him for a model; but Paine, though clear and easy, was far more feeble than his old enemy during his life, and his skeleton-worshipper after his death. He fancied, or he pretended to fancy, that he was indebted for his vigour



and lucidness to his grammatical knowledge of the language, and was fond of referring to his grammars as a proof of his profound information. If he really entertained any such opinion, it was a great mistake. His grammars do not contain one grammatical principle of the slightest value beyond what we find in a sixpenny abridgment of Lindley Murray. Of the philosophy of language he had no idea—no acquaintance with etymology, not a philological notion in his head. We have not looked into his English Grammar for many years; and all we can recollect of it is, that the examples chosen to illustrate the rules were amusingly drawn from his political animosities. In order to explain a noun of multitude, or something of the kind, we had, ‘ Thus we say, A House of Commons, a den of thieves.’ The use of a hyphen was illustrated by ‘ Renolds the government-spy.’ Interjection, if we do not forget, he derived from the Latin words *inter*, between, and *jection*, something thrown. He pulled the king’s speeches to pieces in a very amusing manner—subjecting them to a species of verbal torture which no writing, and least of all his own, could bear. In this sort of work he made occa-



sionally, whimsical mistakes. We recollect his being peculiarly facetious upon Mr. Canning for using the word 'incohete,' as he spelt it, defining it to signify 'not in a state of cohesion.' Canning's word was 'inchoate.' Such accidents will happen to people who will play the verbal critic, without knowing the languages from which are drawn the words on which their ingenuity is exerted.

"We do not think that Cobbett ever read very much, in the scholarly sense of reading. For classical studies he always expressed vast contempt; and he informs us that he never read one word of Shakespeare until the year 1797, when he was five-and-thirty years old. He then formed a very low opinion of him, as only about a couple of months ago he took an opportunity of declaring. He attributed the admiration for Shakespeare to the mere caprice of fashion; alleging the success of Ireland's miserable imposture, *Vortigern*, as a proof that any trash was good enough to pass for Shakespeare's writing, and therefore sure of being applauded. This argument is not worth much, for Ireland's play utterly failed; and it never had any believers among men of sense. Kemble, who took the



principal part in the tragedy, despised it heartily. But, on the whole, Cobbett's criticism on Shakespeare is not more offensive than that of David Hume, a critic by profession, in his *History of England*. Both would have been astonished at hearing it maintained that, in addition to the poetical beauties of Shakespeare, there could be drawn from his works metaphysical doctrines and ethical aphorisms far surpassing, in extensive wisdom and profound philosophy, any thing ever written by Hume, and lessons and reflections in politics to which Cobbett never could aspire. Such, however, is the fact. Milton, also, he treated with deep disdain; his comments on the battle of the angels in the sixth book are very comical: but the dislike is not to be wondered at, for there is little in common between the *Register* and *Paradise Lost*. As for his contemporaries, he looked with disgust, sometimes affected, but with envy always real, upon those among them who attained popularity. Sir Walter Scott was especially an eyesore, and he seldom missed an opportunity of insulting his novels. The Ariosto of the North, if we are not mistaken, did not return the dislike, but read Cobbett



with the greatest pleasure. The fame and the sale of *Waverly*, and the rest of that glorious series, were not to be forgiven; the grand political instructor of the people of England wondered at the strange taste of people in buying the works of Scott, when those of Cobbett were to be had. Byron he contemned; and of Wordsworth and Southey he knew nothing, beyond the facts that one was a stampmaster and the other a laureat. Of the ordinary run of literary labourers he never took the slightest notice.

Though continually writing politics, and sometimes committing, what he called history, the stock of knowledge which he brought to historical disquisitions was singularly small. A more amusing instance of this cannot be found in the whole range of literature than his *History of the Reformation*. It was generally believed at the time, and perhaps with justice, that he entered on the writing of this book with the hope of sharing in some of the pay raised among the Irish patriots for their especial benefit. Whether he got the promised money or not, is a question which we leave to be resolved by his future biographer—we are rather in-



clined to think that the native artists of Ireland took care that he did not. Cobbett's strong mind must have thoroughly despised the Popish superstition; and his keen sense of what are the real causes of the misery and destitution of the lowest orders must of course have taught him to laugh to scorn the supposition that the starvation of the wretched Irish peasantry, and the general pauperism of the Irish tradesmen, were in any degree affected by the fact of the presence or the absence of Mr. O'Connell, or Mr. Shiel, or Mr. O'Dwyer, or Mr. Ronayne, or Mr. Finn, or Mr. Lalor, or Mr. Sullivan, or Mr. Feargus O'Connor, or any of the other flourishing or drooping members of the tail in parliament. In fact, when Cobbett, not very long ago, went preaching in Ireland, his lectures were in general clouded with a shade of unpopularity among the sagacious patriots by trade of that wise and well-behaved island, because he ventured to draw the attention of his hearers to questions of currency, trade, agriculture, manufactures, poor-laws, and so forth, and rather avoided referring all the misfortunes of Ireland to the want of a Roman Catholic establishment, without toleration of any other, as the Liberal South



American states express it in their charters. But the pay was, we believe, the stimulant ; and to the work Cobbett went with that peculiar fearlessness which is the concomitant of an intrepid ignorance. Fearless, indeed, was the ignorance which declared Luther, Calvin, and Beza, to be the greatest ruffians that ever disgraced the annals of the world, and condemned their labours to contempt and derision ; without, we need hardly say, having read one line of their works. His Popish coadjutors supplied him with materials for reviving all the old slanders and insults against the founders of the Reformation here. Cranmer is a scoundrel, without a particle of redemption ; Latimer a blackguard, the burning of whom was a most meritorious act ; Cromwell a robbing blacksmith ; and so forth. Of course, Henry VIII. cuts a great figure in this history ; and whatever could be objected to the character of that burly monarch is put in the fullest light. As old Harry had many vulnerable points, it must be expected that so great a master of Billingsgate as Cobbett has succeeded in making a magnificent picture of that 'rotten lump of beastliness.' In delineating him he had George



IV. in his eye, and many hits, directed apparently against Henry's corpulence, profusion, favouritism, and ill-usage of his wives, have a secondary aim against the character of George. Edward VI. is treated as a sickly and diseased boy, with a predisposition to cruelty: against Elizabeth the full vials of his wrath are emptied. Here, indeed, Sheridan's caution, that there should be 'no scandal against Queen Elizabeth,' is woefully neglected. Every slander that was ever said or hinted against the 'fair vestal throned by the West,' is to be found in this accurate and impartial history of the Protestant Reformation. Her mother, Anne Boleyn, is equally ill-used; Cobbett going so far as to pretend to believe the story of some lying Popish ecclesiastics, that she was the daughter of Henry VIII., and, with the usual harshness of his manner, justifying the horrors of her trial and execution.

So accurate in examination is the book, that he attributes the rack and the loss of Calais to Elizabeth (Lingard, impartial author! is his authority for the first of these discoveries); and scruples not to assert, that the persons who suffered in Mary's time suffered for felony and



treason, not for heresy. He speaks rather tenderly of Bonner, who is held up as a miracle of gentleness, as compared with Lord Sidmouth. Philip obtains no small praise, especially because he brought a large treasure to this country when he married Mary; Leopold of Saxe Coburg, on the contrary, not having brought a farthing, but obtained 50,000*l.* a-year when he espoused the Princess Charlotte. The massacre of Bartholomew is rather eulogised, and Coligni, of course, set down as a scoundrel only worthy of being cut off. The number of people slain in that massacre he fixes at the precise number of seven hundred and eighty-six. He nevertheless has occasionally a misgiving, that, on the whole, St. Barthélemi reflects but dubious credit on the cause of his clients; and takes care to say that, however necessary and justifiable in a political point of view, the then existing state of France being considered, it was not exactly in accordance with the generally mild and humane spirit of Catholicism. Of the approbation of the Pope, and the joy diffused over all the Romish communities in Europe, Cobbett knew nothing. In fact, we have never read a more amusing specimen of the hardihood



of total ignorance, than the discussion on Saint Bartholomew in his history.

“The outrages of the Inquisition, the barbarities of Bonner, the treacherous massacres directed by Charles IX., the exterminating decrees and bulls of the Popes, the sanguinary oppressions of the Spaniards in the Netherlands, the corruption, tyranny, avarice, and rapacity of the Romish Church, in the sixteenth century—its residence to the progress of learning, and its ceaseless attempts to perpetuate, by cruelty or fraud, by falsehood or by blood, its sway over mankind: of all this Cobbett says nothing. But when Elizabeth sends to the gallows those who avowedly were engaged in ceaseless plot against her own life—who were endeavouring to bend the country to a foreign yoke—whose sole thought was how to put back the human mind a couple of centuries, that their ‘order’ might regain its lost supremacy, then the pathetic soul of Cobbett is awakened into sorrow and indignation. Nothing can be finer than his account of the gunpowder plot and the revolution. Oliver Cromwell rather puzzles him. He is obliged to blame him for his cruelties to the amiable men of 1641, reeking with



the blood of the most dismal massacre on record ; but still the iron-souled protector finds some strings in the heart of his unwilling vituperator to vibrate in unison with his own, and he is not cursed altogether. Even toward Elizabeth, Cobbett cannot refuse some words of kindness or approbation when he speaks of the Spanish Armada ; and it is with evident grudging and reluctance he performs his irksome duty of reviling her, when *her* poor laws, so often and so justly the object of his panegyric on other occasions, come under discussion.—Well did he know that, if that glorious princess had done nothing else, yet for this code would she have been worthy of eternal fame ; and that the misfortunes of Ireland arose, not because Elizabeth crushed rebellion in that hapless land, but because she was not able to introduce into it the laws which she had established in England. He also well knew that those who, when he wrote the book, were most loudly proclaiming themselves as the exclusive friends of the Irish—as “*the Irish*,” in fact—were, as they still are, actively endeavouring to prevent the introduction into the country which they disgrace and curse, of a system which, in the



course of a single generation, would, by annihilating the main cause of their mischievous power, render Ireland as amenable to the law and as tranquil as Surrey.

“ Considered as a history, the book is actually droll. Cobbett had never read a single line beyond the most ordinary sources—never qualified himself for his task by any study of contemporary authors, or any researches into theology or polemics. His task was, to him the easy one, of abusing Henry VIII., Elizabeth, William III., and their ministers. This, he unquestionably did in a most amusing manner. Mixed up with such abuse, were tirades of all kinds on the daily politics of the time he wrote. George the Fourth’s reception in Ireland, Sturges Bourne’s act, Castlereagh’s cutting his throat, the Scotch *feelosophers*, the Six Acts, the National Debt, the want of reform in parliament, Queen Caroline, Bishop Somebody’s selling beer at Farnham, the Manchester massacre, and a thousand other matters equally apposite, figure in juxtaposition with the “ history ” of Henry VIII. This rendered the book piquant at the time; but now that most of these topics are wholly forgotten, while

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the great events of the reformation remain as they were before the assault of their Kensington antagonist—we fear that the work is not destined to immortality. We do not believe he found it profitable—at least, he complains that the fine-paper copies did not sell—but it won him a kind of fame, which gratified his vanity very much. The Romish priesthood had it translated into all the languages of the continent; and this, Cobbett persuaded himself, was a great personal compliment to his own fame. What elated him most was a translation into modern Greek. “There,” he said, in one of his “Registers,” addressing Mackintosh (for whom he had, very properly, a most profound contempt), “there, Jamie, think o’ that! Which o’ Walter Scott’s novels was ever translated into Greek?” Cobbett, of course, imagined that the Greek into which his great work had been translated, was the Greek of which he had heard so much, as being the object of study in schools and universities; and, on the principle of “*omne ignotum pro magnifico*,” he doubtless thought he had received a vast compliment, which would, however, have been lowered extremely in his eyes, if he heard that



the very works he was disparaging (those of Sir Walter) had appeared in the same dialect; and, that the said dialect was a miserable and corrupt jargon."

We are now warned to bring this paper to an end—there is no farther space. We could have given a lengthened dissertation in less hurry and a more careful strain—but we are called to pause. We have, however, one remarkable fact to mention. It may excite superstition, to which we are no friend; or, it may be considered as an instance of second sight, but it is true.

It will be in the recollection of our readers that Mr. Cleave, the great leader of the unstamped, and able conductor of the "Weekly Police Gazette," (against which none but a Whig government would so partially and so rigorously have proceeded) has acknowledged his admiration of Cobbett, in a brief published memoir, in which he stated that, he having been exchequered, and sent to the King's Bench Prison for publishing an unstamped paper, Cobbett became his security for the rules—a mutual acquaintance may therefore be inferred. Mr. Cleave, a few days previous to Cobbett's



death, had dreamt ominous dreams respecting him. Amongst other visions, he had one in which Mr. Cobbett appeared to him in an unusual and extraordinary dress—enrobed in a coat and waistcoat with round rolling collar, cut in the first style of fashion, and “swellish to a degree.” Cleave, in his vision, might well be astonished at the farmer turned into the fop. The next morning (it was in term-time, and Mr. Cleave had the day-rules) he visited the shop of Mr. Cobbett, in Bolt-Court. In passing its window, he was astonished to see there a newly-finished bust of Cobbett enrobed in what appeared to be a model of the waistcoat of his dream. In going into the shop he narrated to the publisher of the “Register” the strange coincidence. The publisher paused—turned to some dusty books or papers, which he removed from their kindred shelf, and drew from beneath them a waistcoat, the identical rolling-collar, fashionably-cut waistcoat, of which Mr. Cleave had dreamt. “We could hardly persuade him,” said the publisher, “to put it on to sit for the bust, it was so dandyish.” William Cobbett was then, or the next day, a corpse !



We have no room for further reflections, but shall conclude our work with a poem to the memory of William Cobbett, by the author of "Corn-Law Rhymes:"—

WILLIAM COBBETT.

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Oh, bear him where the rain can fall,  
 And where the winds can blow,  
 And let the sun weep o'er his pall,  
 As to the grave ye go

And in some little lone churchyard,  
 Beside the growing corn,  
 Lay gentle nature's stern prose bard—  
 Her mightiest peasant-born!

Yes, let the wild flower wed his grave,  
 That bees may murmur near,  
 When o'er his last home bend the brave,  
 And say, "A MAN lies here."

For Britons honour Cobbett's name,  
 Though rashly oft he spoke;  
 And none can scorn, and few will blame,  
 The low-laid heart of oak.

See, o'er his prostrate branches, see,  
 Ev'n factious hate consents  
 To reverence in the fallen tree  
 His British lineaments!

Though gnarl'd the storm-toss'd boughs that braved  
 The thunder's gather'd scowl,  
 Not always through his darkness raved  
 The storm-winds of the soul.



Oh, no ! in hours of golden calm  
Morn met his forehead bold ;  
And breezy evening sung her psalm  
Beneath his dew-dropp'd gold.

The wren its crest of fibred fire  
With his rich bronze compared,  
While many a youngling's songful sire  
His acorn'd twiglets shared.

The lark, above, sweet tribute paid,  
Where clouds with light were riven ;  
And true-love sought his blue-bell'd shade,  
"To bless the hour of Heav'n."

Ev'n when his stormy voice was loud,  
And guilt quaked at the sound,  
Beneath the frown that shook the proud,  
The poor a shelter found.

Dead Oak, thou liv'st ! Thy smitten hands,  
The thunder of thy brow,  
Speak, with strange tongues, in many lands,  
And tyrants hear thee now !

*June 23rd, 1835.*

THE END.

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LONDON :

J. LEIGHTON, JOHNSON'S-COURT, FLEET-STREET.