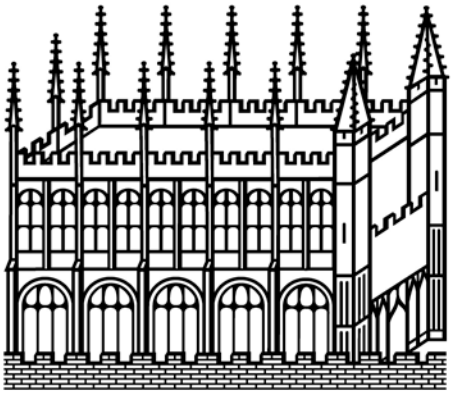

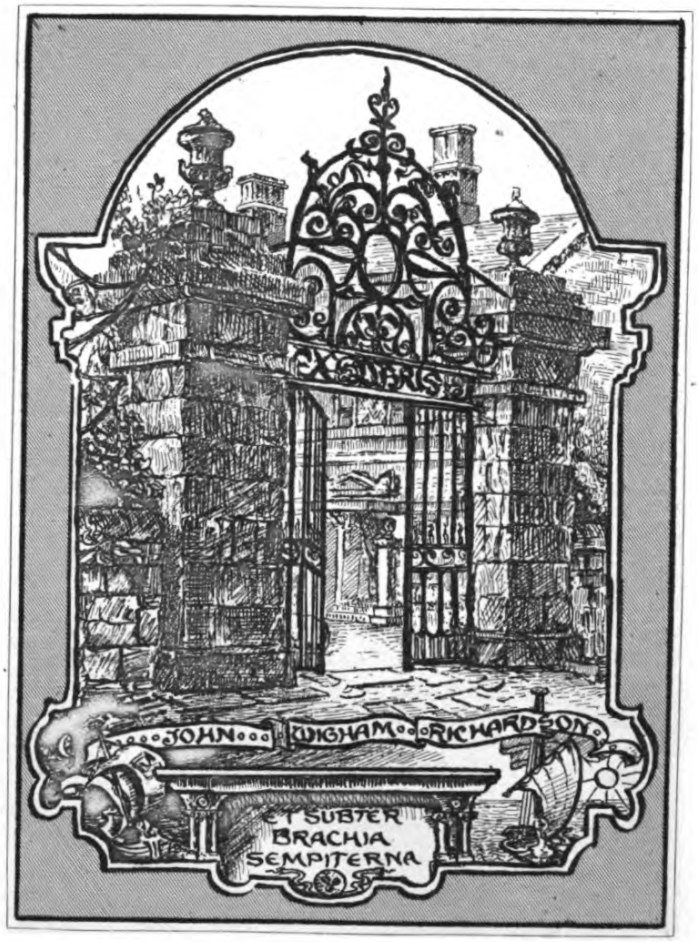
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Mr Watkins the permission
which he requests

Whitehall
May 29. 1850

LIFE,

POETRY, AND LETTERS

OF

EBENEZER ELLIOTT,

THE CORN-LAW RHYMER.

WITH AN ABSTRACT OF HIS POLITICS.

BY HIS SON-IN-LAW,

JOHN WATKINS,

AUTHOR OF THE "LIFE OF JAMES MYERS," "GEORGE CHAMBERS," ETC.

"His heart's his mouth;
What his breast forges, that his tongue must vent;
And being angry, does forget that ever
He heard the name of Death."—CORIOLANUS.

LONDON:

JOHN MORTIMER, PUBLISHER, 69, FLEET-STREET.

1850.

ERRATUM.

In page 131, second line from bottom, *for* "enactor," *read* "establisher."

DEDICATORY EPISTLE

(WITH PERMISSION)

TO SIR ROBERT PEEL, BART.

SIR ROBERT,—To you I dedicate this Life of Ebenezer Elliott, because, since the effective part you took in the repeal of those laws which at once made bread dear, trade profitless, and labour vain, he became one of your warmest admirers. Posterity will do justice to the statesman who sacrificed party, and with it place and power, to principle and the good of his country; who elevated the politician into the patriot; who, belonging to no party, yet fears not the factious opposition of all; who stands alone, a free, philosophical, and independent advocate of national interests.

I have the honour to subscribe myself,
Sir Robert,
Your much obliged and most obedient Servant,

JOHN WATKINS.

Clapham Rise, 1st July, 1850.

N.B.—The above was written previous to the lamented Baronet's decease.

SIR ROBERT PEEL, BART.

At a time of peace and pleasantness, when all was quiet around, the world has been startled with one of those shocks which "overcome us like a summer-cloud," creating wonder and dismay. Sir Robert Peel is dead! Never, perhaps, was the loss of one man so nationally felt. The deceased was the most distinguished patron of the fine arts, and the greatest statesman of the age.

This book derives a melancholy interest from the fact that one of the latest acts of the Right Honourable Baronet was an instance of his generous urbanity in granting permission that it should be dedicated to him.* Elliott's memory will receive this posthumous honour; and the name of the Apostle of Corn-law Repeal will be linked in history with the Accomplisher of that great boon.

May we not hope that those truly disinterested benefactors of their kind and country are now in the enjoyment of the everlasting reward which is reserved for all who have done or suffered well in this life?

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* See the fac-simile at the title-page.

PREFACE.

THE late Ebenezer Elliott, a short time before his death, requested me to write his life. He said he had thought at one time of engaging his son Francis to the task; but had altered his mind because he deemed an own son less likely to execute it impartially than a son-in-law. He gave me some general directions as to the plan of the work, and told me that he had written an autobiography up to his 25th year. He was desirous, above all things, that a true portrait of himself should be drawn, omitting the colouring or dress of adventitious circumstance; "For," said he, "that is not myself!" I promised to comply with his request, and to write such a Biography as I trusted public opinion would ratify.

His decease made me regard his will as a sacred obligation, to be fulfilled before the wish of any one else on the subject. But a natural diffidence caused me to desire that some one more known

in the world than myself, and better qualified than I, should undertake the task. Accordingly, Mr. Fox, M.P., was solicited, but declined on account of his Parliamentary engagements. Application was also made to Mr. Thomas Carlyle, who replied that he had not been personally acquainted with Mr. Elliott.

There seemed no alternative but that I should perform my promise to the deceased. I was partly encouraged to this by the example of the sons-in-law of Sir Walter Scott, of Southey, of Dr. Chalmers and others.

I wanted not for materials, possessing, indeed, a greater quantity than I could render available. Many printed memoranda of the Life and Character of Elliott exist in reviews, magazines, and newspapers, together with notices of his works; these I have not transcribed, because I felt desirous to make the contents of this book as original as possible, and not to republish what had already been published. I have given a somewhat elaborate account of his poetic works and made liberal extracts from them: this I felt necessary in order to do justice to the merits of a poet whose writings are not so generally known as they deserve to be,

and concerning whose character much misrepresentation exists.

Readers of poetry are seldom readers of politics —they seek amusement rather than instruction; but politics could not be wholly omitted in a life of the Corn-law Rhymer. I have, therefore, made a "brief abstract and chronicle" of them, introducing them without amplification.

The letters written by Ebenezer Elliott to a great variety of correspondents are very numerous, and would, of themselves, fill a large volume. But as he was in the habit of copying himself in his epistolary correspondence, the reader will not be desirous to see more than a few specimens. In selecting these, I have had regard to one beautiful phase in the character of the writer, namely, his condescension to the wishes of young authors who needed his advice and encouragement. He himself said that his chief pleasure in old age was to converse with the young minds of the country; and those who sought him found him indeed a literary pastor. The letters in this volume furnish the most valuable portion of its contents.

I have now a grateful duty, which I cannot conclude without fulfilling, namely, to express my

heartfelt thanks to those gentlemen who have kindly answered my requests for assistance. These are particularly due to Mr. Tait, of Edinburgh; the Rev. Jacob Brettel, of Rotherham; Dr. Beard, of Manchester; William Fisher, Esq., of Sheffield; Mr. Ebenezer Hingston, Mr. Bedingfield, and, above all, to Sir Robert Peel, who politely granted me his permission to dedicate to him this book.

CONTENTS.

LIFE OF EBENEZER ELLIOTT.

CHAPTER I.

FROM HIS BIRTH UP TO HIS TWENTY-FIFTH YEAR—BEING AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY, WITH THE EDITOR'S CRITICAL REMARKS.

EBENEZER ELLIOTT is a name that will pass from biography to history. He was pre-eminently a philanthropist and patriot; and, moreover, a poet, who made his ornamental art useful, by words of truth exciting great deeds, as one who had a mission to fulfil on behalf of human progress. For this purpose he mingled politics with his poetry, and was the pioneer and trumpeter of a great national movement for the repeal of the Bread-tax, or the laws affecting Free-trade in corn. He lived to witness the successful result of his labours; and died anticipating the blessings that would flow from them to his country. Ebenezer Elliott was neither a partisan in politics nor a sectarian in religion—he was a general reformer. His indignation against oppressors of all kinds was equalled only by his pity for the oppressed—there

was the MAN in all he wrote. The life of such an individual cannot fail to be interesting if faithfully told; and as there are no biographers equal to autobiographers, when they speak the truth of themselves, Ebenezer Elliott, at every opportunity, shall tell his own story. Accordingly, this chapter will contain an autobiography, written for Mr. Tait, and forwarded by that gentleman, for posthumous publication in the "Athenæum."

AUTOBIOGRAPHY.

Soon after my Corn-law Rhymes had made me somewhat notorious, I was strongly urged by sundry persons to write a history of my life; which I then refused to do, because I had nothing remarkable to relate of myself, and because I knew not that I had done aught that could reasonably induce any person to ask, six months after my death, "What sort of man was Ebenezer Elliott?" I placed, however, in the hands of my friend G. C. Holland, M.D., a series of letters, in which I narrated some incidents of my early life, that had probably influenced the formation of my mind and character, and which might form the basis of a posthumous narrative, if wanted. I embody in the succeeding narrative the substance of those letters now, following the advice which I rejected several years ago—reluctantly, for the same reasons—not that this is "a world to hide virtues

in," but that I have none to hide. I have another reason for my reluctance. The portion of my history which I am about to publish is not that portion of it which would be most instructive were it written as I alone could write it; that is, if I were brave and honest enough so to write it—which I am not. Even that portion of it, however, would not be more instructive than the history of almost any one person out of millions of the Queen's subjects, if truly written; nor could I write it at all without saying to dead sorrows, "Arise, and weep afresh," and to errors and failings that would fain sleep forgotten, "Be ye remembered!" Two men alone in our time, Rousseau and Byron, told the truth of themselves; and how have they been requited? Yet the time may come when my present unwillingness to look back on days of trouble will be lessened; for there is might and majesty in the tale of the honest battle for bread, and of the strength which the struggle gives to weakness.

Of my birth no public registry exists. My father, being a Dissenter, baptized me himself, or employed his friend and brother Berean, Tommy Wright, to baptize me. But I was born at the New Foundry, Masbro', in the parish of Rotherham, on the 17th day of March, in the year of our Lord 1781; and I narrate the fact thus particu-

larly that about an event of such importance there may be no contentious ink shed by historians in time to come. Robert Elliott, my father's father, was a whitesmith, of Newcastle-upon-Tyne; a man in good circumstances, or he could not have given to his son Ebenezer, my father, what was then considered a first-class commercial education, and put him apprentice to Landell and Chambers, of that great city, wholesale ironmongers, who received with him a premium of 50*l*. His wife, who rejoiced in the pastoral name of "Sheepshanks," was a Scotswoman, and, speaking metaphorically, wore breeches: a circumstance which does not seem to have lessened the love her husband bore her, for he lamented her with tears long after she had been laid in the grave, even until the day of his death—especially when he was drunk. The ancestors of my grandfather Elliott, I have been told, and have the honour to believe, were thieves, neither Scotch nor English, who lived on the cattle they stole from both. That my grandmother Sheepshanks had ancestors is probable; but of what they were neither record nor tradition hath reached me, which is the more pity, because my great difficulty in writing this narrative is want of materials. Famous men are fated to have wants; but ask yourselves, ye famous! who could write your histories if all the children of want

were famous? After my father left Landell and Chambers, he became one of the clerks of the Walkers of Masbro', where he lodged with a surgeon called Robinson, under whose roof he first saw my mother—one of the daughters of a yeoman at Ozzins, near Penistone, where his ancestors had lived on their fifty or sixty acres of freehold time out of mind!! I think, then, I have made out my descent, if not from very fine folks, certainly from respectables, as (getting every day comparatively scarcer) they are called in these days of "ten dogs to one bone."

If famous men are fated to have wants, so are they to have misfortunes, truly such—and some of mine were born before me; for the whole life of my mother was a disease—a tale of pain, terminated by death—one long sigh. Yet she suckled eleven children, and reared eight of them to adult age. From her I have derived my nervous irritability, my bashful awkwardness, my miserable proneness to anticipate evil, that make existence all catastrophe. I well remember her sending me to a dame's school, kept by Nanny Sykes, the beautiful and brave wife of a drunken husband, where I learned my A B C. I was next sent to the Hollis School, then presided over by Joseph Ramsbotham, who taught me to write, and little more. In those days the science of monitorship

was undiscovered; and as he had seldom fewer, perhaps, than 150 scholars, of course none but the naturally clever made much progress. About this time my poor mother, who was a first-rate dreamer, and a true believer in dreams, related to me one of her visions. "I had placed under my pillow," she said, "a shank-bone of mutton to dream upon; and I dreamed that I saw a little broad-set, dark, ill-favoured man, with black hair, black eyes, thick stob nose and tup-shins: it was thy father."

And a special original my father was: a man of great virtue, not without faults. One of the latter had its origin, probably, in some superstitious reverence for the cabalistic number "three." I allude to his bad habit of ducking his children thrice, and keeping them the third time some seconds under water when he bathed us in the canal; which produced in me a horror of suffocation that seems to increase with my years. To avoid this cruel kindness, I was obliged to show him that I could do without his assistance, by bathing voluntarily; a consequence of which was, that on one occasion I narrowly escaped drowning: "the more the pity!" I have often said since. I never knew a man who possessed the tithe of my father's satiric and humorous powers; he would have made a great comic actor. He also possessed uncommon political sagacity, which afterwards earned for him the title of

"Devil Elliott," a title which is still applied to him, I am told, by the descendants of persons who then hated the poor and honoured the king. He left the Messrs. Walker to serve Clay and Co., of the New Foundry, Masbro', for a salary of sixty or seventy pounds a year, with house, candle, and coal! Well do I remember some of those days of affluence and pit-coal fires; for glorious fires we had—no fear of coal-bills in those days. There, at the New Foundry, under the room where I was born, in a little parlour like the cabin of a ship, yearly painted green, and blessed with a beautiful thoroughfare of light—for there was no window-tax in those days—he used to preach every fourth Sunday to persons who came from distances of twelve and fourteen miles to hear his tremendous doctrines of ultra-Calvinism (he called himself a Berean) and hell hung round with span-long children! On other days, pointing to the aqua-tint pictures on the walls, he delighted to declaim on the virtues of slandered Cromwell and of Washington the rebel; or, shaking his sides with laughter, explained the glories of "The glorious victory of his Majesty's forces over the Rebels at Bunker's Hill!" Here the reader has a key which will unlock all my future politics. If ever there was a man who knew not fear, that man was the father of the Corn-Law Rhymer. From his

birth to his last gasp I doubt whether he knew what it was to be afraid, except of poverty, about which he had sad forebodings—ultimately realized after he had become nominal proprietor of the Foundry of Clay and Co.—the partners having sold him their shares on credit.

I have left some earlier incidents for after narration, that I may found on my father's peculiarities a claim to speak now of my own, or rather of certain physical or constitutional weaknesses, to which, I fear, all that is poetical in me or in my doings is traceable.

"Oh, blessed are the beautiful!" says Haynes Baily, uttering for ever a sentiment to which I can feelingly and mournfully respond; for in my sixth year I had the small-pox, which left me frightfully disfigured, and six weeks blind. From the consequences I never recovered. To them, quite as much as to my poor mother's infirm constitution, I impute my nerve-shaken weakness. How great was that weakness I will endeavour to show the reader. When I was very young—I might be twelve years old—I fell in love with a young woman called Ridgeway—now Mrs. Woodcock, of Munster, near Greasbro'—to whom I never spoke a word in my life, and the sound of whose voice, to this day, I have never heard; yet if I thought she saw me as I passed her father's

house, I felt as if weights were fastened to my feet. Is genius diseased? I cannot remember the time when I was not fond of ruralities. Was I born, then, with a taste for the beautiful? When quite a child—I might be seven or eight years old—I remember filling a waster frying-pan with water, placing it in the centre of a little grove of mugwort and wormwood that grew on a stone-heap in the foundry-yard, and delighting to see the reflection of the sun, and clouds, and the plants themselves, as from the surface of a natural fountain; for I so placed the pan that the water only was visible, and I seldom failed to visit it at noon, when the sun was over it. But I had also a taste for the horrible—a passion, a rage for seeing the faces of the hanged or the drowned. Why, I know not; for they made my life a burden, following me wherever I went, sleeping with me, and haunting me in my dreams. Was this hideous taste a result of constitutional infirmity? Had it any connexion with my taste for writing of horrors and crimes? I was cured of it by a memorable spectacle. A poor friendless man, who, having no home, slept in colliery hovels and similar places, having been sent, one dark night, from the Glasshouse for a pitcher of ale, fell into the canal, and was drowned. In about six weeks his body rose to the surface of the water, and I, of course,

ran to see it. The spectacle which by that time it presented was daily and nightly, whether I was alone or in the street, in bed or by the fireside, for months my constant companion. Had this morbid propensity any relation to my solitary tendencies? Healthy man is social; but in my childhood I had no associates. Although the neighbourhood swarmed with children, I was always alone; and this is perhaps one reason why I was deemed rather wanting in intellect, and why I might really have had fewer ideas than other children of my age, for I cut myself off from communication with theirs. But though I was alone, I have no recollection that my solitude was painful. On the contrary, I employed my time delightfully in swimming my little fleets of ships, and repairing my fortresses on the banks of the canal between the Greasbro' and Rawmarsh bridges. My early fondness for carpentering is no proof that if I had been bred an engineer I should have made any improvements in machinery, for all children are more or less fond of knicknackery; but I certainly excelled in handicrafts. I was the best kitemaker and the best shipbuilder. Most captains of sloops and other vessels possess a model of a ship of some sort. By borrowing such models, I completed, when I was about thirteen years old, a model of an eighteen-gun

ship. I gave it, many years afterwards, to a boatbuilder of Greasbro', called Woffendin, who begged it of me, that it might obtain for him the office of boatbuilder to Earl Fitzwilliam. He gave or sold it to Lord Milton, the present Earl Fitzwilliam, then a youth; and it was, I believe, a few years ago, still at Wentworth House. But my imitative talents won me no respect; nor is this very surprising. Placed beside my wondrous brother, Giles, who was beautiful as an angel, I was ugliness itself; and in the presence of his splendid abilities I might well look like a fool, and believe myself to be one. As I grew up, my fondness for solitude increased; for I could not but observe the homage that was paid to him, and feel the contempt with which I was regarded. But I am not aware that I ever envied or at all disliked him.

When I look back on the days of rabid Toryism through which I have passed, and consider the then almost universal tendency to worship the powers that were, and their worst mistakes, I feel astonished that a nerve-shaken man, whose affrighted imagination in boyhood and youth slept with dead men's faces, a man whose first sensation on standing up to address a public meeting is that of his knees giving way under him, should have been able to retain his political

integrity, without abjuring one article of his fearless father's creed. But even in those days, I find, I was a free-trader, though I knew it not. So barbarous were some of the deeds done in that time in the name of law, and so painful was the impression which they made on me when I was about sixteen years old, that I should certainly have emigrated to the United States had I possessed sufficient funds for that purpose; nor should I, I fear, have been very scrupulous as to the means of obtaining them—so fully had the idea of emigration obtained possession of me, so passionately had my mind embraced it, and so poetically had I associated with it Crusoe-notions of self-dependence and isolation. It is not improper to blush for uncommitted offences. Even now, after forty-five years have been added to my previous existence, I shudder if I chance to meet an expedience-monger who tells me "that the end justifies the means:"—a false doctrine and fatal faith, which have wrought the fall of many an all-shunned brother, and of ill-starred sisters numberless, once unstained as the angels. Oh, think of this, ye tempted and ye tempters, even if ye be magistrates! but let no man believe that good effected by evil can be aught but evil done, and an apology for more!—I must return from these digressions.

My ninth year was an era in my life. My

father had cast a great pan, weighing some tons, for my uncle, at Thurlestone; and I determined to go thither in it, without acquainting my parents with my intention. A truck, with assistants, having been sent for it, I got into it, about sunset, unperceived, hiding myself beneath some hay which it contained, and we proceeded on our journey. I have not forgotten how much I was excited by the solemnity of the night and its shooting stars, until I arrived at Thurlestone, about four in the morning. It is remarkable that I never in after-life succeeded in any plan which I did not execute in a similar way. If I ask advice, either the plan is never executed or it is unsuccessful. I had not been many days at Thurlestone before I wished myself at home again, —for my heart was with my mother. If I could have found my way back I should certainly have returned; and my inability to do so (though my having come in the night may in some degree account for it) shows, I think, that I really must have been a dull child. My uncle sent me to Penistone school, where I made some little progress. At this school, one of the boys, who had a bad breath, took a liking to me. He would always sit close to me, and almost poisoned me; yet if at any time he happened to be absent I felt as if I could not live: so necessary has it ever been

to me to have some kind bosom to lean upon. When I got home from school I spent my evenings in looking from the back of my uncle's house to Hoyland Swaine, for I had discovered that Masbro' lay beyond that village; and ever, when the sun went down, I felt as if some great wrong had been done me. At length, in about a year and a half, my father came for me: and so ended my first irruption into the great world. Is it not strange, that a man who from his childhood has dreamed of visiting foreign countries, and yet, at the age of sixty, believes that he shall see the Falls of Niagara, has never been twenty miles out of England, and has yet to see, for the first time, the beautiful scenery of Cumberland, Wales, and Scotland?

On my return from the land of the great pan I was again sent to Hollis school, where, as was my wont in all cases, I took the shortest ways to my objects; and the easiest way to get my sums done was, to let John Ross do them for me. This practice, in its consequences, added not a little to my reputation for duncery at home. Yet I have an impression that I was looked up to by my schoolfellows—I cannot tell why; for I never fought, and I think they must have suspected me to be rather wanting in certain learned accomplishments. I say, I never fought, and yet my brother Giles, when in danger, always took me out to defend

him. How all this happened I am at a loss to conceive, for I took no pains to bring it about. But having got into the rule of three, without having first learned numeration, addition, subtraction, and division, I was sent by my despairing parents to Dalton school, two miles from Masbro'; and I see at this moment, as vividly as if nearly fifty years had not since passed over me, the kingfisher shooting along the Don as I passed schoolward through the Aldwark meadows, eating my dinner four hours before dinner-time. But, oh the misery of reading without having learned to spell! The name of the master was Brunskill, a broken-hearted Cumberland man, one of the best of living creatures—a sort of sad-looking, half-starved angel without wings; and I have stood for hours beside his desk, with the tears running down my face, utterly unable to set down one correct figure. I doubt whether he ever suspected that I had not been taught the preliminary rules. I actually did not know that they were necessary; and looked on a boy who could do a sum in vulgar fractions as a sort of magician. Dreading school, I absented myself from it during the summer months of the second year—"playing truant" about Dalton, Deign, and Silverwood, or Thrybergh Park, where I stole duck eggs, mistaking them for the eggs of wild birds, and was brought before

Madame Finch. She, seeing what a simpleton I was, released me with a reprimand.

Let it not be supposed that these were happy days. I was utterly miserable. I trembled when I drew near home, for I knew not how to answer the questions which I feared my father would put to me. Sometimes I avoided them by slinking to bed without supper, which to a lad who took care to eat his dinner soon after breakfasting could not be convenient. It was impossible, however, to prevent my father from discovering that I was learning nothing but vagabondism, or from suspecting that my slow progress was owing more to idleness than to want of ability to learn. He set me to work in the foundry as a punishment. But working in the foundry, so far from being a punishment to me, relieved me from the sense of inferiority which had so long depressed me; for I was not found to be less clever there than other beginners. For this there was a sufficient reason: I had been familiar from my infancy with the processes of the manufactory, and possibly a keen though silent observer of them. The result of his experiment vexed the experimenter, and he had good cause for vexation; for it soon appeared that I could play my part at the York-Keelman with the best of its customers. Yet I never thoroughly relished the rude company and coarse enjoyments

of the alehouse. My thoughts constantly wandered to the canal banks and my little ships; and —I know not why, but—I always built my fortresses, aye, and my castles in the air, too, where the flowers were the finest. The yellow "ladies' bed straw" (I did not then know its name) was a particular favourite of mine; and the banks of the canal were golden with it. At this time I had strong religious impressions; and (when there was service) I seldom missed attending the chapel of Parson Allard—a character who might have sat for Scott's picture of Dominie Sampson. But I sometimes went to the Masbro' chapel (Walker's, it was then called), to hear Mr. Groves, one of the most eloquent and dignified of men, but hated by my father (who was a capital hater) for some nothing or other of discipline or of doctrine. I was on my way, I believe, to hear him, when I called, one Sunday, on my aunt Robinson—a widow, left with three children and about 30*l.* a-year, on which (God knows how!) she contrived to live respectably, and to give her two sons an education which ultimately made them both gentlemen. I thought she received me coldly. She did not, I think, know that I had been tipsy a night or two before, but I was conscience-stricken. After a minute's silence, she rose, and laid before me a number of Sowerby's "English Botany," which her son Ben-

jamin, then apprenticed to Dr. Stainforth, of Sheffield, was purchasing monthly. Never shall I forget the impression made on me by the beautiful plates. I actually touched the figure of the primrose, half convinced that the mealiness on the leaves was real. I felt hurt when she removed the book from me—but she removed it only to show me how to draw the figures, by holding them to the light, with a thin piece of paper before them. On finding that I could so draw them correctly, I was lifted at once above the inmates of the alehouse at least a foot in mental stature. My first effort was a copy from the primrose; under which (always fond of fine words) I wrote its Latin name, *Primula veris vulgaris*. So, thenceforward, when I happened to have a spare hour, I went to my aunt's to draw. But she had not yet shown me all the wealth of her Benjamin. The next revealed marvel was his book of dried plants. Columbus when he discovered the New World was not a greater man than I at that moment; for no misgiving crossed my mind that the discovery was not my own, and no Americo Vespucius disputed the honour of it with me. But (alas for the strength of my religious impressions!) thenceforth often did Parson Allard inquire why Eb. was not at chapel?—for I passed my Sundays in gathering flowers, that I might make pictures of them. I

had then, as now, no taste for the science of Botany, the classifications of which seemed to me to be like preparations for sending flowers to prison. I began, however, to feel mannish. There was mystery about me. People stopped me with my plants, and asked what diseases I was going to cure? But I was not in the least aware that I was learning the art of poetry, which I then hated—especially Pope's, which gave me the headache if I heard it read aloud. My wanderings, however, soon made me acquainted with the nightingales in Basingthorpe Spring—where, I am told, they still sing sweetly—and with a beautiful green snake, about a yard long, which on the fine Sabbath mornings, about ten o'clock, seemed to expect me at the top of Primrose Lane. It became so familiar, that it ceased to uncurl at my approach. I have sate on the stile beside it till it seemed unconscious of my presence; and when I rose to go, it would only lift the scales behind its head, or the skin beneath them—and they shone in the sun like fire. I know not how often this beautiful and harmless child of God may have "sate for his picture" in my writings—a dozen, at least; but wherever I might happen to meet with any of its brethren or sisters—at Thistlebed Ford, where they are all vipers, black or brown—or in the Aldwark meadows, on the banks of the Don, with

the kingfisher above and the dragon-fly below them—or on Boston Castle ridge—or in the Clough dell, where they swarm—or in Canklow Quarry—or by the Rother, near Hail-Mary Wood—whatever the scene might be, the portrait, if drawn, was sure to be that of my first snake-love.

I had now become a person of some note; and if I let my wondering adorers suppose that I copied my figures of plants, not at secondhand, but from the plants which they saw I was in the habit of collecting—pardon me, outraged spirit of Truth! for I had been so long a stranger to the voice of praise, and it sounded so sweetly to my unaccustomed ears, that I could not refuse to welcome it when it came. But my dried plants were undeniably my own; and so obvious was their merit, that even my all-praised and all-able brother sometimes condescended to look at and admire my "Hortus Siccus," as I pompously named my book of specimens. It was about this time that I first heard him read the first book of "Thomson's Seasons;" and he was a capital reader—well aware, too, of that fact. When he came to the description of the Polyanthus and Auricula, I waited impatiently till he laid down the book; I then took it into the garden, where I compared the description with the living flowers. Here was another new idea—botany in verse!—a prophecy that the days

of scribbling were at hand. But my earliest taste in poetry was like that of Bottom the weaver, who of all things liked best "a scene to tear a cat in." Accordingly, my first poetical attempt was an imitation in rhyme of Thomson's blank-verse thunderstorm. I knew perfectly well that sheep could not take to flight after having been killed; but the "rhyme" seemed to be of opinion that they should be so described, and as it doggedly abided by this perversity, there was nothing for it but to describe my flock "scudding away" after the lightning had slain them. I read the marvel to my cousin Benjamin, from whom I received infliction the first of merciless criticism. God forgive him!—I never could. Neither could I help perceiving the superiority which his learning gave him over me; and never was I so happy as when listening to his recitations of Homer's Greek, of which I did not understand a word—and yet, after the illapse of nearly half a century, its music has not departed from my soul.

Willingly, too, would I have shared the praises showered on my brother Giles:—but, alas, how was that to be accomplished? Hitherto I had been fat and round as a ball—I now became pale and lean. My health visibly suffered; but I had inly resolved to undertake the great task of self-instruction. I purchased a grammar; but proved

unable to remember a single rule, however laboriously committed to memory. About a year afterwards, I added the "Key" to my grammar, and read it through and through a hundred times. I found, at last, that by reflection, and by supplying elisions, &c., I could detect and correct grammatical errors. The pronouns bothered me most —as they still do. At this moment I do not know a single rule of grammar; and yet I can now, I flatter myself, write English as correctly as Samuel Johnson could, and detect errors in a greater author, Samuel Bailey. Flushed with success, my enthusiasm knew no bounds. To the great joy of my father, I resolved to learn French. But though I could with ease get and say my lessons, I could not remember a word of them; I therefore at the end of a few weeks gave up the attempt. For once, however, I was lucky in calamity; for my French teacher not understanding the language himself, I was allowed to throw the blame on him, which I did gloriously.

It would seem that my poetical propensities are traceable to certain accidents; but that about the end of my fourteenth year my mind began to make efforts for itself. Those efforts, however, were favoured by an accident of importance in the history of my education. A clergyman, called Firth, who held a poor curacy at a desolate place

called Middlesmoor, bequeathed to my father his library, containing, besides scores of Greek and Latin books, Barrow's "Sermons," Ray's "Wisdom of God," Derham's "Physico-Theology," Young's "Night Thoughts," Hervey's "Meditations," Henepin's "Travels," and three volumes of the "Royal Magazine," embellished with views of Bombay, Madras, the Falls of Niagara, Pope's Villa at Twickenham, and fine coloured representations of foreign birds. My writings owe something to all these books; particularly to Henepin, who carried me with him from Niagara to the Mississippi. I was never weary of Barrow; he and Young taught me to condense. Ray also was a favourite. The picture of Pope's Villa induced me to buy his "Essay on Man," but could not enable me to like it. In the "Royal Magazine" I found the narrative of a shipwreck on a South-Sea island; on which I made a romance in blank verse, twenty years before Scott printed his "Lay of the Last Minstrel." My next treasure was Shenstone; I could repeat all the mottoes, translated from the Greek and Latin, which he has prefixed to his poems. I think he is now undervalued. Then followed Milton, who held me captive long.

I have said I always took the shortest road to an object; this tendency led me into some errors, but is the principal cause of my ultimate success as an

author. I never could read a feeble book through: it follows that I read master-pieces only—the best thoughts of the highest minds; after Milton, Shakspeare—then Ossian, then Junius, with my father's Jacobinism for a commentary—Paine's "Common-sense," Swift's "Tale of a Tub," "Joan of Arc," Schiller's "Robbers," Burger's "Leonora," Gibbon's "Decline and Fall," and, long afterwards, Tasso, Dante, De Stael, Schlegel, Hazlitt, and the "Westminster Review." But I have a strange memory. Sometimes it fails me altogether; yet when I was twelve years old, I almost knew the Bible by heart, and in my sixteenth year I could repeat, without missing a word, the first, second, and sixth books of "Paradise Lost!"

If, then, I possess that power which is called genius, how great must be my moral demerits!—for what have I written that will bear any comparison with the least of my glorious models? But I possess not that glorious power. Time has developed in me, not genius, but powers which exist in all men and lie dormant in most. I cannot, like Byron and Montgomery, pour poetry from my heart as from an unfailing fountain; and of my inability to identify myself, like Shakspeare and Scott, with the characters of other men, my abortive "Kerhonah," "Taurassdes," and similar rejected failures, are melancholy instances. My thoughts are all exterior;

my mind is the mind of my own eyes. A primrose is to me a primrose, and nothing more: I love it because it is nothing more. There is not in my writings one good idea that has not been suggested to me by some real occurrence, or by some object actually before my eyes, or by some remembered object or occurrence, or by the thoughts of other men, heard or read. If I possess any power at all allied to genius, it is that of making other men's thoughts suggest thoughts to me which, whether original or not, are to me new. Some years ago, my late excellent neighbour, John Heppenstall, after showing me the plates of Audubon's "Birds of America," requested me to address a few verses to the author. With this request I was anxious to comply; but I was unable to write a line, until a sentence in Rousseau suggested a whole poem, and coloured all its language. Now, in this case, I was not like a clergyman seeking a text that he may write a sermon; for the text was not sought, but found, or it would have been to me a lying and a barren spirit.

From my sixteenth to my twenty-third year, I worked for my father at Masbro' as laboriously as any servant he had, and without wages, except an occasional shilling or two for pocket-money; weighing every morning all the unfinished cast-

ings as they were made, and afterwards in their finished state, besides opening and closing the shop in Rotherham when my brother happened to be ill or absent. Why, then, may not I call myself a working-man? But I am not aware that I ever did so call myself—certainly never as an excuse for my poetry if bad, or if good as a claim for wonder. There are only two lines in my writings which could enable the reader to guess at my condition in life. I wrote them to show that, whatever else I might be, I was not of the genus "Dunghill Spurner;" for in this land of castes the dunghill-sprung, with good coats on their backs, are not yet generally anxious to claim relationship with hard-handed usefulness. But as a literary man I claim to be self-taught; not because none of my teachers ever read to me, or required me to read, a page of English grammar, but because I have of my own will read some of the best books in our language, original and translated, and the best only, laboriously forming my mind on the highest models. If unlettered women and even children write good poetry, I, who have studied and practised the art during more than forty years, ought to understand it, or I must be a dunce indeed.

I have laid before the reader a history of my boyhood and youth. What excuse can I plead

for troubling him with these common-place incidents in the history of a common-place person? That I write not for the strong, but for the weak; who may learn from this narrative that as by the mere force of will such persons can write poetry, no honest man of good sense need despair of accomplishing much greater because more useful matters. The history of my manhood and its misfortunes—your famous people have a knack of being unfortunate, and of calling their faults misfortunes—remains to be written. It would not, I have said, even if honestly written, be more instructive than an honest history of almost any other man; but when I said so, I forgot that it would be, in part, a history of the terrific changes of fortune, the alternations of prosperity and suffering, caused by over-issues, or by the sudden withdrawal, of inconvertible paper-money, in those days "when none but knaves throve, and none but madmen laughed; when servants took their masters by the nose, and beggared masters slunk aside to die; when men fought with shadows, and were slain; while, in dreadful calm, the viewless storm increased, most fatal when least dreaded, and nearest when least expected." I am not yet prepared, not yet sufficiently petrified in heart and brain, by time and trouble, to tell a tale in

telling which I must necessarily live over again months and years of living death.

When I made the astounding assertion many years ago (in "Tait's Magazine") that the food-taxes were costing, or destroying, or preventing the earning of more than a hundred millions sterling a-year, I knew well that in a short time the truth of that assertion would be confirmed by the wisest and best informed of my countrymen. It has been objected to my political poems that I sometimes repeat in them the same thoughts and words. Why should I not repeat the same thoughts and words, if they are wanted, and I cannot find better? My countrymen were robbed of knowledge as well as food; and it is not my fault that, born dull and slow, I find thoughts and words with difficulty. I husband my materials because I am intellectually poor. No man can, "by taking thought, add an inch to his stature;" but any man may do the best he can with the means in his power—and he who would usefully live in his deeds "must fight for eternity with the weapons of time." Newspaper-taught as I am, and having no ideas of my own, I can only seize those of others as they occur, earnestly applying them to current occasions. If I have been mistaken in my objects, I am sorry for it; but I have never advocated any cause without

first trying to know the principles on which it was based. On looking back on my public conduct—thanks to that science which poor Cobbett, ever floundering, yet great and brave, called in scorn "Poleetical Economy"—I find I have had little to unlearn. And when I shall go to my account, and the Great Questioner, whose judgments err not, shall say to me, "What didst thou with the lent talent?" I can truly answer, "Lord, it is here; and with it all that I could add to it—doing my best to make little much."

EBENEZER ELLIOTT.

Sheffield, 21*st June*, 1841.

The attentive reader of the foregoing autobiography will perceive that Ebenezer Elliott was born with the fatal gift of genius—a thing as much to be deplored in the present social system as the mark of immortality on the brow of a Struldbrug, or the brand on the forehead of Cain. It singled him out even in childhood from his fellows, and made him dwell apart with his soul in solitude. Two antagonistic elements of being early began to strive within him—one derived from the rough fearlessness of his father, the other from the nervous timidity of his mother. In infancy compelled to flee for refuge from the unsympathizing and perhaps inconsiderate spirit of his sire, to the weak and tender arms of her who not only could forgive

him his faults but protect him from the punishment of one who would not forgive. Probably the senior Elliott's creed had wrought an ill effect upon a temper naturally uncouth. He who could believe that hell was hung round with span-long children was not likely to be a very kind father; and his politics were akin to his religion, for it seems that they earned him the cognomen of "Devil!" The stern trade of this iron and steel man had its influence in the formation of his character, and imparted a strong tone to that of his son.

Most men of genius have owned their obligations to their mothers, though there are exceptions. The story of Savage, singled out by Dr. Johnson, is not a solitary instance. Little Ebenezer, however, was doubtlessly well treated in bodily respects, though not indebted mentally or intellectually to his parents. He was sent to a dame's school to learn his A B C. Nor can it be said that he owed much to the teachings of others. Joseph Ramsbotham, his first master, taught him to write, but "little more." This is no reflection on the capacity of either tutor or pupil. Genius loves to walk its own way. It resents the blind and beaten track of a horse in a mill. An unconscious power, it rests unrevealed to the possessor himself till impulse or accident opens its secret springs; and more often owes its full development to sorrow or

suffering than to favour or encouragement. The true teacher of Ebenezer Elliott was yet to come—that was, himself! He could learn little more at school than to read or write, but with the aid of those mechanical acquirements he could unlock for himself the great storehouse of knowledge. In the meanwhile, what he learnt by rote lay like unproductive seed in his heart or mind; and many a boy of moderate but more ductile capacity might compare his accomplishments with this seeming dunce, and exult in the contrast. But the boy who durst hardly speak, and shrunk, like Cowper, with morbid sensitiveness from action, was thinking all the while: his senses were most powerful teachers that were filling him with ideas, and making him God and Nature's scholar.

Unpromising as he appeared, he could excel in anything which he himself took delight in. His ingenuity in constructing the toys that he was to play with ought to have convinced his friends that he was "no vulgar boy." Probably his deficiency in learning was more owing to the false method of teaching in our schools than to any inaptitude of his own. Pedagogues at that period used to think thrashings the best teachings, and were wont to increase stupidity by resorting to an injudicious mode of expelling it. An illness that disfigured his looks operated with his mental backwardness

in flinging him out of society, and throwing him upon his own resources. Solitary habits were to him a necessity, arising from his want of companions. Books he had not yet begun to regard as acquaintance. Play was his first work. He could not tire of his amusements, while sunshine, and water, and flowers, were his playfellows, with whose aid he could make beautiful water-colour drawings. But his mind ever oscillated in extremes. His love for the beautiful was not less than his taste for the horrible, though it terrified him—a fearful desire which he shared with all children who are fond of ghost-stories.

Having no home, for where there is no sympathy there is no home, he went in search of one, and found in the residence of an uncle a more compassionate sphere. Here the yearnings which he felt to return to his mother prove that he possessed a kind and gentle heart, that might have been easily softened, in spite of the indurating process to which it had been subjected.

Ebenezer's father, with a shortsightedness not uncommon, could not see what was in the lad—knew not what to make of him; and, as incurable invalids are sent from doctor to doctor, tried different schoolmasters in vain, till, despairing to see him fit for aught but the drudgery of mere manual labour, he put him, like another Cymon, to the

lowest employment, and associated him with men little better than the brutes. They taught him their pothouse habits; and it is a proof how indifferent his bigoted and tyrannical sire had become to his lot, that he allowed him to sink into this servile and degraded state. But Ebenezer began to reflect; and even while at Nanny Far's house, the sign of the Yorkshire Keelman, he sat an abstracted guest, his mind wandering from the din and smoke to the woods and streams, only roused from his reverie by the garrulous hostess when she had some traditionary tale to tell.

Though Ebenezer says, "Working in the foundry, so far from being a punishment to me, relieved me from the sense of inferiority which had so long depressed me, for I was found to be no less clever than other beginners," yet no doubt his mind was ill at ease under this disgrace. What could be done by any boy could, of course, be done by him; but he felt ambitious to do more, to do what none but himself could do. His destination was not that of a common working-man, but of a master—of one whose head sets to work the hands of others. This ambition, however, was nourished in secret, because its manifestation would have subjected him to scorn and ridicule, if not to worse persecution.

But his boyhood was not all desolate; he found a friend, the son of his schoolmaster, and he fell

in love—haunted by the vision of a young woman whom he had seen, but never spoken to; and as women are like ghosts, that will not speak first, the unconscious object of his passion married another. His friend, however, remained; and how much so isolated a being as poor Ebenezer must have loved that friend! This lone cloud had wandered listlessly as the wind, till it met with one of mutual attraction, and its electric sympathies were drawn forth. We may conceive how readily he would learn from the son what the father had tried in vain to teach; and in their peripatetic rambles through the romantic scenery of the neighbourhood, what an interchange would take place of mind and heart, that would rouse his dormant energies, and make the latent seeds of knowledge which had been sown at school, spring up and bear fruit. No longer kept down by a deep sense of self-humiliation, nor still further depressed by the scoffs of those around, his faculties sprung into mature and manly growth, so that his father made him his commercial traveller, in which capacity he doubtless much extended his knowledge of men and things. Well was it for Ebenezer that the stern will of his sire bent him to his trade, for by that, and not by poetry, he was to live. Nor was his father backward in due encouragement to him; he took him into partnership with him,

though he did not succeed in business till he set up for himself and became independent. He used to express an ill-opinion of partnerships, saying that the Devil threw his club over them.

Ebenezer had an elder brother, named Giles, who was as remarkable for quickness and docility as he himself had been for an apparently dull and intractable disposition. Like Gilbert, the brother of Burns, he was thought the cleverer boy; but showy accomplishments are seldom deep. Giles was a general favourite, and was of great service to Ebenezer, for he inspired him not with envy, but with emulation, till the precocious and popular Giles himself condescended to notice the talents of his poor younger brother, who, in mind and person, seemed so much his inferior. But the world has heard nothing of Giles, while Ebenezer has left a name that will wake its echoes with Fame's trumpet.

This chapter may be appropriately closed with one or two anecdotes, omitted in the "Athenæum," but inserted by the Messrs. Chambers in one of their "Papers for the People."

"Touching the bravery of Elliott, senior, an absurd story is told in which he is represented as thrashing a cavalry officer with a stick, his antagonist being at the time on horseback, sword in hand! After receiving his chastisement, the officer

took to flight, and never afterwards met the victor without touching his hat and saying, 'How do you do, Mr. Elliott?' During his father's scene with the dragoon, Ebenezer, then in his fifteenth year, was 'terribly frightened,' although he must have been sufficiently familiar with such disturbances, it being the custom of the cavalry to back their horses so as to break the windows of the Jacobin's shop. 'But I, alas!' says he, 'am the son of my mother; yet on emergencies, and in the hour of calamity, the single drop of northern blood which my father put into my heart has more than once befriended me.'

"An instance he gives of the terrible criminality of the law exhibits in a half-amusing half-painful manner the wrongheadedness of a man of genius. 'I will relate the circumstances,' says he, 'precisely as they were related to me by an eye-witness. A youth called Yates, a native of Masborough, but apprenticed at Sheffield, instigated by his master, stole a fowl, for which crime he was tried at Rotherham, and convicted on clear evidence. The chairman of the court, in passing sentence, gave him the choice of transportation or the army. He chose the former. Down, black as thunder, came the frown of authority. 'No; you shall be flogged!' —and he was flogged. But why? For stealing a fowl, or for refusing to enter the army?'

"'When a labourer writes a poem,' says he, 'the fact is an incident in the history of poets—a class of persons proverbially unable to earn their bread; but if there is merit in the poem, why marvel at the slave-driver's wonder-cry? I never felt any respect for the patrons of inspired milkmaids and ploughmen, for milkmaids and ploughmen, if inspired, cannot long need patronage; but I know that, unwilling to believe aught good of the poor, the rich, when a poor man's deed shames theirs, transform the individual into a marvel at the expense of his class; because, having wronged, they hate it.'"

There may be some truth in the above remark; but there is more prejudice. The rich may not take pains to discern merit in the poor; but when it forces itself upon their notice they are not slow to welcome it. On the contrary, the aristocracy of merit is regarded, even by aristocrats themselves, as something superior to the aristocracy of mere birth or fortune.

CHAPTER II.

FROM THE PUBLICATION OF HIS FIRST POEMS TO THE PUBLICATION OF "LOVE," A POEM.

Most poets commence writing with love; but love was not the early muse of Ebenezer Elliott. The spirit of botany, or rather a fondness for flowers, led him into the fields, and poetry followed. The alehouse was now deserted—even the chapel. He began by making pictures of flowers, which are the poetry of nature, and ended by translating their beauty and fragrance into verse. His schoolmasters had taught him nothing but that he was unable to learn; and his treatment at home did but increase the self-diffidence that overpowered him. Fear and anxiety robbed him of his faculties. But now Nature took him, and from her flowery breast he imbibed the milk of poesy. The more proficient he became, the more he grew aware of his deficiencies. Shame set him to school to himself, and he became the willing pupil of a willing tutor. His progress was rapid. The best authors were soon his favourites. His great difficulty was the want of a retentive memory. Yet, though his

health suffered by his severe application, he persevered.

Ebenezer Elliott was one more example that knowledge may be successfully pursued under difficulties. All the while that he was taking upon himself the instruction of a simpleton who had been given up by others in despair, he worked for his father, "as laboriously as any servant he had." The leisure that he had formerly employed in debasing relaxations was now enthusiastically devoted to the noblest tasks. Having heard his brother Giles read Thomson's "Seasons," he began with an imitation of the style of that author, but in rhyme. "Genius," says Southey in a letter to the editor, "generally shows itself first in imitation, and necessarily must do so." But one of his critics abused this first attempt so unmercifully, that he was probably incited to put it in the fire, but not to despair of doing better. We cannot wonder if Ebenezer failed in comparison with the great original whom he had chosen to imitate. But such a choice was no proof of presumption, but rather of a desire to inspirit himself with a great example or a great theme; for the subject was a thunderstorm. It is the province of learning to correct genius, though genius is the superior power. The self-education of Elliott leads to an inquiry into the relative value or uses of genius and learning.

It is thought by many, that a classical education is requisite to the development of native genius. But do not facts contradict this theory? Were not our greatest geniuses self-taught? And even those who had received a classical education, did they not fling off its trammels? Learning is well, but genius is "something more, and better." Learning is rich with the ideas of others—genius possesses a golden treasury of its own. But learning often succeeds in making itself more known than genius. Why? Because art is always less diffident or modest than nature. The counterfeit sometimes passes in preference to the genuine coin. Learning makes a noise when genius is silent. The former is assuming, the latter retiring.

Genius knows, intuitively, all that talent labours to acquire; and is learned by fortune, rather than by study. Therefore genius, a thing of privilege, hath scarcely the merit due to learning, no more than he who inherits wealth, or who is gifted with it, is comparable in desert with the man who, by toil and industry, makes his way to eminence. But does not genius learn? Yes; but not so much from books as from life. The elements of genius are—imagination to create, fancy to colour or beautify, taste to select the fittest ideas, and judgment to arrange them in the most perfect order. It also possesses electric feelings and

passions, with a fine power of perception and appreciation. The man of genius is the scholar of his own informing senses—the universe is his book—and talent is to him the pen of a ready writer. For genius includes talent, just as nature includes art. Genius is its own critic, and its works are standard authorities. The only authority which it stoops to is common sense or experience. Whatever is excellent—in heart, mind, and soul—it possesses; and is, inwardly at least, poet, painter, musician, and sculptor. It loves to separate itself from the real, in order to animate the ideal, and to leave its own idiosyncracy to assume that of others. It can metamorphose and transport itself. When it draws only from self, it becomes a mannerist; when from others, a copyist.

The chief acquirements of genius result from the exercise of its own powers. Learning is only of service so far as it enables the man of genius to make use of his own intrinsic stores. Learning is a kind of innoculation, that brings out the inherent qualities of genius—and a small quantity suffices. The youth of genius naturally seeks such information as is most congenial to his bent, and this will generally be of a popular or desultory kind. His delight renders him docile; and thus whatever he reads becomes his own, because not

"crammed against the stomach of his sense." But it is by the exercise of his own thoughts, rather than by reading the thoughts of others, that he strengthens his faculties. The thoughts of others are often suggestive of his own. A weight of imported learning may encumber his innate ideas, or be regarded in preference; and this is the greatest injury genius has to fear from learning. This makes plagiarists and pedants. Better to write as nature inspires than as art dictates. No model, however good, ought to be set up as an idol: it is still but the work of man. Let the oracle within be consulted. Borrow not light from the moon, who herself is a borrower. If ships had always sailed in the wake of each other, the New World would never have been discovered.

But genius generally tries itself first with imitation, till practice having given it the use of its own powers, it attempts an independent flight. It is of consequence, therefore, that good models be presented to it, and the ancient classics are said to be the best. Is it requisite to spend much time to learn the Latin and Greek languages in order to write English well?—or do dead tongues teach us to speak a living one? What we may gain in correctness or polish, we lose in warmth and vigour. Besides, pupils learned in the ancient

classics are taught to despise modern languages as vulgar. They term their mother-tongue the vernacular, or vulgate. Even so the fool of quality makes the tour of Europe, to return a fop, and ridicule the manners and customs of his own country.

The pedant, who reads much, thinks little; he prizes his learning not so much for itself as for the pains it has cost him, and because the generality are without it. He speaks *cum privilegio*. He interlards his English with Latin and Greek, and writes about words rather than things. His chief works are commentaries or translations, not original. He is constantly vaunting artificial acquirements, at the expense of natural endowments. The province of such a one is to follow in the beaten paths of literature, where talent alone is required—he cannot strike out a path for himself. He resembles the course of a stream in a canal, which, however smoothly and regularly it may flow, cannot be admired like the river, that runs a free, though, it may be, an eccentric course.

We know not whether it be in favour or against our argument, that most of our poets were educated at college. We think the learning which they acquired there did not make them men of genius, as the prejudice of the world may suppose,

but that they were geniuses in spite of it. For genius can burst the swaddling bands of learning, as well as the chains of ignorance. Genius is not a prescriptive thing, and it hates to be tied down to any rule or method except its own. Its ideas spring spontaneously in an indigenous mind; they do not require to be planted, and have much care and labour bestowed upon their cultivation, as in extraneous soils. But let us look at some examples :—

Byron abhorred the mechanical teaching which he had received at college, and complained that the freshness of his mind had been worn out before it was free to choose, and that he could not afterwards restore its health, to relish what it might have sought. Scott left his books to study human nature, whose epitome was in himself; he eschewed a regular course of study at school or college, and betook himself to a circulating library. These are the two greatest of our modern geniuses; but there was a greater, before them, whose genius owed nothing to learning. It has been said, that Shakspeare would have greatly surpassed himself if he had been classically educated. On the contrary, would he not have degenerated to a Jonson, who, but for his pedantry, might have been a Shakspeare?

The greatest geniuses make the least show of

learning. How simple is Wordsworth! He teaches wisdom as from the mouth of a babe. Burns warbled his songs as intuitively as a bird. Swift was English to Saxon plainness. Sterne's touches came hot from his heart. Pope lisped in numbers. Dr. Johnson was the worse for his Latinity. Milton wrote Latin sonnets which no one reads. Dryden followed the French fashion, in his rhyming plays, which are now totally neglected. Much learning made Southey mad. Sublimity is always simple; and those portions of "Paradise Lost" which are regarded as the best, are those where the genius of the author borrows least from his learning.

If, as some think, learning is essential to genius, what praise is due to those who are great geniuses without being learned? If a classical education fails to make a poet, what shall we say of the poets who had no means of procuring education from others, scarcely of educating themselves? Some follow literary pursuits exclusively, and with every facility; others are obliged to follow occupations the most detrimental to literary exercise; such was Elliott, who, speaking of a youth like himself, says,—

"Here oft, with fading cheek and thoughtful brow,
Wanders the youth, town-bred, but desert born;
Too early taught life's deepening woes to know,
He wakes in sorrow with the weeping morn,
And gives much labour for a little corn.

In smoke and dust, from hopeless day to day,
He sweats, to bloat the harpies of the soil,
That make the labour of his hands their spoil,
And grind him fiercely; but he still can get
A crust of wheaten bread, despite their frowns.
* * * Thrall though he be,
He feels his intellectual dignity,
Works hard, reads usefully, with no mean skill
Writes, and can reason well of good and ill.
How gratefully his growing mind receives
The food which tyrants struggle to withhold!
Oh, with what rapture he prepares to fly
From streets and courts with crime and sorrow strewed,
And bids the mountain lift him to the sky!"

Nothing is more rare and great than true genius; it is a gift that fortune, or rank, or learning cannot confer, but nature only. Its seed springs as capriciously as if sown by the winds—sometimes in a garden, but oftener in the wild. Mankind have always been disposed to pay more homage to that nature which owes little to art—to that genius which borrows nothing from learning. The powers of such minds are more native and original—more genuine and strong. Thus, Burns is a greater name in Scotland than men of much superior pretensions; and Bloomfield, in England, was regarded as more of a prodigy than Pope. None of our poets deserve more the attention of the critic than those of self-taught genius. None are so truly original. Their genius, excited with passion, always speaks to the purpose. It is

not curbed by servile fear, nor trained to one particular track. It instinctively obeys its own impulses; and, by a fortuitous flight, reaches the sublime without losing the simplicity of its character. Learning is but its instrument. But always let us remember, that the proper use of genius is, to promote the interests of virtue; and that, when it degrades itself by a subserviency to vice, it forfeits its title to honour, and turns its own fame to infamy. There is no great man who is not a good man; and the most glorious genius may humble its pride, when it reflects that the highest stretching of its ambition cannot reach beyond the attainment of common sense.

Young Ebenezer lived deep in himself, hid from the world.

> "His books were rivers, woods, and skies,
> The meadow, and the moor."

When he first made the discovery that he possessed talents, he grew proud of himself—"an honest pride, and let it be his praise," for it rescued him from self-abasement and low company. No mortal pain or trouble could now deter him from seeking immortality; and they who sought to drive or divert him from his course might increase his difficulties—might retard his progress—but could no more prevent his ultimate success than they could make a drone of the

working-bee, or a noxious reptile of the provident ant. Instinct, the locomotive of nature, is not a greater propelling power than genius.

Whoever saw this solitary boy wandering on the mountain heaths might have prophetically exclaimed, "Of such materials wretched men are made!" He was not thoughtless or cruel. We do not hear that he robbed poor birds of their young, or tormented insects for sport. He played truant; but it was rather to make playfellows of the free and beautiful creatures of nature than to hunt them to destruction. He left "Murray's Grammar" unlearnt; but it was that he might read the great book of creation, which lay open all before him. Thus he fed the spirit of poesy, like a bird, kept secretly in his bosom.

Ebenezer Elliott's first published poem was a piece which he had written in his seventeenth year, entitled "The Vernal Walk." How this was ushered into the world, whether in leading-strings, through the nursery of a magazine, or independently, we have no present means of ascertaining, nor is it of any consequence. He found an auspicious printer in Mr. Flower, of Cambridge, whom he terms the father of the Liberal newspaper press. "The Vernal Walk" is a "rhapsody of words," with little antecedence or sequence, yet with a few lines here and there of genuine poetry,

though containing no characteristics of the future bard. He had not yet found out his forte—his metal had not yet received the stamp of his individuality. Not daring to trust his own judgment, and dreading the contempt of his too familiar critics at home, he sought impartial advice from those most able to give it—from those who had succeeded in the arduous path which he was pursuing. He dedicated his "Vernal Walk" to Miss Sarah Austin, the writer of "Pride and Prejudice," and styles her what no doubt he had found her, "A man in counsel."

The delicious disorder of a soul thrown into tumult with the emotions of first love, would resemble the poet's feelings on writing this maiden effort, which indicates all the defects of youthful genius ere nature has learnt the use of art—tautology, redundancy—that superfetation which, Dr. Johnson says, is so much better than barrenness. It is a chaos, but not without gleams of the sublimity and beauty which were the elements of Elliott's world of poetry. The following extracts will show how full of promise was the poet's boyish muse:—

"Oft have I passed yon cottage-door at eve,
Where sat the swain, his daily labour done,
Nursing his little children on his knee,
And kissing them at times, while o'er him bent
His happy partner, smiling as she viewed

Her lisping babes; then have I blessed thee, Love,
And fondly called thee Fount of Social Peace!
What! art thou deathless, all-pervading power,
That like a meek, yet universal sun,
Through universal nature gently shin'st?
Art thou a ray from light's unclouded source?
An emanation of divinity?
No: thou art God, our God, th' eternal One!
To thee I bow, Being all amiable,
On thee I call. Parent of every good,
Preserve me from the vices of the base;
And when I reach the dark and narrow house,
Let me have well deserved the good man's love!
* * * * *
Farewell, cold world, farewell! I flee to thee,
O Nature! Hail, thou solitary vale!
And hither come, Imagination! Come,
And waft my soul to isles of poesy!
Come, come, oh come!—come with thine eyes of light
That shine away the darkness of the soul!
Come with thy heaving bosom, and thy hair
That streams like sunshine on the hollow wind!
And I will strike my lyre of rustic song,
And sing of all things that are frail and fair."

Most of the early poetry of genius is of a repining character, more so than its later productions. Young poets love to believe themselves not of the earth, to regard their doom as that of fallen angels. It is some time before the world can wean them from self; but habit at length reconciles them to the customary lot of human beings, and the melancholy which they took delight in gives way to a kind of levity—solitude becomes less congenial than society—in a word, their ideal stoops to the real. The young poet

finds the vanity of his ideal, even as the old worldling of his real.

Ebenezer's next piece was an attempt at humour, with the title "Second Nuptials," a tale which, he says, was "my first sustained effort in rhyme." His admiration of Milton and Thomson had induced him to mould the first outpourings of his muse in blank verse; but there is no style that requires more maturity of power. Blank verse must support itself upon the wings of the eagle or the feet of the ostrich; words sonorous as the tones of a trumpet, expanded not with empty air, but with the full breath of impassioned feeling—with ideas strong as those thoughts that move the will to act. High sounding, without sense, it is fustian—too familiar, it degenerates to prose. A master-hand can alone wield this giant's sword. Elliott doubtless disdained the jingle of rhyme, and much has been said to induce writers to discard it; but does it not give a certain melodious turn to harmonious numbers? and is there not something pleasing in its ingenuity? Though the sublime may reject the littleness of this artifice, it will never be out of place with the beautiful.

Elliott was not a man of wit, his forte was not humour. He was too grave to be gay, too serious to be lively. He did not, like Burns, "rhyme for fun"—he had not the wisdom of the merry. His

attempts at wit are always mistimed or misplaced, and breathe an air of vulgarity. He smiles sadly —his laughter is coarse. He seems ever glad to escape from his forced humour to indulge the native sadness of his disposition. He might have said with L. E. L.,—

> "In vain I try a lighter tone,
> My lute must breathe what is its own;
> It is my own heart that has taught
> This constancy of mournful thought."

Or as himself more appropriately expresses it:

> "I would not, could not if I would, be glad,
> But, like shade-loving plants, am happiest sad."

He seems to have written his "Second Nuptials" in imitation of Scott's "Metrical Tales." The story is of a widow who is about to wed the messenger who has brought her news of her husband's death in a foreign land, when, throwing off his disguise, he appears as her husband. There are passages in this poem like roses among thorns; and had the whole been equal to some of its parts, it might have fairly stood beside Scott's "Lay of the Last Minstrel." The following is a description of a minstrel-youth disappointed in love:—

> "Pensive and pale arose the youth,
> The child of feeling and of truth;
> And modestly, and yet with pride
> His ancient fiddle laid aside,

Which not its weight in gold could buy.
True, it was clumsy to the eye;
  True, its dark side some flaws displayed;
Yet was there more than music in't,
  For why? 'twas by his grandsire made.
The worm of death was in his breast;
  Sarah, the faithless, met his eye,
Which grief and mute reproach expressed.
  Then gazing, self-condemned, on earth,
She heaved, or seemed to heave, a sigh;
  But Jacob came, and in its birth
The infant, frail Repentance, died.
At first the minstrel's voice was low
As whispered prayers of fear or wo;
But soon distinct, and deep, and clear,
The soul-felt accents met the ear,
Full of that fervour of the heart
Which bids all earthly toys depart;
Taught by calamity to scorn
All that of human pride is born."

Here is one verse of the minstrel's song:—

"And not to soothe wild passion, came
  Religion from above;
Speak not in scorn her holy name,
  Religion's self is love.
Love, with no poison in her kiss;
And, if she weeps, her tear is bliss.

* * * *

Applauded by the noiseless tear,
Although no plaudit met his ear,
Thus sang the meekest child of wo
The song his heart made years ago;
But inspiration's sudden glow
Added a happy word or so.
His cheek, late pallid as the snow,
Now burned with feeling's hectic glow.
For Death his banner there displayed,
Beautiful as a dying maid,

Or blushing merit in distress,
Or like the meek and splendourless
  Rose—not the white one, but the pale,
That with cheek carnation'd faintly,
Blushing sweetness, chastely, saintly,
  Sigheth in the vale."

One more extract :—

"She hung upon his bosom—weak—
She looked the love she could not speak;
He smiled the rose back to her cheek:
'Thou fond and full heart, do not break.'
He sealed with kisses warm her lips,
And, as the half-flying redbreast sips,
A dew-drop from the lily's breast,
  Then, perching on it, trills his song,
So kissed he off her tears to rest,
  Soothing the heart-throb tortured long.
A fairy shod with gossamer,
Joy unexpected came to her
  For past wo to atone.
Her cheek lay on his neck, embraced;
As if an angel's glance had chased
  Her troubles, they were gone."

Elliott says this poem was endeared to him by the persecution which it had suffered; such a sympathiser was he with whatever suffered.

Having passed the Rubicon of his juvenile poems, we come to his more elaborate performances. But who can tell what numbers of pieces, written as exercises, were cast away before he ventured to solicit public approbation? His private critics seem to have been sufficiently severe, but not more so than himself; and when the public came to sit in judgment on his efforts,

neglect or condemnation seems invariably to have been its verdict, at least in all his earlier appeals. This ordeal would have discouraged any one but a true poet, whom nothing can discourage. Poetry is so rare a gift that the possessor of the ethereal flame will never be found to quench it himself; and the efforts of others to extinguish it always end in making it burn more intensely. Genius is a thing of exercitation. Elliott still sung on, though to his own ears, for none other would listen to him. Probably the fault lay in ill-chosen subjects. He had not yet learnt to be popular. "Night, or the Legend of Wharncliffe," drew from the reviews the first notice which he obtained. The "Monthly Review" styled it "the *ne plus ultra* of German horror and bombast." Horror indeed, but not bombast. He had written it to show that he could make poetry of plague or pestilence, as afterwards he did of famine; and probably it owed something to his early *penchant* for the horrible. Striga, an adulteress, who has murdered her own husband, calls on her paramour to murder his wife, her sister; but he shrinks from the task. She then, being an enchantress, invokes the fiends to shed a pestilence. They comply with her wish; but she herself falls a victim. There is a dark light in this piece horribly beautiful. It is wild, turbid,

and supernatural, as the painting of a Martin; possessing awful power that is nowhere feeble, nowhere lacking congruity, and Miltonic in its grandeur. The following is an extract:—

"'Hope! saidst thou hope?' exclaimed the fallen one,
'Never Idona, never may I greet
That heavenly stranger. Dwellest *thou* in heaven?'
'No,' answered then Idona; 'but where heaven
Borders on chaos, and, dimensionless,
Rocks in perennity of gloom repose,
I make perpetual night my dwelling-place,
And, with the majesty of ruin, sit
Awfully lone. The elements, all dark,
Combat before me; or the hand of God
Writes fiery indignation on the deep,
Which seems in fragments wild a universe,
Or continent of deflagrated worlds
Arrayed in lightning; or infinitude
Of burning oceans up in ridges rolled
Huger than myriad systems ruined. There
I dwell in horrid solitude, yet not
Heaven's outcast Sometimes I revisit, calm,
Th'eternal throne, and breathe my native air
Unblamed, a duteous guest; for not a sun,
Extinguished, ceaseth to illumine space,
But to Heaven's silence sad Idona's voice
Singeth the funeral song of funeral worlds,
While seraphs weep; for well they know how once
More bright than suns was he who sings their fall!'"

This tale is dedicated to Earl Fitzwilliam, but was scarcely calculated to win his patronage. Elliott had "supped full of horrors." Doubtless they are very indigestible fare, and apt to produce the nightmare. "Wharncliffe of the Demons" is a dream of this kind; crude, yet more cohe-

rent than its predecessors. He was evidently advancing in the art of composition, but still swinging like a comet of the night.

Next followed his "Tales of Night," comprising "Bothwell," "The Exile," &c. These evince still further progress. His poetic zeal had defied expense, and now was rewarded by the friendship of one or two masters of the art, whose praises consoled him for the want of public approbation, and taught him how it was to be obtained. Southey wrote to him, saying, "There is power in the least of these tales; but the higher you pitch your tone the better you succeed. Thirty years ago they would have made your reputation; thirty years hence the world will wonder that they did not do so." It is now more than thirty years since Southey made this observation; but the world does not wonder that the poems adverted to did not make Ebenezer Elliott's reputation, whatever they might have done thirty years previously. Let us recollect who were in the field at that period. Wordsworth, Southey, and Coleridge, Byron, Scott, Crabbe, Campbell; the men have passed away, but what poem of Elliott's would stand in competition with one of theirs? Our poet's poetry was irregular—unequal—indicating by fitful passages of great power and beauty the struggles of the god

within, rather than the liberated expression of his genius. His forces were as yet undisciplined; he had not obtained the complete mastery over them. He lacked the dignity of ease. Every fresh poem, however, was an instance of progress. The two last, in particular, indicated powers of narration and description, above all of pathos, that none of his contemporaries had surpassed. He possessed a kind of wild vigour, like that of Orson, but lacked the grace of Valentine. His lofty sallies of imagination were not sufficiently corrected with taste, or curbed with judgment. He was also unfortunate in his choice of titles, none of which could be deemed "taking titles." His subjects, too, though they seem to have strongly possessed himself, lacked popular interest; and poetry in these utilitarian days will hardly recommend itself. "Is it good?" is not the question—but "What is it about?" Elliott found out this truth afterwards. In the meanwhile he went on as he had begun, writing on subjects which interested his own very powerful sensibilities, and, of course, excelling in them; but they were rather of a hackneyed nature; and though he treated them with great originality, they lacked the charm which soonest arrests the public ear—the charm of novelty.

Elliott took no means to make himself popular

beyond legitimate merit. He resorted to no tricks. He belonged to no clique or coterie. He was a provincial poet, and stood aloof from the literary world, and independent of it. He knew that a clique reputation, though it may buoy up a writer into sudden notice, is not a public reputation, and that true fame, to be lasting, must be of slow growth. The laurel grows nowhere but on graves manured with the ashes of the dead. Thus, though Elliott deserved success, he did not succeed. This neglect, and the consequent obscurity it kept him in, he probably resented as an injustice, and seems to have been indignant that Lord Byron did not mention him in his "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers." It is said that he even wrote a satire on Byron to revenge himself for this omission, but his better feelings caused him to suppress it. The taunts and jeers which he had to sustain from his father, who, he says, possessed much satiric power, were doubtless hard to bear; but, with a burning heart and silent tongue, he did not despair, but resolved more desperately to pursue his fortune, trusting that his star would yet predominate, and that his ultimate success would convert the unbelievers in his genius, and convince them of his merits. Would not that be a glorious revenge?

Our poet's dedications of his poems were dedications of gratitude rather than of hope. He could not be said to seek patronage by them. His poem

of the "Exile" he dedicated to Bulwer, "who," he says, "helped me when I was helpless and unknown." Bulwer is the most multifarious author of his day, and stands the highest for varied excellence; but all his fame will not speak so loudly in his favour as this dedication of Elliott. The "Exile" is a story of a young woman who had loved "not wisely but too well." Her lover had been compelled to flee the land as a partizan of the Royalists in the days of the Commonwealth. She "became a mother, not a wife." Spurned from her parents' door, she first attempted to support herself by needlework; but this resource failing, she is driven to worse means, yet soon relinquishes them with horror and disgust, and ultimately pawns the "stolen silk," for which crime she is sentenced to transportation. Her destination happens to be the very country in which her lover is spending his hopeless exile. He sees her—she tells her sad tale to him, and dies. In this story, though the subject is not felicitous, there is the pathos of an Otway. Crabbe's "Ellen Orford" cannot compare with it for fine-wrought sensibility. The following is the mother's narrative of the funeral of her little boy, who had died at sea:—

"Oh, let me weep!—What mother would not weep
To see her child committed to the deep?
All lifeless o'er his marble forehead rolled,
The third night saw his locks repose in gold.

Methinks 'twas moonlight, and a torch cast wide
Its lanthorn'd radiance o'er the umbered tide,
As wan on deck he lay serenely fair,
And oh! so like his sire! that man of care
(From home, and hope, and all he loved impelled),
Who ne'er his child in life or death beheld,
And *could* not come my breaking heart to share!
No mournful flowers by weeping fondness laid,
Nor pink nor rose, drooped on his breast displayed,
Nor half-blown daisy in his little hand;
Wide was the field around, but 'twas not land.
His features wore a sweet and pensive grace,
And death was beauty on his silent face.
No more his sad eye looked me into tears!
Closed was that eye beneath his pale cold brow;
And on his calm lips, which had lost their glow,
But which, though pale, seemed half unclosed to speak,
Loitered a smile like moonlight on the snow.
I gazed upon him still—not wild with fears—
Gone were my fears, and present was despair.
But as I gazed, a little lock of hair,
Stirred by the breeze, played trembling on his cheek.
O God, my heart! I thought life still was there.
But to commit him to his watery grave,
O'er which the winds, unwearied mourners, rave,
One who strove darkly sorrow's sob to sway,
Upraised the body; thrice I bade him stay,
For still my wordless heart had much to say,
And still I bent, and gazed, and gazing wept.
At last my sisters, with humane constraint,
Held me; and I was calm as dying saint,
While that stern weeper lowered into the sea
My ill-starred boy! deep—buried deep he slept.
And then I looked to heaven in agony,
And prayed to end my pilgrimage of pain,
That I might meet my beauteous boy again!
Oh! had he lived to reach this wretched land,
And then expired, I would have blessed the strand.
But where my poor boy lies I may not lie—
I cannot come with broken heart to sigh

O'er his loved dust, and strew with flowers his turf:
His pillow hath no covering but the surf.
I may not pour the soul-drop from mine eye
Near his cold bed; he slumbers in the wave!
Oh, I will *love* the sea, because it is his grave!"

The following is still more painfully pathetic:—

"'Spare me,' she cried, 'O thou destroying rod!
Hark! 'tis the voice of unforgiving God!
A mother murdered, and a sire in woe!
Alfred, the deed was mine! for thee, for thee
I broke her heart, and turned his locks to snow!
Hark! 'tis the roaring of the mighty sea!
Lo, how the mountain billows fall and rise!
And while their rage beneath the howling night
Lifts my boy's tresses to the wild moonlight,
Yet doth the wretch, the unwedded mother live,
Who for those poor unvalued locks would give
All, save her hope to kiss them in the skies!
But see, he rises from his watery bed,
And at his guilty mother shakes his head.
There, dost thou see him, blue and shivering, stand,
And lift at thee his little threatening hand?
Oh, dreadful!—Hold me!—Catch me!—Die with me!—
Alas! that must not, and it should not be!
No; pray that both our sins may be forgiven;
Then come! and heaven will—will indeed be heaven!'"

What sea is deeper than tears? and what author ever sounded that briny ocean with a more fathomless plummet than Elliott?

"Bothwell" is a dramatic poem with the following dedication:—"To my great master Robert Southey, who condescended to teach me the art of poetry." It was an odd subject for him to choose, but few could have written it so well. Conflicting

feelings wrought to madness in this poem, show that the author possessed strong dramatic powers, though fitful as the eruptions of a volcano, and lacking the art of construction. Bothwell is dying in a dungeon in Norway, and his mind reverts to his guilty passion for Mary Stuart. Rhinvalt, a fellow-prisoner, is his sole attendant.

"*Rhin.* Alas! how farest thou now? Darkness hath chased
The dreadful paleness from thy face; thine eye
Upturned, displays its white; thy cheek is laced
With quivering tortuous folds; thy lip awry
Snarls as thou tearest the straw; the speechless storm
Frowns on thy brow, where drops of agony
Stand thick and beadlike; and while all thy form
Is crumpled with convulsion, threateningly
Thou breathest, smiting the air, and writhing like a worm."

The following stanza might have found a place in Byron's "Childe Harold" without disparagement to its company:—

"Farewell, my heart's divinity! To kiss
Thy sad lip into smiles of tenderness;
To worship at that stainless shrine of bliss;
To meet the elysium of thy warm caress;
To be the prisoner of thy tears; to bless
Thy dark eye's weeping passion; and to hear
The word or sigh, soul-toned or accentless,
Murmur for one so vile, and yet so dear—
Alas! 'tis mine no more! Thou hast undone me, Fear!"

Such names as Southey and Bulwer were deemed likely to direct public opinion, but their praises of Elliott did not produce the effect that might have been expected. Was it because they spoke of him

as a mechanic? Burns had but recently died—Bloomfield had just been lauded for his self-educated genius—nay, the *Quarterly Review* had discovered a mighty poet in one John Jones; the public was probably not in the humour to listen at that moment to a new name, founding its claims on the marvellous fact, that poetry had inspired a poor man. Byron, the lord of the ascendant, with some degree of aristocratic hauteur, had ridiculed the pretensions of poets of this class. However, the undaunted bard was still in hopes that he should hit the bull's eye—the white mark of public favour. His next volume contained—"Love," "The Letter," "They Met Again," and "Withered Wild Flowers." Now that we can look back on all his poetry we have no hesitation in saying, that the genius of the author reached its meridian in this volume, and that these poems will be those for which he will be most remembered by posterity. Taking them, therefore, as criterions of his merit and fame, let us enter more largely into an examination of them, for a critical discussion of his poetry is probably the best illustration we can give of the life of the poet.

CHAPTER III.

FROM THE PUBLICATION OF "LOVE," TO THE PUBLICATION OF THE "CORN-LAW RHYMES."

"LOVE" is a poem sweet as love itself—rich with ideas that are jewels and glow with delight—round and smooth as the apple which Paris gave to Venus. All that love has done, can do, or will do in its various forms of youthful, conjugal, maternal, and heroic, is expressed in this poem, though it remained unnoticed and unknown, and "wasted its sweetness on the desert air," while many a gaudy plant was cherished in the conservatory of public favour. It is a poem not only good in its poetry but in its purpose. Dr. Holland had the honour to have it dedicated to him. It is written in what had become the author's favourite measure, the heroic couplet. Practice had now enabled him to perfect his style, yet something was still wanting to render it complete. He had at length obtained the mastery over his genius; his ideas came at his call, and he had learnt to condense them into words of force, even as water in the distiller's alembic is steamed into drops of spirit. Reading and obser-

vation had stored his mind. His fluent verse had its fountain in his heart, and ever flowed warm as his own blood—deep, yet not smooth, somewhat confused, yet never feeble. If his poem of "Love" has a fault, it arises from the too uniform solidity of his thoughts, which make it somewhat accord with Shakspeare's description of that passion—"heavy lightness, serious vanity." The following is a favourable specimen :—

"Blessed is the hearth when daughters gird the fire,
And sons that shall be happier than their sire,
Who sees them crowd around his evening chair,
While Love and Hope inspire his wordless prayer.
Oh, from their home paternal may they go,
With little to unlearn, though much to know.
Them may no poisoned tongue, no evil eye,
Curse for the virtues that refuse to die—
The generous heart, the independent mind—
Till truth, like falsehood, leaves a sting behind.
May Temperance crown their feast, and Friendship share—
May Pity come, Love's sister-spirit, there.
May they shun baseness as they shun the grave ;
May they be frugal, pious, humble, brave ;
Sweet peace be theirs, the moonlight of the breast,
And occupation and alternate rest ;
And dear to care and thought the rural walk ;
Theirs be no flower that withers on the stalk,
But roses cropped, that shall not bloom in vain,
And Hope's blest sun that sets to rise again.
Be chaste their nuptial bed, their home be sweet,
Their floor resound the tread of little feet ;
Blessed beyond fear and hate, if blessed by thee
And heirs, O Love ! of thine eternity."

"The Letter" is a tale that reminds us of Crabbe ; but Crabbe had a more philosophic

insight into human nature than Elliott; he was more a metaphysician, and could analyse motives better, so as to instruct where he entertained. Elliott's view was of the outer rather than the inner man; he showed effects better than causes. He is more a representative than a creative poet—a poet of the heart more than of the mind or soul. Crabbe does not affect us like Elliott, nor is he so full of the beauty of nature. He is more a conventional bard. Moral and religious worth is in both bards; but Elliott has more feeling, though perhaps less literary merit. "The Letter" tells a story of a young woman who was struck blind just as she became a bride, and by losing her sight lost her husband's love. He deserted her, and she was reduced to become the inmate of a workhouse. While there, and in a dying state, a letter is brought to her from her husband. It speaks of what he has seen, but says nothing to *her*, does not even mention her name. She dies; and some time after, her husband, unknowing of her fate, but struck with some degree of remorse, returns to rejoin her, but too late. This is told in a quiet feeling manner that gently interests the heart. The following is a picture of the blind bride :—

"Sad then it was to see a form so fair
In tears resigned—though dark, not in despair;
Still on his bosom she could lean and weep,
And feign a dream of eyelids closed in sleep;

Still when with him she walked, at eve or morn,
She could inhale the odours of the thorn;
And while she hung so helpless on his arm,
Dependence gave his words a double charm:
They fell like dew o'er violets on her ear,
Or like offended Love's forgiving tear
On man's warm breast. Yet by the plaining rill
The thought would rise that flowers on every hill
Were beautiful to every eye but hers—
That broom, and hawthorn, and the armèd furze,
Bloomed vainly fair beneath the sapphire sky.
Still waved the birch in memory's happy eye,
Yet made by vain regret more sadly sweet;
The hours returned when oft, with naked feet,
And bare plunged arm, the trout or loach she took
Where stones upturned perturbed the shallow brook,
Or mid her sister maidens of the dale,
Held forth the lizard by his golden tail
In childish wonder; and an envious pang
Assailed her weakness if the echoes rang,
With 'Holiday' proclaimed in joyous cries,
And little boys and girls, with upturned eyes,
Came whispering round her."

"They Met Again" is another story of remorseful guilt. We are introduced to a rebel and traitor who hides his life in a cave. A storm has cast an aged shipwrecked voyager on shore, and in him the outlaw recognises a wronged friend—a husband whom he had deceived and injured in the deepest degree, robbing him of his wife's love. The victim does not recognise his wronger, and while dying recounts to him the history of his wrongs and sufferings, which awaken the vain repentance of the listener, who cannot atone. The following lines no learning, but only genius, could have dictated:—

"I may not lie where Ann in cold earth lies;
But might I see again with these sad eyes
The clay that is her pillow, they would close
Happy to shut for ever on the woes
Of such a world as this. I weep for her:
I am not stone: she was a sufferer,
And though a sinner, yet a Magdalene.
She died repentant, and was loveliest then.
Oh, she was false to me, but I am true;
And when she died we then were wed anew.
The worms, the worms our bridal bed prepare;
Long waits the bride—in vain! I come not there.
Severed in life, still, still let death divide;
Why should I slumber by the lost one's side?
Yet when the trump of doom shall rend the sky,
And wake all sleepers, she shall meet an eye
That could not meet hers frowning. Oh, her breast,
Though dearest still, is spotted and unblessed—
No pillow meet for me, although I long for rest."

"They Met Again" is one of those tales of truth that are stranger than fiction, and contains an excellent moral, exemplified in the following fine lines:—

"No fancied muse do I invoke to aid
The song that tells of trusting truth betrayed.
Be thou, my muse, thou darkest name of woe,
Thou saddest of realities below,
Love! But I called not thee, thou boy of guile,
Cruel, though fair, that joyest to sting and smile!
Sly urchin, winged and armed too like the bee,
And tressed with living gold, I called not thee —
But thee, sweet profligate, who gavest all,
Peace, earth and heaven, for poisoned fire and gall!
Thee, thee, thou weeping Magdalene, I call.
Alas! o'er thee hath rushed the avenging blast,
Through thee the arrows of the grave have passed.
Avaunt! thou palest daughter of Despair!
If thou art Love, what form doth Horror wear?

Yet stay! I know thee, in thy faded eye
The light of beauty lingers—soon to die:
Known by the worm that feedeth on the heart.
Stay, guilty Magdalene, we must not part
Till I have told this saddest tale of thine,
And steeped in tears each slow complaining line."

It will be seen that "They Met Again" is of a similar character with "The Letter;" and there is yet another, "Withered Wild Flowers." From what source Elliott drew these tales, whether he was indebted for them to fact or fiction or to his own imagination, it were bootless to inquire. There is but little incident and character in them. The story is simple, and seems written to exemplify one moral, namely, that sin is the sure breeder of misery. All are tales of sorrow and remorse. Narrative and descriptive powers they evince in a high degree, but are chiefly characteristic for pathos. "Withered Wild Flowers" is a tale of New England. We are introduced to Kirk, Winslow, and Henley; also to Elliot, the Indian Apostle. Senena, the guilty and unfortunate love of Henley, and Mary, her sister, the wife of Winslow, are the female characters of the drama. After a dialogue, remarkable for the courtier tone of the cavalier Kirk, contrasted with the fierce republicanism of Winslow, the conscience-stricken Senena quits the room, and we follow in secret to a dark deed of guilt, the mur-

der, by drowning, of her infant child; it hath no other name. Afterwards, impelled by that strong curiosity which prompts the murderer to look upon his deed, she goes and draws the dead body of the infant to land. Remorse plunges her with it into the wave. The guilty lover discovers his victims, and sequesters himself from all society. He also dies, and his funeral gives occasion to Elliot, the missionary, to preach a funeral sermon over his grave, from the text, "The curse of God is in the house of sin." Most tender and solemn is the feeling awakened by this. Bad indeed must that heart be whose better feelings would not be touched by it—hard indeed, if the hand of sorrow that can soften a stone did not cause those tears of penitence to flow, whose drops, more than "great Neptune's ocean," have power to wash away guilt.

Elliott's choice of those melancholy subjects arose in part from the morbidity of his disposition. His sensibilities were roused by his sympathies; he wrote to ease a bursting heart. Had he been able to identify himself with the characters he described, or had he drawn from self, he would have evinced power little lower than Shakspeare or Byron. As it was, he at least reached the second best of Byron, and was thus far superior to that misanthropic genius—he wrote with better purpose. Some of his lines have the condensed

power and sonorous swell of Byron's most majestic flow. For instance:—

" Kirk turned black with ire,
And on his forehead darkness seemed on fire."

* * * * * *

" But Kirk, with gloomy stare,
Perused each sunburnt warrior's haughty air,
And, starting, almost feared rebellion there."

In the following extract each word seems a tear—each tone a cadence of woe.

" My murdered baby! Oh, that I had borne
The taunt of prudery, the scourge of scorn,
The penance due to sin! Would I had taught
Thy little lip to know this breast, and bought
Thy thankful smile with love, and o'er thee hung,
To bless the name of mother from thy tongue!
Was this a mother's deed? Thy stifled cry
Still echoes in my soul, and will not die.
Bitter remembrance is my portion set,
Never on earth to smile, or to forget.
And I must bear perdition in my breast,
And wear my hopeless anguish as a vest.
Why did I do this deed? Let Henley tell:
He, most unworthy, still is loved too well.
But he shall weep when I am lowly laid,
And wish too late I had not been betrayed.
Canst thou forgive me, baby? Thou, my child,
Canst thou forgive this wretch with blood defiled?
Baby, forgive me! I forgive thy sire.
O Heaven, forgive us both! and in thine ire
Remember him with mercy. Let me weep
A little longer, ere I try to sleep."

No one could excel Elliott in depicting what Crabbe calls " the strong yearnings of a ruine mind," or those horrors of a guilty conscienc

which are so pitiful in their terrors. The following passage will not easily be paralleled :—

"And he complained that oft the light was green,
That blue sparks girt his bed, in darkness seen,
And that the rushes on the floor had wings,
And moved and flew like animated things.
Then would he mourn his nights unblessed with sleep,
And bend his face upon my knee and weep,
And say that he had wished in vain to die ;
And that (although he shrunk when death seemed nigh)
Oft had he gazed upon the heaving main
And longed to leap, and turned, and looked again.
But if I prayed him to return with me,
Then, like a wretch who strives with agony,
And deeply maimed prepares his final blow,
He mustered up his strength and answered 'No!'
Once, only once, his anguish sank in prayer,
And uttered all a broken heart's despair:
'In doubt I lived, in horror I expire.
Release me ; Oh, release me! in thine ire,
Or in thy mercy rather, set me free!
For my eyes hate the blessèd sun to see,
That only bids my hopeless spirit mourn
O'er ill-spent hours that never can return.'"

"Spirits and Men," is a poem of the world before the flood, but might with equal propriety have had a posterior date. Incited by the examples of Milton, Byron, Moore, and Montgomery, who had all written on this subject, our author, too, must needs enter the lists, but we cannot say with equal success. Milton has legitimately possessed himself of that ground, and rendered it an act of temerity in all who would trespass on it. Elliott's poem is a fragment, deficient in story and charac-

ter, and is, indeed, what he terms it, an "evidence of his presumption and despair." The literal character of his genius unfitted him to grasp a purely spiritual subject. His poetry is not fiction, but truth; he could not idealise the real, still less realise the ideal. He looked on nature with his own eyes—and not with the coloured glasses of fancy and imagination. His spirits are men Without the metaphysics of Byron, the mellifluous sweetness of Moore, and the theological piety of Montgomery, he yet possessed a something of his own which, exercised in its proper sphere, made him a magician as mighty as they in their circles — namely, an exquisite sensibility. The death of Thamar in this unfinished epic is an instance:—

"Words came at length, and tears were wildly shed;
'I die at home, and thou art here,' he said;
'But though released, I die at home, and feel
Thy warm tears, Zillah, on my bosom cold,
Think not that aught but fire can soften steel,
Or that in pity wolves relax their hold.
Oh, I have dreamed of vollied seas and fire,
Sad retribution haply yet to be:
The tyrant's power and will obey a higher,
And vain is human strife with destiny.
Know, from thy womb the destined twain have sprung,
On whom the fate of this doomed world is hung.
Oh, may their deeds, magnanimous and just,
Cancel the crimes of ages, and retrieve
The fainting hopes of man, when I am dust!
For I must leave thee, Eva—I must leave

Thee, my brave boy! your sire is summoned hence
To join Mahali, whom his innocence
Could not defend or rescue; if, indeed,
My ill-starred father lives, not yet fast bound
In torturing dungeons, whose slow pangs exceed
All other pangs. But ah, what mists surround
My swimming brain? What means this sudden gloom?
Take not my children from me ere I die!
I cannot see your faces, nearer come,
Irad, yet nearer. Eva, art thou nigh?
Zillah, thy hand—my poor ill-fated one!
I see a shade resembling thee—'tis gone!"

There was ever deep feeling in that well of truth—the poet's heart.

Elliott had hitherto written as he had read, as chance led him, with probably no greater design than to prove his powers as a poet. It is remarkable that his earliest subjects are not drawn from local or national sources, from individual or social feelings. There are none of the superstitions or traditions of his native place versified by him—none of the characters either domestic or in the neighbourhood figure in his rhymes. He "takes off" no one—writes no love songs—and is anything but a genius *loci*. With the exception of a well-paid tribute to the memory of his schoolmaster's son, whose soul of flame, he says—

"Cherished in mine a spark that else had died,"

he passes over all that lay nearest to him, and sends his thoughts into the Far West to gather

the honey of poesy from foreign rather than from native flowers. His mind appears to have been early turned towards America. One of his first projected poems was an epic on the Revolution. He was a diligent reader of transatlantic books. Thus he lays the scene of his "Exile," and other poems, in that land of freedom, though he never was there. He had a strong desire to emigrate, and was, no doubt, in correspondence with one or two friends who had done so. From their descriptions, and from the works of Audubon and others, he drew many of those pictures which seem taken on the spot. Could he have gone to that land of his love, we should doubtless have had a poem filled with all the power of personal experience, and entitled, "The Emigrant."

One of his own favourites was "Miranion, a Tale of the Conquest of Quebec." It is more finished than many of his poems, and, as a poem, might form a companion-piece with West's celebrated picture of "The Death of Wolfe." The following is an instance of rapid narrative :—

"The rocks frowned darker o'er the shoreward fleet.
First on the strand stood Wolfe. Boat followed boat,
And warrior, warrior. With uplifted sword
He pointed to the rocks; and swift, and strong,
And resolute, they scaled the steepness there.
Silent, and each assisting each, they rose
From tree to tree, from cliff to cliff; and soon,
High on the summit, twenty veterans waved

Their Highland blades. Mute thousands followed them,
With labour infinite and cautious tread,
And breathing half suppressed; and painfully
Their slaughtering cannon weighed from pine to pine."

As the work of an uneducated man, "Miranion" will bear comparison, even in classical correctness, with the prize poems of a collegian. Southey produced no better epic.

Those who have formed their opinion of Elliott chiefly from his political rhymes, will scarcely credit the excellence of his heroic poetry. The poet appears in two aspects—a kind of Janus—one face glowing with the godlike muse of Romance—the other contracted with the scowl of embittered trade. I have dwelt the more upon the merits of his unpolitical poetry because I am apprehensive that, as an Apollo, Elliott is still a stranger in the land, he being more known as a Vulcan; but if he was a Vulcan, he was a forger of celestial armour. We now proceed to regard him more particularly in this latter character, a forced one to him, whose aspirations were for a more congenial sphere.

"Oh that I were all thought and memory,
A winged intelligence invisible;
Then would I read the virgin's fears, and tell
Delicious secrets to her lover's heart,
By spectre-haunted wood or wizard stream."

CHAPTER IV.

CONTAINING A HISTORY OF THE CORN-LAW RHYMER'S POLITICAL POETRY.

We have already seen the influences which bore upon the youthful mind of Elliott and made him a poet. We have now to remark those which operated to make his poetry political. In the first place, we must observe that he was born a radical; for his father was one, and he was brought up in that school, as his class generally are. His father was his tutor; and however that stern republican might complain of his son's dullness in other respects, he, no doubt, found him apt in this. But no induction would have availed to one who, like young Elliott, began, as soon as he could think at all, to think for himself; unfortunately, however, his thoughts were of a nature to rivet his first impressions. Ebenezer Elliott could not be kept in mental childhood; as he grew to man's estate, nay, while yet a boy, he thought as a man. This unhappiness affected his health—for what had he to think of? England was at war with France, not to put down French freedom—that had gone

mad and destroyed itself; but to control the power of a Usurper who, imitating the despots of ancient Rome, set enslaved States free but to bring them in bondage under himself. The French Revolution had failed because, while professing to make that of America its model, France could but produce a Robespierre in place of a Franklin—a Bonaparte instead of a Washington. No doubt, in common with other youthful minds, Elliott had enthusiastically hailed the rising of that sun which so soon, alas! was to set in blood, and to give power, or rather pretence, to petty despots, to insult the hopes of disappointed patriots, and to rivet their chains. He longed to escape to America, but his lot forbade. In the meanwhile such scenes as those at "Peterloo," never to be forgotten and never to be forgiven by a true radical, inflamed him with a hero's passion and a martyr's zeal. At the same time, his father's affairs, which involved his own, went wrong; and whether this was caused by individual mismanagement or the turn of the times, the consequences were not likely to improve his temper. His mother did not survive the shock, nor was his father long a mourner.

Our poet has versified this most calamitous period of his life in the following passage from the "Village Patriarch:"—

"But danger lurked where safety seemed to be,
And cloudless thunder turned his hopes to dust;

While navies sank on fortune's sunny sea
Unskilled to save his little bark was he.
  In dreadful calm the viewless storm increased;
Most fatal when least dreaded came the blow,
  That still was nearest when expected least,
And none who felt the stroke could see the foe;
But all was wondering fear and helpless woe.
  The servant took the master by the nose;
The beggared master slunk aside to die;
  Down dropped the cobweb Crœsus, stunned: he rose,
And fell again he knew not how nor why.
Like frost and thaw in April's fickle sky,
  The wretched rich, and not less wretched poor,
Changed places miserably; and the bad
  Throve while the righteous begged from door to door.
None smiled save knaves; but loudly laughed the mad,
Even at their prayers, and then they kicked the sad;
  And still men fought with shadows and were slain;
For ruin smote, nor warning gave at all,
  Unseen, like pestilence, and feared in vain!"

Ebenezer Elliott shared the fate of thousands, but thought more about it than they all, and felt it deeper. He left the tale untold because it could derive no public interest, save from its connexion with such a man as himself. Thousands at the present day might tell similar tales, more instructive than entertaining to the general reader. Elliott attributed his disasters to the Corn-laws, and he was not one to suffer without seeking a remedy. We have seen from his non-political poetry that he could sympathise with fictitious grief, nor did this make him fashionably callous to the real. Yet he dwelt not on his own grief, but as an item in the general account.

Our poet and steel-merchant, at the age of forty, had to begin the world anew. True, it was not without a stock of deeply-bought experience, and past failures sometimes prove the foundations of future success. He left Rotherham, where he had been unfortunate, and began business at Sheffield with a borrowed capital of 100*l.* This, he said, "tippled right over its head." A re-action had taken place, and he now received the benefit of the fresh-strung nerve of commerce. His first place of business was in Burgess-street, where he dealt in the raw material of Sheffield cutlery. Here it was that, as Howitt reports him to have said, he made 20*l.* a day, sitting in his chair, without seeing the goods that came to his wharf and left it with such profit to him. But this was only for a time. It lasted sufficiently, however, to enable him to make his fortune.

Prosperity and the Corn-laws could not continue together long. Trade was ever fluctuating like a strong spring tide, that carries what floats on it to a high flood, but then, with low ebb, sweeps back again. Elliott's former reverses had taught him prudence. He never acted as if good luck was to be permanent, but provided against the turn of the times. "While others, therefore, were increasing their liabilities by augmenting their stocks, Elliott prudently kept his within the narrowest compass.

This saved him from embarrassment when the tide turned, and enabled him to do business profitably when many who had hasted to be rich were overwhelmed." But all the prudence in the world cannot preserve the fair trader from the effects of monopoly or class-legislation. Elliott was doomed to a second reverse. In a letter to Mr. Tait he says:—"In 1837, when the commercial revulsion began, I ought to have retired from all business, as I then intended, being aware that without Free-trade no tradesman could be safe. But my unwillingness to lead an idle life (which being interpreted means, my unwillingness to resign the profits of business) tempted me to wait the crash—a crash unlike all other crashes in my experience. I lost fully one-third of all my savings; and after enabling my six boys to quit the nest, got out of the fracas with about 6,000*l.*, which I will try to keep."

Elliott had a scape-goat on which to lay all his misfortunes and all the sins of the nation—viz., the Corn-laws. To these he attributed the tantalising uncertainties of trade, so vexatious both to employers and the employed—its struggles to mount upwards ever ending with a sudden downfall—capitalists compelled to lower wages or to stop work, and the strikes of labourers who only saw the stick and not the hand that held it. That hand, said Elliott, was the Bread-tax. In Sheffield,

indeed, he had found a congenial sphere; it was here that he first succeeded in business, and here he began to be popular as a poet. This large manufacturing town, with its many thousands of intelligent operatives—men of steel, true to the cause of truth—this "town of the cloud," as he called it, which ever seems to wear the cap of Liberty—a pillar of smoke by day, turning at night into a tongue of flame—this town of industry, with its romantic scenery, supplied him with materials for his muse and gave him audience fit and not few. Here he organised the first "Anti-Bread-tax Society;" almost alone he did it, for his associates were all of the working-class. They formed the nucleus of a society which, had not the Reform Bill intervened, would soon have numbered many thousands; but the agitation for the Reform Bill caused them to suspend their operations in order that they might assist in promoting that measure.

Parliamentary reform had become the grand question of the day. The state of the national representation was found to be greatly at variance with its theory, and presented many remarkable absurdities and anomalies. It was thought the people's voice would reform all abuses, and cure all corruptions. Elliott expected from it the immediate repeal of the Corn-laws. Always in

earnest, he threw his heart into whatever cause he advocated. But neither the hopes of the Reformers nor the fears of the Anti-reformers were realised. The Reform Bill, regarded as a panacea for all evils by the one, as a Pandora's box by the other, proved, after all, a nullity. It is in the nature of parties to sever as wide as possible, leaving Truth standing in the midst, exclaiming, Peace! But Truth is not listened to, and there is no peace. The representation of the people was little improved. Men of birth and wealth could still command most votes; intimidation was at work; and the new electors, though Reformers, found themselves obliged either to lose their livings or to vote against their consciences. We must not be surprised if the majority adopted the latter alternative. In the House, interest still overruled principle, faction still overcame patriotism; and the hopes of the Anti-Corn-law party were frustated by a clause introduced by the Marquis of Chandos, which gave a vote to tenant-farmers of 50*l.* a year rental. Elliott saw the necessity of resuming his Anti-Corn-law agitation. He had assisted the advent of Reform by several spirited songs, written for the Sheffield Political Union, of which he was a member. One or two of these are worth quoting :—

SONG.

To the tune of "Scots wha ha'."

"Hands, and hearts, and minds are ours,
Shall we bow to bestial powers?
Tyrants! vaunt your swords and towers,
Reason is our citadel.

"With what arms will ye surprise
Knowledge of the million eyes?
What is mightier than the wise?
Not the might of wickedness.

"Trust in force!—so tyrants trust;
Words shall crush ye into dust.
Yet we fight—if fight we must—
Thou didst, Man of Huntingdon.

"Heirs of Pym! can ye be base?
Locke! shall Frenchmen scorn a race
Born in Hampden's dwelling-place?
Blush to write it, Infamy.

"What we are, our fathers were,
What they dared, their sons can dare;
Vulgar tyrants, hush! beware!
Bring not down the avalanche.

"By the death which Hampden died,
By oppression, mind-defied,
Despots! we will tame your pride,
Stormily or tranquilly."

The trumpet that sounded the charge also celebrated the victory.

THE TRIUMPH OF REFORM.

To the tune of "Rule Britannia."

"No paltry fray, no bloody day,
That crowns with praise the baby great;
The deed of Brougham, Russell, Grey,
The deed that's done, we celebrate.
Mind's great charter! Europe saved!
Man for ever unenslaved!

"Oh, could the wise, the brave, the just
Who suffered—died—to break our chains,
Could Muir, could Palmer from the dust,
Could murdered Gerald hear our strains,—
Then would martyrs throned in bliss
See all ages blessed in this."

His own prosperity never made Elliott indifferent to the welfare of others, particularly of the poor. He was by nature their friend. No poet or man of large and universal sympathies can be indifferent to the welfare of any of God's creatures, more particularly of those who, like the children of nature, are dependant on Providence for their food. Business, however profitable, still left him leisure to advocate the cause of the people. He wrote, lectured, and attended public meetings on their behalf. Right! was his one-worded motto, and his thoughts and deeds always corresponded. He had lived through the worst times, when the horrors of the Reign of Terror had given to George the Fourth and his Ministers power to persecute all under the ban of radicalism. The escape of Horne Tooke, Thelwall, and Hone probably secured his own. The arm of the Sidmouths and Castlereaghs had been shortened, and on the accession of William the Fourth, a patriotic king, the hopes of the people revived.

Elliott's ill success in the world had called his thoughts from the regions of romance home to himself and family, and he had renounced the

visionary speculations of poetry to consider why such a man as himself was unsuccessful. To what cause could he attribute this? Of course, to the Corn-laws! There was no occasion to employ his muse in fiction; there were truths, more strange, that invoked her. The weapon he had used for Reform he could use for the repeal of the Corn-laws; and he sharpened it upon his wrongs to make it more cutting. The subject came home to his business and bosom. Here, then, is the secret of his "Corn-law Rhymes." Not that his personal losses rendered him selfish, any more than his gains made him sordid. He wrote for the nation as for himself—for all fellow-sufferers. He says, "If my composition smell of the workshop and the dingy warehouse, I cannot help it; soot is soot, and he who lives in a chimney will do well to take the air when he can, and ruralise now and then, even in imagination. But we are cursed with evils infinitely worse than a sooty atmosphere—we are bread-taxed. Our labour, our skill, our profits, our hopes, our lives, our children's souls, are bread-taxed."

Trade was fettered by the operation of certain laws that had been enacted for the benefit of land-owners, because their party was the most powerful in the State, and had rendered a factitious service to Government in its late wars. Those laws imposed

a duty on all foreign corn imported into England, thus keeping up the price of bread here by law, and enabling tenants to pay high rents. This, in itself, would not have been felt a hardship if trade had uniformly continued good, for high profits would have enabled manufacturers to pay high wages, and workmen could thus have afforded to pay a high price for bread. But trade declined. The manufacturers found that their customers abroad were becoming rivals—formidable, because their bread was not made dear by law. Accordingly, the manufacturers called for the abolition of this impost; they were not afraid of competition if they could meet their foreign rivals on fair ground. They hoped that when corn should be imported duty free, foreigners would betake themselves to corn-growing as a better speculation, and leave manufacturing to those who were more adept at it. Thus the strife of competition would be shuffled off their shoulders upon those of the landowners. Trade not being so healthy, so steady, nor so agreeable an occupation as agriculture, seemed to require some immunities; but the manufacturers called for none, except that the land should not be protected at their expense. This was the question; and we must not wonder that Ebenezer Elliott, born and bred a manufacturer, whose interests were all embarked in trade, whose

very bread depended on its being made free, should be, or become, what was called a Free-trader. How warmly he thought and felt on the subject, owing to his repeated sacrifices and sufferings, may be gathered from his own nervous prose. "When suicidal anti-profit laws speak to my heart from my children's trenchers, when statutes for restricting the industry of a population, which is only superabundant because it is oppressed, threaten to send me to the tread-mill for the crime of inflicted want—when, in a word, my feelings are hammered till they are 'cold-short'—habit can no longer bend them to courtesy; they snap and fly off in sarcasm. Is it strange that my language is fervent as a welding heat when my thoughts are passions that rush burning from my mind like white-hot bolts of steel?" Southey, when he wrote "Wat Tyler," possessed much of Elliott's nature; but he suffered the world so far to win him that he afterwards expressed scorn of the unsophisticated feelings of his youth, and deprecated this language of Elliott. Southey would have advised Elliott to dip his white-hot bolts of passion into the slack-trough of prudence. With admirable conventional tact, the Laureate, when writing a review of Elliott's poems, desirous to serve the author and yet not to offend his own patrons, steered a middle course, and, by dint

of tacking and veering, manœuvred his vessel through. Elliott, who disdained to trim, would rather have run her on shore. Southey was a scholar and a gentleman, who had not been worn and torn with the tug of commercial war. Elliott's wrath was that of the dove, that in defence of its young will peck the eagle. He wept as he wrote. Such scenes as a large manufacturing town presents in times of distress were enough to render him, whose heart was so feeling, frantic with grief and rage. He had been more or less than man could he have written coldly.

Elliott's politics had rendered his poetry practical —he "stooped to truth and moralised his song." He denounced the Corn-laws and all their supporters—nay, the whole system of Government and society that could uphold them. He sympathised with their victims, being himself one. He became a political poet. The first fruits of this change was "The Ranter"—a sermon in poetry. Why he called it "The Ranter," I cannot conceive. There is no rant in it—and no ranter could or would have written such a sermon. Nor is there any cant in it. It might have been preached on the mount which overlooks Sheffield. It is a sermon full of radical Christianity. As a poem, it is more regular than any of its predecessors, having a beginning, a middle, and an end.

He intersperses his usual beautiful descriptions of natural scenery with his fervid human feelings, and writes from actual life, from what himself had seen, and felt, and remembered of England's evil days and his own.

"The Ranter" was the first poem that made him popular but with the class for whom it was written only. Yet individuals of all parties must have admired the poetry, if not the politics. The following may serve as a specimen, and it shows the author's favourite method of illustrating Free-trade from its analogy with Nature:—

"Look on the clouds, the streams, the earth, the sky,
Lo! all is interchange and harmony.
Where is the gorgeous pomp which yestermorn
Curtained yon orb with amber, fold on fold?
Behold it in the blue of Rivilin borne,
To feed the all-feeding seas! the molten gold
Is flowing pale in Loxley's crystal cold.
To kindle into beauty tree and flower,
And wake to verdant life hill, dale, and plain,
Cloud trades with river, and exchange is power;
But should the clouds, the trees, the winds disdain
Harmonious intercourse, nor dew nor rain
Would forest-crown the mountains; airless day
Would blast on Kinderscout the heathy glow.
No purply green would meeken into grey
O'er Don at eve; no sound of river's flow
Disturb the sepulchre of all below."

The "Ranter" is remarkable for an attack on Methodism, which the author accuses of Jesuitism. Is it true that these people, having humbled them-

selves to be exalted, now make a despotic use of their power, and more than imitate the worldliness of the wealthy institution from which they seceded?

> "There is the moral of all human tales,
> 'Tis but the same rehearsal of the past—
> First freedom, and then glory. When that fails,
> Wealth, vice, corruption—barbarism at last."

With the "Ranter" appeared "Corn-law Rhymes;" a strange, unpromising title, as if the poet had taken the wings off his Pegasus, and turned her into a common hack for the highway. Having reached middle age, what had he to look back upon but a youth spent in vain toil—in sufferings and sacrifices, such as he believed no other man had ever endured—such as had often made him exclaim, when thinking of his narrow escape from drowning when a child, "The more the pity!" Well would it have been for the landlords if Ebenezer Elliott had been quietly allowed to write poetry or attend to his business without being driven to politics—well also for his own fame, because that portion of his poetry which he wrote before he rhymed politics is his best. He says truly in the preface to the "Ranter," "I have published poems which contained no political allusions, and the worst of them all might justly claim a hundred times the merit

of the "Corn-law Rhymes." He himself seems to have wondered at the sudden popularity which attended these. But there was nothing to wonder at. His readers were interested in the subject—he wrote on what concerned them. Thus inferior poetry rose superior in the estimation of the people, because on topics of temporary interest. But the occasion past, what is to prevent all his poems founded on it from passing likewise? The repeal of the Corn-laws repealed the "Corn-law Rhymes." Like "Junius' Letters," nothing but their vigour of style will preserve them.

The "Corn-law Rhymes" are short pieces, all the more effective for being short. Many of them are mere versifications of maxims in Colonel Thompson's works on Free-trade. They are written in every variety of style or measure, fit to be sung, read, or recited. Their chief fault lies in their spirit of personal invective. He does not reason with the enemy—he keeps no terms with him, gives him no quarter; he runs a muck at all Corn-law supporters, real or imaginary, and makes a scalping-knife of his pen. His sarcasm is indeed very bitter — his words are drops of vitriol. He lashes himself up to frenzy, and growls and tears with savage fury. Like Hamlet he seems to exclaim,—

> "Why, I will fight with them upon this theme
> Until my eyelids will no longer wag."

Like Coriolanus :—

> " Let them pull all about mine ears; present me
> Death upon the wheel, or at wild horses' heels;
> Or pile ten hills upon the Tarpeian rock,
> That the precipitation might down stretch
> Below the beam of sight, yet will I still
> Be thus to them."

He never attempts to soften or persuade, never argues; but, like a wolf, whose native wildness no art can civilise, spends his vain fury on his bars and chains. Elliott's creed was, that milk and water never cauterised a national cancer; and in words that might have been written by the author of

> " Be Kent unmannerly when Lear is mad,"

he says—

> " Be Supplication dumb
> When Charity is deaf."

He knew that selfishness would listen to no voice but that of alarm; and therefore he does not say—

> " Let gentleness our strong enforcement be,"

but, let us speak with thunder and lightning, that terror may teach the selfish there is more to fear by refusing justice than by granting it. After all, the landowners had themselves to thank for all this. One class, as it ought not to, so it never will, thrive long at the expense of another. The plundered combine, and the fat are no match for the hungry.

It is well if retribution does not fly back to retaliation and revenge. Elliott speaks right out what he thinks, and would act what he thought. He insults without mercy. The landed aristocracy are all paupers kept by the poor, whose bread is taxed to support them in luxury! And he represents those Pharaohs as requiring the tale of bricks without straw—as famishing the very slaves whose labour supported them. He utters warnings like those of Noah when he prophesied the flood. Yet let it not be supposed that he desired to see the revolution which he foretold. He himself would have been one of the first and greatest sufferers. Revolutionists do not warn, they conspire secretly. But Elliott suffered the fate of all prophets, from Peter the Hermit downward. He was adjudged as one who desired the accomplishment of his own prophecies. True it is, that while he roused the fears of the landlords, he excited the feelings of the people; and had he inadvertently kindled a conflagration, his well-meant intentions would not have quenched it.

The reader may be desirous to see a specimen of those far-famed "Corn-law Rhymes:"—

SONG.

To the tune of "Scots wha ha'."

"Others march in Freedom's van;
Can'st not thou what others can?
Thou a Briton!—thou a man!
What are worms if human thou?

" Wilt thou, deaf to hiss and groan,
Breed white slaves for every zone?
Make yon robber feed his own,
Then proclaim thyself a man.

" Still shall paltry tyrants tell
Freemen when to buy and sell?
Spurn the coward thought to hell!
Tell the miscreants what they are.

" Dost thou cringe that fiends may scowl?
Wast thou born without a soul?
Spaniels *feed*, are whipped, and howl—
Spaniel! thou art *starved* and whipped.

" Wilt thou still feed palaced knaves?
Shall thy sons be traitors' slaves?
Shall they sleep in workhouse graves?
Shall they toil for parish pay?

" Wherefore didst thou woo and wed?
Why a bride was Mary led?
Shall she, dying, curse thy bed?
Tyrants! tyrants! no, by Heaven!"

It may be some excuse for Elliott that losses in trade, against which no skill nor industry were of avail, and public neglect, which had been the sole reward of his merit, had soured his temper.

" Long years of outrage, calumny, and wrong,
Imputed madness,"

had, as in Tasso's case, worked a cankering effect on his mind and health; but all honour to poetry which could spring up in this arid soil, and make the wilderness bloom like a garden. The "Corn-law Rhymes" themselves present several instances of the admirable effect of poetry in controlling

and soothing the ungovernable and embittered rage of politics. His politics bade him curse, but his poetry involuntarily blessed. As, for instance, in the "Jacobin's Prayer:"—

"Avenge the plundered poor, O Lord!
But not with fire, but not with sword—
Not as at Peterloo they died,
Beneath the hoofs of coward pride.
Avenge our rags, our chains, our sighs,
The famine in our children's eyes!
But not with sword, no, not with fire,
Chastise thou Britain's locustry!
Lord, let them feel thy heavier ire;
Whip them, O Lord, with poverty!
Then cold in soul as coffined dust,
Their hearts as tearless, dead, and dry,
Let them in outraged mercy trust,
And *find* that mercy they deny!"

And, again, in "O Lord, how long?"

"Oh, vengeance!—No, forgive, forgive!
'Tis frailty still that errs:
Forgive? Revenge!—shall murderers live?
Christ blessed *his* murderers."

Politics apart, what would the poet have been? Let his own prayer inform us:—

A POET'S PRAYER.

"Almighty Father! let thy lowly child,
Strong in his love of truth, be wisely bold;
A patriot bard, by sycophants reviled,
Let him live usefully, and not die old!
Let poor men's children, pleased to read his lays,
Love for his sake the scenes where he hath been;
And when he ends his pilgrimage of days,
Let him be buried where the grass is green.

Where daisies, blooming earliest, linger late,
To hear the bee his busy note prolong,
There let him slumber, and in peace await
The dawning morn, far from the sensual throng,
Who scorn the windflower's blush, the red-breast's lonely song."

In the preface to the "Corn-law Rhymes," Elliott endeavours to vindicate the union of poetry with politics. He says, "All poets are fervid politicians." True; but not in the sense that he was. They are politicians abstractedly or generally. They are lovers of liberty, for poetry inspires the love of liberty; and even those who in their lives were opposed to liberty are, in their poetry, its advocates. But poets do not pick out a law, and harp on that string till their song disgusts and tires. They write not for trade. Elliott as a denouncer of the bread-tax was a poet; as a Corn-law rhymer he was a politician. The careless reader may say this is a distinction without a difference; but the discerning one will see otherwise. Shakspeare was a politician when he wrote Hamlet's soliloquy. Milton was a politician, but more in his prose works than in his poetic. Otway was a politician when he wrote in "Venice Preserved:"

"Fools shall be pulled
From wisdom's seat; those baleful, unclean birds,
Those lazy owls, who, perched near fortune's top,
Sit only watchful with their heavy wings
To cuff down new-fledged virtues, that would rise
To nobler heights, and make the grove harmonious."

Burns was a politician when he wrote—

" It's hardly in a body's power
To keep at times frae being sour,
To see how things are shared;
How best o' chiels are whyles in want,
While coofs on countless thousands rant,
An' ken nae how to wair't."

Many noble stanzas in "Childe Harold" declare Byron a politician. But these poets turned politics into poetry; they did not, like our Rhymer, turn poetry into politics. None, like Elliott, were statute-law politicians; and yet if that law, by taxing the bread of the people, forced them to relieve the miseries of want by death or crime, surely its abolition was as worthy of a poet's advocacy as that of the slave-trade, so eloquently denounced by the poet Cowper. Yet, for the sake of Poetry, let us hope that she will not in future be made a politician. The Muses have always been represented as belonging to the softer sex, and we should be sorry to see them out of character. Politics should be confined to prose; for if there be any two things more unaccordant with each other than poetry and politics, let them be named, that we may know how to speak when we would express our ideas of extreme contraries; and that the phrase, "As wide as the poles asunder!" may become obsolete. We grant that true politics, which are pure patriotism and philan-

thropy combined, are fit—perhaps the fittest—subjects for poetry; but that lower species known by the name of party-politics, which is little better than personal strife, cannot be etherealised into poetry. You may turn them into verse, just as you make a rhyming satire or a lampoon; but true poetry, which is the real made ideal, or the ideal made real, flies from politics like a retort in chemistry. Poetry deals with great principles—its engines are the heart, and mind, and soul; policy resorts to little expedients, and sets the baser passions of our nature at work. Poetry loves the still life of retirement, like the lake which, when calm, reflects the face of heaven; politics are the same lake agitated by the winds, and throwing up the lees from the bottom to mingle with and mar the bright aspect of its waters. The poet cannot bend to the world, and therefore is often broken upon it, as upon a wheel; while the subtle and intriguing politician suits himself to all its turns, and becomes, in time, the prime mover of the rolling machine.

Political poets must fail as poets, however they may succeed as politicians. Where is the political poetry that is popular? Much has been written, but who reads it? Who does not deplore the waste of poetic talent on such a theme as politics? Party-purposes may be served at the expense of

the general interests of mankind; and politics may be served by poetry at the expense of the general interests of literature. We do not say but that the politician, even if a party man, may be honest and conscientious—may act up to his principles, and speak what he thinks; but party politics form too narrow a basis for the universality of genuine poetry, which builds from earth to heaven; while the political tower too often resembles that of Babel. Politics are as the hooded falcon, trained to fly at a given quarry; not like the free eagle, that soars to the sun, and sees the whole world lying beneath its feet.

Too many selfish and sordid passions mingle with politics to suit the genius of poetry. Poetry makes its escape, not merely from political, but from social strife; and, having regained the calm regions of literary musing, says, in the words of Byron,—

> "Clear, placid Leman! thy contrasted lake
> With the wild world I dwell in, is a thing
> That warns me, with its stillness, to forsake
> Earth's troubled waters for a purer spring.
> This quiet sail is as a noiseless wing,
> To waft me from distraction. Once I loved
> Torn ocean's roar; but thy soft murmuring
> Sounds sweet, as if a sister's voice reproved
> That I with stern delights should e'er have been so moved.'"

Poetry is as the telescope, which discovers to us the beauties of the moon and stars; politics more

resemble the microscope, whose purpose is to magnify the little things of earth, and to give them an importance not intrinsically their own. The political poet seems to reject the harp of Apollo, and to choose a jew's-harp; his themes will not admit of poetry, however harmoniously he may handle them—just as a cleaver and marrow-bones cannot be called musical instruments, though you may strike out a tune with them. The poet's words are bees that make honey sweet as that of Hybla; the politician's more truly resemble the stings of those bees.

Poets, in their proper sphere, may render much service to politicians, by supplying them with maxims for quotation; and thus Shakspeare is a great authority in the House of Commons. Poetry, which is of an abstract and ethereal nature, may be made of use to elevate the tone of politics; but not if the poet descend to the politician—he must keep ever above him. We have had poets who have integrated politics in their poetry, and have fared the worse for it. The Corn-law Rhymer is a noted instance. Who, on reading the title of his poems, "Corn-law Rhymes!" would not suppose that the Corn-laws were put into rhyming verse? But, in fact, you might as well think of turning an Act of Parliament into a poem as of making poetry of

politics. According to a homely proverb—"You cannot make a silk-purse out of a sow's ear." "Corn-law Hymns!"—a still further desecration.

But, luckily for literature, and for the fame of the poet, the Corn-law Rhymer has written much poetry that has nothing to do with politics, and this portion of his poetry will live and transmit his name to posterity. Elliott has, in fact, obtained a European reputation by his poetry for the poor. He is the most honest poet the poor ever had. Not like Burns, who was more a poor man than a poet of the poor. Not like Crabbe, who paints poverty sternly in its effects, and gives it a repulsive, not to say a disgusting, aspect, but who never shows us the cause; who sometimes, indeed, wins our sympathy for the oppressed, but does not excite our indignation against the oppressor; who is the gaoler that shows us the criminal, but does not tell us that he who drove him to want and crime should be there in his stead. Not like Wordsworth, whose poor are inhabitants of the country—waiters upon Providence—freed, in a great measure, by their rural situation from the effects of that system which in towns often drives the unfortunate victim, in spite of his own endeavours, to become the inmate of a prison, or a workhouse, or a lunatic asylum. Elliott was the true friend of the poor; he loved

them because they were poor; and he hated those who did not love them because they were poor.

But general denunciations of the rich, or execrations of a system of government, or of society, serve not the cause of the poor. More is done when one victim is selected, in the manner of Sterne, and we are made to pity him, and desire, from very self-love, his relief or redress, and, in his, the general enfranchisement of his fellow-sufferers. Elliott is not deficient in this; as, for instance, where he speaks of the poor woman who was compelled, by want, to sell her linnet, that had belonged to her dead brother, though its keep cost but a groat a-year! and of the children who go about begging—

> "Till the stones of every street
> Know their little naked feet."

God forbid that we should say that disagreeable truths are not to be spoken! They ought to be the more repeated the more disagreeable they are, just as a wound is probed to prevent mortification. But let not poetry, which ought always to speak to the whole of mankind, aim to enlist our sympathies for party or political purposes—it is as if the poet volunteered to sing a song, and afterwards taxed us for listening to it.

Poetry should leave politics to prose: for let us

see what politics have done for poetry. Sometimes the politics of a poet have recommended him to a partial and temporary notice, and sometimes the reputation of the poet has done the same for his politics; but men feel that there is no natural alliance between the two. In fact, the politician laughs at the poor poet. Politics have been as fatal to the poet as to his poetry. We do not recollect one successful political poet. Dryden is better remembered by his "Ode on Alexander's Feast" than by his political satires; and Pope's "Abelard and Eloisa" shows more of the poet than even his moral satires. Swift's verses have got a keen, ironical edge, which makes them dry and cutting as a north-east wind in frosty weather; but they are not poetry. Thomson's "Liberty" is not relished like his "Seasons," though he thought it the finer poem; nor is Goldsmith's "Traveller" equal to his "Deserted Village." Butler is more a wit and a humorist than a poet. Canning was a political poet; but the politician in him quite eclipsed the poet. His story of the "Needy Knife-Grinder," who had got no story to tell, is a good exemplification of what poetry can do in politics. Many of our minor poets have dabbled in politics; but we need not enumerate them, as most of their names are to be found in the Dunciad.

Poetry should ever be a peace-maker; it mistakes its mission when it becomes a stirrer-up of political strife. Its office is to still and soothe the angry passions to which politics give rise; and for this purpose it should use the tender lute, not the fierce trumpet. Poetry belongs to nature, which pursues its unvaried course with a calm indifference to the petty passions of men. Poetry is not a stormy petrel, but rather a halcyon, that loves to brood on a smooth surface, where its own painted image can be reflected, like Wordsworth's swan. When party politics run high, the still small voice of poetry is drowned; and it is only when they are spent with their own vain fury, and a lull ensues, that the eternal chime can be heard, like the sound of a distant waterfall, which comes in between the pauses of a storm.

CHAPTER V.

"THE VILLAGE PATRIARCH." "THE SPLENDID VILLAGE." "CORN-LAW HYMNS."

THE longest but not the best of Ebenezer Elliott's poems, is "The Village Patriarch." It can scarcely be called a poem—it is a string of poetic passages, each a little poem in itself, but which have little connexion with each other, except what Enoch Wray, the Village Patriarch, gives them by being made the peg on which this bundle of desultory descriptions and reflections hang, just as "Childe Harold" is introduced by Byron to give some degree of concatenation to the poet's musings. Harvey's "Meditations," Young's "Night Thoughts," Wordsworth's "Excursion," are works of this kind. If we ask Enoch Wray for his story, he might reply with the "Needy Knife-Grinder" of Canning, "Story? God bless you! I have none to tell, sir." Was it that Elliott could not invent a story —could not create fictitious characters—could not contrive incidents—could only delineate or represent, and could not embody or identify? The poet says of his poem—"It is the incarnation of a

century." Had he made old Enoch Wray relate to his sons, grandsons, great grandsons, and great great grandsons, unto the third and fourth generation, his own life from infancy to youth, manhood, middle age, and old age, with all the changes that had happened in the political, social, and moral world in that century of time, then, indeed, an interesting, retrospective, biographical history might have been written. But Enoch Wray does not do this; he does nothing and says nothing; he is as dumb as blind—but he dreams a dream. Elliott's genius was too impulsive to submit to a regular plan; but this very tendency to the indulgence of wild self-will required all the more that he should have possessed the bridle-rein and guiding hand of art. His spur needed the curb. Unity of time, place, and action, there is none in his epic. It is divided into ten books; and we need but give the contents of one of those books to show how desultory they are :—

"BOOK III.—CONTENTS :—Comparative Independence of Skilled Labour—Fine Sabbath morning—Sunday Stroll of the Townsmen—Coach-race—Misery and Misfortunes of the Poor—Congregation leaving the Village Church—Old Mansion—Country Youth working in the Town—Poacher of the Manufacturing Districts—Concluding Reflections."

This is the true Pindaric style as ridiculed by Peter: "A cock—a bull—a soldier roasted." Some

of the paragraphs of this poem merit quotation. The following street scene might have furnished a subject for the pencil of Hogarth :—

"Where draymen bawl, while rogues kick up a row;
And fishwives grin, while fopling fopling meets;
And milk-lad his rebellious donkey beats;
While dwarfish cripple shuffles to the wall;
And hopeless tradesman sneaks to alehouse mean;
And imps of beggary curse their dad, and squall
For mammy's gin; and matron poor and clean,
With tearful eye, begs crust for lodger lean;
And famished weaver, with his children three,
Sing hymns for bread; and legless soldier, borne
In dog-drawn car, imploreth charity;
And thief with steak from butcher runs forlorn;
And debtor bows, while banker smiles in scorn;
And landed pauper, in his coach-and-four,
Bound to far countries from a realm betrayed,
Scowls on the crowd, who curse the scoundrel's power,
While coachee grins, and lofty lady's maid
Turns up her nose at bread-tax-paying trade,
Though master bilketh dun, and is in haste."

He thus eulogises the town of which he was the bard :—

"Ere Bedford's loaf or Erin's stye be thine,
Cloud-rolling Sheffield! want shall humble all.
Town of the unbowed poor! thou shalt not pine
Like the fallen rustic, licensed Rapine's thrall,
But first to rise wilt be the last to fall!
Slow are thy sons the pauper's trade to learn;
Though in the land that blossoms like the rose
The English peasant and the Irish kerne
Fight for potatoes, thy proud labourer knows
Nor workhouse wages nor the exile's woes.
Not yet thy bit of beef, thy pint of ale,
Thy toil-strung heart which toil could ne'er dismay,

Nor yet thy honest skilled right hand, shall fail;
Last from thy hearths the poor man's pride shall stray,
And still shall come thy well-paid Saturday,
And still the morn of rest be near and sure."

Read, and pity the poor post-horse :—

"Oh, blessed Sabbath! to the coach-horse thou
Bringest no pause from daily toil. For him
There is no day of rest. The laws allow
His ever-battered hoof, and anguished limb,
Till, death-struck, flash his brain with dizzy swim.
Lo, while his nostrils flame, and, torture-scored,
Quivers his flank beneath the ruthless goad,
Stretched on his neck, each vein swells like a cord!
Hark! what a groan! The mute pedestrian, awed,
Stops, while the steed sinks on the reeling road,
Murdered by hands that know not how to spare!"

But, thanks to science, what neither the Sabbath, nor the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, nor Martin's Act could do, has been done to a great extent by the steam-engine.

It may not be amiss to hear Elliott's summary of his contemporaries :—

"Scott, whose invention is a magic loom;
Baillie, artificer of deathless dreams;
Moore, the Montgomery of the drawing-room;
Montgomery, the Moore of solemn themes;
Crabbe, whose dark gold is richer than it seems;
Keats, that sad name which time shall write in tears;
Poor Burns, the Scotchman, who was not a slave;
Campbell, whom Freedom's deathless Hope endears;
White, still remembered in his cruel grave;
Ill-fated Shelley, vainly great and brave;
Wordsworth, whose thoughts acquaint us with our own;
Didactic, earnest Cowper, grave and gay;
Wild Southey, flying, like the hern, alone;
And dreamy Coleridge, of the wizard lay."

THE GRINDER.

"There draws the grinder his laborious breath ;
There, coughing, at his deadly trade he bends.
Born to die young, he fears nor man nor death ;
Scorning the future, what he earns he spends.
Debauch and Riot are his bosom friends.
He plays the Tory sultan-like and well ;
Woe to the traitor that dares disobey
The Dey of Straps ! as rattened tools shall tell.
Full many a lordly freak by night, by day,
Illustrates gloriously his lawless sway.
Behold his failings ! hath he virtues too ?
He is no pauper, blackguard though he be.
Full well he knows what minds combined can do ;
Full well maintains his birthright—he is free !
And, frown for frown, outstares Monopoly !
Yet Abraham and Elliot both in vain*
Bid science on his cheek prolong the bloom.
He *will* not live ! He seems in haste to gain
The undisturbed asylum of the tomb,
And, old at two-and-thirty, meets his doom ! "

THE MOORS.

" The moors—all hail ! Ye changeless, ye sublime,
That seldom hear a voice save that of Heaven !
Scorners of chance, and fate, and death, and time.
But not of Him whose viewless hand hath riven
The chasm, through which the mountain-stream is driven !
How like a prostrate giant—not in sleep,
But listening to his beating heart—ye lie !
With winds and clouds dread harmony ye keep ;
Ye seem alone beneath the boundless sky :
Ye speak, are mute—and there is no reply !
Here all is sapphire light and gloomy land,
Blue, brilliant sky, above a sable sea
Of hills, like chaos ere the first command,
' Let there be light !' bade light and beauty be."

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* Mr. Abraham improved, it is said, and Mr. John Elliot invented, the grinder's preservative, which the grinders will not use.

OLD BLIND MAN.

" Ye who can gaze on beauty-breathing day,
And drink intoxication with your eyes,
Compassionate the sightless on his way.
With gloomy trepidation sympathise,
When faithless snows the icy way disguise.
With pity hear his faint and feeble call,
With pity see his quivering lip and cheek—
His grasping hands that try to catch the wall;
His wild, wide eyes, that helpless trouble speak;
His sliding feet; his knees bent, trembling, weak;
His hatless locks, which frantic dread uprears!
The beauteous girl, too, trembles, and, in tears,
Pale with her grandsire's fear, laments its cause."

The redeeming points in the "Village Patriarch" are the bits of natural scenery which are everywhere interspersed, and which, with their sunny smiles and fragrant beauty, are felt particularly refreshing after the sickening descriptions of town-misery with which the poem abounds. One great truth is told which we cannot refrain from quoting:—

" Shall *I*, lost Britain, give the pest a name
That, like a cancer, eats into thy core?—
'Tis Avarice, hungry as devouring flame;
But, swallowing all, it hungers as before,
While flame, its food exhausted, burns no more.
O ye hardhearts that grind the poor, and crush
Their honest pride, and drink their blood like wine,
And eat their children's bread without a blush,
Willing to wallow in your pomp, like swine,
Why do ye wear the human form divine?
Can ye make men of brutes, contemned, enslaved?

Can ye grow sweetness on the bitter rue?
Can ye restore the health of minds depraved?
And self-esteem in blighted hearts renew?
Why should souls die to feed such worms as you?"

There are also one or two episodes well worth extracting, particularly one of a widow whose cottage has been unroofed by a village satrap named Esra White, who detects her and her silly daughter re-roofing it, and assaults her, but is killed by the daughter. The mother is tried and hanged for this. Crabbe alone could have told the tale as Elliott tells it. But the best thing in the poem is Enoch Wray's dream, which is horrible as Dante's "Inferno." It begins with low, muttered tones of complaint, suddenly bursting into wrath and defiance, or into a crash of execration and despair, and anon relapsing into melancholy wailings, like the music of the organ or of the wind-harp, which unites all instruments in one; or it resembles a torrent, "dashing or winding," sometimes visible, sometimes not—sometimes playful or prattling, at others murmuring or moaning, and at last leaping into an abysm—

"Among rocks of jet,
That gird the gulf around, in pitiless horror set."

But, with the want of true taste that makes us sometimes regret that Elliott did not receive a classical education, he does not sustain himself, but, like Milton's fiend, creeps as well as flies,

steps from the sublime to the ridiculous, or falls into vulgarity and coarseness. He makes Enoch Wray go to tell his dream to an old snuff-taking gossip, named Alice Green, and the interview between the patriarch and the crone is the most successful instance of Elliott's attempts at humour. But the dream was not for such ears as hers; "let him that hath ears to hear, hear it."

In the preface to "The Village Patriarch" Elliott says, "I am called, as I expected to be, an unsuccessful imitator of the pauper-poetry of Wordsworth; I might be truly called an unfortunate imitator of Crabbe." Byron styled Crabbe "Nature's sternest painter, and her best." I do not see how the sternest painter of Nature could be her best. Elliott is a better painter of nature, because more sympathetic. Crabbe was an anatomist who laid bare the bones, and muscles, and nerves of the body politic; but feeling flies before him. He was an artist that used the stick end of his brush—a matter-of-fact poet, more head than heart. Being a clergyman, he was restrained from Elliott's freedom. He writes like a gaoler, or the keeper of an asylum, or a Poor-law guardian. His lines are cast, like cast-iron. There is nothing utopian in him; he is hard and literal, without mellowness of tint or tone. Crabbe enlightens the mind, but Elliott warms the heart.

Crabbe possessed more knowledge of the world, and reasoned better, but felt less; Elliott is more eloquent, more oratorical. Crabbe was the physician, the lawyer—Elliott the friend. What would have moved Crabbe's feelings would have put Elliott in a passion. Satire in Crabbe would have been sarcasm in Elliott. Crabbe was formal and precise—a kind of dry crab-stick; Elliott was the crab-tree itself, growing. Neither of them made fiction real, nor idealised fiction; they were literal transcribers, of the Dutch rather than Italian school; or, shall we say, they were British to the bone.

"The Splendid Village" is a more equal poem than "The Village Patriarch." It seems to challenge a comparison with Goldsmith's "Deserted Village." Elliott is more powerful, but less pleasing; more sad, less sweet; more angry, less sorrowful: more mad, less melancholy. The following passage, however, might have found a place in Goldsmith's poem:—

"But me nor palaces nor satraps please;
I love to look on happy cottages.
The gems I seek are seen in Virtue's eye;
These gauds disgust me, and I pass them by.
Show me a home like that I knew of old,
Ere heads grew hot with pride, and bosoms cold;
Some frank good deeds, which simple truth may praise;
Some moral grace on which the heart can gaze;

Some little hopes that give to toil its zest;
The equal rights that make the labourer blest;
The smile in which eternal love we scan,
And thank his Maker while we look on man."

It is worthy of remark, that the Corn-law Rhymer in this poem almost forgets his politics—is scarcely true to his creed as a manufacturer. His heart was homed in the country; he had a father's fondness for flowers. Rural life won him from life in towns. He gave the preference to a farm over a factory—to a peasant over a mechanic; in a word, to agriculture over trade. Yet his political principles, pushed to the extreme, would cause our villages to be deserted for towns, the plough for the loom or the forge, and England to become a workshop, where no green fields grow. He says, "Should we not be better without agriculture altogether than bread-taxed as we are? Should we not have cheaper bread, and more of it?—higher profits and wages, that would purchase a larger quantity of food by at least one-third?" Now that the bread-tax is taken off, the question is, Cannot something be done to enable farmers to grow corn as cheap as it may be imported from abroad, making allowance for freightage, &c.? Farmers should scorn to ask for protection; Fair play! should be their cry. Rents should be lowered, in order that pomp and luxury should

not destroy skill and industry. The true political economist will legislate in favour of that interest which makes the State most powerful; but why should one have the preference over another? Cannot all live and let live? Why must the world for ever be moved, like a watch, by contrary wheels? When the country was nothing but agricultural, it could not defend itself from the Roman conqueror, nor from the Saxon, nor from the Norman; and who will say that it was not trade and commerce that kept Bonaparte from our shores? Had Parliament represented the manufacturing rather than the landed interest, America would not have been lost. What but commerce conquered for us in the East and West? This is all very true; and yet, what is England but the land? Trade and commerce are birds of passage, and may migrate to other climes; then what would preserve this country from sharing the fate of Venice—what but a well-supported landed interest?

Elliott certainly was no respecter of conventional life—he strips the tinsel off society, and lays bare its wretchedness. He shows things as they are, not as they should be or ought to be. In his Preface to the "Splendid Village," he says—"Only in a sinking land, a land of taxation without representation, of castes and Corn Bills, of degradation,

cant, and misery, of wretched poor and wretch-making rich; where destruction grows like a weed, and where capital and skill are alike profitless, could such a poem as the 'Splendid Village' have been written or conceived." If Elliott truly showed the very age and body of his time, its form and pressure, it must be confessed that its features were hideous.

Elliott did not only bring poetry and politics, dictated by patriotism and philanthropy, to aid in the cause of Free-trade—he also enlisted religion in its service. His "Corn-law Rhymes" derive an awful power from their pious character. Nor did he use the name of God as some of our poets do, merely to heighten the effect of his poetry. He was sincerely devout. No man more truly abhorred cant and hypocrisy. Doubtless, he deemed himself a practical Christian in his crusade, or holy war, against the Corn-laws. "Corn-law Rhymes" were followed by "Corn-law Hymns." He entertained sanguine hopes that they would be sung in churches; but the Church of England would deem the very thought sacrilege. Fitter that they should be sung in an unwalled temple, uncircumscribed by any roof save the floor of heaven. Elliott poured forth his whole soul in those orisons. His feelings as a father, a husband, a fellow-citizen, and, shall I add,

as a tradesman, filled them with the fervour of his genius as a poet. The reader, if not a superstitious bigot or fanatic, will judge for himself.

CORN-LAW HYMNS.

No. 4.

"Father! thy nation-girding seas
Obey alike the storm and breeze
To clasp us all in one embrace,
Not sever wide our social race.

"To feed, not famish, human kind,
Was laboured land by thee designed;
To yield us food, not tax our bread,
And libel thee with mouths unfed!

"Yet prosper they who curse the soil,
Ordained to feed the sons of toil!
They who make pain of sun and rain,
Of seas and winds a dungeon-chain!

"God of the poor! shall labour eat,
Or drones alone find living sweet?
Lo! they who call thy earth their own
Take all we have, and give a stone!

"They toil not, neither do they spin,
But call us names of shame and sin;
Eat e'en our lives, our very graves!
And make our unborn children slaves!"

No. 8.

"Lord! bid our palaced worms their vileness know!
Bleach them with famine till they earn their bread,
And, taught by pain to feel a brother's woe,
Marvel that honest labour toils unfed.

"They never felt how vain it is to seek
From bread-taxed trade its interdicted gain,
How hard to toil from dreary week to week,
And, ever labouring, labour still in vain.

"They never heard their children's grim despair
Cry, "Give us work, ere want and death prevail,"
Then seek in crime or in desponding prayer
A refuge from the bread-tax-crowded gaol;—

"They never saw the matron's breaking heart
Break slowly o'er her son's desponding sigh,
Nor watched her hopeless mate, when glad to part
From all he loved and left beneath the sky.

"They heed not, though the widow wrings her hands
Above her wo-worn husband's nameless grave,
When her last boy departs for distant lands,
Rather than live or die a bread-taxed slave.

"But, Lord! thou hearest when the sufferer cries;
Thou markest when the honest heart is rent,
Thou heedest when the broken-hearted dies;
And thou wilt pardon—when thy foes repent.

"Then let them kneel—oh! not to us, but thee;
For judgment, Lord! to thee alone belongs.
But we are petrified with misery,
And turned to marble by a life of wrongs."

Believing, as Ebenezer Elliott did, that the Corn-laws were the cause of bankruptcies, of want of employment, of extinction of trade—that, indirectly, they occasioned famine, pestilence, and crime—peopling gaols, mad-houses, and work-houses with starved operatives and law-made widows and orphans—believing all this, nay, seeing it—having in his own person and family experienced some of these evils—who shall say that his hymns were not religious, that he was not a true Christian, following, not only the precepts, but the very example, of Christ, who fed the

multitude before he preached to them, and gave them bread, unbought, untaxed. True that Elliott's "prayers were curses;" but let those who did the wrong bear the blame. Strong convictions were the basis of his strong expressions. He said, "Whoever does not oppose the Corn-law is a patron of want, national immorality, bankruptcy, child-murder, incendiary fires, midnight assassination and anarchy. Therefore every supposed moral or religious man, every schoolmaster, every teacher of religion especially, should oppose the Corn-law, or he cannot possibly be either moral or religious, and the Devil would be more fit to be a teacher than he."

Elliott justly considered that the ministers of religion were in duty bound, by their calling, to come forward and relieve him of his task—a stern task of soul not likely to meet its reward here. He feelingly alludes to the painfulness of his position in the following lines:—

"But who will listen when the poor complain?
Who read or hear a tale of woe, if true?
Ill fares the friendless muse of want and pain.
Fool! wouldst thou prosper and be honest too?
Fool! wouldst thou prosper? Flatter those that do!
If, not unmindful of the all-shunned poor,
Thou write on tablets frail their troubles deep,
The proud, the vain will scorn thy theme obscure.
What wilt thou earn, though lowly hearts may steep
With tears the page in which their sorrows weep?"

Here he had found that honesty is not the best policy; that to be good is not to be happy; yet he was determined to be honest and good, because his feelings were unsophisticated and rung true to every touch of Nature. Fools who dote on folly and heed not the misery of others, knaves who regard their own interests only, these could not be shamed with the truth, though it is said to shame the Devil; these endeavoured to shame the truth-teller by raising an outcry against him; yet, like the moon in Scott's incomparable simile, Elliott steadily pursued his course through good report and bad report, more sorry for the ill reception of truth than of his own. His method of doing good was to war on those that do evil, though thereby he brought a host of foes upon himself more unscrupulous than he in their mode of warfare. What firmness was required in this man, who not only had to beat down the repugnance of his own nature, but to defend himself against the malice of those whom his virtue had provoked—without allies and beset with traitors! Nothing could have saved him but the celestial armour of his cause.

In the prologue to his "Corn Law Rhymes," he says:—

"For thee, my country! thee, do I perform
Sternly the duty of a man born free,
Heedless though ass, and wolf, and venomous worm

Shake ears and fangs, with brandished bray, at me.
Alone as Crusoe on the hostile sea,
For thee, for us, for ours do I upraise
The standard of my song! for thine and mine
I toll the knell of England's better days,
And lift my hated voice that mine and thine
May undegrade the human form divine.
Perchance that voice, if heard, is heard too late:
The buried dust of Tyre may wake and sway
Re-conquered seas, but what shall renovate
The dead-alive who dread no judgment-day—
Souls whom the lust of gold hath turned to clay?
And what but scorn and slander will reward
The rabble's poet and his honest song?
Gambler for blanks! thou play'st an idiot's card;
For, sure to fall, the weak attacks the strong.
Aye! but what strength is theirs whose might is based
on wrong?"

Elliott had a soul tuned to excellence, yet was compelled to brood over misery—misery occasioned, not by his own sins, but by the sins of others—misery the more painful because absurd—misery inflicted on merit at the behest of wantonness. He might have sung, like the wild birds, to cheer himself, but that would have been mockery; how could he enjoy the gladness of Nature while there was so much want and woe calling for sympathy and redress? Pity that he could not have always breathed the mountain breeze—yea, have been the zephyr itself; but then he would have ceased to waft the fragrance of flowers, and gone, like the sigh of a Howard, to fan the captive's cheek. Who does not lament that the world

would not allow this poet to realise his own aspirations as expressed in the following beautiful and touching passage?—

"Oh that my poesy were like the child
That gathers daisies from the lap of May,
With prattle sweeter than the bloomy wild!
It then might teach poor wisdom to be gay
As flowers, and birds, and rivers, all at play,
And winds that make the voiceless clouds of morn
Harmonious. But, distempered, if not mad,
I feed on Nature's bane, and mess with Scorn.
I would not, could not if I would, be glad,
But, like shade-loving plants, am happiest sad.
My heart, once soft as woman's tear, is gnarled
With gloating on the ills I cannot cure.
Like Arno's exiled bard, whose music snarled,
I gird my loins to suffer and endure,
And woo Contention, for her dower is sure."

When we see what politics had done to the poetry of Elliott, well may we exclaim—

"Oh, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown,
Like sweet bells jangled out of tune, and harsh!"

"The British Government," says Elliott, "is the only one that ever legislated against the bread of its people." He would have made the whole world our harvest-field, that bread might be obtained as cheaply as possible. Tax anything but food. Famish not the poor. Fasting sorrow is the worst to bear. Make the poor pay a high price out of their hard earnings for bread, in order that the rich might enjoy their luxuries! His feelings and understanding were outraged by these cruel and

absurd laws. A few privileged persons, by virtue of class legislation, had been enabled to procure a monopoly of the sale of food—the most oppressive of all monopolies—and their avarice had set Elliott his task to undo what they had done. He was the first man to found an Anti-Corn-law association. Strange as it may seem, considering how many thousands were concerned equally with himself, he stood alone in this; and much ridicule, much obloquy did he encounter. More distinguished men would not come forward till the road was cleared for them by humble pioneers like Elliott—till a party was organised for them to take the lead of. Some bowed to the existing law because it *was* law; others attended to their business, and remunerated themselves for the bread-tax by selling their goods at a higher price, or by reducing the wages of their workmen; others supinely left the work to be done by the more zealous. Elliott complained of this. He said in the preface to the "Corn-law Hymns:" "The worst symptom of the malady which is preying on the vitals of the body politic is the apathy with which our first-class merchants and manufacturers, and, I may add, the base middle classes, generally regard the insane and suicidal power which, straining the cord that binds us to fatal competition with our best friends, converts customers into rivals."

Not only at his desk, but in the lecture-room and on the hustings, did the indomitable Rhymer take up the subject of the Corn-laws. He spoke of nothing else in common conversation, and became almost a monomaniac, for—like poor *Lear*, who fancied, when he could no longer think, that ingratitude was the sole cause of all distress—Elliott imputed every evil under the sun to the Corn-laws. There is a remarkable instance of this in one of his poems, where, speaking of a man found dead in the mountains, Who knows, says he, but this was a victim of the Corn-laws? Such exaggeration proceeded from the frenzy of an enthusiast, but it was the language of one thoroughly in earnest. Persecution, as is generally the case, did but increase his zeal. He was charitably deemed mad by some—a rebel by others. The Attorney-General was instigated to prosecute him as a promoter of revolution, whereas he only foretold that keeping the Corn-laws would bring it on, and that the only way to prevent it was to repeal them. Fearful were the warnings which he uttered. "Can we compete for ever with un-bread-taxed rivals? No! Capital will go where it will pay; skill will follow capital; and our manufactories will at length stop, simultaneously and for ever! The immense camp of London will then be *without pay*; the immense

camp of Glasgow will be *without pay;* the immense camp of the West Riding of Yorkshire will be *without pay,* and almost within shout of a still more multitudinous camp—that of Lancashire—also *without pay!* And all this may happen, and if the Corn-laws remain much longer on the Statute-book, *will* happen; perhaps in one and the same week, day, or hour!" Here was a man born for the time. Had Ebenezer Elliott not lived, it is quite possible that the Corn-laws would not have been repealed. And what was this man? Let not the reader suppose him a Wat Tyler or a William Tell. He has been described as a "burly ironmonger;" but nothing was farther from his personal appearance. It may be supposed that he was the image of the smith in Goldsmith's "Village," who "Relaxed his ponderous strength and leaned to hear"—or one of those who, as Shakspeare expresses it, "gape and rub the elbow at the news of hurly-burly innovation." No. He who was chosen of God for this great work was a small man, of nervous temperament, weak in body, but possessing a soul like a good sword within an ill sheath. There is a miniature of him when he was about twenty-five. A more meek, quiet, boy-looking man never wore a white cravat, and prayed or preached in a conventicle, with light blue eyes and straight hair. Yet he was all energy of spirit, and

what he thought he should do, that he would do. He was endowed by nature with the feelings of an Indian or aboriginal—a man new made. His native honesty was kept pure and strong by his love of the country, which imparted all its pristine influences to him. Such a man could not but be susceptible of deep and tender emotions, and, indeed, his sympathies were continually vibrating with torture, like the strings of the Æolian harp in a rough wind, sending forth music that yelled with the shrill dissonance of anger or agony.

We have seen that he expected from the reformed Parliament the repeal of the Corn-laws, but was disappointed. His advocacy of that measure had been purely for the sake of this ; he had no place to seek by displacing others, no power to gain, no personal ambition to gratify. His reasons were the cries of the oppressed for their rights wherewith to prevent future wrong. Equally indignant and pitiful, his wrath drew its lightning from the cloud that contained the tear-drops of his pity. True, he might have remained at home at ease, and viewed the strife through "the loop-holes of retreat," but there would have been no peace for him at his own fireside while there was war without; he could not remain ingloriously in a safe harbour and see his brethren struggling at sea in the storm. Like Cowper's goldfinch, he had obtained his own

freedom, but then his fellow-prisoner remained behind.

One of those gluts of prosperity which alternated with scarcity having prevented the parties most interested in a repeal of the Corn-laws from joining Elliott in his movement, and quiet to his quick soul being unendurable, he joined in the Chartist agitation which now sprung up, hoping from the Charter the accomplishment of his long-baffled desires. The working-classes had assisted the middle classes to obtain the Reform Bill, and got a New Poor Law for their pains. They now called on the middle classes to assist them to obtain the Charter, saying that they would exercise the franchise more fearlessly; but the answer of the middle classes was, "The Ballot." The working-classes refused to agitate for this, as it would have proved of no benefit to them, and only have afforded the middle classes a cloak for their own interests. Thus a split took place between them, though a few individuals of the middle classes advocated the Charter on principle. Among these, Elliott was one of the foremost. As a delegate from Sheffield, he attended the great public meeting held for the Charter in Palace-yard, Westminster, in 1838.

In 1837, when Chartism first sprung up, the people seemed entirely governed by principle and guided by experience, making former errors their

beacons; but their leaders were each actuated by some crotchet of his own, and sought popularity for selfish ends. Attwood, a banker, wished an alteration in the currency; Oastler and Stephens, men living in the manufacturing districts, sought the restriction of factory labour; Feargus O'Connor had got a land lottery in view. Elliott only was a sincere Chartist and Corn-law Repealer, till, under the insane guidance of O'Connor, the Chartists were made to repudiate Corn-law Repeal, and were put in antagonism against it; then Elliott withdrew his name from the association, and wrote the following letter:—

"TO THE SECRETARY OF THE SHEFFIELD WORKING MEN'S ASSOCIATION.

"Can't your enemies starve you fast enough? If they can, why do you seek to get yourselves butchered like sheep? The Convention, by defending monopoly and advocating physical force, are fighting the battle of the aristocracy under the people's colours—a battle ultimately for self-destruction, and which these magnificent wretches are well able to fight for themselves without your assistance. I learn, from the newspaper of Saturday last, that your representatives in the Convention (with the concurrence of your own men) are about to send deputies into the country to advocate the starvation laws! Of those laws you will very soon have quite enough; and so, thank God! will their authors. If you like such laws, what use do you intend to make of the franchise when obtained? I have no wish to force my opinions on you. No; you will soon be starved to your heart's content, for we shall not long have to wait. But, in the meantime, it must not be supposed that *I* am one of a body of men

who are willing to be represented by persons capable of supporting such barbarous legislation. If, then, my name is on your list of members, please erase it; and oblige your fellow-townsman, "EBENEZER ELLIOTT.

"*Sheffield, May* 6, 1839."

Elliott now turned his sole attention to his favourite measure again, and with better auspices, for now the middle classes began to move in right earnest. Cobden, Bright, Fox, and others took up the banners of Repeal, and carried them, like the fiery cross of the Highlanders, throughout the country. Funds were raised for sending Repeal members to Parliament. The war of the League commenced, and was carried on with the spirit of the Protestants under Henry of Navarre. An unexpected ally, like Blucher at Waterloo, turned the scale of victory, and the odious law was for ever blotted from the Statute-book of the realm. Sir Robert Peel was the statesman of cheap bread—a cautious politician, who seemed ever to act as if he thought that Government should be a drag upon the will of the people, to prevent them being too precipitate; but who, when the moment arrived for taking off that drag, immediately sunk the politician in the patriot, and became a philosophic statesman, whose name will stand high in history as the emancipator of the Roman Catholics, the enactor of the Reform Bill, and the great repealer of the Corn-laws.

CHAPTER VI.

CONTAINING AN ACCOUNT OF THE EDITOR'S VISIT TO EBENEZER ELLIOTT, AT UPPERTHORPE, NEAR SHEFFIELD.

A SHORT period previous to the events which I have anticipated in the latter end of the last chapter, I became acquainted with Ebenezer Elliott. I had heard by common rumour his name, and that he was a poet famed for uttering what he thought, and for thinking freely. Having published a volume of lay sermons, I dedicated them to him as follows:—"To Ebenezer Elliott, author of 'Corn-law Rhymes,' this volume is dedicated by an unknown admirer of an honest man." Some time afterwards I wrote to him, requesting him to write me a prologue for a play entitled "Wat Tyler." He answered as follows:—

EBENEZER ELLIOTT TO JOHN WATKINS.

"*Sheffield*, 21*st January*, 1836.

"DEAR SIR,—I thank you for your favour of yesterday, and for dedicating your lay sermons to me. If you will give me the title of them, I will order my bookseller to procure them for me. I will try to write you a prologue, on this condition, that, if you should not like it, it shall be rejected by you, and not printed; for, as I never yet could execute successfully a prescribed task, it is more

than probable that I shall fail. If you wish to be useful, I would, for many reasons, advise you not to write plays. The highest success is impossible; for who can equal Shakspeare? Theatricals are going down, and cannot get up unless a truly patriotic Government would adopt the theatre as the most powerful of state engines, which is not likely to happen in my time. Let no honest man expect any success with the theatres—*besides, we have a censorship.* If you can write an opera, *with nothing in it,* you may put money in your purse, but you will not serve the people. I have had disastrous dramatic experience, having written, before I was twenty-five, three rejected dramas, one of which is published in my third volume; its title is 'Taurassdes.' I am decidedly of opinion that the very best and only remunerative vehicle of a patriot-poet's opinions is the novel. I am, in haste, dear sir, Yours, very truly,

"EBENEZER ELLIOTT.

"P.S. But though I advise you not to write plays, I shall be happy to read your play, if you think me worthy; but I have very little time, Sunday being my only day for reading, writing, and out-of-door exercise. The "Westminster Review" is my favourite book, but so little leisure have I that I seldom get through it in less than six weeks.

"Do not address me Esquire. I have been a hard-working man all my life, and am now a humble tradesman with a very large family to maintain, and so they call me a big man, because we cannot get into a very small house. Surely I should read Scott's works. I have not yet read them, and I believe I never shall, unless God send me a slow death, and I read them during my last illness."

EBENEZER ELLIOTT TO JOHN WATKINS.

"*Sheffield, 24th February,* 1836.

"DEAR SIR,—You have dedicated to me one of the most beautiful little books I ever read. The first sermon is a fine poem; all the better for being in prose, and such

prose! With the exception of a few passages in Rousseau, I scarcely remember to have read anything finer or more eloquent.

"In 'Wat Tyler' you have resolutely thrown away a triumph. Instead of idealising you have vulgarised your hero, as it seems to me, to exemplify a theory which I believe to be false, and which is still more lamentable if true. Wat Tyler and his followers, while successful, committed much fewer crimes than their betters were ever known to commit when victorious. Had he wanted moderation, he would have refused the conference, or have said, 'Get thee behind me!' Moderate rebels are almost always hanged, drawn, and quartered. Confound your blank verse—not because it is bad, for it is just the reverse—but because your prose is infinitely better. Your best characters are John Ball (why have you not given him something more to do?) and Jack Straw; the latter is Shaksperian, and the epilogue is capitally imagined. How came one-childed Smith to be so very poor? In those days he could easily have lived by deer-stealing, and you might have connected a trespass of that kind with the oppressive forest-laws. The parents part with their child too easily. But I must return to the master-fault of your drama. If I possessed a tithe of the dramatic power exhibited in every page of your prose dialogue, I would myself write a play on the story of Wat Tyler—although I have perpetrated about half a dozen dramatic failures already—that I might snatch it from hands that most perversely *will not* be worthy of it. You give no sufficient reason for the sudden change for the worse in your hero, and it is quite incompatible with the good things he is made to say and do. Your mind being more intellectual than imaginative, it is strange that you should be deficient in constructive power. If you must needs put royal blood into your hero's veins, let his mother, in a powerful scene, reveal his birth to him, and afterwards, in her proud weakness, urge him to marry royalty. You may then bring before us the struggle of duty, ambition, and love, and, giving the triumph to his

better nature, suffer him to die, as he undoubtedly did, by treachery, and while uttering, perhaps, words meet for eternity. No man would have acted as Walworth did, had he not been aware that Tyler was betrayed; and malice, you know, is even now commonly—and in those times was always—the historian of unsuccessful rebellions. Read the life of Hofer, and then revise or re-write the 4th and 5th acts.

"I am much struck with the excellence of your prose, and yet I suspect you are, like me, self-taught, despite your Latin. I, who never could learn a single rule of grammar, have more than once quoted (from a book of mottoes) both Latin and Greek, knowing, perhaps, as much about them as some of the learned seem to do of English."

The working-men of Whitby having called on me to come forward and be their advocate, I accepted their call, after having in vain referred them to one or two more distinguished reformers in the town. I proceeded to organise them as a branch of the National Charter Association. For this purpose I was desirous to obtain more information than an obscure local district could afford, and I resolved to visit my friend Elliott. I had also hopes that my play of "Wat Tyler" would be brought out at the Sheffield theatre.

After a ride of 100 miles, on a cold, clear, frosty day in December, 1838, I arrived at Sheffield, much pleased with my journey's end and the warm welcome of a good fire in an inn. Next day I called upon a friend who took me through the town and showed me the country round. The

chief objects of attraction are the manufactories and show-rooms of cutlery, which are rendered doubly interesting by the civility and intelligence of those employed in them. But what chiefly interested me was the poet. The first time I saw this remarkable man he was coming out of a bookseller's shop in the neighbourhood of his own business-premises, in Gibraltar-street, for he had removed from Burgess-street. I immediately recognised him by the portrait in his works, published in three volumes, by Steill, of Paternoster-row, though he looked older and yet better. I followed him into his premises, but though I was not a minute behind him, he had gone out again. I was desired by a tall young man, his son and foreman, to sit down and wait his return, which, he said, would not be long first. I accordingly took a seat in the counting-house, a dingy place, up a flight of wood stairs, proper enough for the business of an iron and steel merchant, but giving no indications of the poet, and, with the exception of a newspaper and a franked letter or two, none of the politician. I was with difficulty reconciling my previous impressions of Elliott from his poetry with the scene around, when the poet himself made his appearance; a man rather under the middle size, slightly formed, with features marked by the small-pox, a light blue eye, eye-brows very shaggy,

thick grey hair, and long upper lip; his looks were expressive of one "frenzied by disease or woe," as Byron says of Rousseau, but sometimes a smile like a wintry sun-bean lit up the habitual sadness of his countenance. I rose on his entrance and shook hands with him, telling him my name. On resuming my seat, I said I had come from Whitby to see him. He seemed now to recollect me, and shook hands with me again, more warmly than at first, saying he had read my little book and liked it exceedingly. I am a bad hand at introducing myself, and so, by way of giving a better colour to my visit than that of mere curiosity, I told him my errand to Sheffield. He said he would take me to the Secretary of the Working-Men's Association, but proposed a walk in the meanwhile, asking me if I was a good walker. I told him I should not tire if I had him for a companion. He led the way, talking as he went on various subjects, among which the Corn-laws were the most prominent. His words on this topic sounded somewhat mystical to me, and, indeed, he complained he could not get people to see the evil clearly as he did. He said if he had known the French language he would retire to France to avoid the coming revolution, for the sake of his children. I thought it strange that one whose writings seemed calculated to excite the people to a revolution should talk in this manner; but I endeavoured to dispel

his forebodings, and as for his children, I said, the world would have a good feeling towards them for his sake, and when he was gone that feeling would grow stronger. I told him of the ferocious idea which those who did not know him entertained of him from his writings; he smiled at this, and said—"I would not hurt a fly, not even if it stung me." He said competition was ruining trade, and when trade was gone England would go. He spoke of his family, saying he had two sons in the Church; it was not a trade that he would have chosen for them. We met a poor man dirty and drunken. Elliott exchanged a nod with him; he told me that that man had been a fellow-workman of his in his younger days; he said that he himself was once a sad drunken dog, but that he had got a taste for botany, which led him into the fields, and poetry followed. I could not but give the glory to literature that had made such a difference.

We reached a wood with pathways through it—he lamented that, being winter, everything appeared to disadvantage, and a mist which hung over the scene prevented a distant view. He pointed out the scene of "The Ranter," which first made him popular as a poet. He had taken a Sabbath walk with his children, when he saw a preacher holding forth in the open air. The scene struck his fancy; and, shifting the *venue* to Shire-

cliffe, he had painted the view as in his poem. He pointed out a tree, into which he had climbed to obtain a better view, and which he had distinguished by driving a nail into it. Sheffield was hid by its smoke; but a diversified prospect lay before us. There was Loxley, where he had purchased a piece of land for a burial-ground. We returned by a different route. His chief talk was still about the Corn-laws, which seemed ever uppermost in his mind. I was told by a friend of his that, on every occasion, when speaking in public, whatever might be the object of the meeting, he invariably brought it to this complexion at last; and when cries of "Question, question," arose, he replied, "I am coming to the question; this is the question; for without bread we cannot live: all questions depend on this!" But we had some literary talk in spite of the Corn-laws. He spoke of Scott, and likened him to Shakspeare. He said Scott's ruin was owing to his receiving paper money for his works and paying gold for his land. Byron being mentioned, I said that he was morbidly sensitive. He denied this, and said that Byron's mind was naturally healthy, but that, born and bred as he was, it was a wonder he was not a much worse man. We returned to Sheffield. A fox-coloured terrier which accompanied us waited with me in the street, while he went into the bank.

He took me to the Mechanics' Institute, where I heard him argue in a very tolerant humour with one who differed from him, as if seeking to gain a point for the other rather than for himself. He left me here, after telling me to call at his warehouse and he would give me a letter to the Sheaf-works. I availed myself of this, and saw the process of iron from the raw material to the finished razor. Also his son showed me their process of converting iron into steel in the furnace. He invited me to come on the following Sunday, and spend the day with him at his house at Upperthorpe; but I was engaged to go to Castleton on that day—so he appointed Saturday, and said he would have a walk up the Rivilin, his favourite valley, and the scene of many of his poems.

I accordingly went, and found his dwelling-house at Upperthorpe from his description of it—a neat stone building with a slated roof, standing on an eminence in the midst of a large garden that was surrounded with a wall. The postern-door was left open for me, and he himself opened the front-door of his dwelling, and ushered me into a breakfast-parlour which had two windows, commanding different prospects. The room was genteelly furnished. The first thing that struck me was a portrait, in oil, of himself, which, though a likeness, I did not much admire, because it

rather caricatured him. His wife told me it was taken during the agitation for the Reform Bill, and that might account for its wild look. There was another picture, a better one, that of his son William, who had died of consumption, well painted, and very life-like, especially about the eyes. There was also a bust of himself, with rather a ludicrous expression, which was increased by a woman's cap that had been placed, either by accident or design, on its head. On the mantel-piece stood a full-length small figure of Scott, and an extract from Channing, "On the Reasonableness of Christianity," written in his own bold hand, and framed. A few books lay on a table with Sowerby's "Botany," which he told me first made him a poet.

After breakfast we sallied forth, and took our course up a hill, till the vale of the Rivilin opened to our view, which he described with the eye of a painter. The mills on the stream, and the weirs belonging to them, made a succession of beautiful landscapes. We looked in at one of those mills, and saw an old man of thirty, a grinder. He said they seldom reached forty, yet would not use the grinder's life-preserver, because, if they prolonged their lives, there would not be work for them all, and they preferred to die of the disease rather than of starvation. The poet was now at home—he

pointed out the little pink buds on the firs, and seemed to be acquainted with every tree and flower, speaking of them as of personal friends. We walked about five miles up the valley, till we came to a streamlet which he had christened Ribbledin, from the music of its waters as it flowed. We came to a little waterfall at the head. He said it was Nature's boudoir; and, indeed, it might have served for a fountain for Diana. After crossing the stream on bridges of fallen trees, and remarking the great age of the hollies, we clambered, with some difficulty, which he made light of, up a rocky ascent, and returned by the moors, first sitting down on a large grey rock to partake of luncheon. Our drink was a flask of home-made wine, concocted from the fruits in his own garden, and racy enough. In listening to his talk, I almost forgot the scenery, till we reached a point where a circumference of landscape was visible, which we stood to admire. We arrived at his house with a good appetite for dinner; after which we resumed our table-talk over a bottle of claret. He said he was very sorry to hear a man like me speak ill of Byron. I told him there was no poetry that satisfied my mind more fully than his, but maintained my opinion of the man; for, being a public man, I said, he was all the more bound to lead a good

private life. Mrs. Elliott joined me. He got up, and said he would leave us two to tear him to pieces. He had once seen Byron, he said, in a bank at Sheffield, and thought that the noble poet looked at him with a sneer; for it was a time, he said, when I was in great distress! He likened Byron's complexion to a marble bust.

I had now an opportunity of studying him more closely. When I had first seen him at his warehouse, he was dressed in a suit befitting the place, but now his appearance was that of the gentleman. He wore a black surtout with a velvet collar, and bore eye-glasses suspended with a ribbon. He walked with a rather jaunty air, or with a slight swing of the body from side to side, as one desirous to appear younger than he really was, though he did not disguise that he was fifty-eight. He was somewhat nervous, and had got an idea that he would not live long; indeed, he said he had been dying four years of consumption. His general look expressed a kind of severe benignity. His head was not what phrenologists would term a good one; it was small, and of an oval shape, but his forehead was neither high nor broad. He said his wife was his critic. Her familiarly affectionate manner of addressing him as Ebby, or Eb, sounded rather oddly in my ears. He could not write, he

said, unless he was warm and comfortable, and generally sat near the oven, which was his muse.

He generally walked about while he talked; stopping when uttering anything particular. His voice was deep and solemn, and had a kind of dying fall. No one could read his poetry like himself. It was as if he was reading Scripture with all the fervour and unction, but, at the same time, some of the monotony, of a zealous preacher. In reciting he was very vehement. He startled me with a passage from his speech at Palace-yard. "They poisoned Socrates—they crucified Jesus—*and they are starving* YOU!" The climax he delivered with all the force of his stentorian lungs.

It was his constant habit to disparage himself, and to speak in a tone of hyperbole of the merits of others. Thus he said, "I have one of the poorest intellects that God ever made. I have no mind. I cannot create. I wish I could write like you; your prose is perfect. If I were to read your play to you I would make you wonder at the merit of it!" On giving him a few M.S. verses to read, he said, "They were beautiful as an expression of the writer's feelings, but were not poetry." I asked what was poetry? And he answered, "It is the heart speaking to itself!"

He said, if you wish to know what human

nature is, you should solicit subscriptions for a poem. He had done so, and one man said, "D—n you! Why don't you write something a gentleman can read?" Another, "Well, I suppose I must patronise your vanity, or what you please to call it!" We talked of dramatic writing, and of the condensation it required, which makes it so difficult. He said, he had made several attempts, but failed, because he could not go out of himself; that Byron failed for the same reason; and that Scott, though his novels were dramatic, could not write a good play. He sang, "Ye Banks and Braes o' bonny Doon," and then recited it, to show the difference, saying that the artificiality of singing spoiled the effect of a simple and natural piece of writing. In his conversation, as in his writings, he was ever recurring to the one dear thought, which he kept thinking over almost to madness. He said, "If a man were to be tried for the murder of my father, and I were on the jury, when asked for my verdict I would say, Place the Marquis of Chandos at the bar instead of the prisoner; for I can prove him guilty of this murder; the Corn-laws are the cause of all the crime that is committed." I rather stood up for agriculturists, and said they were a useful class of men, who ought to live. He said, if they could not live by that trade they ought to choose

another; they ought not to live by robbing and murdering the manufacturers.

I mentioned his fellow-townsman Montgomery, and said that, although a Whig, the Tories had pensioned him. Elliott said, he had been offered a pension at the same time, but had refused. He said he cared not a straw for money, except for his children, whom he wished to render independent, because poverty is a crime in this country.

His youngest daughter laid on her mother's lap, a shy timid girl, more fit to be a flower-gatherer than to encounter the trials of the world. His eldest daughter joined us at tea, but retired as soon as it was over; and I heard no more of her except in a tune from a piano in another room.

When I came away it was late in the evening, and the stars shone brightly. He accompanied me through his garden. I quoted that line in Byron—

"Ye stars that are the poetry of heaven!"

I said I had heard some one remark that he could see no sense in it. Elliott, with a slight smile, replied, you should have said to him—

"Ye plums that are the poetry of pudding!"

We parted with mutual expressions of goodwill, which, on his part, took a paternal, and on mine a filial tone.

Two anecdotes which I heard of him may serve to indicate the fearless self-will of his character. He had taken a pipe of wine from a merchant, in liquidation of a debt. The merchant's creditors requested the wine to be given up, and employed a solicitor to write to him about it. The cholera was then raging, and he returned for answer, "If you were all dying of the cholera, and one drop of that wine would save your lives, you should not have it!" It was his custom, when speaking in public, to hold a card in his hand, on which he had written the heads of his address. Getting up on one occasion, putting on his spectacles, and taking out his card, a person in the meeting said, "He's going to read his speech!" Elliott glanced with ineffable disdain at this person, and said, "Do you think I am such a fool as you—to come here and not know what I am going to say?"

I returned to Whitby, wearing a political medal which Elliott had given me. I proceeded to advocate the principles of the Charter; but the current of persecution set in under a Whig Government, and I was arrested and committed to prison, to be tried for sedition. Lord Normanby, then Secretary of State, interfered, however, on my behalf, and released me from the gripe of the panic-stricken magistrates. Having

consulted my friend Elliott on my situation, I received the following letter from him :—

EBENEZER ELLIOTT TO JOHN WATKINS.

"*Sheffield, 9th November*, 1839.

"DEAR SIR,—I duly received both your letters, and have long been impatient to answer the first of them, dated so long ago as the 25th March last; but, postage being a heavy tax, my wish was to send with my letter a copy of the new edition of my poems, which I find is delayed another month. I wish time may confirm your high opinion of the merit of my poems, for, in that case, men of inferior natural powers will learn from my example the probability of supplying the want of genius by earnest well-directed industry and single-heartedness, and perhaps they will do so, for, as you can yourself write well, you ought to be a sound critic. I read your Sermons aloud on Sunday last, instead of taking a long walk, the day here being rainy; and I can assure you that reading aloud is no bad substitute for out-door exercise, if the latter cannot be had.

"I scarcely know how to answer your last letter. It would grieve me to hurt your feelings, yet, on again reading the letter, I am still, like Shakspeare's Moor, 'perplexed in the extreme.' The conduct of the Chartists, in listening to no advice but that of their worst foes, has convinced me that it would be wrong to concede universal suffrage, except through the educational franchise, which, offering a premium for education, would ultimately, and soon enough, be universal suffrage. But when I find you—a man not only well-educated, but of strong natural powers of mind—making an idol of a person who must be weak, or wicked, or both, I almost doubt whether any form of government will ever avert from society its hitherto constantly-recurring evils of legislation. It is true, I praised your god in Palace-yard. But what did I say of him? 'That he has a brazen face, a loud voice, and a big bread-basket,' which, as Lillibullero says,

'nobody can deny.' The words I used, quoted from Homer, were the following:—'But when the deep and mellow bass breaks forth from his broad breast, the breath of all is hushed, all listen, all are still.' Yes, my friend, the aristocracy know how to choose their advocates; and it will turn out, I fear, that certain sham radical newspapers have been established, and certain Chartist leaders paid, to prevent the workmen from seeing the Corn-laws. I do *not* wish, as you suppose, 'to postpone the franchise to the Corn-laws.' But what can the Chartists want the franchise for, if not to get rid of such evils? The truth, however, is, that they have efficiently supported them, and that this is all they have done. Had they been fit to exercise the franchise, they would have made the Corn-laws their pivot.

"I find nothing in your lecture except the word 'fight' that can even be considered improper. But, as you have honestly got into a scrape, I trust you will not think of getting out of it by any improper submission. Why not plead your own cause? You may carry a half-hour's speech on a three-inch card, memorandummed on both sides; and a card twice as large would hold your notes of reply, with which, of course, you would precede your prepared speech. This is what, I think, I should do in your place."

I had some thoughts of writing a History of Chartism, and wrote to him to speak for me to his publisher, Mr. Tait, on the subject.

EBENEZER ELLIOTT TO JOHN WATKINS.

"*Sheffield, 24th January*, 1840.

"DEAR SIR,—I have by this post told Tait all I know about you, and that I think you will write a good History of Chartism, if you avoid the partisan's fault—diffusion. A more awful and important subject no author could desire.

"Nothing can be less dramatic than your no Corn-law

epilogue—a manifest after-thought—to your New Poor-law drama. I read the play instantly on its arrival; but we have not yet read it in divan; something or other has always put us off; but by-and-bye you shall have our opinion. Up to a certain point you are excellent, as in Wat.

"I am much indebted to you for thinking of me. Pray excuse me, for I can hardly hold the pen, having been bed-rid for nearly three days with the rheumatism."

As he was retiring from business, he was desirous of purchasing a house—the one he dwelt in at Upperthorpe not being his own. I had hopes of getting him for a neighbour, and invited him to Aislaby to look at a house that was for sale.

EBENEZER ELLIOTT TO JOHN WATKINS.

"*Sheffield, 25th May*, 1840.

"DEAR SIR,—I think you may conclude that I shall not come over to Aislaby, though I very much wish to see the property; but my son being ill, I am a sort of prisoner here. Without a strong motive, it would be wrong to leave my affairs in the hands of mere workmen, and I should be justly blamed for so doing. I have, however, ordered the newspaper which contains the advertisement, and, if I get it, may decide to come. You do not say of what tenure the property is.

"There are some expressions in your last letter which I do not like. You say, you thought your drama 'too homely.' Why? Have you forgotten 'Margaret,' in Goethe's Faust? or Crabbe's 'Ruth?'

"Alluding, I suppose, to the physical-force leaders—tools of the aristocracy—you complain (if I understand you) of having been *misled*. Did Napoleon place himself at the top of things by doing what others bade him do? When Danton organised forty-four thousand unions in France, was he obeying his enemies?

"You do not seem to be aware that every proprietor of a magazine employs a critic of his own. On sending a critique you are opposing his man of affairs; and Tait's man, I am told, is one of the cleverest that ever wore petticoats. '*Always keep thick with the lasses.*'"

One of Elliott's young friends, whom he most liked, with whom he walked and talked the most, was Francis Fisher, the son of William Fisher, Esq., of Sheffield, a friendly and ingenious youth, whom the world lost early. Through the kindness of his father, I am enabled to place Elliott's correspondence with this amiable and talented young man before the reader.

EBENEZER ELLIOTT TO FRANCIS FISHER.

"*Sheffield, 26th May,* 1840.

"DEAR SIR.—Wishing to make two kindred minds acquainted with each other, I send you a book, which you will read (twice, perhaps), and then carefully return to me. It is a friend that I cannot afford to lose. *When I despair of human nature I read this litttle book.* The author is John Watkins, Esq., of Aislaby Hall, near Whitby, a lover of the beautiful, a hater of oppression—a man who looks on suffering with the eyes of the heart. "I am, dear Sir,

"Yours very truly,

"EBENEZER ELLIOTT."

FRANCIS FISHER TO JOHN WATKINS.

"*Bank-street, Sheffield,* 18*th June,* 1840.

"DEAR SIR,—A few weeks ago, our mutual friend, Mr. Ebenezer Elliott, sent for my perusal a small volume of lay sermons, by yourself, thinking that I, a lay preacher, should have pleasure in reading the

productions of a 'kindred spirit.' I have since read and re-read each sermon with such delight, and, I trust, heart-benefit, that I cannot restrain myself from thanking you, who have spoken to me with the power and weight of a mind deeply imbued with a sense of human duty and responsibility. I often regret that the vices you so justly reprobate and expose are so little treated of by preachers in general. They are the stain and reproach of the age and of human nature. Most rightly do you denounce the fastidious taste which leads men to be 'more shocked at the mention of crimes than at perpetrating them.' Much of the misery that exists in society flows from the unrestrained licentiousness which sacrifices thought and feeling at the shrine of brute passion.

"Mankind are fed with the frothy food of sectarian theology instead of the true bread of life, which came down from heaven in the moral teachings of Christ. Your volumes contain this bread in abundance. I hope they have had an extensive sale, for great and salutary will be their influence on every well-regulated mind and feeling heart.

"Accept my grateful thanks for elevating my opinion of our common humanity, and believe me to remain, your brother in soul, "FRANCIS FISHER."

JOHN WATKINS TO FRANCIS FISHER.

"*Aislaby, near Whitby, June* 20, 1840.

"DEAR SIR,—The circumstance of receiving a note from a friend of Mr. Elliott gave me more pleasure than the praise of myself which it contains. Nevertheless, I highly value praise when it proceeds from one evidently sincere, and of good understanding. Such praise is true fame: would I were more worthy of it!

"I am sorry to say I am not the man I was when I wrote the sermons you have read. The wear and tear I have suffered in the world has somewhat sophisticated me, although I frequently endeavour to wash the dust off my heart by laving it with nature's baptism. I gave

those sermons to the public with a pledge, that such as they were such would I be; but I dare not read them now—they would make me ashamed, not so much of them as of myself. You are right in saying that much of the misery in society results from the vice of individuals.

> "'How small of all that human hearts endure,
> That part which laws or kings can cause or cure!'

So says Goldsmith, though he partly contradicts himself in the same poem by saying:—

> "'Each wanton judge new penal statutes draw—
> Laws grind the poor, and rich men rule the law.'

"The truth is, the example of the higher classes is too readily followed by the lower, who cannot so readily exonerate themselves from the effects. One sins with more impunity than the other. The splendour and selfishness of the rich deludes and destroys the poor. Education is what is most wanted. Israel must first *know* before it will *consider;* and consideration is the angel that 'must whip the offending Adam out of us.'

"Books not calculated to please a false appetite are seldom popular. He who publishes Truth throws down a gage to the world, which will not accept the challenge, but falls foul on the author. The ill opinion expressed of my sermons by 'good kind of people,' and the ill-will they bore me for writing them, made me deem the volume unworthy to have been dedicated to Ebenezer Elliott; but his good opinion of it, now confirmed by yours, will occasion me to think better of it—at least to thank it for having obtained for me the friendship of two men whose suffrages must outweigh a whole host of others. Thanking you for the evidence which your note affords me that I possess some degree of usefulness, "I remain, dear Sir,

"Your fellow Pilgrim,

"JOHN WATKINS.

"P.S. Forgive this note."

EBENEZER ELLIOTT TO JOHN WATKINS.

"*Sheffield*, 18*th May*, 1840.

"DEAR SIR,—How could you imagine you had disgusted me? Anything but that. I owe you an apology. I have been much to blame; but I will state the facts. Having read your 'Yorkshire Tragedy,' I thought it such an impressive commentary on the time, that I determined it should be heard by some friends, particularly John Fowler, secretary of our Mechanics' Institution, an enthusiast in theatricals and a good dramatic critic; but circumstances, some of them of a very painful nature, prevented the parties from meeting. I still wish this had been otherwise. But on receipt of your letter of the 13th instant, I determined to read the play to such members of my family as might be present, which I yesterday did. Mrs. Elliott thinks you must have suppressed two acts, cutting down a five-act play into three acts, and withholding from the audience information essential to the due understanding of the story. She agrees with me that it might easily be made a most interesting and instructive composition. As it is, I would give all my writings to be the author of it; for though I could not have written it, I possess the powers which would enable me to make it what it ought to be. If you perfect it, you must study probabilities in little matters. Read Crabbe and Wallenstein, and study Schiller's characters of Gustave Wrangel, Butler, Octavio Piccolomini, &c. The facility with which Manless exhibits his baseness in the first act is unnatural even in a mother-spoiled lord. The truth is, such persons are prone to hide their baseness even from themselves under assumed motives. Exaggerate nothing; there is no need. The catastrophe will be sufficiently dismal if James and his dame survive to attend the funeral. But if James must die, warn the audience that he is in a dying state, instead of suddenly killing him first. By no means forget the inquest. You could draw a good Conservative coroner; and (if

you are determined to haul the Corn-laws into your New Poor Law drama) you may put into the mouths of the witnesses Manless, Stockton, Nodd, and Bluefly the actual words of Lord Richmond, Yarmouth, Darlington, &c. Show the audience distinctly that John is transported—that Mary has born twins; let them see her heroic struggles to avoid the workhouse, her begging at the hall of Manless; and to account for so poor a person having poison in her possession, let them know that she has long meditated suicide, and that she steals in the forlorn hope of avoiding the more horrible catastrophe. All this should be done in action. Are you not aware that single speeches are as heavy on the stage as narrative itself? Besides, he who could draw the characters of Nodd, Stockton, and the two Blueflies, need not resort to the idle trick of soliloquy. Is it usual, in your neighbourhood, for the children of the poor to remain unweaned till they are old enough to go a begging? What is the clap-trap of the poisoned suck worth? Less than nothing. Do not be in a hurry to get your play acted or printed. All its faults, I suspect, are the results of constitutional indolence in you; but if so, you can for once struggle with your nature, remembering that whoever has written a masterly tragedy has done one of the greatest things possible to man. Omit the epilogue; it is dull and dead as a stone, and has nothing to do with the subject as you have treated it.

"The *Yorkshire Gazette* is not taken in here. Could you describe your neighbour's property? How far is it from Whitby? How far from the nearest neighbour? Is the water good? How many bed-rooms, &c., does the house contain? How much land is there in all? What would be the probable price? And when and where will the sale take place? You see I take great liberties with you, but you will excuse me."

CHAPTER VII.

LETTERS TO JOHN WATKINS, FRANCIS FISHER, AND EBENEZER HINGSTON.

EBENEZER ELLIOTT TO JOHN WATKINS.

"*Sheffield*, 30*th May*, 1840.

"DEAR SIR,—After the great trouble I have given you, I ought to come over and view the property, but I am now too late for the sale. If it should not be bought by auction, and you can learn that it might be had for about 750*l.*, I will come and see it; but I think it will sell for more. Judging from your drawing, I should think the house must have twenty windows in it. A less house would suit me better, for my family generally will not exceed six—myself, Mrs. E., two daughters, a servant-maid, and lad; and after distributing 2,000*l.* among my grown-up sons, my affairs, unless things mend, will not realise above 8,000*l.*, a small income for a big house.

"A young man should not like such poems as the 'Winter Speedwell.' But you have been hit 'by the archers' and 'are sad of spirit.' You must change all this. Acquire, if you have it not, a taste for landscape-drawing, which will lead you often into the fields; and then you can return, and sit down to write such things as the preface to your Sermons. You were in a healthier state of mind when you wrote them than you now are. But there are portions of your last letter which please me. I am glad that you can give reasons for the faith that is in you—that your mind is your own—and that you are ready to defend your sayings and doings against all impugners. This is as it should be.

"Nothing is more common than for persons to suppose that they 'love the poor.' Your observations on this subject are connected with a deep and high philosophy.

"Am I really to conclude that you have read 'Taurassdes' through? Then three persons have peformed that feat—yourself, John Fowler, and the author. Well, you may derive advantage from the perusal. If 'Taurassdes' had been as attractive as it is the reverse, it could not have succeeded in representation, unless the information communicated to the reader at the close of the play had been given in the first act.

"I have often wondered that we have no drama of Robin Hood. And don't you think that the Commonwealth and its men, connected with the early settlement of America by the Pilgrim Fathers, would furnish a noble subject for a national epic poem?"

EBENEZER ELLIOTT TO JOHN WATKINS.

"*Sheffield, 13th August*, 1840.

"Dear Sir,—I find it no easy matter to get out of business; and my endless and painful occupations in trying to get out must plead my excuse for not sooner answering your favours of the 2nd and 20th June.

"Before I write a prologue for your 'Robin Hood,' I should know how you treat the subject. I shall be happy to comply with your request.

"Exempted from the necessity of getting money (your father having got it for you), forgive the scorn of those who in this bread-taxed land must get money or go to the guardians. You cannot too soon seek and find some pleasing task, that will occupy all the powers of your mind for a length of time. What think you of balladising the history of Parliamentary Reform? 'Some Passages in the Life of a Radical,' by Samuel Bamford, would furnish you with excellent hints, and the exercise would strengthen and mature your powers for the composition of a Radical epic, say 'Robin Hood.'

"It is a positive duty to marry, and also to be a Radical, that good legislation may allow marriage to be as happy as it ought. That marriage, with all its troubles, is happier than celibacy, is proved by the fact that married men live longer than bachelors. Yet, and although I drew a great prize in the lottery of matrimony, and have enjoyed, perhaps, more than the average of happiness in the married state, I cannot advise you to marry until, by some stern and continuous exercise of your faculties, you have done your self-oppressed mind and self-oppressed heart justice. Can you blame others for tyrannising over the world while you continue to tyrannise over yourself? God meant you to be happy. You have a sound body, good health—that first of blessings. If, then, your mind is out of health, inquire if you are not yourself the cause of the disease? Why should an honest man be unhappy, if God have not visited him with ill health or other physical calamity? Toil and be strong; and remember this precept applies both to mind and body. But I know how it is with you. You must have sympathy. You cannot be properly said to live without some one to sympathise with you. So much the better; for you possess one great (the greatest) requisite for domestic happiness. But in the present state of your mind, you might easily commit a fatal mistake—one which to you, or any man like you, requiring sympathy, would indeed be a calamity. For one moment suppose yourself married to a woman who cannot and will not sympathise with you! The chances are fearfully against the supposition that at present you would choose the right one."

EBENEZER ELLIOTT TO JOHN WATKINS.

Sheffield, 3rd September, 1840.

"DEAR SIR,—In sitting in judgment on your melodrama, I shall suppose myself in the presence of Shakspeare and his master pieces; for why should my friend, if he is a man of genius, aim at anything lower than excel-

lence? I am aware, also, that the author of five rejected and abortive dramas can have no right to criticise you but the right you have given him. You could not, if you would, write anything positively bad, and there are in your drama lines that would not discredit Wordsworth—passages sweetly idiomatic, which remind me of our Elizabethan poets; but the play, as a drama of Robin Hood, the people's hero, has utterly disappointed me. The first scene, with all its faults, is perhaps the best; but it is dramatically fatal, for after reading it the reader is in doubt whether the earl or your hero is the viler reptile. Indeed, you seem to delight in lowering the latter; for in the only scene in which he displays a bit of honest spunk (that where he saves George-a-Green), he seems to do so merely because he happens to have fallen in love with Marian—a passion which does him no great credit, for a more vulgar spitfire than you have painted her never talked brandy in peacroft. It may be doubted whether there is in the whole play a single character; certainly there is not one for whom the reader cares a straw, unless it be Friar Tuck. The sentiments he expresses are beautiful, and, in him, appropriate; but Robin Hood never used a pen, except to sign his mark. Much that is out of place in his mouth might have been properly uttered by the worthy friar. Comedy is probably your forte, perhaps satire; but I doubt still whether you can write serious drama. The play ought to have opened with the expulsion from his lands of the yeoman (not the lord), George-a-Green. Your hero should have witnessed the scene, pitying but unable to help the victims; and he should then for the first time have seen Marian. The audience should have *seen* him trying to restrain the aristocratic tendencies of his father; *seen* him grossly and repeatedly insulted by that father, *yet always retaining his dignity;* and when at last he retreats to the forest, carrying with him all our sympathy and respect, this would have enabled you to perform a philosophical and Shakspearian purpose, by showing the bad effects of the exercise of arbitrary power and a vicious

system, even on good natures; and naturally good your earl must have been, or the words you make him utter in the first scene of the fifth act are sheer nonsense. Indeed, the great thing to do in treating such a subject as yours is to show that the victimisers, plaguing all around them, make victims of themselves. This you have only half done, and I have hinted to you before that you are mistaken in supposing yourself a Radical. I am a rank aristocrat, but more Radical than you. Never was there so poor a creature in Sherwood as the Robin Hood you have drawn; the delineation is quite unworthy of you and the subject. Compare it with that of Charles Moor in Schiller's "Robbers." But, to return. When Robin rescues George-a-Green from Scarlet and Scathlock, he should then see Marian for the second time, and fall deeply in love with her. In this way Shakspeare and Nature manage such matters. I am sorry you should have introduced Ellen and Allen-a-Dale merely, as it would seem, to exhibit Marian as a brimstone virago, and swell the numbers at a wedding dinner. What noble objects in a drama of Robin Hood, the people's hero! Mind, I do not say that your play is a bad melo-drama; on the contrary, I think we have few melo-dramatists who could have written it; and it will act much better than it reads."

EBENEZER ELLIOTT TO JOHN WATKINS.

"*Sheffield, 4th September*, 1840.

"Dear Sir,—I thank you for your criticisms; and am glad that there is one person who thinks, with me, that my prose is better than my verse. I have long thought so; and if Tait would have printed my speeches, and published letters with the poems, the book would have sold better. As you, too, decide that the 'Village Patriarch' is a desultory poem, I must have failed in my intention to connect with Enoch Wray the changes which have been caused in a century by the progress of population and machinery—changes which, but for our absurd legislation, would have benefitted all mankind.

"If the 'Village Patriarch' will not live, all my poetry must go the way of all flesh; not because it is based on temporary politics (for it is based on the eternal principle of free action in man), but for another and quite sufficient reason. The truth is, I am not a poet. The thoughts of genuine poets flow without effort, as from a fountain: I have to pump for mine; and the well is not my own. But whenever I meet with a man who is not what Carlyle calls a 'sham,' I find a well. Not that I steal the thoughts of others, but that the written or spoken minds of self-sustained men originate thoughts in me. You have discovered the true source of my merit, if I have any. Earnestness will be found at the root of every useful or successful thought or thing in the world. Proverbially, half measures (born of half convictions) never come to good. I have not yet returned your play, Mrs. Elliott wishing to read it to, or with, a lady-friend. I suppose she doubts the inerrability of my sovereign decision in your case as in all others."

EBENEZER ELLIOTT TO JOHN WATKINS.

"*Sheffield, 11th January*, 1841.

"DEAR SIR,—I thank you for your favour of the 6th instant (received this day), which I hardly think I deserve. But the advertisement reached me a few days too late; for I have just now contracted for the building of a humble cottage of about eight rooms, on ten acres of bad land, at Great Houghton, near Barnsley. This, I am told, is a great error, for the estate is seven miles from the nearest town. 'Great Houghton is the road to nowhere,' said the lawyer, when I purchased. 'Just so,' said I; 'therefore I buy.' But it is only $2\frac{3}{4}$ miles each from two North Midland stations. There is a weekly carrier from Pontefract and Rotherham; a post three times a week; and a village two miles off, where anything can be had but fish. I shall not lay out so much money in it as to make it dear to let for $4\frac{1}{2}$ or 5 per cent., if my family should not like it. Perhaps it will cost me 700*l.* for ten acres of land, house, stable, &c., and

thirty-five oak, ash, and beech trees, about forty years old. A spring of excellent water runs through it, the roads and the neighbours are good, the air excellent, the prospects from it fine; and hard coal is to be had at 7s. per ton, slack coal 2s. 6d., at the pit two miles off.

"There is nothing in your last letters at all discreditable to you; and there is much in them that deserves and will receive my immediate attention. I was prevented from attending to them by engagements which I could not neglect.

"But unemployed men of ardent minds are necessarily unhappy. Do something, then, even though it be a drama on Frost and Williams; but surely it is unworthy of you to write satires on a petty attorney. Besides, there is danger in such things. I almost think your satire a libel. And the world will always have dirty work to do. It must be done by somebody; and it is sure to be well paid for. Will you do it? No! Heaven forbid! Then don't blame the used besom for being a dirty besom. I will write you a long letter very soon, and beg pardon in due form."

Some cessation occurred in our correspondence at this time. I left the little lifeless town of Whitby and went to London. Lovett, taking advantage of the imprisonment of O'Connor, made an attempt to get the leadership of the Chartists into his own hands. For this purpose he concocted a traitorous plot called the "New Move," which being detected, was exposed, and the "New Movers" lost all influence with the people. But this attempt to form a party caused a factious division in the people, who, before that time, had been united in one body on principle. O'Connor set himself up as an idol, and passion once inflamed with

party-spirit, the Chartists apostatised from their own cause, and became his man-worshippers, denouncing all who would not bow the knee to him. Thus Chartism was narrowed into O'Connorism, and this enabled him to bring forward his long-meditated land-lottery, which, appealing to the selfish cupidity of his followers, drew them from the Charter, just as a red-herring trailed across the scent of a pack of hounds diverts them from the true chase. How miserably they were duped by this Irish demagogue; how much more wretched slaves and victims of his they became than they were of the Government whose tyranny and injustice they complained of, the newspapers have published to all the world. O'Connor, as Hume told the House of Commons, is the greatest enemy that Chartism ever had; he has sunk it too low in public opinion for it ever to rise again, except by virtue of an educational qualification, and this makes it a matter of regret that Fox's Education-bill should have been thrown out, unless it was to make way for a better.

Having made several vain attempts to rouse the independence of the Chartists, sunk under the "Imperialism" of O'Connor, I found that the middle classes were right when they warned me, at the commencement of my advocacy, that the people were not fit for the franchise. For if they

were to give their votes to such men as O'Connor, what would become of England?

The next letter which I received from Elliott was dated from his new residence at Hargitt Hill :—

EBENEZER ELLIOTT TO JOHN WATKINS.

"*Hargitt Hill, Great Houghton, near Barnsley, April 27th*, 1842.

"DEAR SIR,—Your verses on the 'Strike of the Masons' are egg-full of good sense, and, as verses, equal to Pope's or anybody's. There is something striking in your observation that his merit is founded on good sense, 'the rock that England stands on.' Fine! and flattering to us Englishers. Where are your proofs of England's good sense? Are they found in our submission to a tax which costs, or destroys, or prevents the earning of 150,000,000 a-year, for the supposed benefit of 20,000 lords and lordlings, who only pocket about one-fifteenth of the amount wasted? Or are they found in the support which you and the Chartists and their god, O'Connor, have given to that tax? Don't you think that Norway, the poorest of whose peasants lives in a house larger at least, if not better, and certainly better supplied, than mine, has a much juster claim to good sense than food-taxed England has, with her population working harder for less than any other people, and cabined, cribbed, garretted, cellared, and dog-holed? I rejoice that the eyes of your heart are opened. Your father fought the fight for bread when victory was possible. Here it is no longer possible. Of what use, then, is it to repeat to you, 'That happiness is to be found in active and useful exertion only?' Nor have I any hopes but in two or three men, Tories, for the Liberals can do nothing. Peel, I have long thought, sees our position clearly: not so Wellington, or he would have acted on his convictions. But I trust his eyes, too, will be opened before 20,000 harpies shall have anarchised 20,000,000

of human beings who will begin the work of horror by butchering first their best friends. I have sent your lines to Tait; but advise you to write *prose*. Such compositions as Howitt's 'Visits to Remarkable Places' are sure to find readers. Write to me often, your letters are always refreshing to me; and pray pardon my neglect, not my forgetfulness, for we often speak of you. I have had hard work in getting out of business where—competition being a death-struggle by Act of Parliament—there must soon be less kissing or more food."

EBENEZER ELLIOTT TO JOHN WATKINS.

"*Great Houghton, near Barnsley, 4th May*, 1842.

"DEAR SIR,—Your letter of the 30th ult., I think, is one of the best you ever wrote to me. I like the pluck with which you defend your convictions, right or wrong.

"Wellington and Peel, you say, do not fear revolution. Did the French Marshal Broglie fear it? What could he do with it when it came? We know what he did—nothing. There are two sorts of mobs. That which *will* riot can be put down, not so that which *must;* for the latter is everywhere at the same moment, while the force which should suppress it is nowhere, or a part of it.

"You seem not to be aware that 'Lara' (if you mean Byron's poem) has been dramatised already. The characters of Osmyn and Zara, in Congreve's 'Mourning Bride,' furnished Byron with hints for his Conrad and Gulnare in the 'Corsair,' of which poem 'Lara' is the sequel."

EBENEZER ELLIOTT TO JOHN WATKINS.

"*Great Houghton, 1st July*, 1842.

"DEAR SIR,—With the exception of an exercise in what Dr. Johnson might have called 'metrical epistolary composition,' I have done nothing in the rhyming way lately; nor have I anything to send you at all

likely to please. How poor must the bard be who is destitute even of rhymes! The inclosed, if you print it, will offend every bigot and hypocrite among your readers or patrons. If I can bring my poor old drape of a muse to her milk, you shall have something better from her. I am glad to learn that you mean to lecture. Thousands may hear for one that will read. The enemy know this well, and strive to keep to themselves the grand instrument of noise—the pulpit."

EBENEZER ELLIOTT TO JOHN WATKINS.

"*Great Houghton*, 10*th Sept.*, 1842.

"DEAR JOHN,—As you like to discover merit in working-men, I send you a poem of merit written by a working-man. I know not what sort of a working-man he may be, but I have letters from him that might make the college-taught ashamed."

EBENEZER ELLIOTT TO FRANCIS FISHER.

"*Great Houghton, near Barnsley,*
13*th March*, 1843.

"DEAR FRANCIS FISHER,—How came I not to think of the ministry as a profession for you? Even as a matter of conscience you ought to decide on becoming a preacher. What though a man born under a three-penny planet cannot reasonably expect sixpenny luck as a preacher among the Unitarians, still the emolument will be sufficient for a bachelor who can dine deliciously on milk-creved rice, and requires no stronger beverage than God's own cloud-distilled. Supposing, then, that you have come to this right decision, you avoid both the dangerous ford and the morass: 'The Lord will be with you, for the ways of holiness (wisdom) are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.'

"But when shall we expect you here? If you will inform us by post, a few days before you start, on what day and by what train you will arrive at Darfield Sta-

tion, I will meet you there with my magnificent equipage, which cost 10*l.* for gig, horse, harness, and repairs.

"The story of 'The Exile' is fictitious; but it is quite true that Virginia was originally colonised by white slaves (involuntary emigrants), and that the result (established slavery) is worthy of the cause. How unlike that of FREE emigration in New England!

"Tell Mr. Knowles that most of my best poems are written on the very subject which he suggests, and that I have to this hour vainly recommended a remedy for the evils he deplores in universal free-trade, which would soon (and alone can) put an end to competition for human pigsties.

"Peel's attack on Cobden was a base blunder, little short of a deliberate attempt to assassinate the character of an opponent for a political purpose. If ministers of the Crown can play such pranks with impunity, legislation through representation is mere mockery.

"I have received a letter from Dr. Holland, in which he greatly over-estimates my merit as a poet, setting me in some respects above Wordsworth, for reasons, however, which set me above nobody. I have not answered the Doctor at large on this subject, but as you entertain similar opinions, I will set you right, by producing my 'exquisite reasons,' to show that you are both mistaken.

"'The child is father to the man.' Now, from childhood upward I have been deemed by those who know me best one of the weakest-minded of human beings. I am like a thick horn lantern with the dullest of slow souls for a candle; but I claim a merit which is my own, that of having, with feeble abilities, done well-intended deeds which have excited some notice, while persons of far superior powers have effected and attempted nothing. If, when I attend a public meeting, I find that I am the least efficient person there; if, when called on to act or decide, I can always tell afterwards how I ought to have acted or decided; if I am best known in my own house at this hour by the name of 'Tom Fool,' or more significantly, 'Old Tom Fool;' if

they who thus sincerely designate me (having had the best opportunities of estimating me rightly) cannot be altogether wrong in the estimate they have formed; then I must be physically, mentally, perhaps morally, inferior to the generality of men; and I doubt the possibility of such a person writing any book worthy of lasting remembrance, for nothing can live but truth. He who invents an original character or fable has discovered a new truth, which will live because it is interesting, and is interesting because it is true. But how few in all ages have been the discoverers of truth! Assuredly, the 'Tom Fools,' old or young, have not been of the number; and the world will have long to wait for another Christopher Colon, or James Watt, or Walter Scott, if he is to be sought only among them.

But let us now turn to my writings themselves. Can you find in them all one spark of invention, one original character?—anything like the wildness of 'Thalaba,' or the ethereal beauty of 'The Lady of the Lake?'—anything, in short, giving evidence of the presence of genius? No, no. There may be sunbeams in cucumbers, but my ganister stone is not made of sunshine. Oh, but I am national, says the Doctor. Yes; but it is the reverse of nationality, it is universality that gives immortality to poems. But I can describe well, he says. So can any tolerably sensible person, who will attend to the objects before him. But then, I write a condensed style. Yes, because I am compelled, by my defective memory and the morbid melancholy of my constitution, to contemplate all sad things with an almost mute direness of feeling, and express my miserable thoughts so briefly that the utterance of a dozen sentences pumps me dry. And yet, forsooth, I have got repute as a public speaker! and, depend upon it, I am quite as much an orator as a poet, though I never delivered an unprepared speech containing twenty sentences, except on one occasion, and it was only a reply to a lecture recommending paid or forced emigration, by H. G. Ward, Esq. I happened

to think, with my master, Colonel Thompson, that the breeding of white slaves for exportation here, at this time, must be a losing trade, on the whole, and I was full of the subject; yet I was twice conscious of breaking down in the course of my harangue. Some of my speeches, however, are still readable; I can actually read them without falling asleep; and if you can select from all my poetry a poem like 'Death and Dr. Hornbook,' combining humour with pathos or sublimity, I will believe that it may keep my book alive for a few years. But the mere heaviness of my poetry will sink me. I sat down to read it yesterday, beginning with the 'Vernal Walk,' and in ten minutes I was asleep, with the volume at my feet. The strongest proof that it will not live is the fact that it is dead already. What Sheffielder reads it except yourself and the Doctor? Are there fifty persons living who can truly say they have each read ten pages of my verse? I once had an opportunity of examining a copy of my works presented by me to a 'great admirer of my genius.' He had commenced reading 'The Ranter,' a poem of some laboured merit, but he stuck fast half-way. All the pages except twenty-three were uncut; and I found that the 'admirer of my genius' probably did not know by name 'The Village Patriarch,' 'The Exile,' 'Bothwell,' 'Withered Wild Flowers,' 'They met in Heaven,' 'The Recording Angel,' 'Come and Gone,' 'The Splendid Village,' &c. No, it is not an easy matter for fools 'to live in all de mouths of their posteriors.' See the 'Louisiad' of Peter Pindar, a forgotten immortal!"

EBENEZER ELLIOTT TO FRANCIS FISHER.

"*Great Houghton, near Barnsley,*
29th May, 1843.

"DEAR FRANCIS,—Having long wished to try my hand at 'metrical epistolary composition,' as the great lexicographer would probably have termed it, I have addressed to you a lengthy rhymed letter, written, I confess, chiefly as an exercise, and to drive away painful

thoughts; and I must apologise for sending it to Mr. Tait, although there is nothing in it which, if printed, could hurt your feelings, or in any degree otherwise injure or prejudice you. Of course, I do not know that Mr. Tait will like it; I, however, think well of it, as daddies usually do of their youngest bairn. Your last letter, though it informs me that we shall probably meet no more on this side the unutterable deep, is the best I ever received from you; and your almost unconscious praise of your father is the sweetest hymn of the affections I ever read. Since I received it, I think of you more frequently, for you are become scarce. In the mornings, when I am saddest (it is in the *morning* that people hang themselves), you come to my assistance. I live over again your visits—your holdings forth—the little sermons! Surely those hours were happy hours, and my house at Upperthorpe, on your account, a happy place. I often think of our wanderings to the Rivilin, and how we always paused when we reached Walkly Bank, to take into our souls the sudden burst of glorious prospect on the right and the left, beneath and before us, over cloud-loving Stannington to what a Hebrew bard might call 'The moors of God.' I am glad that you have got to Dorchester, and that you like your little flock. The fame of you will soon go forth. By-and-bye, you will address larger congregations; and in a few years (weeds only grow fast) obtain a salary that will decently maintain you. Then if, in the meantime, you have sufficient self-denial to remain unmarried, and will marry (if you marry) a healthy lady of forty or upwards (as I have before advised you to do), you will be a happy man. Such a partner will not be too old and hard for new impressions, and she will always be ready and happy to bless God with you. But, whatever you do, don't marry an old cat of a widow. If you do, she will lock your bed-room doors when she goes out, and put the keys in her pocket, lest you steal your own things. Thanks for your newspaper. With the best respects of Mrs. E. and my daughters, I remain," &c.

EBENEZER ELLIOTT TO FRANCIS FISHER.

"*Great Houghton, near Barnsley,*
5th June, 1844.

"DEAR FRANCIS,—Please tell me if the enclosed will would be a good and safe one? If it would, please return it to me. If it would not, please send me one that would, with your charge, and I will remit you a Post-office order. My wish, you will see, is to leave the income of all I have to Mrs. E. during her life, for the maintenance of herself and daughters; and, after her decease, to divide the principal, share and share alike, among all my children, without appointing a stranger trustee, if it can be safely, that is legally, avoided.

"In your last, you said I might send you the number of 'Tait' containing my rhymed letter, if I could do so without expense to myself or you. Finding that Mr. Innocent charges me fourpence for every number of 'Tait' which I receive through him, I concluded that I could not send the number without expense to you, and therefore did not send it.

"I am not hearty at present; but heartily wishing you all possible good, I remain," &c.

EBENEZER ELLIOTT TO FRANCIS FISHER.

"*Great Houghton, 27th May*, 1845.

"DEAR FRANCIS,—In reply to your favour of the 24th I inclose a note to Mr. Tait, and heartily wish you success. The attempt itself is creditable to you; there are glory and good omen in it, even if you fail.

"Mr. Tait declined to risk the publication of my prose some time ago; and he understands such matters. Since I wrote or spoke it much of it has been said better by Cobden, Bright, Fox, and others. A few days make sad havoc with the immortals of a fortnight! Even old Morrison is forgotten!

"'Why should futurity give me or thee hopes,
If not a pinch of dust remains of Cheopes?'

"I begin to think that the sun has shifted his quarters farther north; if so, you will be likely to be warmer where you are than I am here. If you were to see how the cold lifts my back up you would think me an old man! Mrs. Elliott rejoices with me in your heroic expedition northward, though she is not at all surprised to learn—

> "'What a grandeur, what a spirit,
> What a bold genius you inherit!'

It is, she says, precisely as she expected."

EBENEZER ELLIOTT TO FRANCIS FISHER.

"*Great Houghton, 22nd September*, 1845.

"DEAR FRANCIS,—I am sorry you did not succeed at Edinbro'; but, never mind, you did your best. Napoleon met with a rebuff when he asked to be a fourpenny lieutenant; but it could not be said of him that he did not make the attempt.

"Burns, I fear, understood the Scotch character well, and has drawn it truly; but I am surprised that Sawney should want courtesy. To say of a man that he is not civil is to say that he is deficient in good sense. Well, Sawney has done great things in his time. We must take him as he is, and be thankful.

"I should like to have another stroll with you before I die, if only that I might feel assured that I have legs. I feel nothing so much here as the want of some one to walk with. At Sheffield, I had you, and Paul, and Fowler always come-at-able. I would rather chat or dine with you here than in that Heavenly House of yours; not that I have any dislike to it, but it seems so far off, and so long to wait, if we are not to get at it before the resurrection-day. And then those confounded worms in the meantime, and the cold! The very thought of it gives me the rhumatizm. Don't laugh at my bad spelling. I have not only lost my dictionary, but almost the use of speech. Sometimes I think that I have lost my tongue, and that 'Ar Mester' has lost

her's; but that is a mistake sure to be rectified. You know nothing of these 'mysteries of Hymen,' which is very unfortunate for you. Seriously, I will see you at Dorchester, or elsewhere, before I 'gang hame.' I must not conclude without saying, that had you been Mrs. Elliott's own and only son she could not have been more sorry than she is at your want of success at Edinbro'."

EBENEZER ELLIOTT TO FRANCIS FISHER.

"*Hargitt Hill, near Barnsley, 4th April*, 1846.

"DEAR FRANCIS,—I rejoice to hear that you are going to Lincoln. Old as I am, I shall hear of you being Unitarian Bishop of Liverpool yet!

"I had once customers at Lincoln; but I have almost forgot their very names. Jepson, lord mayor; Sharp, boat-owner; Barrett, machine-maker, &c. Pickslay (once of the firm Green and Pickslay, of Sheffield) was an apprentice of Jepson's when I knew Lincoln.

"It is luxury for one to read your letters, so full of love for all good creatures, and particularly for your excellent parents. God bless you! I shall never see you again in this world. Never mind. In the next we will have a roast duck cooked by Ar Mester, and cramfull of boiled onions.

"Our agriculturists here seem fully aware that they must soon quit the nursery for six foot infants, and be baptised in the fire of competition. They looked as if they had been too well dosed with jalap and scammony by Act of Parliament. Mrs. E. begs to be remembered to you."

EBENEZER ELLIOTT TO EBENEZER HINGSTON.

"*Great Houghton, near Barnsley,*
14th November, 1843.

"DEAR SIR,—I duly received your favour of the 8th instant. The poets of our day have a glorious prospect before them, if they will pursue their own interests through the wants of the age, and write in prose. I

should have written few verses if, before I had acquired the bad habit of rhyming, I had been honest enough to confess to myself that my thoughts were not good enough for prose. The best poetry of the age—the only poetry that is read—is written in prose, and to be found in the prose of Scott, Dickens, Richter, Thomas Carlyle, and others. Verse is a trick which the age has seen through and despises. It is utterly unsaleable, and absolutely unread, even by the writers of verse themselves. Nobody buys it. My poetry does not sell. The poems of Robert Nicoll have not paid the expenses of printing. To be able to write poetry in these days is anything but an enviable distinction. Tait is offered more poetry every month for nothing than would fill his Magazine; and his lady-manager, with equal honesty and frankness, calls the writers of it 'rhyming bores.' Why, then, labour for disappointment and contempt, by writing composition which, when printed, is unpublishable? If you are resolved to be an author, write prose. But you will not succeed by brooding over your own pain. Look abroad on life—use it, and serve it; and rest assured, the poetry that is in you will not be less poetical for being made useful, and expressed in the best way, that is, in honest prose. "I am, dear Sir, yours very truly,

"EBENEZER ELLIOTT.

"How shall I return you your manuscripts?"

EBENEZER ELLIOTT TO EBENEZER HINGSTON.

"*Great Houghton, near Barnsley,*
24th November, 1843.

"MY DEAR YOUNG FRIEND,—I am sorry you should have thought it necessary to apologise for writing to me. I think your correspondence an honour—it is certainly a compliment; and I shall always be happy to hear from you. If I have given you pain, pardon me, as I deserve to be pardoned; for I could not have written otherwise than I did, had I been writing to my dearest child.

"Before poetry can become extinct, earnestness and

honesty, sorrow and gladness, the great mystery itself in which we live and die, must also cease to be; and before I turn my back on the muse she must give me the opportunity. I am not a poet, but, on the contrary, one of the dullest and slowest of minds, writing in the sweat of my brow. It is true, I can write good verses; but so may almost any man, woman, or child, that will take the pains; for though there is no art or mystery which requires a longer apprenticeship than this of verse-making, success in it implies no mental superiority. If you will read my lectures on poetry (my best compositions) in 'Tait's Magazine,' you will find that I by no means think this age unpoetical. Never was poetry better appreciated than at present. But verse is not poetry. It must be essentially *anti*-poetical, if it restrains the free expression of feeling. Shakspeare and Milton rejected rhyme for blank verse, and Scott both for prose. Shakspeare has written prose which, as poetry or as language, is equal to his blank verse, and consequently to any verse whatever; and this is especially true of Milton, one of the greatest masters of versification that ever wrote.

"Dramatic narrative is Carlyle's forte. In style, and in matters still more important, he is good and bad; but more bad than good: one of the best and worst of authors. He is dreamy and inconclusive, suggesting rather than expressing thoughts. But it is something to suggest a thought. I hate his metaphysics and everybody else's. I have not found one useful precept or hint, scarcely one good thought, in all the metaphysics I have read. If you like metaphysics in verse read 'Festus,' a drama by a genuine bard.

"That there is nothing in you do not you believe. Your compositions—your letters particularly—prove otherwise. But if there is nothing in you, put something in; and be sure of this, that if you are a man of genius, the thoughts that get in will come out improved. Get knowledge, thoughts, no matter whose; wed thought to thought, and make them breed; the offspring will be

your own. And sometimes write to me, I pray you do, that I may live with you some of my young years over again."

EBENEZER ELLIOTT TO EBENEZER HINGSTON.

"*Great Houghton, near Barnsley, Jan. 15th*, 1844.

"DEAR SIR,—I do not know your age, but if you are not more than 25 years old, I ought to read with wonder your letter of the 28th December last, especially when I compare it in imagination with what would probably have been my best had I attempted a similar production at your age. This cannot all be owing to the superior advantages which young men now possess. I do not remember the time when I was not sensible of my natural inferiority to others in all respects, physical and mental; my merit, if I have any, being my own. Perhaps I owe it to my natural dullness that I have not been troubled with misgivings like yours. Even now I cannot doubt that all God's creatures are safe in his hands. True it is, that as I approach the edge of darkness my thoughts darken too; for I have always dreaded death, or rather pain; and yet, if it shall be consistent with the designs of our Father to give me a quick death, I believe I shall die cheerfully. There is a more dreadful King of Terrors than 'Bumless Old No-belly;' his name is 'Want,' as the greatest of our few great men, Colonel Thompson, has finely said.

"On the subject of metaphysics, I will confess to you, my young instructor, that I have not spoken quite sincerely. Though I have found that this life is made of solid pudding, I *do* sometimes indulge 'those thoughts that wander through eternity,' and your rebuke, 'severe in youthful beauty,' makes me feel like Satan in the presence of Abdiel.

"Another of my young friends, John Watkins, Chartist leader, alluding to my assertion that Cowper's muse was conscience, said 'Yes, a creed-conscience.' True, it was

a creed-conscience; but let us not forget that when the future nerve-shaken bard was a boy, he did not dare to lift his eyes above the shoe-buckles of his bigger schoolfellows, and that not one of those tyrants has done anything worthy of remembrance. I have not his works, or your blushes should keep mine company; but I know he somewhere uses words to this purport: 'Oh, could I worship aught beneath the sun, I would let fly a captive bird into the boundless air, and kneel at thy altar, Liberty!'

"I will now try to answer some of your queries. When I was a boy I was remarkable for dullness and slowness of apprehension (as I still am), but quite confident that I was making progress. In my thirteenth year I could not understand the Scripture phrase, 'All flesh is *grass*,' and it would do you good to feel how wise, how great I felt, when I discovered its meaning, that 'All flesh was frail.' You seem constituted quite differently from me. Fifty years ago my convictions were exactly what they are now. I have never had occasion to rat out of my political creed, for I was always Jacobin through bone and marrow, and I have never doubted the great truths of Christianity. But I do sometimes doubt whether the end of my existence has been answered; whether I have not done more harm than good; whether the balance of *usefulness* is not against me. And yet it is certain that any man who can and will fairly earn more than maintains him, may, if he pleases, leave the world in a better condition than he found it; it is the grand curse of monopoly that it will not let men earn fairly more than will maintain them.

"I thank you for your letter; it is a fine compliment to my grey hairs. I have ordered the edition of Shelley you name. 'Festus' is out of print, but another edition is forthcoming. I have not the book, or I would give you the information you ask.

"Go on getting and keeping knowledge; make other men's thoughts your own by reflection, and fear not the issue. There is now a medium through which a clever

man may at any time reach the public. The readers of novels, it is true, do not read for instruction; and it is also true that one page of original thinking will keep an amusing book from oblivion. But there are minds that can transmit to posterity copies of themselves in little; and if it is possible that the writings of Moliere can perish, the maxims of Rochefaucault, which could be printed on half a sheet of foolscap, may outlive every other book in the French language.

"Do you know that De Foe was a Free-trader? The kernel of our new politico-economical philosophy is to be found in him.

"I do not know what lines you allude to, but I have a son called Francis, to whom I was on the point of sending your M.S."

EBENEZER ELLIOTT TO EBENEZER HINGSTON.

"*Great Houghton, 8th May,* 1844.

"DEAR SIR,—If you can write for the Magazines prose that will interest the general reader, you will soon find yourself on the road to success. Both Carlyle and Dickens started in Magazines—Tory, I believe. Do not despond if your first contribution should be rejected. If Coleridge had sent his 'Ancient Mariner' to a periodical, would it have been accepted? I believe not. Would its rejection have proved its worthlessness? Certainly not, but the poem would have been all the better, could it have been made acceptable to the general reader. Some of my best pieces have been rejected by Mr. Tait, and very properly.

"If I do not always answer you at length, do not conclude that your letters are not welcomed by me. They are exceedingly beautiful and surprising. They both please and instruct me—yes, and cheer me also.

"I am sorry to hear of your illness—not surprised. Your mind is 'O'er-informing its tenement of clay.' But I know it is vain to warn you. I might as well say to the pot on the fire, 'Don't boil.'"

EBENEZER ELLIOTT TO JOHN WATKINS.

"*Great Houghton Common, near Barnsley,*
10*th May*, 1842.

"DEAR SIR,—Did you ever read Cowper's letters? Your's want only the sweetness of his to be perfect.

"Yes, there is hope for America. *If well governed*, the rate of profit in the United States will go on steadily increasing for centuries; but that those States are not well governed at present their frightful currency errors fully prove. The other evil of the Union, slavery, will cure itself; for the blacks breed faster than the whites, and the latter will be forced to offer the former, not only the right hand of friendship, but the lip of love. America, however, unless you can be your grandfather, or turn Yankee in earnest, will not suit you.

"Happy, indeed, should I be to walk with you through the lanes of Surrey, your account of which almost makes me repent building here. If ever you come this way, and can contrive to spend a fortnight with me, I will show you some pretty walks in this neighbourhood; not like Rivilin, though.

"I am sorry to say I do not know one bookseller in London."

EBENEZER ELLIOTT TO JOHN WATKINS.

"*Great Houghton Common, near Barnsley,*
3rd June, 1842.

"DEAR SIR,—I thank you for your beautiful letter of the 1st instant. Your fine descriptions of the localities of Battersea make me ashamed of those of Great Houghton, and, lest you should form extravagant expectations relative to my present residence, I will briefly describe it to you. It is found fault with by architects, landscape-gardeners, and other such cattle, because the kitchen-garden is seen from the windows; but to a cottager, whose motto, copied from the squire's, is, 'Beware of poachers,' the cabbages, all round which he has so often

travelled, is an object of importance. My impugners would be right if my house were a villa or mansion; but it is a simple, gable-ended, old English farm-cottage, with its garden, orchard, croft, and field (about ten acres in all), a plain dwelling for a plain, retired old man: just such a place as a sensible bachelor of 300*l.* a year, with his black hair turning gray, would like to live in for the shooting season. The orchard, from behind the house, breaks over a steep bank in front of it, mingling with the kitchen-garden; and immediately before the porch is a flower-garden or lawn. The high ground on which the house stands commands varied and extensive prospects, but I am happy to say they are not all visible from the house itself; and I think of excluding some that are visible, for the greatest defect of the place is want of seclusion. I have, as yet, no walk in my grounds where I can saunter unobserved to collect and enjoy my thoughts in the cool of the evening.

Poets, you seem to think, are not swans. But neither are they birds of any kind. They are fish; and I think they have a right to complain that they are not cased in shell, like lobsters. Unable to provide meat and clothing for themselves—the only article they can command for outside and inside wear being water—they must be fish of some sort. In my opinion it is wrong to pension them off on anything but water. I don't say, Drown them; but I say, Throw them into their proper element! If they sink and rise no more, so much the better for them and the other fish, or such of them as can eat bones.

"I have had a contest with the Owenites myself. They will not see that competition is the law of God, unerring as that which carries the earth round the sun. Repeal that law, and there will be no pig so swinish as man. What worse than beasts we should be but for our necessities! The food monopoly is a vain attempt to repeal the eternal and all-merciful law of competition. Look at the consequences."

EBENEZER ELLIOTT TO JOHN WATKINS.

"*Great Houghton Common, 21st August*, 1842.

"DEAR SIR,—I am very much pleased with your critique on my lecture on Cowper and Burns. 'Cowper's,' you say, 'was a creed-conscience;' true, and he was not the less conscientious on that account. There is something striking, and, I think, new, in your observation, that, 'Byron was the poet of conscience.' Perhaps I shall steal it. I much doubt whether there is one good thought in all my writings that I have not stolen from somebody.

"In your last, just received, you ask, 'Why say that the food-monopoly killed Nicoll?' I say it, because that monopoly *did* kill him; but I am quite aware that I have dragged the subject of the Corn-laws into the lecture, as it were, by the head and shoulders. It is also true that the food-tax has stopped the mills in Lancashire; but not, I fear, without orders from the employers of your god. Madmen! as if in bread-taxed England the mills were not likely enough to stop of themselves! But as the old French aristocracy did so will ours do, even the work appointed them.

"How strange it seems that the best-conditioned and most fortunate rascals in the universe should *force* their multitudinous victims, not merely to learn the art of war (the simplest in the world, for it is nothing but the art of skulking or fighting out of the reach of the enemy), but also to adopt a mode of fighting which the oppressor can neither resist nor imitate, and which (if they are forced to adopt it) must succeed. But was Napoleon a skulker? Yes; he never fought but when he believed he had got a longer staff than his opponent; and therefore he was always the assailant, but not the less a skulker. Every improvement in the accursed art, and every weapon invented from the beginning of time—the staff, the sword, the shield, the lance, the arrow, the musket, the cannon, the rocket, the shell—have had but this one cowardly object, to fight, as it were, out of reach.

In two years the bread-taxers will be at war with the Executive. Can they induce their victims to join them, as the French aristocracy did? I fear they can. They are trying hard to *Foulon* it—in the end they will *Affgawn* it—in a country where there is more cover than in the American forest.

"How liable to error is figurative reasoning? for porcelain and delf-ware are, perhaps, equally permanent. But it is mournful to think that a fragment of either may possibly outlive London itself.

"What comparison, even as an editor, will O'Connor bear with poor Robert? As a noise-monger, of course, Robert could not compete with him of the loud voice, brazen face, and broad ——; or, as I translated these terms for the cockneys, 'Your own O'Connor, too, whose eloquence reminds me of that of Ulysses in Homer; for when the deep and mellow bass breaks forth from his great breast, the breath of all is hushed—all listen, all are still!"

CHAPTER VIII.

MISCELLANEOUS POEMS AND DRAMAS.

ELLIOTT's miscellaneous poems show most of the man, if not of the poet. He was the man of his times—a Cobbett in rhyme; one of the main instruments of Reform and Corn-law repeal; a Chartist, too, till the Chartists took the wrong road, and compelled him to leave them. He was not less excellent in the private relations of life. Compare him with Burns, and though he may fail in some respects as a poet, how much superior he rises as a man! Elliott, misunderstood and misrepresented, was not appreciated in his lifetime; but time will tell the truth of him. Burns, feted and caressed by the great of his land, had a sufficient sum of money subscribed to enable him to stock a farm; yet because he did not succeed the first year, he lost all perseverance, and sought, with degrading avidity, the unpoetic and unpatriotic trade of a gauger, for the gratification of wild and unsettled propensities. Elliott had to begin life again at a more advanced age than that at which Burns died; and was sober, industrious,

and fortunate. In their poetry, the chief advantage possessed by Burns was in his vein of humour; he was a better describer of manners and character. Did he possess more sensibility? No! His songs are chiefly in praise of love and liquor. Bacchus and Cupid were his gods. He says himself—

> "For me, an aim I never fash;
> I rhyme for fun."

Elliott rhymed for a better purpose. His ambition was not to raise a laugh; he thought too much of the wrongs and sufferings of his fellow-countrymen. Let them rejoice that could rejoice; as for him, he would rather weep with those that wept. Like the sorrowing minstrels at Babel's stream, he hung his harp on the willows.

Burns was a man of impulse—Elliott was only a poet of impulse. Burns might possess finer qualities; he was a genial, hearty good fellow, but more vices mingled with his virtues. The one was not more national than the other. Manly humanity equally characterised their writings; but was found more in the life of Elliott.

Elliott's greatest praise, a praise not due to Burns, was, that he not only endeavoured to raise man politically, but socially, or morally. He wished to give the working-man a taste for those fine arts which might redeem him from the grosser

impulses of his nature. He was well aware that though the bad government of others might occasion us much misery, our bad government of ourselves occasions more. A moral renewal is full as much needed as a political one. But would not political reform induce moral reform? for when men are elevated in their own opinions it occasions them to seek the good opinion of others.

I have already quoted very liberally from Elliott's poetry; but I cannot refrain from making a few more extracts. The following is a perfect treble and bass:—

FOREST-WORSHIP.

" Within the sun-lit forest,
Our roof the bright blue sky,
Where fountains flow, and wild flowers blow,
We lift our hearts on high.
Beneath the frown of wicked men
Our country's strength is bowing;
But, thanks to God, they can't prevent
The lone wild flowers from blowing!

" High, high above the tree-tops
The lark is soaring free;
Where streams the light through broken clouds
His speckled breast I see.
Beneath the might of wicked men
The poor man's worth is dying;
But, thanked be God! in spite of them
The lark still warbles flying!

" The preacher prays, 'Lord, bless us!'
'Lord, bless us!' echo cries;
'Amen!' the breezes murmur low,—
'Amen!' the rill replies.

The ceaseless toil of wo-worn hearts
The proud with pangs are paying;
But here, O God of earth and heaven,
The humble heart is praying!"

FOOTPATHS.

"Wolves with the hearts of devils!
They steal our footpaths too!
The poor man's walk they take away,
The solace of his only day,
Where, now unseen, the flowers are blowing,
And, all unheard, the stream is flowing!
What worse could devils do?"

Burns has not a more pathetic ballad than the following:—

HE WENT.

"He left me sad, and crossed the deep,
A home for me to seek;
He never will come back again:
My heart, my heart will break!
To see me toil for scanty food,
He could not bear, he said;
But promised to come back again,
His faithful Ann to wed.

"Bad men had turned into a hell
The country of his birth;
And he is gone who should have stayed
To make it heaven on earth.
A heaven to me it would have been,
Had he remained with me;
Oh, bring my William back again
Thou wild, heart-breaking sea!

"He should have stayed to overthrow
The men who do us wrong;
When such as he fly far away,
They make oppressors strong.

But, oh, though worlds of cruel waves
Between our torn hearts rise,
My William, thou art present still
Before my weeping eyes.

" Why hast thou sought a foreign land,
And left me here to weep?
Man! man! thou should'st have sent our foes
Beyond that dismal deep!
For when I die, who then will toil
My mother's life to save?
What hope will then remain for her?
A trampled workhouse grave!

HE WROTE.

" He did not come, but letters came,
And money came in one;
But he would quickly come, they said—
'When I,' she sighed, 'am gone!'
Thenceforth she almost welcomed death,
With feelings high and brave;
Because she knew that her true love
Would weep upon her grave.

" 'No parish hirelings,' oft she said,
'My wasted corpse shall bear;
The honest labour of my hands
Hath purchased earth and prayer;
Nor childless will my mother be—'
The dying sufferer smiled—
'Thou wilt not want, for William's heart
Is wedded to thy child.'

" But death seemed loth to strike a form
So beautiful and young;
And o'er her long, with lifted dart,
The pensive tyrant hung;
And life in her seemed like a sleep,
As she drew nearer home;
But when she waked, more eagerly
She asked, 'Is William come?'

" 'Is William come?' she wildly asked.
The answer still was 'No!'
She's dead! but through her closing lids
The tears were trickling slow;
And like the fragrance of a rose,
Whose snowy life is o'er,
Pale beauty lingered on the lips
Which he will kiss no more.

HE CAME.

" At length he came. None welcomed him—
The decent door was closed;
But near it stood a matron meek,
With pensive looks composed.
She knew his face, though it was changed,
And gloom came o'er his brow;
'They're gone,' she said, 'but you're in time;
They're in the churchyard now.'

" He reached the grave, and sternly bade
The impatient shovel wait—
'Ann Spencer, aged twenty-five,'
He read upon the plate.
'Why didst thou seek a foreign land,
And leave me here to die?'
The sad inscription seemed to say—
But he made no reply.

" Her mother saw him through her tears,
But not a word she said—
Nor could he know that days had passed
Since last she tasted bread.
She stood, in comely mourning, there,
Self-stayed in her distress;
The dead maid's toil bought earth and prayer.
Sleep on, proud Britoness!

" But thou, meek parent of the dead,
Where now wilt thou abide?
With William, in a foreign land,
Or by thy daughter's side?

Oh, William's broken-heart is sworn,
To cross no more the foam!
Full soon will men cry—'Hark! again!—
Three now!—they're *all* at home!' "

Several of Elliott's best pieces may be found in his "Miscellaneous Poems," and some that seem not to have been written by him, so different are they to others in thought and expression. For grandeur and beauty we may refer to "Win-hill," "The Wonders of the Lane," "The Excursion," &c.; for pathos, to "The Dying Boy and the Sloe Blossom," "Thomas," "Poor Andrew;" for power and eccentricity, to "Great Folks at Home," "Bawl Brawl Hall," "The Storming of Badajoz;" for good purpose, "Rub or Rust," "The Home of Taste," &c.

In the preface to his "Miscellaneous Poems," Elliott beautifully exemplifies the purity and disinterestedness of his motives in a passage of prose unsurpassed by all his verses. "I am sufficiently rewarded if my poetry has led one poor despairing victim of misrule from the alehouse to the fields; if I have been chosen of God to show his desolated heart that, though his wrongs have been heavy and his fall deep, and though the spoiler is yet abroad, still in the green lanes of England the primrose is blowing, and, on the mountain-top, the lonely fir, with her many fingers, pointing to our Father in Heaven." There is also in this preface an

indignant attack, in self-defence, upon one of his false accusers.

"Rhymed Rambles" suggest that Elliott might have made a Childe Harold's Pilgrimage through England.

Of all Elliott's productions, none are less happy than his dramas. Of these we have two specimens, one entitled "Kerhonah," the other "Taurassdes." They are not only unfortunate in title, but in subject. The former is an attempt to dramatise the subjugation of the Indians by the whites, our sympathies being enlisted on the side of the Indians; the latter is an Eastern story, but inexplicable. Elliott was a bad plotter, and could not individualise character. We are left quite in the dark in his drama, or led away by Will-o'-Wisp gleams of poetry or passion. The story of a drama should be obvious from the commencement, that he who runs may read. The author should embark his reader in a torrent of action, and carry him along with him; but Elliott leaves us lost and wondering at his meaning. His characters come and go, "with the motions of a pewterer's hammer," we know not how nor why. There is no central figure, round which all the rest are grouped. The story does not run, like a hare, to return and die where it set out, or, like the image of eternity, with its tail in its mouth. Hamlet says, "The

players cannot keep counsel; they tell all." So should it be; we should see and hear all to know all.

But it is not to be regretted that Elliott did not succeed as a dramatist; there is no true reputation to be gained by writing for the stage in its present degraded condition. It is not a laudable object of ambition. Managers do not understand their duty, or have not the virtue to practise it; actors are servile tools of managers, and authors of both. The ill name which the drama got in the reign of Charles the Second has not been wiped off; public opinion, instead of being conciliated by a drama of pure morals, has been defied by the licentiousness of the stage; the respectable portion of the community have been driven away, and rakes and libertines courted. Thus the stage is now under a fatal necessity to pander to vitiated tastes and corrupt fancies. The acted drama is adapted not to reform but to harden the vicious and immoral; and all who write dramas "chaste and noble," may print them for the closet, but must not expect to see them on the stage. This is the true reason of the decline of the drama, nor must we look for its revival until the system is entirely changed, and the stage taken out of the hands of private speculators and managed by the public.

Having compared Elliott with Burns, let us see what comparison he will bear with Byron.

No two beings could come into the world under more diverse auspices than those which attended the births of Lord Byron and Ebenezer Elliott. The former was born at the top of Fortune's wheel—the latter underneath its rolling weight. Both were victims of our high state of civilisation, but at the opposite ends of attraction and repulsion. One felt the "fulness of satiety"—the other the pressure of adverse circumstances. Yet it may be questioned whether the facilities afforded to the former were more favourable to the development of his powers than the trials which strengthened the genius of the latter, and refined and purified it. Strong indeed must have been the poetic impulse in Byron to make him proof to the allurements of aristocratic life, and the disappointments and disgusts of authorship. "A nobleman a poet!" the sneering world exclaimed, and made him, in a fit of spleen, curse the pen which had gained him honourable envy—even as a ruined gambler curses the dice that have been the fatal instuments of his undoing. Yet did Byron labour in his vocation to the last; and how industriously let his voluminous poems testify! Equally strong must have been the same impulse in Elliott, which could make him, a working man, toil with thought,

the hardest pioneer, after bodily labour had indisposed him for mental exertion. As the truth and nature of Byron were not spoiled by the flatteries of Fortune, so neither did her frowns prevent the genius of Elliott. A classical education did not encumber the mind of the former with pedantry, nor did the want of such an education make the latter an ignorant barbarian. Both were self-taught; for, indeed, who can teach the man of genius? Can originality be learnt? Genius knows more by intuition than mere talent can acquire by study. Nature's gifts are superior to the endowments of schools; and he whom she inspires arrives at once, by a happy flight, at that summit which plodding art can reach only step by step. Byron says he hated the "drilled dull lesson, forced down word by word." Yet did he read and observe much, but think more. Book-learning to the man of genius is necessary in no further degree than the bucket of water which is poured into a dry pump, to make it yield the stores of its own inexhaustible spring; or as the "drink" which is technically given to wet the whistle of a flute, and make it discourse most eloquent music. It is the manure which, spread on a good soil, quickens its latent fecundity, and causes it to bring forth, in some thirty, in some sixty, in some a hundred fold.

Shakspeare was little the worse for not having had the advantage of a classical education, and Ben Jonson's Latinity was an absolute impediment to his native English tongue. Theory and practice differ on this point. Whether prosperity or adversity is the most favourable to genius may also be questioned. Too free a facility may weaken the force of ideas; too much repression may stop their current, or divert the flow of them. Gray, in his incomparable "Elegy," says,—

> "Chilled penury repressed their noble rage,
> And froze the genial current of the soul."

But adversity, if not crushing, is probably less fatal to genius than prosperity. Virtue that is strengthened by adversity is too often corrupted by prosperity. The flower that sickens in the sun blooms sweetly in the shade; the plant that springs from underneath a rock, though probably distorted in its growth, waves its green branches triumphantly overhead, but would have degenerated to a weed in the fulsome warmth of a dunghill. A mixed or struggling state, teaching various experiences, and keeping the mind exercised, is best. Poets have ever been regarded as camomile, that grows faster when trod upon; or as flowers, that shed most fragrance when crushed; or as bees, that make most honey under the driving system—that is, when allowed none for their own share.

Genius is a self-willed thing, and seeks the food necessary for its powers wherever instinct leads it. This is generally of a desultory and miscellaneous kind, like the herbage of the fields, where many different grasses mix their sweets. Hard bodily labour is, perhaps, the greatest obstacle to mental improvement. Ordinary capacities are apt to make it an excuse for not striving to improve themselves, or for sinking into brutal or demoralising ignorance. It is therefore greatly to the credit of genius that it will pursue knowledge under difficulties; that its desire of fame is a continual spur to excellence; and, moreover, that it rescues the being whom it favours from idleness or debauchery, and elevates him to seek pleasures, not of the senses, but of the soul. It may not, and, indeed, too seldom does, enable its possessor to break the chain of worldly adversity, but it prevents the iron which enters the soul from rusting there and cankering it.

Had it not been that this divine gift redeemed him from self, Byron would doubtless have spent much of his life in the follies and dissipations of his rank; and Elliott, instead of raising himself into a master manufacturer and merchant, would most probably have given himself up to that despair which, hopeless of good, makes evil its good, or, in other words, turns bad to worse,

because that is easier than to make it better. Blessed, therefore, be poetry and love! They are divine missionaries, to convert the mind and heart, and to make fallen humanity regain its original divinity.

Politics are the burden of Elliott's song, and a heavy burden they are; poetry and politics do not agree. Poetry will ever escape from this "working-day world," and soar "to realms apart, to regions of her own." You cannot marry immortal verse to such an unequal and unseemly mate. But Elliott attributed the social evils which he had experienced, and which he saw others suffer, to political causes; and whatever a poet feels most strongly, he is apt to make the theme of his genius. Perhaps it is more to his honour, as an honest man, that his poetry sung the sorrows which had moved his feelings and sympathies, than if he had tuned his lyre to gain the ear of pride or power. The Corn-law was, to his imagination, the serpent from the sea, and he a second Laocoon, who was linked with his children in a chain of torture. All his efforts are bent to slay the monster that had bound him in its tortuous folds, and "stung his every thought to strife." He succeeded at last, and now his effigy may stand with this dragon under his feet.

Happily, however, for his fame, he has written many poems that are not political. His muse fre-

quently tired of sounding the trumpet of exasperation, it was a task that was torture to her, and she soothed herself with the "soft complaining lute." His Castalia was not always a fountain of bitter waters, it sometimes flowed sweetly and pleasantly, like a stream in Arcadia.

Elliott had suffered too severely to allow his muse to beguile him long from what he deemed "the cause." He takes the first opportunity to recur to his troubles. The Corn-law was a base string, which evermore checked the bird just as it was beginning to wing its happy flight to its woodland home, and by which it was drawn back to its cage, where, like Byron's falcon, it beat—

> "Its beak and breast against its wiry dome,
> Till the blood tinged its plumage."

His steel-trade was in fault for this. His political poetry was inspired by the furnace; his irons are heated in the chimney of his own manufactory. His muse recruits her wing in the country; in the "town of the cloud" it droops, and becomes dingy.

Elliott possesses much of the compressed vigour of Byron; but lacks his philosophical transparency of thought, and classical elegance of expression. In Byron, each word is a thought that revolves around the ruling idea, reflecting the light which it receives, like the satellites of Jupiter.

Byron's darkest gloom is instinct with a light that renders that darkness visible. Elliott is more chaotic; his passions emit with the fitful force of a volcano's flames, not clearly traceable as the course of the lava stream. He is frequently abstract to mystification; there is a want of individual character or separate idiosyncracy in him. Byron's poetry resembles a river, rapid yet clear, you see the bottom as it runs. Elliott's is turbid with the violence of its motion. Probably Elliott's feelings are as passionate as Byron's, but he does not refine upon them so well; that is to say, he does not so clearly illustrate his meaning with the force of intellect, as to convince at the same time that he excites. His ideas seem as if poured from a bottle, rather than an urn, bubbling, not flowing forth. His muse labours, and her deliverance, like that of the Pythoness, is with the inspiration of pain. He is declamatory rather than argumentative; he does not always carry our understanding along with the torrent of his feelings. His denunciations strike with a stunning force, that drives the apprehension back for a while to return with fuller power; or like the shot from a gun, which reaches its object before the report can be heard.

Elliott's sarcasm is very bitter; and yet it proceeds not so much from ill-will as from the irritation

of his good-will. He is bold, because honest; bitter, because true. Yet he is not less remarkable for pathos than for invective.

It is difficult to conceive that if Elliott had possessed Byron's opportunities, he would not have been equal to him as a poet; his character as a man must be deemed superior.

Elliott's forte, like Byron's, is in describing remorse—instance "sad Senena;" but while Byron's is impenitent with pride, Elliott's is softened with sorrow, and accepts misery as a fitting judgment for sin. In summing up Elliott's merits, we may say that he is a poet of Nature's own making, though almost marred by man; that, leaving out his politics, and making allowance for those inelegancies which a classical education would have corrected, he is worthy to rank with the best which England has produced.

As the reader may be desirous to view Elliott through other eyes than mine, I will here insert a criticism written for this work by Richard Bedingfield, on the posthumous publications of the poet, entitled "More Prose and Verse. By the Corn-law Rhymer." The reader will perceive that Mr. Bedingfield is a psychological critic, or transcendentalist; and it may be interesting to know what a "ripe and good scholar" of the ideal school may think of such a realist as Elliott.

"MORE PROSE AND VERSE.

"The highest poetry is that which not only suggests the infinite, but brings down the things of Eternity to the comprehension of finite minds. *This* poetry is religion. God is the great Poet, whose utterances are in the stars, and, above all, in the soul of man. The soul is divine; and he who can reveal some portion of its essence must have genius—genius not only to reveal what is part of itself, but its relation to the universal.

"Now that Ebenezer Elliott is dead, his claims to genius are canvassed among lovers of poetry; and the general verdict is in his favour. To genius of a *secondary* order (if that is possible), there can be no question, the volumes before us have a title. To the inspiration which dwells on the mind for ever—the passionate, wise, majestic, and sublime expression of a great and a powerful intellect, and a vast imagination—Elliott has no claims. Unequal in his best passages, and in the vigour of his life, he frequently, in these volumes, betrays the inroads which time makes on the intellect and the fancy, and wearies us with the dilution of his genius in feeble and ill-judged verses. But there are some passages we could here and there select worthy of the Corn-law Rhymer's best days, breathing the spirit of resignation and peace—the

outpouring of a full heart and fervent soul, though not bearing the strong impress of distinct individuality which characterises the works of great poets. We select a specimen—

" ' And to the Father of eternal days,
And fairest things that fairer yet will be,
Shall I no song of adoration raise,
While Passion's world, and Life's great agony,
Are one dread hymn—dread progresser—to thee?
Thou, Love, art progress! and be thine the praise,
If I have ever loved thy voice divine,
And o'er the sadness of my slandered lays
Flings its redeeming charm a note of thine.
O gentlest Might Almighty! if of mine
One strain shall live, let it thy impress bear,
And please wherever humble virtues twine
The rose and woodbine with the thorns of care,
Thriving because they love! Thy temple, Lord, is there!' "

"The religious idea, however, is not the dominant one in Elliott's poetry, as it is in the works of a few of our imaginative writers; for instance, Mrs. Browning, whose mind is larger and more ethereal than his. Elliott was in earnest, and wrote with fire; but he was no thinker, and there is much vacillation in the tone of his mind. In these volumes the absence of a strong directing purpose is frequently felt, and many a good thought is lost for want of clearness and condensation. It is evident that he wished *not* to be diffuse; but there is painful evidence that mind and taste were largely wanting in the composition of this poet. There is

more of the physical than the ideal in these volumes; and when Elliott attempts to introduce a supernatural element his muse is not propitious. The longest poem in the first volume, 'Etheline,' is quite a failure; and yet passages may be found interspersed through it not devoid of sweetness and fancy. It is in the natural and the human that he is at home. Elliott's philosophy did not lie much beneath the surface; and, unlike Wordsworth, he said that he did not love things for anything they might suggest, but for the simple reality they embodied. He loved a flower because it was so, and the symbolism of the universe was, therefore, lost on him. His religion was that of nature; and a few lines which we extract will afford a favourable specimen of his sentiments on the great subject of human destiny:—

"'To live in vain! to live in pain!
To toil in hopeless sadness!
Is this the doom of godlike man,
O God of Love and Gladness?
Not so the rose in summer blows—
Not so the moon her changes knows—
Not so the storm his madness.

"'From storms that rock the oak to sleep,
Thy woods their beauty borrow;
And flowers to-day unheeded weep,
Whose seeds will live to-morrow.
So man, by painful ages taught,
Will build at last on truthful thought
And wisdom, won from sorrow

"'Else, what a lie were written wide
By thy right hand, my Father,
O'er all thy seas in crimson dyed,
When morning is a bather;
O'er all thy vales of growing gold,
Or where, on mountains bleak with cold,
Thy clouds to battle gather!'"

"Elliott was of opinion that his prose possesses higher merit than his poetry; here, however, he was decidedly wrong. If he *should* live (and the question of a poetic immortality is not to be summarily disposed of), it will be by his poetry alone. There is no remarkable excellence in his prose, and his sentiments are generally erroneous and betray a lack of judgment. We confess that, with half-a-dozen exceptions, we doubt the permanence of any poetic fame in the present century. Shelley, Byron, Keats, Wordsworth, and Coleridge, had all a genius peculiar to themselves. And not only was this a distinctive character, but it exercised a strong influence on their age. It cannot be said that this is the case with the writings of Ebenezer Elliott. With every wish to do justice to his memory, we cannot think the genius a sublime and great one that does not carry the general mind of humanity onwards in the career of improvement—not only elevating and strengthening the mind and heart, but, like the sun, creating life and developing the latent germs of thought. This, the highest and the noblest

prerogative of genius, is above all party and political questions; this creative imagination it is which 'bodies forth the forms of things unknown,' and intimates the everlasting. In the calm power of inspiration, the far-seeing insight which no study and amount of thought can give, the spirit of man evinces that it is not born of clay. In the lightning-flashes of a vivid and passionate imagination, the poet often suggests great truths which even a profound philosophy seldom developes; but in the lower aspects of fancy and feeling, whatever the natural beauty and sweetness on which the eye rests satisfied, we perceive nothing save the flesh, blood, and bones of our being. To imagination and intellect Elliott has scarcely any claims, but 'More Prose and Verse' will have charms for those who do not require the highest elements of poetry, who do not seek to dive into the recesses of our deep nature, and trace the mysterious works of God to their source in Him who is the Light of all light."

CHAPTER IX.

BEAUTIES OF ELLIOTT.

CONSCIENCE.

"Guilt hath a tongue
That blabs what he would hide."

SEDUCTION.

"Oh, cold men!
Ye pluck the flower, and lo, it is a weed!"

WRATH.

"Wrath, like a serpent, wrinkled on his brow."

HORRORS OF PLAGUE.

"He spake—and when he ceased the firm rock reeled
In deeper darkness; thunder o'er their heads
Roared and was still; then, like the distant sound
Of worlds in ruin hurled, a voice was heard—
'Plague! wander wild among the homes of men,
And leave the fates to me.' Hades fell prone.
'Didst thou not hear?' he cried; 'Clouds heard and fled;
Winds and the thunder heard, and where are they?
Tremendous silence! O thou palsied earth!
Whose footsteps shook thee? To my soul dismayed
Speak, cloudless storm! and soundless lightnings, say
What 'tis ye fear? Was it a dream?' At once
Gone were the giant angels. Where they stood
Was loneliness: no living thing was there,
But the breeze lifted up the little leaf,
And on the cold rock lay the moonbeam cold."

TIME.

" Time ever moves, the only traveller
That tires not, rests not. Dilatory man
May loiter and may pause; Time pauses not.
How fast his wings have swept away the hours!"

APPROACHING STORM.

" Darkness was spread o'er half the sky. The moon
Slept on her sea of blue. The stars appeared
To dream around her, in night's awful noon!
Wild lightnings, fluttering distant, fringed with fire
The growing darkness of the wrathful west;
And on sublime Potomac's troubled breast,
Convolved in seeming agony and ire,
The red reflection like a dragon burned.
And though the coming thunder was not heard,
Yet on the breezeless sky, perturbed in dread,
The silent bear his gleaming eyeballs turned;
Hoarse croaked the eagle on the mountain's head;
The buffalo in ominous horror lowed;
The storm-fiend whispered from his desert cave;
The forest shuddered; the tumultuous cloud
Wandered in Heaven; black rolled the moaning wave."

CONCISE NARRATIVE.

" My love went to the war, and came not back;
Prince Charles, they said, was worsted in the strife.
Anxious I watched on reputation's rack,
But Alfred fled beyond the sea for life.
Soon I became a mother!—not a wife!
My wrathful parents spurned me from their door.
Oh, cherished like the choicest garden flower,
And nurtured on the breast of tenderness,
And all unusèd to the evil hour,
How should their silk-clad daughter face distress?
Where should the outcast Emma lay her head?
I sought and found a little lowly shed,
Where long we lived resigned and calm, though poor;
My active needle earned our daily bread.

But sickness, then by famine followed, came;
My hungry boy looked up for food, and pined!
My wearying task was profitless; my frame
Enfeebled by disease, unnerved my mind.
I would not beg the alms of charity,
Nor ask the legal dole of paupery;
No, I did worse—far worse. Heaven pardon me!
Thou would'st not think that Emma once was fair,
Yet fair she was, or Envy's self hath lied;
And she had still some sweet and drooping charms—
But she had still some virtue and some pride.
I turned abhorrent from lust's venomous arms;
How *could* I clasp pollution to my heart?
I wept, I prayed, but want would not depart;
And my boy's asking look, so pale and sad,
Drove me in one unhappy moment mad.
No pitying daughter of the rich and free,
With angel looks and bounty, came to me.
Oh, how I envied then the spotless maid,
Who passed me blushing, and almost afraid!
Spurned by the base, scarce pitied by the good,
Affliction rushed upon me like a flood.
No aid without, and want and woe within;
Deserted—ah, no—left—by him I loved,
My life's life was that boy, the child of sin!
What mother's heart could see his tears unmoved?
I pawned the stolen silk!—detected—tried—
In the thronged court I stood, half petrified;
And there was doomed, beyond the billowy tide,
On wild Columbia's shore of tears to groan."

LILY AND ROSE.

" Pale mourned the lily where the rose had died."

MARY STUART.

" Perhaps the artist might, with cunning hand,
Mimic the morn on Mary's lip of love;
And Fancy might before the canvas stand,
And deem he saw the unreal bosom move.

But who could paint her heavenly soul which glows
With more than kindness—the soft thoughts that rove
Over the moonlight, of her heart's repose—
The wish to hood the falcon, spare the dove,
Destroy the thorn, and multiply the rose?
Oh, hadst thou words of fire, thou couldst not paint
My Mary, in her majesty of mind,
Expressing half the queen, and half the saint—
Her fancy wild, as pinions of the wind,
Or sky-ascending eagle that looks down
Calm on the homeless cloud he leaves behind,
Yet beautiful as freshest flower full-blown,
That bends beneath the midnight dews, reclined;
Or yon resplendent path o'er ocean's slumber thrown."

DARNLEY.

" Pride without honour!—body without soul!
The heartless breast a brainless head implies.
If men are mad when passion scorns control,
And self-respect with shame and virtue flies—
Darnley hath long been mad. Thou coxcomb rude!
Thou reptile, shone on by an angel's eyes!
Intemperate brute, with meanest thoughts imbued!
Dunghill! wouldst thou the sun monopolise?
Wouldst *thou* have Mary's love? for what?—Ingratitude."

BOTHWELL.

" A troubled dream thy changeful life hath been,
Of storm and splendour. Girt with awe and power,
A Thane illustrious, married to a queen—
Obeyed, loved, flattered: blasted in an hour.
A homicide; a homeless fugitive
O'er earth, to thee a waste without a flower;
A pirate on the ocean, doomed to live
Like the dark osprey! Could Fate sink thee lower?
Defeated, captured, dungeoned in this tower,
A raving maniac."

MURDER OF DARNLEY.

" Up, up the rushing, red volcano went,
And wide o'er earth, and heaven, and ocean flashed
A torrent of earth-lightning, skyward sent.

O'er heaven, earth, sea, the dread explosion crashed;
Then, clattering far, the downward fragments dashed.
Roared the rude sailor o'er the illumined sea,
'Hell is in Scotland!' Shuddered Roslin's hall;
Lowed the scared heifer on the distant lea;
Trembled the city; shrieked the festival;
Paused the pale dance from his delighted task;
Quaked every masker of the splendid hall;
Raised hands unanswered questions seemed to ask;
And there was one who leaned against the wall,
Close pressing to her face, with hands convulsed, her mask."

REMINISCENCE.

"White billow, know'st thou Scotland? Did thy wet
Foot ever spurn the shell on her loved strand?
There hast thou stooped the sea-weed grey to fret,
Or glaze the pebble with thy crystal hand?
I am of Scotland. Dear to me the sand
That sparkles where my infant days were nursed!
Dear is the vilest weed of that wild land,
Where I have been so happy, so accursed!
Oh, tell me, hast thou seen my lady stand
Upon the moonlight shore, with troubled eye,
Looking towards Norway! Didst thou gaze on her?
And did she speak of one far thence, and sigh?
Oh, that I were with thee a passenger
To Scotland, the blessed Thule, with a sky
Changeful like woman! would, oh, would I were!
But vainly hence my frantic wishes fly.
Who reigns at Holyrood? Is Mary there?
And does she sometimes shed for him once loved a tear?"

DEATH OF BOTHWELL.

"Champion of freedom! pray thee pardon me
My laughter, if I now can laugh (in hell
They laugh not); he who doth now address thee
Is Hepburn, Earl of Bothwell. Hark, my knell—

The death-owl shrieks it. Ere I cease to fetch
These pantings for the shroud, tell me, oh, tell,
Believ'st thou God? Blow on a dying wretch,
Blow, wind that com'st from Scotland! Fare thee well!
The owl shrieks; I shall have no other passing bell."

RIVER-FLOWERS.

" How the flowers freshen where the waters glide,
And seem to listen to the limpid tide!"

LOVE.

" Love, eldest muse! Time heard thine earliest lay,
When light through Heaven led forth the new-born day.
The stars that give no accent to the wind
Are golden odes, and music to the mind;
So passion's thrill is Nature's minstrelsy,
So to the young heart Love is poetry!
God of the soul! illumination caught
From thy bright glance is energy to thought;
And song bereft of thee is cold and tame—
The bard a cinder, uninstinct with flame.
But when the heart looks through the eyes of Love
On Nature's form, things lifeless breathe and move.
The dewy forest smiles, dim morning shakes
The rainbow from his plumage, music wakes
The dimpled ripples of the azure wave,
In fiery floods green hills their tresses lave,
And myriad flowers, all bright'ning from the dews,
Day's earth-born stars their golden beams effuse.
Transported passion bids rocks, floods, and skies,
Burst into song, while her delighted eyes
To all they see their own rich hues impart,
And the heart's language speaks to every heart."

GUILTY LOVE.

" For what is sinful passion, but the lamp
That gilds the vapours of a dungeon damp,
And cheers the gloom awhile with fatal light,
Only to leave at last a deeper night,

And make the darkness horror? Yet for this,
This shadowy glimmering of a troubled bliss,
Insensate man peace, joy, and hope foregoes;
Reckless, he plunges into cureless woes,
Buys fleeting pleasure with enduring pain,
And, drunk with poison, weeps to drink again."

STRONG IMAGE.

" Let the storm smite his hands together."

FLOWER AND MOONBEAM.

" Sweet as the flower on which the moonbeam sleeps."

DECEIVED HUSBAND.

" I was undone! By Ann and all forgot;
Cold, naked, hungry—and she sorrowed not;
Distracted—and she soothed not my despair;
Sick and in prison—and she came not there.
Night was around me, and I wept alone,
Despised, neglected, left unheard to groan.
But when I rose out of the earth, and light
And Nature's face rushed lovely on my sight,
How did the bosom serpent greet her mate?
With looks of rancour and with words of hate;
And wretch she called the wretch herself had made.
She cursed me to my weeping eyes—she bade
My children curse me! and I wished again
To hear the clanking of my dungeon chain.
But Julia was the sweetest child of all;
She kissed, she blessed me; she alone did call
Her mother's husband 'Father!' While the rest,
Jane and Matilda (though my own), expressed
No joy their sire's long-absent face to see.
Julia—the youngest—Julia welcomed me!
Dear Julia! on my broken heart she smiled—
Dear Julia! wherefore was she not my child?"

WOMAN'S HEART.

" To hush the *heart* is woman's hardest task."

FLOWERS.

" Flowers ! ye remind me of rock, vale, and wood,
Haunts of my early days, and still loved well;
Bloom not your sisters fair in Locksley's dell?
And where the sun o'er purple moorlands wild
Gilds Wharncliffe's oak while Don is dark below?
And where the blackbird sings on Rother's side?
And where Time spares the age of Conisbro?
Sweet flowers, remembered well ! your hues, your breath,
Call up the dead to combat still with death;
The spirits of my buried years arise!
Again a child, where childhood roved I run,
While groups of speedwell, with their bright blue eyes,
Like happy children cluster in the sun.
Still the wan primrose hath a golden core,
The mill-foil, thousand-leafed as heretofore,
Displays a little world of flowerets grey;
And tiny maids might hither come to cull
The woe-marked cowslip of the dewy May;
And still the fragrant thorn is beautiful.
I do not dream! Is it indeed a rose
That yonder in the deepening sunset glows?
Methinks the orchis of the fountained wold
Hath in its well-known beauty something new.
Do I not know thy lofty disk of gold,
Thou that still wooest the sun with passion true?
No, splendid stranger! haply I have seen
One not unlike thee, but with humbler mien,
Watching her lord. O lily fair as aught
Beneath the sky! thy pallid petals glow
In evening's blush; but evening borrows nought
Of thee, thou rival of the stainless snow,
For thou art scentless. Lo! this fingered flower
That round the cottage window weaves a bower,
Is not the woodbine; but that lowlier one,
With thick green leaves, and spike of dusky fire,
Enamoured of the thatch it grows upon,
Might be the house-leek of rude Hallamshire,
And would awake, beyond divorcing seas,
Thoughts of green England's peaceful cottages.

Yes, and this blue-eyed child of earth that bends
Its head on leaves with liquid diamonds set,
A heavenly fragrance in its sighing sends;
And though 'tis not our downcast violet,
Yet might it haply to the zephyr tell
That 'tis beloved by village maids as well."

GENIUS.

"I am Timna, called the sad,
Because fond mothers still are doomed to see
Their most unhappy sons resemble me:
Timna, at whose approach dull spirits flee;
Who sits beneath the roof of amethyst,
And treads the spacious, mountain-broidered floor;
From courts and palaces with scorn dismissed,
Nor always welcomed by the friendless poor.
But all the children of the forest know
The leveret's playmate, the lark's bedfellow.

CURE OF WOE.

"Woe's dreadful cure is its enormity!"

TOWN USURPING THE COUNTRY.

"But much he dreads the town's distracting maze
Where all to him is full of change and pain.
New streets invade the country, and he strays,
Lost in strange paths, still seeking, and in vain,
For ancient landmarks of the lonely lane
Where oft he played at Crusoe, when a boy.
Fire vomits darkness where his lime-trees grew;
Harsh grates the saw where coo'd the wood-dove coy;
Tomb crowds on tomb where violets drooped in dew,
And, brighter than bright heaven, the speedwell blue
Clustered the bank where now the town-bred boor
(Victim and wretch! whose children never smile)
Insults the stranger, sightless, old, and poor,
On Swilled Saint Monday, with his cronies vile,
Drunk, for the glory of the holy isle,
While pines his wife, and tells to none her woes."

WOMEN SINGING AT WORK.

"Hark! music still is here! How wildly sweet,
Like flute-notes in a storm, the psalm ascends
From yonder pile in traffic's dirtiest street!
There hapless woman at her labour bends,
While with the rattling fly her shrill voice blends;
And ever as she cuts the headless nail,
She sings—'I waited long, and sought the Lord,
And patiently did bear.' A deeper wail
Of sister voices joins in sad accord—
'He set my feet upon his rock adored!'
And then, perchance, 'O God! on man look down!'"

NATIVE RIVERS.

"Five rivers, like the fingers of a hand,
Flung from black mountains, mingle and are one,
Where sweetest valleys quit the wild and grand
And eldest forests, o'er the sylvan Don,
Bid their immortal brother journey on,
A stately pilgrim, watched by all the hills.
Say, shall we wander where, through warriors' graves,
The infant Yewden, mountain-cradled, trills
Her Doric notes? Or where the Locksley raves
Of broil and battle, and the rocks and caves
Dream yet of ancient days? Or where the sky
Darkens o'er Rivilin the clear and cold,
That throws his blue length like a snake from high?
Or where deep azure brightens into gold,
O'er Sheaf that mourns in Eden? Or where, rolled
On tawny sands, through regions passion-wild,
And groves of love, in jealous beauty dark,
Complains the Porter, Nature's thwarted child,
Born in the waste, like headlong Wiming."

BEE AND PRIMROSE.

"And soon faint odours o'er the vernal dew
Shall tempt the wanderings of the earliest bee,
Hither with music sweet as poesy,
To woo the flower whose verge is wiry gold."

FATE OF GENIUS.

" Who shall credit thee,
Genius? still treacherous or unfortunate,
Victim or wronger! why must Hope still see
Thy pinions plumed with light divine abate
Their speed when nearest heaven, to uncreate
Her glorious visions? Aye, since time began,
Creatures with hearts of stone and brains of clay,
Scorning thy vaunt to wing the reptile man,
O'er thee and thine have held barbarian sway;
And in the night which yet may have its day,
(The night of ages, moonless, starless, cold,)
If the rare splendour of the might of mind
Hath sometimes flashed o'er plagues and errors old,
It flashed but to expire and leave behind
A deedlier gloom. But woodbine wreaths are twined
Round thorns; and praise to merit due is paid
To vulgar dust, best liked when earthy most.
While Milton grew self-nourished in the shade,
Ten Wallers basked in day. Misrule can boast
Of many Alvas; Freedom, oft betrayed,
Found her sole Washington."

SABBATH IN THE FIELDS.

" Hail, Sabbath! day of mercy, peace, and rest!
Thou o'er loud cities throw'st a noiseless spell.
The hammer there, the wheel, the saw, molest
Pale thought no more. O'er trade's contentious Hell,
Meek quiet spreads her wings invisible.
But when thou com'st less silent are the fields
Through whose sweet paths the toil-freed townsman steals;
To him the very air a banquet yields.
Envious he watches the poised hawk, that wheels
His flight on chainless winds. Each cloud reveals
A paradise of beauty to his eye.
His little boys are with him, seeking flowers,
Or chasing the too venturous gilded fly.
So by the daisy's side he spends the hours,
Renewing friendship with the budding bowers;

And—while might, beauty, good without alloy,
Are mirrored in his children's happy eyes—
In his great temple offering thankful joy
To Him, the infinitely Great and Wise,
With soul attuned to Nature's harmonies,
Serene and cheerful as a sporting child."

MERIT.

" Lo! merit is not food to every man!"

THE SOUL.

" Our souls are lyres that strangely can retain
The tones that trembled on their stricken chords.

PARTING.

" The meanest thing to which we bid adieu
Loses its meanness in the parting hour."

WAVES.

" Like billows on the solitary shore,
Where baffled wave to baffled wave succeeds,
Spurned by the sullen rocks with sullen roar,
And rising, falling, foaming evermore,
To rise, and fall, and roar, and foam in vain."

PASTORAL.

" Where is the matron, with her busy brow,
Their sheep, where are they? and their famous cow,
Their strutting gamecock, with his many queens,
Their glowing holyoaks, and winter greens?
The chubby lad, that cheered them with his look,
And shared his breakfast with the homebred rook;
The blooming girls, that scoured the snow-white pail,
And waked with joy the echoes of the vale,
And, laden homewards, near the sparkling rill,
Cropped the first rose that blushed beneath the hill.
All vanished, with their rights, their hopes, their lands,
The shoulder shaking grasp of hearts and hands;
The good old joke, applauded still as new;
The wond'rous printed tale, that must be true;

And the stout ale, that showed the matron's skill,
For not to be improved, it mended still!
Now, lo! the young look base as greybeard guile,
The very children seem afraid to smile,
But not afraid to scowl, with early hate,
At would-be greatness, or the greedy great;
For they who fling the poor man's worth away
Root out security, and plant dismay."

BYRON AND NAPOLEON.

" Lo! as I ceased from earth a stranger came
With hurried step—a presence heavenly fair
(Yet grief, and anger, pride, contempt, and shame,
Were strangely mingled in his troubled stare),
And thus he spoke, with timid haughty air,
To Russell, Fairfax, in tones low but sweet,
'I, too, am noble! England's magnates rank
Me with themselves. And when beneath their feet
Fate's low-born despot, hope-deserted, sank,
When torrid noon his sweat of horror drank,
I joined his name for ever with my own.'

" Him then to answer, one who sate alone,
Like a maimed lion, mateless in his lair,
Rose from his savage couch of barren stone,
His kingly features withered by despair,
And heart-worn, till the tortured nerve was bare.
With looks that seemed to scorn, e'en scorn of less
Than demigods, the army-scatterer came—
An awful shadow of the mightiness
That once was his—the gloom, but not the flame,
Of waning storms, when winds and seas grow tame.
The stranger, shrinking from the warrior's eye,
On his own hands his beauteous visage bowed,
Sobbing; but soon he raised it mournfully,
And met the accusing look, and on the crowd
Smiled, while the stern accuser spake aloud."

THE MIND'S EYE.

" O look on Alfred!—look! the man is blind!
She whom he loved, sleeps in her winding-sheet;
Yet, he beholds her with the eyes of mind!

He sees the form, which he no more shall meet;
But cannot see the primrose at his feet."

WORKS OF GOD AND OF MAN.

" How beauteous are the dyes
That grove and hedgerow from their plumage shake!
And cannot the loud hammer, which supplies
Food for the blacksmith's rosy children, make
Sweet music to thy heart?"

MACHINERY.

" Poor, blind, old man! what would he give to see
This bloodless Waterloo! this hell of wheels;
This dreadful speed that seems to sleep and snore,
And dream of earthquake."

MECHANIC.

" Lo; there he moves, the thoughtful engineer,
The soul of all this motion; rule in hand
And coarsely-aproned—simple, plain, sincere—
An honest man;—self-taught to understand
The useful wonders which he built and planned.
Self-taught to read and write—a poor man's son;
Though poor no more—how would he sit alone
When the hard labour of the day was done,
Bent o'er his table, silent as a stone,
To make the wisdom of the wise his own."

MISERIES OF THE POOR.

" Some griefs the strongest soul might shake,
And I such griefs have had;
My brain is hot—but they mistake
Who deem that I am mad.
My father died—my mother died—
Four orphans poor were we;
My brother John worked hard, and tried
To smile on Jane and me.
But work grew scarce, while bread grew dear,
And wages lessened too;
For Irish hordes were bidders here,
Our half-paid work to do.

Yet, still he strove, with failing breath,
And sinking cheek, to save
Consumptive Jane, from early death—
Then joined her in the grave.
His watery hand in mine I took,
And kissed him till he slept;
Oh, still I see his dying look!
He tried to smile, and wept!
I bought his coffin with my bed,
My gown bought earth and prayer·
I pawned my mother's ring for bread—
I pawned my father's chair.
My Bible still remains to sell,
And yet unsold shall be;
But language fails my woes to tell:
Even crumbs were scarce with me."

SPIRIT OF LIBERTY.

"Father of all! hear thou our cry,
And England *shall* be free!
Methinks thy nation-wedding waves
Upbraid us as they flow;
Thy winds, disdaining fettered slaves,
Reproach us as they blow."

FORCE OF TRUTH.

"They smite in vain who smite with swords,
And scourge with vollied fire;
Our weapon is the whip of words,
And truth's all-teaching ire."

THE PRESS.

"God said—'Let there be light!'
Grim darkness felt his might,
And fled away.
Then startled seas and mountains cold
Shone forth, all bright in blue and gold,
And cried—''Tis day! 'tis day!'

" 'Hail, holy light!' exclaimed
The thund'rous cloud that flamed
O'er daisies white;
And lo! the rose in crimson dressed
Leaned sweetly on the lily's breast,
And blushing, murmured—'Light!'

" Then was the skylark born;
Then rose the embattled corn;
Then floods of praise
Flowed o'er the sunny hills of noon;
And then in stillest night, the moon
Poured forth her pensive rays.

" Lo, heaven's bright bow is glad!
Lo, trees and flowers, all clad
In glory, bloom!
And shall the mortal sons of God
Be senseless as the trodden clod,
And darker than the tomb?

" No, by the *mind* of man!
By the swart artisan!
By God, our Sire!
Our souls have holy light within,
And every form of grief and sin
Shall see and feel its fire.

" By earth, and hell, and heaven,
The shroud of souls is riven!
Mind—mind alone
Is light and hope, and life and power!
Earth's deepest night, from this blessed hour,
The night of minds is gone!

" 'The Press!' All lands shall sing
The Press—the Press we bring,
All lands to bless.
O pallid Want! O Labour stark!
Behold, we bring the second ark!
The Press! The Press! The Press!"

THE PRIMROSE.

"Still thou art loveliest in the lonest place."

DYING BOY'S LAMENT.

"But woodbines flaunt when blue bells fade,
Where Don reflects the skies;
And many a youth in Shirecliffe's shade
Will wander where my boyhood played,
Though William dies.

"Then panting woods the breeze will feel,
And bowers, as heretofore,
Beneath their load of roses reel;
But I through woodbined lanes shall steal
No more, no more."

MAJESTY OF WIN-HILL.

"To be a crowned and sceptered curse, that makes
Immortal worms! a wolf, that feeds on souls!
One of the names which Vengeance whips with snakes,
Whose venom cannot die! a King of Ghouls,
Whose drink is blood! To be clear-eyed as owls,
Still calling darkness light, and winter spring—
To be a tiger-king, whose mercy growls—
To be of meanest things the vilest thing!
Throned asp o'er lesser asps! what grub would be a king?

"But crowned Win-hill! to be a king like thee!
Older than death! as God's thy calm behest!
Only heaven-rivalled in thy royalty!
Calling the feeble to thy sheltering breast,
And shaking beauty from thy gorgeous vest,
And loved by every good and happy thing!
With nought beneath thee that thou hast not blessed,
And nought above thee but the Almighty's wing—
Oh, glorious, god-like aim! who would not be a king?"

STORM ON THE HILLS.

"Now expectation listens mute and pale,
While ridged with sudden foam the Derwent brawls,
Arrow-like comes the rain, like fire the hail;
And hark! Mam-Tor on shuddering Stanage calls!

See what a frown o'er castled Winnat falls!
Down drops the death-black sky! and Kinderscout,
Conscious of glory, laughs at intervals,
Then lifts his helmet, throws his thunders out,
Bathes all the hills in flame, and hails their stormy shout."

WONDERS OF THE LANE.

" Lo! in that dot, some mite like me,
Impelled by wo or whim,
May crawl some atom cliffs to see
A tiny world to him!
" Lo! when he pauses and admires
The works of Nature's might,
Spurned by my foot, his world expires,
And all to him is night!"

EXCURSION.

" 'Tis passing sweet to wander free as air,
Blithe truants in the bright and breeze-blessed day,
Far from the town, where stoop the sons of care
O'er plans of mischief, till their souls turn grey,
And dry as dust, and dead-alive are they—
Of all self-buried things, the most unblessed.
O morn, to them no blissful tribute pay,
O night's long-courted slumbers, bring no rest
To men who laud man's foes, and deem the basest best.
" God! would they handcuff Thee? and, if they could,
Chain the free air, that like the daisy goes
To every field, and bid the warbling wood
Exchange no music with the willing rose
For love-sweet odours, where the woodbine blows
And trades with every cloud and every beam
Of the rich sky. Their gods are bonds and blows,
Rocks and blind shipwreck; and they hate the stream
That leaves them still behind, and mocks their changeless dream."

POET'S ASPIRATION.

" Even here on earth not altogether fade
The good and vile. Men, in their words and deeds,
Live when the heart and hand in earth are laid;
For thoughts are things, and written thoughts are seeds:

Our very dust buds forth in flowers or weeds.
Then let me write for immortality
One honest song, uncramped by forms or creeds,
That men unborn may read my times in me,
Taught by my living words when I shall cease to be."

LIFE AND DEATH.

"Oh, welcome in the morn the road
That climbs to virtue's high abode;
But when descends the evening dew,
The inn of rest is welcome too."

MIND.

"Mind is mightiest then
When turning evil into good,
And monsters into men."

POET OF THE POOR.

"Shall we not lift the lowly,
Whom law and custom ban?
Oh, help us to exalt and praise
God in the mind of man!

"In vain your pomp, ye evil powers!
Insults the land;
Wrongs vengeance and the cause is ours,
And God's right hand."

FREE-TRADE.

"Streams trade with clouds, seas trade with heaven,
Air trades with light and is forgiven;
While man would make all climes his own,
But, chained by man, laments alone.

"Thy winds, O God! are free to blow,
Thy streams are free to chime and flow,
Thy clouds are free to roam the sky;
Let man be free his arts to ply."

NOTHINGNESS OF ALL THINGS.

"The generations gone,
What are they but a word?
All, all that all have done,
Is but Thy whisper, Lord."

PLEA FOR THE POOR.

" Wrong not the labouring poor by whom ye live,
Wrong not your humble fellow-worms, ye proud !
For God will not the poor man's wrongs forgive,
But hear his plea and have his plea allowed.

" Oh, be not like the vapours splendour-rolled
That, sprung from earth's green breast, usurp the sky,
Then spread around contagion black and cold,
Till all who mourn the dead prepare to die !

" No, imitate the bounteous clouds that rise,
Freighted with bliss, from river, vale, and plain ;
The thankful clouds that beautify the skies,
Then fill the lap of earth with fruit and grain.

" Yes, emulate the mountain and the flood,
That trade in blessings with the mighty deep ;
Till, soothed to peace and satisfied with good,
Man's heart be happy as a child asleep."

PATIENCE AND POWER.

" Man endures
The curse of bondage better than he cures."

DEATH OF KERHONAH.

" Quit not, thou ruddy tide, my harrowed cheek,
Lest white men mock its paleness. Why should death
Whiten the lip which fear could never change ?
Weep not, my daughter, lest these tongues of serpents
Say that thy tears, which bathe my breast, are mine."

SORROW.

" On his face
Sorrow had written kindness with a tear."

WOMAN.

" Earth's heavenly flower."

PROSE PASSAGES.

"If we saw a brewer ordering two of his servants to pump ale into a cooler, and at the same time ordering another servant to pump that ale out of the cooler into the street, we should say to ourselves, "This is a comical way of brewing.' We should think the brewer a very silly person, and we should tell him that he was paying the wages of three men for the work of one, and wasting the ale besides; but we should also see before us an exact picture of bread-taxed England at this moment. We, the vast majority, 12,000,000 of manufacturers and tradesmen, are trying to fill the cooler, while the minority, the 4,000,000 of agriculturists, are throwing the ale out of the cooler into the street."

"The Corn-law is another proof of our having annihilated Jacobinism and French principles. Over it, in embryo, the hereditary ears had long been shaken; but when the perfection of monopoly was born, how joyful were the pangs of parturition! how loud was the bray of absolute wisdom on the birth of the donkey of his dotage, so worthy of its father, and so like him! The thistles of old Scotland had a holiday on the occasion, and to this hour, expecting to be food for man, disdain the approaching jackass!"

"The Parisians talk of the 'Roast Beef of Pork,' but what would they say of the 'Roast Beef of Potatoes?'"

"If the Corn-law should destroy our trade, and the agriculture of the country be unable, as it would be, to furnish even potatoes for the population, it is rather probable that 15,000,000 of Radicals would not die of famine without making very odd grimaces and uttering sounds which Nimrod and Tallyho could not easily mistake for the cry of a pack of hounds, though each of those gentlemen might play his character of puss or fox in the drama of retribution."

"Thanes of the splendid village! think of these things. If you have been engaged since your arrival at years of indiscretion in patronising ruin by Act of Parliament; if your whole lives have been spent in sapping the very foundations of society, wonder not should the floor of the social edifice sink suddenly beneath your feet, and the roof descend on your heads in thunder!"

"It is a horrible fact that not one petition for peace emanated from the great body of religionists in England during twenty-five years of war against the laws of God and the rights of man."

"Every man who would not welcome revolution should oppose the Corn-law, or it will revolutionise the kingdom."

CHAPTER X.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR.

"*Great Houghton, near Barnsley,*
8th June, 1843.

"DEAR SIR,—I could like, before I die, to prove a true prophet for once, and hear that you are become a first-class editor of some honest out-spoken newspaper, or author of a capital acting drama, or a popular lecturer and critic. Suppose you start with 'Byron as the poet of conscience?'—are not these your words? equally fine and true; or 'Byron as a dramatist.' (By the way, there are not many finer things than his 'Sardanapalus.') But what sort of a gab have you to lecture with? Is it a squeak, or a mew, or a growl, or a Rory O'Thunder? I dare not quote the Latin for the latter term, but it (the Latin) signifies Open-gab or Round-mouth.

"This 'Chartist Magazine' cannot succeed *commercially*, and it may turn out to be the greatest blunder you ever committed. If you are a shareholder in it, it may take your last penny and your honest name, involving you in bankruptcy! Get out, if you are in. Colonel Thompson's acceptance of a share in the 'Westminster Review' cost him 10,000*l*. I am a shareholder in a Joint Stock Bank, out of which I would gladly get, with the loss of half my investments.

"I don't think your first number any great shakes. Mrs. Elliott, however, thinks differently. 'The article on the Repeal of the Union,' she says, 'is cram-full of good sense.' Whew! I agree with her that there are some capital observations in the letter to Canter; for instance, that Abraham was a pagan (perhaps a cannibal?),

and that Paul corrupted Christianity by his windy metaphysics. (Between ourselves, he owes his popularity to them.) The author of 'Poems by a Sufferer' should mystify in the same way—*it won't do to be understood*, especially in poetry, which, to be sure, seldom happens. 'But the Poor-law Martyrs,' she says, 'is to be the gem of the book.' If so, I am no prophet of good, at any rate. 'Prophet of Evil! never came *good* word of thine to pass,' says Agamemnon to Chacas in Homer. Have you read Samuel Bamford's 'Passages in the Life of a Radical?' If you have not, do.

"I wish my children could say of me as you say of your dad, that I am a Rothschild. I have invested badly, and am likely to become a poor man; but not, I hope, to die in a workhouse bed. Poverty, however, prevents no poor man from shaking hands with a rich one, if the latter is willing. Should you ever find yourself at the Barnsley Station, on the North Midland Railway (with a fortnight on your hands that you don't know what to do with), you may there, or at the adjoining village of Cudworth, get a guide over three miles of the ugliest, dirtiest, and worst to find of all possible or conceivable footpaths to my miserable hut, or den in the wilderness. But I don't expect to meet you again on this side the black pond; and, on the other side, I shall not take the same road as you Feargusites. I'd scorn it."

"19*th June*, 1843.

"Dear Sir,—I look forward with pleasure to our meeting next month. If there are any little *delicates* that you can't well do without, and which can't be got on a common nine miles from the nearest market, bring a pint or two of them in a little bag, as the bag will be useful to carry provend in during our rambles. If you like fish, bring a fishmonger with you, otherwise the thing (the fish, I mean) is hardly possible. Perhaps you can 'waft a pioneer from Battersea to the desert' a week or two before you start, that I may be sure to be at home.

"I am this day informed that an excellent young

man, called Webster, a lawyer, and editor of the late Tory newspaper, the *Sheffield Patriot*, is made bankrupt, on account of his connexion with the concern. Now, a 10s. share in the *Chartist* would make you liable to all you are worth!

"If you carried a resolution against Feargus at a public meeting of Chartists, certainly you have done a feat which all we Corn-law repealers put together could not have done; but when I said that with the Feargusites 'I'd scarce gang *ony* where,' I by no means meant to say that you are *not* a clever fellow. On the contrary, I allow that you are a critic. Of your critic might be made a lawyer; and the personage who alone can outwit a natural lawyer must not be named irreverently."

"*From my Den on the Common,*
6th December, 1843.

"DEAR SIR,—Well, you have mauled him! But who would be a god to be so mauled by one of the most devoted of his worshippers? In point of style your Philippic beats all your previous doings. I mean not to flatter when I say that I know not the author in whose pages I should look for more vigorous English idiom. I have a theory on this subject: Let him who would successfully denounce or persuade accustom himself to public speaking. If there is truth in physiognomy, you were born a fighter; this is obvious in the lip of your portrait, as in that of Keats. But he, poor boy, fought not. Let us hope better of you. And if we are to have a duel, let it be fought under the Wind-Gap Oak, on old Ringston-hill, that I may be the Homer of your Iliad, and also write an elegy on both the heroic defunct. In the meantime, with your terrible 'Impeachment' before me, I am almost forced to exclaim, like the valet in the play, 'Zounds! won't it go off!'"

"15*th December*, 1843.

"DEAR SIR,—I have been revisited by my choking fits, or I would sooner have answered your favour of the 9th instant.

"I am a fool, a proved, confirmed fool, desperately, incurably stupid—some say, mad; and of me you ask advice. I will give it in all sincerity.

"To a man of the poetical temperament, single blessedness is no small evil; indeed, the longevity of married persons proves it to be a great one. On the other hand, it is certain that the greatest benefits ever conferred on mankind have been conferred by bachelors; some of whom—for instance, Bentham—lived in all happiness to a great age. But you, it appears, have a friend worth all the wives in the world—a mother! Live, then, with that best friend—not rich, but in modest self-dependence—controlling as you may the strongest of human feelings. If you are a dramatist, prove it, not as a matter of business, but of amusement; if you are a poet, that sad fact will inevitably prove itself; but if you are a philosopher, how happy, how useful may you not be! what dignity, what beauty may not your life exhibit! Avoid at present, as you would avoid death itself, everything like business or commercial speculation. There is a trade by which, if I were put to my shifts in London, I think I could live—the bone and rag trade; but it would not suit you. However, if your income is not equal to your wishes, try to increase it by obtaining, through the influence of some friend or member of Parliament (and in no other way), an agency or clerkship in some public office or company, But why submit to any such humiliation? You have 80*l.* and a mother! and you complain. I shudder to think what my condition was at your time of life. I was steeped in troubles—meditating suicide, with a cast-iron weight between my legs—then! but it stops my breath. I could tell you tales that would make your hair lift your hat off. Towards the close of November, 1819, however—when Fortune, for the first time, began truly to smile on me—I was flitting to Sheffield, with eight or nine children *in a cart*, my main stay being the Gospel Oak Company's agency, worth perhaps 50*l.* per annum. And now, after all my trials, and with three out of eight surviving children, unestablished in the world, I seriously doubt whether I have

a clear income of 200*l.* a-year. True, I still have property, which ought to be worth much more; but it is at present unproductive. This, you may say, must be the result of my own mismanagement. Very differently managed your excellent father, and I reverence him for his providence and wisdom. My life has been one long blunder—all blunder—and I have blundered worst at last. Perhaps, as you seem to hint, my greatest blunder is this, of expending not less, I fear, than 1,250*l.* on ten acres of bad land and a dwelling here. But I was aware, when I came hither, that the country possesses no advantages except for him who loves it for its own sake; and that this situation possesses none over Sheffield, except cheaper and better fuel, sweeter water, purer air, and good roads, without toll-bars. I did not expect to find here a paradise of cherubs praising God, though we have some strapping ones of that species. I knew that if there is vice in towns, there is crime in the country—crime of the blackest; for in crimes of violence, and in proportion to population, the village of Wombwell, four miles hence, exceeds the criminality of Sheffield one hundred per cent. I knew that if we would fall in with a rogue able to cheat the devil, we have only to buy horses at a country fair; and that if we would know who they are that cheat Railway Companies, by getting into wrong carriages, or not paying at all, we shall find on inquiry that nineteen-twentieths of them are country people. I was prevented by the dearness of fuel from removing to the neighbourhood of London, where my present income would not have maintained me. Perhaps I ought to have gone to Doncaster, one of the best markets in England; but I should not have been happy there, for it is full of the pride of caste and exclusiveness. Here, however, I am—in this wilderness of foxhunters—a very experienced jackass, grey as a badger, and braying characteristically with a measure in my ears for all longitudes.

"Mrs. Elliott joins me in the best wishes for your happiness, and I assure you, if ever you find your way hither, I will show you all our queer-nebbed things."

"*26th December*, 1843.

"DEAR SIR,—If you knew as much about marriage and its consequences as I do, I believe you would not marry in any circumstances; and yet, I conceive, I was lucky in my choice of a wife, and am of opinion that, had I not married, I should have been put under the sod some thirty-five years ago.

"I continue unwell, without any very obvious cause except the true one; I therefore begin vehemently to suspect that I really am getting old.

"There is an impression on my mind that we shall meet no more on this side the moon; if we do, I believe we shall quarrel, perhaps fight. It will certainly be bad economy in you to spend 5*l.* merely to have a talk with an old fool. Could you not plan a visit to your friends in the north, and, calling on me by the way, pass a month with us? Such an exercise of the patient virtues might enable you to bear any infliction of the uproarious fates in future. I am glad, however, to learn that you are tired of leading a life of turmoil and contest. Dully as my days pass here, 'I'm na' for ganging back again,' even to hear Feargus—sublimest incarnation of truths that lie.

"As you seem to rejoice in pinning a clout to my tail, I must tell you that there is one that I have earned that I am justly proud of, and to the respectability of which neither the prefix 'Mr.,' nor the termination 'Esq.,' can add anything. Address me, then, as the author of 'Festus' does, plain Ebenezer Elliott, C. L. R. Our poorest esquires keep half-a-dozen flunkeys, I keep none; they spend 5,000*l.* a year each, I can barely muster 4*l.* a week.

"I wonder that a man of genius should countenance the barbarous practice of putting letters under a cover; a practice which, besides being troublesome, destroys the value of letters as evidence, by cutting off the postmark. But this comes, I suppose, of being born of folks worth 40,000*l.*"

"*27th January*, 1844.

"DEAR SIR.—Your three kind and most welcome letters came duly to hand. I am recovering from a sort of cold which has kept me in a listless state some weeks. With a friend to show me the 'uncos' I could spend a few days pleasantly in London; but what I require is, cheerful conversation, rather than change of scene. Here are pleasant places, but I visit them alone; for my folks are in-door folks and bad talkers: I doubt whether ten words a day are addressed to me, except by my poor servant lass. At Sheffield the case was still worse, for there I had no conversation at all; nor could I, during the last ten years of my stay there, induce any of my women to visit with me the beautiful scenes in that neighbourhood, except on one occasion, when I took my youngest daughter a walk of eight miles and lamed her for a week or more. My best solace is conversing, albeit imperfectly and in writing, with the young minds of our country: with a letter in my hand from such a man as the author of 'Festus,' 'I live my young years o'er again.'

"If in my passage through life it has been my hard fate not to be understood by persons whose approbation would have been to me 'more precious than rubies,' I ought to be consoled when I find that by you I am both understood and appreciated; and if you like my writings you cannot fail to like me, for they are the best of me: thank God, I have at least *written* honestly. I agree with you that 'The Letter' and the two last books of 'They Met Again,' are among my best compositions; but 'The Exile' has been most praised; and one of my friends prefers my little epic, 'Withered Wild Flowers,' to all my other metrical sins. 'Spirits and Men' was lauded on its first appearance, and I liked it then, but not now; it is well that I stopped at the end of the first book; the perusal of nine more like it would have killed Job. I am not surprised that 'Kerhonah' has pleased nobody, for it is made up of disjointed scenes from a five-act play, one of five rejected dramas. Five rejected dramas!

Who can say that I want perseverance? One of these rejected dramas, printed in the three-vol. edition of my poems, and called 'Taurassdes,' is a comical joke for a tragedy, or there never was one.

"I was delighted with your description of Wimbledon and your intended cottage. But why have a housekeeper at all? Do without one, and you will live rent-and-tax free. So, at one time of their lives, have lived some of the greatest men of the Continent—Schiller, Richter, Rousseau, Beranger. And why not? 'The world can always spare the man whose most important business it is to ring the bell.' So, I believe, says Thomas Carlyle. Independent with your 80*l.* a year, be self-dependant too. You would soon take an interest in your own cooking, and relish your food better. Cleaning, purveying provend, reading, writing, and seeing friends in and about town, would leave you not one heavy hour. Of course, you would have your washing done out of the house, and employ a charwoman twice or thrice a year to snug you up; when, throwing the window wide open for protection, you might venture to cuddle a *bit*, by way of a change.

"The word I like best in your letters is the word 'lecture;' but Feargus is unworthy of your notice, and if you had the powers of a Paul you could not deprive him of the requisites for which his employers chose him, 'the loud voice, the brazen face, and the broad—' for which I praised him in Palace-yard, when I slily quoted Homer to the cockneys. Your own Feargus, too, whose eloquence reminds me of Homer's description of Ulysses:—

> "'For when the deep and mellow bass breaks forth
> From his broad breast, the breath of all is hushed—
> All listen, all are still.' ('Hear, hear, hear.')"

"19*th February*, 1844.

"Dear Sir,—If Paine had written nothing but his 'Common Sense,' he would already have been one of the most popular authors in the world; and if he had not

written it, America would now have been about as well governed as British India.

"I am not aware that Peel has put Dan into a fright; but if his trying to do so is an artful dodge, let him exercise his art.

"What you say of young folks and old folks is strictly true; but my folks made no use of the social advantages of Sheffield when they had them. Your descriptions of the neighbourhood of London disturb me. We miss your facilities, and the market of the town. At Sheffield, with an eightpenny haddock and a tenpenny rabbit, we had an elegant dinner, if a stranger happened to drop in. Here, perhaps, we have no compensating advantages. But I could be happy in a wood, ten miles from the nearest neighbour; and yet I believe few men are more social than I am. Let me not forget, however, that in my youth I was scarcely ever seen with a companion of my own sex, and with the lasses I had no luck.

"'Festus,' as printed, is a metaphysical poem. A new edition, greatly enlarged, is about to appear. The author, I fear, will turn parson of some sort. He is a son of a rich wine merchant at Nottingham, and lives at Wandsworth.

"I suspect I am as old as Methuselah, and shall never be young again. Ill-health, or possibly what you call 'the mopes,' has prevented me from sooner answering your favour of the 30th ult."

"15*th April*, 1844.

"Dear John,—Nations reap what the 'Peep of Day Boys' sow for them; but men generally reap as they sow; complain not, then, of 'Fate.'

"You do wrong to tell your faults. Rousseau and Byron did so, and men not only believe the evil which they confessed, but suspect them of much more. The truth is, they were neither better nor worse than other people; indeed, they could not be so sensual as most, because they had not sufficient physical strength; it *can't* be true that Genius is a rake.

"I have latterly had a new visitor—flatulence. I am very, very weak; the game, I believe, is nearly *up* with me."

"*25th April*, 1844.

"DEAR SIR,—While our anti-profit laws continue, it is perhaps sinful to marry in this country, if children are to be the consequence. Supposing it justifiable to marry at all in food-taxed Britain, it would not be justifiable in your case, unless you could marry an elderly person, or one whose fortune would add a hundred a-year to your income. Marry fortune or forty-five. The marriages of young men with middle-aged women are almost always as happy as those of young women and old men are the reverse. If you could meet with such a partner, you would love each other more and more every day.

"Is it not better to be good and happy than to be thought so? The stars are impartial, and notoriety is not fame. My 'Corn-law Rhymes' made me notorious, and my honest object in writing them may one day make me famous. On looking back on my past life, I find two incidents which please me. I had the honour to originate the first Anti-Corn-law Association. It was called the 'Sheffield Mechanics' Anti-Bread-tax Society.' The 'Corn-law Rhymes' were written to spread the opinions of its members; and I still think our Declaration a master-piece of its kind. If you feel any curiosity on the subject, I will send you a copy of it, with facsimiles of the signatures, as exact as I can make them. They remind me of Wordsworth's poem, 'We are Seven,' and of the old proverb, 'Rome was not built in a day.' I had also the honour to instruct and send forth on his mission the first Anti-Corn-law lecturer, Mr. Paulton, now, I believe, sub-editor of the *League*. I began with A, food limited—B, population increasing—C, profit and wages diminishing; he listened carelessly, but left me either with a letter to Colonel Thompson, or an assurance from me that I would write one, which I did; and I soon heard of him preaching to the plundered the truth

which is life. From that hour the good cause has been making progress.

"I need no cramp in the stomach to tire me of life. Positively, if I knew any way of dying without pain, I would not live an hour, suffering as I do. I feel contemptible to myself. Formerly my stomach, I verily believe, could digest ganister stone; and now, if I happen to eat a few inches of raw cabbage-stalk, I am ill in consequence."

"1*st June*, 1844.

"DEAR SIR,—I know not that I am worse, but a change has taken place in my complaint, the dyspeptic symptoms alternating with others of a painful kind, preparatory, I suppose, to the great change—truly so called, if greatness is universal.

"I am much pleased with your account of the speakers at Exeter Hall. Bright I have not heard, though, I believe, I have seen him. Colonel Thompson is the only orator I ever heard, and yet I have heard O'Connell. He cannot, like O'Connor, bawl opposition down—he laughs it down. I will give you an instance of this, if I can paint a scene as it was represented to me by a famous Tory barber, who shaves behind a huge inn at Manchester, and having heard that I was the Corn-law Rhymer, flourished his razor over my beard, while he held me by the nose, giving me a pro-Corn-law lecture. What a subject for a Hogarth! Never did I hear arguments so powerful, not even from Chartists, when their arguments were brickbats.

"[*Scene.*—An immense hall. Audience three thousand persons, some of them ladies. Opposition packed in a corner, some twenty persons, among them a woman. On the platform Mr. O'Connell and other speakers.]

"O'Connell (rises amid tremendous applause).—I would scorn to ask for Ireland a privilege that I would not grant to all the world. (Shouts from Paddy outside.)

"Woman.—Get ye gone—you're paid. Go home—us does not want ye. (Tumult.)

"O'Connell.—Pray, ma'am, are you married?

"Woman.—Yes.

"O'Connell.—No bairns?

"Woman.—Yes, seven.

"O'Connell.—What! married, and seven bairns, and do you like dear bread? God bless you, and send you six twins in three years. (Laughter and waving of handkerchiefs.) Oh, it delights me to see a meeting like this attended by the flower of the crehation. Surely the fairest of the witches ye are, or who could see them and not go into hydrostatics? There is but one other conthrey in the world that could show a sight like this. (Laughter, and shouts from Patrick outside.)

"Of course you have heard the good news from Lancashire. The defeat of the League there was necessary to show all who would live without having their hands in other people's pockets the deadly nature of the struggle. If palaced rascality is fighting for its all, well may it fight like a wolf, faced for the first time. The grand consolation is this: that there is nothing so cowardly as wolfishness after it has been faced, as the event will show, too late, perhaps, to save the wolf; but he can be spared."

"*June* 18*th*, 1844.

"Dear Sir,—I duly received your favour of the 6th instant, and would have answered it sooner had I not mislaid the address of the author of 'Festus;' his name is P. J. Bailey, Cedar Cottage, Wandsworth. Since I received your letter I have been assailed by an army of aches, all new comers, ear-ache, face-ache, neck-ache, back-ache, shoulder-ache, thigh-ache, ankle-ache, sore throat-ache, and inflamed breast-ache; they attacked all at once and downed me; but 'Corn-law Rhymes' 'got up again, and sore amazed them all.' If they will give me leave to day, I shall write a long letter to John Taylor, Chartist, Pentonville, who has sent me a book of which he is the author, and which I greatly like; it is called 'The Influence of Respect for Outward Things.'

Fox, Paternoster-row. I cannot agree with you that the Chartists are Free-traders. They have been and are the best aids the monopolists ever had, the anti-slavery people alone excepted. The latter cannot plead the poor Chartists' excuse for ignorance; they are utterly loathsome. By advocating the equalisation of the sugar-duties, they would have freed both the black and the white slaves, and emancipated commerce; but the sole object of their doings was, and is, to prevent the people from seeing the Corn-laws. I, though Chartist to the back-bone, am by no means sure that the Charter, if obtained to-morrow, would emancipate our commerce in time to prevent national ruin. Monopoly has caused two revolutions in France, and is preparing a third, although the first started with Universal Suffrage, and elected, I do believe, the very best and wisest men then living in Europe. Oh for ten years, not of an uncontrolled Napoleon the Little! certainly not of Arthur Timbersmile, greatest of that breed!—but, oh for ten years of an uncontrolled Peter the Great!

"Christian Chartist Church! Well, why should there be more than one Church—that which every good man carries within his heart of hearts? I am opposed to all paid preaching. The Methodists could, and I believe would, alone and unassisted, have put down the Corn-laws, if they had had no paid preachers. Perhaps the meanest, the most selfish, the most corrupt body of men now in the world, is the Methodist Conference.

"The Corn-law Rhymers advocate Free-trade in all things; and, therefore, cannot be seeking a measure beneficial to themselves alone."

"28*th August*, 1844.

"Dear Sir,—The lecture-power is power No. 2, or second greatest—perhaps it is No. 1; and I am glad that you are using it on Sunday evenings for the good of the right ones. Did you ever hear Fox, or see him? He is a portmanteau set on end, full of goodness, eloquence, and genius.

"I have written by this post to the author of 'Festus.' I ought to write often to you both. I know not that I am worse; but I get feebler, feebler every day, and I lose weight, though not much. I am reduced to ten stone. A strange unwillingness to do anything, the least thing in the world, has come upon me. What makes the thing worse is, that I cannot go out without meeting some palaced pauper, or his policeman, alias gamekeeper. Cain, Cain, why didst thou not die childless?"

"*9th December*, 1844.

"JOHN WATKINS,—How delightful it is here to receive a letter from a good and wise friend! This is one great advantage of solitude, perhaps the greatest. Why, then, do I not oftener seek to profit by it? Truly if I do not always answer my correspondents in course, it is because I fear to trouble them with say-nothings. My mind, ever dull and slow, is becoming quite sterile. Though I never could originate a thought, I could once fructify other men's thoughts; but even that beautiful power (it is a power) has left me.

> "'So passeth in the passing of an hour
> Of mortal life, the leaf, the bud, the flower.'

I have a most interesting letter, unanswered, from Ebenezer Hingston—a rare lad! Do you know him?

"Your criticism is, as usual, just. My last verses in the *League* are not poetry at all. But though your forte is certainly criticism, I shall look for your new play with some expectation that it will show progress. The sad fault of your drama is, that your last plays are no better than your first. Shakspeare went on improving to his last drop of ink. First, he mastered English rhyme, writing it, even in narrative, with an exactitude and clearness to which Pope himself can make no pretension. But by what process did he give to his 'steel pen' ductility, and to his later style its inimitable grace and freedom? It is quite possible that he might have

been self-satisfied with his 'Two Gentlemen of Verona.' So of the author of 'Festus.' Doubtless he is more extraordinary than his work, and will, if he lives, do still greater things. But nudge him gently. Tell him the reader cares nothing for his grand character Faust the Second. We want something to love, to weep for, or with. Who reads the 'Paradise Lost' because he cannot help it? Goethe's 'Margaret' is ever with us! Bailey's assertion, that poetry is inspiration, is true as to the power; but it is not artistically true. Can you get me the title, publisher, &c., of his copy of 'Faust?' (It is well to hunt on the scent of this originating *varmint.*) Also of a cheap edition of Shelley? I am told it is disgraceful not to have read Shelley. How very little I have read, except newspapers! Thank God, Scott's novels are to come, like the 'cheese and pippins,' in the 'Merry Wives.' There they are! all in reserve for my last six months of leisure! I could write you a long Free-trade lecture about beggarless Guernseys, where land lets for 4*l.* an acre. But you have already found out that 'to make food dear, and labour cheap,' is not the way to carry the Charter.

"I have been reading Shakspeare's 'Love's Labours Lost,' and in the style and matter satirised find a startling resemblance to some of Wordsworth's doings!"

"1*st July*, 1845.

"DEAR JOHN,—My excuse for not having long ago written to you is the true one, and a disgrace to me—it is that the last infirmity has come upon me—the utter want of will to attempt doing any one thing in this world of work. The critic in Lloyd's paper is more just to the author of 'Festus' than you are. We must not say of such a man as P. J. Bailey that he is deficient in judgment, but that his judgment is not ours. He is a power in literature; and I never think of him without a feeling of reverence I have not for Wordsworth, who is, you will say, a power greatly superior. I am by no means sure that my poverty will not desperately resolve to buy

the book. Your remarks on 'Chartists and Corn-law Repealers' are very able. Chartism and Free-trade are opposed by one and the same evil, the cause of all remediable evils—ignorance. I had scarcely joined the Chartists when I found that, if they succeeded, they would forthwith strengthen the hands of monopoly, which is bad government in its essence! It is painful to reflect that our biblists to a man, and religionists generally, have been and are the most efficient opponents of Free-trade. The anti-slavery people, perhaps, have done most mischief, though with a good intention. And now we have the dissenting bigots furiously exclaiming in their anti-Maynooth meetings that they will give monoply a lift at the next election! These wretches cannot plead the excuse of the poor Chartists. No, their error is at least a fat one—and prudent! for they do not meet black slaveholders in every street. By-and-bye you will see them running with water in a sieve to put out a fire.

"I am sorry to hear that my portrait was at the bazaar. All the portraits yet taken of me are caricatures of some sort. What was the artist's name? Don't inquire if you don't know; it is of no importance. The only likeness of me is a bust by a young sculptor of Birmingham, whose name I forget.

"You ought to succeed as a novel-writer, and will, *if you will go out of yourself.* You are bewitched if, with your abilities, you don't succeed in something."

"28*th August*, 1845.

"DEAR SIR,—I do not agree with you about the League, and the victory of King Hum the Fifth at Sunderland. If the very best men of the working-classes, such men as Ironside, Fowler, Rodgers, and Beale, of Sheffield, were now in Parliament, I am not sure that they would not vote for monopoly. There is *no* class of men in this country sufficiently enlightened to vote as one man for Free-trade, nor will there be in time to prevent the Corn-laws from being put an end to by their own ruinous consequences and the overthrow of

society; nor am I sure that, after such a catastrophe, those laws would not be re-enacted. But I might yet hope to have the honour of breaking stones on the highway with that poor sunshiny devil of one vilest idea, King Hudson and his gods, if I could believe that road-rates would continue to be in the day which I foresee his Corn-laws will bring. One bad harvest under those laws, it is good to know, may unking him; and the sooner such ket as he comes to the dogs the better; for deadliest ever of all the tyrants is the tyrant dung-hill sprung, and worst of all haters of the poor the dunghill-sprung recreant who betrays his own order. In Parliament no doubt, his pluck, if nothing else, will be conspicuous; for the higher a monkey climbs the more he *shows* his bottom:

> "'And who can tell but sages yet
> For eloquence may hail him,
> As if he had the angel met
> That met the ass of Balaam?'

"Mrs. Elliott, who has just finished reading to me your satire, thinks with me that, according to your own showing, O'Connor is utterly unworthy of your notice. The satire, as she says, is powerful—equal, perhaps, to some praised passages in Dryden; but 'Glorious John, the mighty in the war of verse,' was also greatest of all reasoners in rhyme, and he generally contrived to be logical. I will not praise you if I can help it, unless you repent, and that, I hope, is impossible. If your picture of the Chartists is correct, Sturge does not deserve your censure; and if the difference between him and you is merely verbal, surely Vincent, a man who in all good qualities, is excelled by no champion of the poor who has yet shown himself in the ring, did well to become the mouthpiece of the Suffragists, and ought to have got a good word or two from you. My recollections of Lovett by no means bear you out in your vituperation of him.

"You he-termagant! you poacher on my manor of

Black-'em-well! why should you *not* live in penance? and mind, I don't mean single blessedness. I advised you to marry a woman of forty; but none under fifty ought to venture on you, and she ought to be a widow of five husbands, all cat-killed. There! I have not felt so hearty I hardly know when."

"14*th June*, 1846.

"Well! you ——! if I were a dramatist, I should be jealous of you. There is poetry in your play such as I have seldom met with out of Shakspeare. But did not Bailey write it? I put the question in all seriousness. The piece does not commence badly. The King clearly understands Mr. Picktman and his partner, Church. Yet he proceeds to *try* Griselda! His conduct is mean and motiveless; it is conceived in the lowest spirit of vulgarity and fine clothes; and by destroying his character you destroy hers. After the second act, the reader cares not a rush for him or her. Are you destitute of all moral conception? If there is a man in any audience who could sit out the fourth act, or patiently hear the first eighteen lines of it, he ought to persuade Trewine to bury poor old Biddulph alive, and then marry the widow. Here, then, is a drama steeped in poetry, and displaying high dramatic and other power in the author or his assistant—yet what a failure! worse than a failure: it is an abomination in a writer possessing such talents. We read a few scenes, and start.

"I write immediately after reading your play aloud. I blush to say it has beguiled us of our tears. Perhaps I ought to wait for the opinion of Mrs. Elliott and my eldest daughter, my greatest critics, who are both at Sheffield; but my eagerness to inflict upon thee will not let me. Oh, John! John! John! thou strangest queer mon! art thou sworn not to win? Gie o'er! or begin!"

"28*th June*, 1846.

"Dear Sir,—When you write again do not allude to my last letter, or *Ar Mester* may want to know what I

said in it, and I may get into a scrape. I meant no harm. Why will you defeat yourself? Even now you seem not to know that your drama fails because your hero is worthless. What does your heroine gain by her submission to such a born cuckold? Just what she deserves, tinsel and fine clothes. I have read 'Boccacio,' and suffered for him, narrowly escaping (after having been before blackballed) expulsion from a public library for bringing him into it; and he was literally *burnt*, and by a worse than the hangman! If 'Griselda' cannot be popular with women she cannot be popular at all, for women are men and more. A prudent woman is four-parts man, and three-parts methodee parson besides; a perfect woman is four-parts man, and one part angel, with a wasp in its topping. Dramatists should never forget that though a reader can pause an audience neither can nor will."

"31*st July*, 1846.

"DEAR SIR,—My greatest critic having at length returned from Sheffield, we have read your 'Griselda' together, and her decision is entirely against me. She says I am jealous of you! You be ——. I am sorry for the coarse words I used, though you will forgive them, as natural to the coarseness of the utterer. That will be a mistake. You youngsters are not aware how much you have to be thankful for. Fifty years ago, men were not reckoned men unless they could swear, talk smut, and swallow two bottles of port wine without flushing. Coarseness was an essential part of my education.

"Though I can have no chance with you in a critical contest, I still hold that the harsh conduct of Walter is without sufficient motive. Had his nobles forced him to it, and forced him also to hide his motive from Griselda, you would have written a play.

"I wrote to Mr. Tait on receipt of your letter, warmly recommending 'Griselda' to his attention. Having a critic of his own, he discourages reviews from others.

The truth is, any one can write them. The critique in Lloyd's is poor; and I wish the Devil had the last fifteen lines quoted in it.

"I am awkwardly situated here for the cheap publications. They are not worth delivery by the booksellers, and I cannot call for them, consequently I do not see the 'People's Journal;' but I shall get the volumes as they appear. I shall order the first to-day.

"'Runnymede' is a noble subject. Milton should have chosen it. If you prove worthy of it, I never can forgive you. Before you proceed, read the 'Aristocracy of England,' by John Hampden, jun. Perhaps you wrote it."

"14*th September*, 1846.

"DEAR SIR,—I return you Mr. Marston's letter, and thank you for his play,* which completely refutes the assertion so often heard, that modern characters and manners furnish no materials for comedy. It is equal to anything out of Shakspeare and Moliere, perhaps not at all inferior to the latter.

"Since I wrote to you last my eldest daughter has returned from Sheffield. 'Griselda' will be a fine play, she says, if you will make her husband act as consistently as the honest farmer does. Some of the poetry she thinks is out of place, though excellent as poetry.

"At present we have more bums than beds here; but a week ago I played Robinson Crusoe for three days and nights, my companions being a great black dog, a widowed pigeon, a tailless one-winged jackdaw, and, of course, the Devil."

"*7th October*, 1846.

"DEAR JOHN WATKINS,—Is Marston a descendant of *the* Marston?

"I thank you for the *Nottingham Mercury*, and rejoice to learn that Bailey is editor. His article on the

* "Borough Politics."

'Poor Removal Act,' does him much credit, and shows not only the advantage of having a legal education, but the great advantage which you educated persons have over us self-taught wretches. The thoughts are as precise as the style is clear and simple.

"I cannot contend with you at all in criticism, the weaker must go to the wall; therefore I at once submit, and have only to say that nothing would please me more than to see in you the author of a good acting drama.

"Carlyle's 'French Revolution' is a prose epic, perhaps the finest in the world. Some of his *heroes* are no gods of mine. If the idea of dividing France into some forty thousand committees of public safety *was* Danton's idea, he must have been somebody; but his big bushy head availed him little, and I suspect he was a mere scoundrel, blackguard, and huge jackass on two legs. I have not a much better opinion of Mirabeau; he was not an *originator* of circumstances, and a little longer life would have shown that he could not govern those in which he was placed.

"If the proprietor of the *Nottingham Mercury* will stick to principle, it will succeed. He should—*without any the least deviation from principle*—try to conciliate *influential* masses, say the religious of *all* denominations, by reviewing their books (in every number if he can), always praising when he honestly can, and *never* blaming. I think the *Spectator* is learning this secret. That paper is the only literature I purchase, though I don't altogether like it.

"When I was young, a mill came to the fair, and ground old folks young again. I did not want it then, and now it never comes. What a pity! If we are on the eve of better times, I ought to see them. Is the schoolmaster to blame?"

"*5th November*, 1847.

"DEAR JOHN,—Your 'Runnymede' seemed to me such a failure, such a decided step backward, that I

could not find in my heart to tell you what I thought of it; and I am glad that I did not, for my son Frank, an excellent judge of such matters (intelligent, honest, but severe), thinks it is superior to 'Griselda' as a drama, though it contains no character equal to yours of that heroine. Your 'Oliver Cromwell' is a firm step forward. It *is* a drama. It ought to live. The fifth act is fine. Your conception of the character is almost all that it should be. But you might have introduced an effective scene before the trial of Charles, and it need not have been a mere imitation of that in Shakspeare's 'Richard III.,' where the dreaming tyrant sees the ghost of all his victims pass before him, and they are visible to the audience. The spirit of (the bad?) Strafford might have presented to Charles the result of the coming trial, and justified his desertion of the people on the ground (the true one?) of his sincere conviction that it was justifiable. Would it not be delightful to you at all times to wipe away a stain, if possible, from the character of greatness? Maligned greatness, perhaps! Then why not have wiped a stain from the character of Cromwell, too, by grounding his distrust of Charles on the true ground—the murder of his great and conscientiously faithful servant by that 'royal wretch?' The mighty Ironsides, relying for support in his last moments on poor Hugh, is a beautiful circumstance, and drew tears from us all, Noe, Mrs. E., and myself; but I think the allusion of the dying Cromwell to the death of Charles, though grand, is not in character. Mrs. E. bids me say to you, 'Hail, king that shalt be!' Your style is too metaphorical. Though one Shakspeare swaddled himself in metaphors, and Colonel Thompson's are demonstrations, I still think that figures should never be used except when plain terms will not express the meaning so well.

"What is the eclipser, the great P. J. B. doing, and be hanged to him, and all of you? I like your dedication much."

"Dear Sir,—Tait did not, and I suppose his succes-

sors do not, admit reviews from correspondents. If you think it would be of use, I can send to Sheffield for your presentation-copy of 'Cromwell,' and write an article on it for one of the newspapers there. Perhaps it would be accepted. I will hint to my son Frank that he might, usefully to himself and you, try his hand at a critique. His answer will probably be that he has no correspondence with any journal.

"You are still great as a critic. I like what you say of dramatic style, though it contradicts all successful practice but that of Shakspeare.

"Before you print another play, read it to your housekeeper, and try it with her in *action*, as Moliere used."

"21*st February*, 1848.

"Dear Sir,—I have been expecting from Sheffield an old friend of my youth, I mean a book called 'A History of Cromwell,' that I might refresh my memory about Pym before answering your letter. The book is lost. Many years have passed since I read of Pym's doing, and yet I have been many years meditating an epic on the Great Rebellion, to be called 'The Rebellion.' At Sheffield, time (leisure) was wanting to acquire the requisite information; here, will is wanting. I doubt whether it is possible, in any form of poetry, adequately to paint Pym and his immortal compeers for good or evil—Strafford, Hampden, Elliott, Vane, Cromwell. You should see Browning's 'Strafford,' a recent drama. You have chosen a task which might overtask a Shakspeare; and your boldness frightens me. In a trilogy, perhaps, something might be done worthy of the subject. But a trilogy would not suit modern playgoers. The impression on my mind is that Pym was *all*; that nothing could have been *done* without him. His oratory resembled that of Demosthenes; but as an *orator*, I think him greater far; immeasurably greater, as a statesman. The world has not seen his equal. In comparison with him, our Mirabeaus, &c., are all fingers without wrists, blaze without cinder, flash that goes out. I wish you

luck with a subject which I have resigned in despair—as I have all other subjects.

"It is nonsense to ask, 'When shall we two meet again?' But I take shame to myself that we so seldom talk through the Post-office.

"My poor son Frank has lost in his aunt Martha his more than mother, and is in a state of great despondency in consequence. Write him at Miss Gartside's, Shiregreen, near Sheffield—it will be charity."

"25*th February*, 1848.

"DEAR SIR,—What a sieve my head is! I forgot to say when I wrote last that we had then in the house neither penny nor stamp. It sometimes happens with us here, that pennies are scarcer than pounds. 'And so long as that is *so*,' Mrs. E. says, 'we shall *do*.' I forgot, too, to say that I had, a few hours before, received from Sheffield Forster's 'Lives of British Statesmen,' and skimmed a few pages of vol. 6. Though he praises Browning's 'Strafford,' you must read vols. 2, 3, 4, and 6, and not rely on Hume. I have not yet read a page through, but I shall *settle* desperately down to the task in a few days. The old 'History of Cromwell' that I mentioned states that he was secretly buried at midnight, near Chalgrove, by Hampden's side. It is entertaining as a novel, and perhaps as true.

"You are such a capital critic, that it is almost a pity you should write aught but criticism.

"I have got 'Festus' (the cheap edition), and cut and skimmed it, with misgivings which you confirm. I fear the author has converted it into a hash of monkery. The Christians of the year 2000 will care as much for the mystery of the Three as Protestants now care for the miracles of the Saint Suckemwells whom fools suckled five hundred years ago. As an editor, Bailey might use the canters; but as a poet, surely *he* could do without them, if any one can. I purpose to begin reading 'Festus' up to-night, and, supposing Mrs. E. will listen, get through in a week or so, dead or alive.

"I have also got 'Vestiges of Creation,' cheap edition, after a long time to wait. So, you see, the Lord does not forget poor old Eben., ebeonite though we be."

"*September* 27, 1848.

"DEAR JOHN,—My son Francis, who is here to see me, thinks your 'Isolda' is a very fine *poem;* and don't you cry if I think her no improvement on some of her predecessors. It is something to be the author of perhaps the sweetest dramatic eclogue in English; and the oftener I read your 'Griselda,' the better I like her and you. If the ribbed grinner will wait a wee, 'Isolda' may creep into my favour too.

"Willy Wagstick, were he alive, would make a thing of King Pym and his compeers; but you!—now let us see that meek under lip of yours!

"I read 'Isolda' when it came, and would have written long ago, had not exhausting pain prevented."

"*October* 5, 1848.

"DEAR SIR,—It would be rather *infra dig.* at present to comply with your request, if I were able, which I am not, being, indeed, all but interdicted the use of the pen. Tait's successors have not condescended to write one word to me. It is true, none of my letters to them absolutely required answering, but they might have said, we shall like to hear from you. I have long wished Frank to try his hand, and will persuade him, if I can, to write the article. Most of your plays are at Sheffield or Shiregreen, where he generally is, and in a few days 'Griselda' will again be on her way thither. 'Cromwell' went to Edinburgh with my critique.

"I ought to have been where you are, for railways will soon equalise the prices of coals, and most other things."

"14*th February*, 1849.

"DEAR SIR,—Am I indebted to you for the *Court Journal* of 27th instant? It contains a friendly article

on Ebenezer Elliott, not unlike your style. I shall be glad to learn that you are 'Jonathan Walnut, Esq., of Almond Hall.' That criticism is your forte you may be unwilling to believe: good critics, however, are more rare than good poets. How many can you name? I thought I was forgotten by all. And why should I not be? What do I to remind the world of my existence? The truth is, that I can find no publisher who will risk my doings, even on the principle of sharing profits. I am at a discount, as poetry itself seems to be; and political honesty, I am told, is anything but a recommendation to a publisher. I have added four or five prose articles to about 4,000 verses, to be called 'More Prose and Verse, by the Corn-law Rhymer,' but can get neither a bite nor a nibble. So is it, so it was, and will be, with the immortals of a fortnight. But though I am out of the world of literature, and unable to help you or any one else in any way, I could like to hear now and then how you go on, for I consider you to be in mind my son, and at once my pupil and instructor. You have had the advantage of a good grammar-school education, perhaps the best of all, which I have not had. You can select what is best; I swallow all that comes, and prefer the coarsest, like the shark that swallowed thousands of kiplings and scores of codfish, but only felt the codfish. This is the fourteenth day of Free-trade. If we have really got rid of monopoly you will live to see in the monopolists the best of all reformers; and the East India Company itself consenting to put to death its dear child, the cholera, so worthy of its parents."

"14*th August*, 1849.

"DEAR SIR,—For your article on 'Politics and Poetry' I thank you with all my soul. You are the only critic who has told the truth of me; you alone of them all seem to understand me; you alone allow my claim to trustworthiness as a friend of the poor. And your creed is probably a right one. But we must not forget that the staple of Dante's great poem is party-

politics; that some of the best passages in 'Childe Harold' are political; and that the only popular living poet is so because he is a politico-economical poet; for when I am asked if I have seen Tennyson's second volume, I am referred to his 'Locksley Hall,' a poem crammed with such passages as these, 'A year in England is worth a cycle in Cathay'—'Let the great world spin for ever down the ringing grooves of change'—'Slowly comes a hungry people, like a lion creeping slowly, towards one who dozes, winking, behind a slowly-dying fire;' every one of which passages might have been furnished by the Corn-law Rhymer. To come nearer home. If I offer a manuscript to a publisher, and try to encourage him by saying, 'It contains few politics,' he tells me, in reply, not that political poetry won't sell, but that *poetry* won't. Montgomery's does not; even Wordsworth's does not, though he is the paid bard of the taking and spending classes. I am sorry to find you discouraging the anti-British habit of painting rogues as they are. Such painting does help the oppressed, for it intimidates the oppressor. And every writer who, like you, does not belong to the Swiss of the press, should remember that of every oppressor it may be said, 'Now, this Barabbas (in his heart) is a murderer!' and that to every Cervantes reformers are Don Quixotes! But how mournful it is to reflect that, from the beginning of the record, the world's best intellect has been Tory! I am selecting instances, as you advise, and for doing so I expect to be hunted by the offended in pack, as Dickens may expect to be; for he meets a Pecksniff or a Dombey at every turn. By and bye, if I can meet with a publisher who will share profits with me, you may have a chance of writing a ten pound article for the 'Foreign Quarterly,' or some such periodical. Can you tell me what is the law in regard to paid contributions to the periodicals? I have always stipulated that the copyright should remain with me; but I am not sure that I have always obtained from the parties acknowledgments in writing to that effect, so

that they, if dishonest, might defeat me, unless a conveyance something like a receipted invoice is requisite to secure the copyright to the periodicals respectively."

"17*th September*, 1849.

"DEAR SIR,—I like Tyrrell's* style of flint and fire; but his critique on 'Runnymede' is not equal to that on 'Strathmore.' The latter is a model from which even you, perhaps, might derive profit, though your prose is perfect. Could you not procure an editorship? You might then marry and give the usual hostages to fortune. Or is there no saint in Whitbyshire now about thirty-two—kind, sensible, healthy, handsome, and sufficiently literary to honour alike your authorship and you? I know no position in life more enviable than that of a literary man to whom the mere necessaries of life are secured, as they are to you, and married to such a woman, bringing him no children. This, I am told, is Carlyle's position—except that, instead of 80*l.* a year, he has 150*l.*

"Whatever propriety there might be in my observations on your 'Griselda,' your intimation that you have altered it alarms me.

"I could like to see London again, but think I shall not, nor you unless you visit me.

"I will send you a copy of Tait's edition endorsed; and I would gladly at any time pay the carriage of any parcel which you might send me."

"25*th September*, 1849.

"DEAR JOHN,—I am negotiating with Charles Fox, 67, Paternoster-row, who brought out Harriet Martineau so successfully, for the publication of a volume of poetry and prose. * * * * * * *

"Pray excuse me: for whom else have I to help me in these matters?"

"29*th September*, 1849.

"DEAR SIR,—Mr. F. is of long standing; fifteen years ago, he paid Harriet Martineau 600*l.* or 700*l.* for her share

* Editor of the "Practical Elocutionist."

of the profits of the 'Tales of Political Economy.' I know he does not keep a retail shop, and I am told that circumstance does not usually influence the sale of twenty copies. He is, I believe, a brother of Mr. F., M.P.

"Don't talk of coming here for a day. Come for a week or fortnight at least. If you will let me know on what day you will be at Darfield Station, Midland Railway, by the down train which arrives there at 11·45 morning, I will send a conveyance to meet you; or by an up train at 5·13 evening."

CHAPTER XI.

THE EDITOR'S VISIT TO EBENEZER ELLIOTT AT GREAT HOUGHTON.—MARRIAGE WITH THE POET'S DAUGHTER: AND DEATH OF THE POET.—CONCLUDING REMARKS.

FEARING, from the sad accounts of the poet's health, that I should see him no more, unless I hastened to pay my long-intended visit at Great Houghton, on the 6th October, 1849, I took the Midland Railway as he had directed, and landed at Wath, that being the nearest stopping-station. Having arrived some three hours earlier than I was expected, there was no conveyance waiting for me at Darfield, and therefore I had to walk to Houghton Common, a distance of three miles. I enjoyed this walk through one of the green lanes of my native county, from which I had been absent nearly ten years. The road led up a gradual ascent to the village of Great Houghton, and thence more steep to the Common, on the verge of which, facing a grand prospect below, stood the dwelling of the poet, a neat substantial stone house, with a slated roof and out-buildings of similar materials. I was welcomed at the outer gate by the honest

bark of a large black Newfoundland dog, whose name I afterwards learnt was Tiger, though he has more of the composition of the lamb. I passed through a garden, half flower, half fruit, with a grass lawn, and reached the pillared porch of the house. The door was opened to my knock by a country servant girl, and I was received by Mrs. Elliott and her eldest daughter, who ushered me into a parlour where the poet was busy preparing for my visit. He would not keep me waiting, but rose and greeted me very cordially. Alas! one glance was sufficient to tell me the change which time and ill-health had wrought in his appearance since I last visited him at Upperthorpe. His features more pale and thin, his form more attenuated, and his hair almost white, told a ten years' tale of sorrow, and suffering, and age; but his voice was still loud, and his manner as flatteringly kind as ever. I soon felt at home, and his spirits lightened up as if his youth and strength had been suddenly renewed, like that of an old eagle. Conversation set in as the evening advanced, and engaged us all very agreeably. A fire like a furnace blazed in the chimney—a harp and a piano stood in the room, and there was a one-eyed pet canary which flew about, perching on the heads of those present. The poet's only drink was an invalid's glass of French brandy. He reclined on

an American rocking-chair, propped with pillows. Mrs. Elliott occupied a similar one opposite; Miss Elliott played and sang some favourite tunes, introducing one or two lyrics of her father's which had been set to music. Ten was the hour of good night.

Next morning, at breakfast, I was startled with observing him suddenly pause, and fix an expression of awe on me, while he solemnly exclaimed, "How like that cut-throat you look!" I found he alluded to Napoleon. We took one of his favourite walks on the common. I could not but smile at his eccentric appearance. He wore a little low-crowned broad-brimmed hat, not particular in its block, a grey tippet over a blue surtout, blue cloth vest and pantaloons, a steel watch-chain, hanging in the old fashion, black handkerchief knotted round his neck, common yarn stockings, ankle-boots, and was armed with a holly staff, rough from the wood. You might have taken him for a quack-doctor going to seek simples. His step was as springy as ever. We passed a quarry, which had supplied him with stone for his house, costing him nothing but a toll paid to the lord of the manor, who, happening to be a brother poet, was content with a song. After walking a mile we reached the distance-post of the poet—Wind-gap

Oak, which stands on an eminence, commanding views on all sides. He told me a tradition concerning this old oak. It is said to have been the trysting-tree or place where the parliamentarian forces of the county first assembled or erected their standard. Once another oak stood near, in whose hollow trunk Nevison, the highwayman, is reported to have been hid when he was taken. In revenge of this, it had been burnt down by some gypsies. We returned, and visited the poet's fishpond and his grounds, where he showed me what he had done, and what he intended to do for the improvement of his little estate, pointing out the remarkable objects in the landscape. There was Houghton Hall, now an Inn, where Strafford married his third wife, Bessy Rhodes, and where Roundheads and Cavaliers alternately took up their quarters. There was also the picturesque tower of Darfield Church, so soon to stand like a monumental guard over his grave. Wentworth Park, with its pillar, the Needle's Eye, marked the horizon.

During my stay we had other walks in this interesting neighbourhood, visiting, among other curiosities, the moat, where stood the Castle of Earl Waltheof, the Saxon patriot, who was put to death by Norman William; Howell Wood, the

Lady's Well, &c. This was his Arcadia; and these scenes, immortalised by him, will

"Live in description and look green in song."

Much literary and political talk had we, chiefly in the evenings at home, when we discussed the progress and prospects of society—not Southey's. But sad presages of his approaching dissolution ran like a melancholy accompaniment throughout. His disease admitted of no cure but death, though he was not without hopes; and his friend Mr. Adams had sent him a medical treatise from London, containing instructions how to operate on himself. He had procured some surgical instruments for this purpose, and said, in his simple way, "If I do not succeed I shall die, sir."

He was not without visitors, though nervous despondency at times unfitted him for company. But his dread of pain was greater than his dread of death. To a neighbouring farmer he said, "I wish you would shoot me without letting me know what you are going to do." Another rallied him on his nervousness, and said, if he would come to him he would cure him by sending him to the plough. He bore this kind of worrying with a patient smile.

Proofs from the printer of his "More Prose and Verse" kept coming to hand to be revised by him. He was very anxious to see the publication of this

work, and to learn what the critics would say of it. "Etheline" he thought was the best poem he had written—he intended to make a trilogy of it; but the reader will not be sorry that only the first part was completed. He had made several alterations in "Taurassdes" to adapt it for the stage, with the fallacious hope that Macready would bring it out. He read several of his poems to us, and got us in return to read to him, intermingling desultory remarks on the poets of the day. I had brought Marston's "Strathmore" with me, and read to him one or two scenes. He said there was "something in" Marston; and lamented his own disadvantages at Houghton, where he lived a hermit-life, precluded from witnessing the performances of such a son and daughter of nature as the Keans. He also said, "How much I should like to see Dickens before I die!"

It was pleasing to observe that retirement had softened his feelings—there was now more poetry, less politics, in his conversation—the Corn-laws had given place to more sociable themes. The Howitts, he said, always reminded him of King William and Queen Mary, whose heads were joined on the coins of the period. Jerrold's "Caudle Lectures" were good, because true. Women, he remarked, were always most in fault if man and wife quarrelled, and yet women would be the

regenerators of men; but he did not like those women who wished to take the place of men. He found fault with Carlyle for calling Dr. Johnson a hero, and abused the doctor with the strongest terms of invective. I said, "Dr. Johnson would have liked you because you are a good hater." He read a scene from Moliere's "Hypochondriac," which made us all laugh very heartily. He said it was a just judgment upon him that he himself had become a hypochondriac for laughing at the character. One of his friends from Sheffield, who wore a moustache, came to see him. Elliott, who never could bear to witness the least sign of affectation, begged this visitor to shave off his moustache, telling him that he would look better without it; the man, however, seemed to be of a different opinion, and kept his moustache.

I was desirous of visiting the most interesting relic of antiquity in Yorkshire, or in England—the ruins of Conisbro' Castle. Miss Elliott accompanied me. The scene brought Coleridge's verses on "Love" to my mind:—

"Oft in my waking dreams do I
Live o'er again that happy hour,
When midway on the mount I lay
Beside the ruined tower."

I felt that the time and place were propitious;

for it might have been said of me as of the "Knight of the Burning Brand"—

> "And that for ten long years he wooed
> The lady of the land."

I am happy to inform all faithful lovers, for their encouragement, that I met with better speed than the poor knight in the poem; and, accordingly, I took the earliest opportunity to speak to my old friend on the subject, who simply answered that he should feel proud and honoured in having me for his son-in-law. "She will make you a good wife, sir," he said.

The marriage was to take place at Christmas, and I returned to London loaded with literary presents from the Rhymer, among which was one that I chiefly value: his own copy of Tait's edition of his Poems, corrected by himself for republication.

The poor invalid, impatient of his sufferings, made his last attempt at a cure, which, unfortunately, did but hasten the catastrophe. He then wrote to me as follows:—

"*Hargitt-hill, near Barnsley, November* 9, 1849.

"Dear John,—I know not how you are conditioned; but if a great change do not take place soon in my disease, I cannot live many days longer. The wish nearest my heart is to see my daughter married to you. The accomplishment of it would smooth my passage to the grave. Compared with it, all other matters seem of no importance. Mrs. E. does not object to my present

writing, and will post this letter unknown to Fanny. She, of course, knows nothing of it; and the idea of having yet to wait eighteen months for you never crossed her mind! Your bride would remain here, and you could visit us to our great gain and yours. And she could not but think all the better of you."

On the receipt of the above letter, I hastened to the north. Mr. Elliott had taken to his bed altogether. He was delighted with my despatch, and exclaimed on seeing me, "Now you are John!"

He desired the marriage to take place immediately, without any celebration but the ceremony. All were anxious to fulfil his dying wishes. Accordingly, on the 17th of November, this, the most felicitous event of my life, took place at Darfield. He caused himself to be lifted out of bed, and placed at the window, to see us depart for the church, and requested us to come to him for his blessing as soon as we returned. When we were gathered round his bedside, he said, "This is Roger's Human life!" He planned several excursions for us in the neighbourhood with much kind solicitude, and, though dying, all his thoughts were for the living. He did not even forget his dog, but one day sent his untasted dinner, saying, "Tell him that his master thinks of him."

His powers of mind and body gradually decayed, but his medical attendants declared they had

never known any one so tenacious of life. The love shown him by his wife and family made him very loth to leave them, and his mind ran on the publication of his new volume, also he was desirous to come to London to take up his abode with us. This made him say to me, "You see a strange sight, sir; an old man unwilling to die!" Sometimes his mind wandered, and he dreamed awake. "I thought I was on the Common," he said once, "and a child knocked me down with a flower." He has the same idea in one of his poems :—

"An infant might have felled him with a flower!"

At another time he said, "What a strange head your sister has; like a flower top-heavy!" He lay helpless as a new-born babe, yet, with the strong self-will which had governed him through life, he could not submit to Death, but looked with a frown, as though he resented the intrusion of that stern power into his presence, and was indignant at the advantage which the conquerer was taking of his weak and prostrate condition. As if he would escape from the foe that was dealing his blows on him, he resolved to get up and join his family at tea; and was only prevented, though instant death would have been the consequence, by having the tea-table brought to his bedside.

The trees were weeping their leaves for the poet of Nature, and his favourite little bird, the robin, perched beneath his window, and trilled its pensive lay. He heard it, and dictated the very last verses which he wrote.

"Thy notes, sweet Robin, soft as dew,
Heard soon or late, are dear to me;
To music I could bid adieu,
But not to thee.

"When from my eyes earth's lifeful throng
Has passed away, no more to be,
Then, autumn's primrose, Robin's song,
Return to me."

This song was sung to him by his daughter, like the music of the dying swan.

The villagers of Houghton were anxious in their inquiries after his health, and said a great man, who could be ill spared, was going from them. His servant, who was about to lose the best master that man ever had, went to take his last leave of him. Diffidence kept him near the door; the poet rested his languid eye upon him, and moved his lips inarticulately. Finding himself unable to speak, he held forth his hand, and the sorrowful retainer stepped forward, weeping as he grasped it, and then parted for ever. At length he sunk into utter insensibility, and on the morning of

the 1st of December won the great prize for which his life had been a struggle—the prize of immortality!

Ellen Rendall, to whom he dedicated "Etheline," sent flowers from London to strew his corpse.

He had intended to be buried in his own grounds, and had marked out a spot for that purpose, but afterwards said he would be buried where his daughter was married. I had the melancholy duty of choosing a grave for him. He is laid in fresh earth, beneath a hawthorn-tree, that will shed its blossoms upon him on the death of every spring.

A public meeting was held at Sheffield, for the purpose of raising subscriptions for a monument to Ebenezer Elliott, and this design is still in progress. Some discussion has taken place with regard to a proper site. We would suggest the most public square in the town, that the men of Sheffield might never pass along the streets without calling to mind their most illustrious bard and patriot.

On a retrospect of Elliott's life, we find him born like the rose of the desert, dispensing beauty and fragrance in the waste. The spirit of poetry, moving over his stagnant mind, awakened its

powers, and animated them to productiveness. Genius reversed the transformations of love, and metamorphosed a brute into a god.

Elliott first wrote poetry as a poet, merely to please himself with the exercise of his talents; afterwards, he made use of this godlike gift of Nature for a nobler purpose than even to obtain fame—he advocated the rights of the poor, whose labour is his life, and denounced the oppressor, whose luxuries are wrongs. What had he to gain by this but hatred on the one side and ingratitude on the other? yet he persevered, for the sake of the cause which he had at heart: that cause was the repeal of the bread-tax! He knew that nothing has a more demoralising effect than physical degradation—that misery leads to sin; for Sir Walter Scott himself has said, "unmerited suffering hardens the heart to the consistence of the nether millstone." Therefore, for the sake of honest labour, compelled to live idly and become the victim of want—of lost chastity, whose crimes can scarcely be called its own, he took up his song, like Barak, against both the selfish tyrant and the inactive slave.

How much to the credit of his genius, that it not only rescued him, but was the means of rescuing others! The strong in mind are warm in

heart; the flame that is kindled in their souls, and which burns immortally, like a consecrated lamp, thaws the frost of worldliness; so that, instead of becoming misanthropical with wrong, they become the more philanthropical, because their own sufferings have rendered them sympathetic with those of others. Genius is a divine power—pity that its operations should ever be less than divine! How much is that man to be praised who uses this power for good—who does good instead of evil—who overcomes evil with good!

No poet of his day deserves so much this praise as Ebenezer Elliott. Hardly one had a higher purpose than to amuse. Some were pernicious, others merely dreamers; the main part negative in their character—few positively good. They may have tuned our feelings, refined and purified our passions, and made life musical; but have they gone further—have they incited us to action for the public good?

Paine, with his pen, prepared the way for Washington's sword, and America gained her freedom! Rousseau and Voltaire were the apostles of the French Revolution, which, had its practices conformed to their theories, would not have failed in redeeming France: so, Elliott wrought the greatest

public benefit that ever happened to the people of England—he untaxed their bread!

Few of our poets are men of this world—they generally speak of "Africa and golden joys;" they soar into ideal regions, and will not stoop to view what is passing around them; like swallows, they are best on the wing, they use their feet awkwardly —air is their ground. Elliott, however, thought it no degradation to domicile the muse with the poor, for our Lord took their nature upon him; he knew no greater theme for poetry than charity, the rest to him were but as sounding brass and tinkling cymbals. Nor did he assume the garb of wretchedness merely to show its misery, but rather the sin which caused that misery. He traces effects to their causes; he described the evil, but not without proposing the remedy. While making the oppressor uneasy, he did not wish the oppressed to be content; he did not take up the comfortable creed that the poor do not feel their wants as we think they do; he wished them to feel them, and to set about removing them. Elliott alone may, with justice, be styled the true poet of the poor.

The politics of his country, interpreted to him by unfed toil, compelled him to quit the wilds of nature, whither he would fain have escaped, and

dragged him back to the crowded town where wretches congregated together to each other's bane, like the tenants of the Black Hole in Calcutta. It is much to Elliott's credit that, foregoing the immortality which he might have insured by writing on topics of universal interest, he made choice of those which most concerned his fellow-countrymen, though, perhaps, but of temporary interest. Much of his poetry requires to be understood to be relished; but, warmed by his subject, he supposed the reader equally so, and spoke of persons and things known but to few as if known to all, without illustrating his meaning with notes, which his local allusions rendered necessary to the general reader. Accordingly, he frequently seems mystical and unintelligible, and many of his thoughts "will die with those they think on." Elliott thus sacrificed his fame on the altar of his country; or rather did he not insure it and make it blaze higher by this devotion and disinterestedness? Readers of poetry, is is true, will be disagreeably surprised to find that they have got into the midst of politics: it is like inviting a party to pleasure and setting them to work. Disagreeable truths are the more disagreeable the truer they are; but should they therefore be avoided? Ought we not rather to conquer our repugnance and do good to ourselves

by doing good to others? Nevertheless, it must be conceded, that disagreeable truths are not the fittest subjects for poetry. The Newgate Calendar would make but an indifferent epic. What politician was ever a poet? none but Elliott. But we should not regret, even for his sake, if poets in future left politics to politicians.

Elliott's devotion to his country deserves that his memory should be highly honoured by his countrymen. He voluntarily renounced all the delight of a rich imagination to sympathise with the sorrows of the poor.

> "His nature was too noble for the world!
> He would not flatter Neptune for his trident,
> Nor Jove for his power to thunder."

Alas! that a genius like his—hardy as the mountain oak strengthened by storms, yet tender as the herb which breathes sweetness when crushed —that a divinely inspired poet should have been doomed to dwell amid scenes of human woe and wrong till he became infected with the madness of their misery, and felt that he must sting the tormentors, or, like the scorpion environed with fire, sting himself. His rage was like that of the bear, which, when robbed of its cubs, howls forth a curse of desolated love.

Poets should always live in the country. Sym-

pathising with the flowers, Elliott felt their beauteous joy, and forgot the troubles of towns. He might have been an Arcadian shepherd, piping to Pan, the god of Nature. But sadness had grown habitual to him—the past forbad him to enjoy the present—yet let us hope that his future will be one of heavenly compensation for that suffering virtue which on earth had no reward save its own !

ON THE DEATH OF EBENEZER ELLIOTT.

"Good night! Good night!" thy last farewell
Still loves upon mine ear to dwell,
Like lingering sound of passing bell.

Elliott, my friend! nor mine alone,
The people mourn their father gone—
The patriot-bard, whose words of fire
Kindled the despot's funeral pyre,
And bade his laws in flames expire.

I saw thee in thy parting hour,
When Pain had given thee to the power
Of Death—but, in thy weakness strong,
Thou didst resist the treacherous wrong.
And, as in life thou ne'er wast bowed
By tyrant men—so now uncowed
By man's dread foe, thou smil'dst to see
His dart was Immortality.

When cold thy hand lay clasped in mine,
No more in friendship's grasp to join,
And in thine uncommuning eye
Death seemed in dreamy sleep to lie—
And short thy breath stood fluttering
Upon thy lips with ready wing—
I could not see thee thus, at last,
And weep not o'er thy goodness past.

With filial love I closed thine eyes,
And bad God speed thee to the skies!
Oh, who could doubt he fled above
Whose last look on the earth was love!

THE END.

Salisbury, Printer, Primrose-hill, Salisbury-square, Fleet-street.