

CHAPTER X

I LEAVE POLITICAL LIFE

By the end of 1842, I had had enough of newspaper editing. I found it a rather unquiet life. Yet it was in many respects pleasant. I was introduced to good society, was invited out a good deal, and made many friends. But it seemed to lead to nothing. There was the perpetual grinding, the threshing of straw that had been a thousand times threshed, the constant excitement, the wonder whether I was doing good or harm by my efforts. I wished to pursue some quieter course, and to have more time for reading and study.

Besides, I had got engaged to be married, and would now have to work for two instead of one. I had never before thought much of money or of money-making. It was sufficient for me if I earned enough to pay my way and save a little besides. But now I was about to give "hostages to fortune," and I required to consider the future. To marry, one must have means, as well as the prospect of increasing means. As Keats says :—

"Strange! that honey
Can't be got without hard money."

Accordingly, I considered whether I might not resume my former profession. With the consent of my affianced, I did so. I took a house in Holbeck, an out-township of Leeds, and put my surgeon's

address on the door. In course of time, I was occupied in many ways. I attended the members of several of the Benefit Lodges, and in this way became known amongst the working people. On Sundays I taught young men, and sometimes gave addresses, in the Zion School, New Wortley. Nor did I give up my connection with the newspaper. I continued to write articles so long as was necessary, and until I could dispense with doing so. Moreover, I was kept constantly busy by a Leeds publisher, who engaged me to write various guides and pamphlets. Some of these had an immense circulation. Among them were Guides to America and the various English colonies. The *Guide to America* was especially successful.

Mr Mann, the publisher in question, also requested me to write a *History of Ireland*. This was an entirely new field of work. I looked into the materials for such a history. Unfortunately, they were not very numerous. The Leeds Library, to which I had access, contained very few books about Ireland. Moore's History only brought it down to the period of the Reformation; Leland's to the Revolution of 1688; Taylor's gave the Civil Wars of Ireland; and so on, but there was nothing very good or complete. I wished to give a summary down to the present day. I ought to have had access to the State Paper Office; and there I might have been able to produce something good. But I had no such access. Yet I did the best that I could.

The work was produced in monthly numbers in 1843. I must confess that it was written too hurriedly, and scarcely deserved the success it obtained. The arrangement with the publisher was half profits, but, so far as I was concerned, I received

nothing in return for my labour and trouble. The work had a large circulation; but the failure of the Dublin bookseller through whom the principal portion of the book was sold, prevented the publisher deriving any profit from the work, and I shared his bad fortune.

After I had got out the last number of the *History*, I married, on the 7th December 1843; and the Christmas of that year saw my once solitary home lighted up with love and cheerfulness. I never regretted my marriage. My wife and I were altogether united through life. I obtained a cheerful and affectionate companion, and I hope that she obtained a devoted and equally affectionate husband. But these are things over which we draw the curtain. The happiness of married life cannot be babbled about to all the world.*

To return. The *History of Ireland* was published as a whole in 1844, and was well reviewed by the *Eclectic Magazine*, the *Nonconformist*, and the best of the Irish reviews. The *Athenæum*, while praising the book, said that "the author has made but little use of the documents published from the State Paper Office. Notwithstanding these drawbacks, his work claims the merit of honesty and impartiality; his views of policy are sound and philosophical; his sympathies are on the side of the oppressed; and his opinions are the result of careful examination." No one could be better aware than myself of the imperfections of the work, arising, in a great measure, from my having to work at a distance from the best

* Dr Smiles married Sarah Anne Holmes, daughter of a contractor in Leeds. She was born in 1823, and was educated at Liverpool by Miss Martineau, a sister of the well-known Dr James Martineau. Mrs Smiles died on the 14th February 1900.—ED.

authorities. I was afterwards urged by William Howitt to republish the work; but that would have occasioned me too much trouble, and my labours besides were turned in an altogether different direction.

I think 1843 was my heaviest year of work. I was well and healthy, took plenty of exercise, and my mind was always alive and active. I found work, plenty of work, necessary for my happiness and welfare. I had always a lot of business laid out beforehand. So soon as I had finished *Ireland*, I prepared six lectures on the "Men and Times of the Commonwealth," which I delivered gratuitously to the members of the Leeds Mechanics Institution and Literary Society, the first four in February 1844, and the last two in December 1845. I afterwards delivered these, reduced to four, at the Manchester Athenæum, and the Liverpool Mechanics Institution. I was very proud of this period of history, and often afterwards thought of devoting myself to its study. But it is only men of sufficient means and fortune who can devote themselves to the pursuit of any branch of history.

In the year 1844, I moved over to Wellington Street, Leeds, and there my eldest child was born. I was still near my old friends in Holbeck. Yet, by the removal, I to a certain extent separated myself from them. I still continued my literary pursuits, but I had given up the idea of living by literature. I liked to regard it as my staff and not—my crutch. It had hitherto failed me. "Dinna be an author," said Robert Nicoll's aunt to him, "they're aye puir." And so Robert had experienced at Leeds, in the position which he occupied, and in which I succeeded him. I recognised the truth of Coleridge's statement

in his *Biographia Literaria*—"With the exception of one extraordinary man," he says, "I have never known an individual of genius healthy or happy without a profession: *i.e.*, some regular employment which does not depend on the will of the moment, and which can be carried on so far mechanically, that an average quantum only of health, spirits, and intellectual exertion, are requisite to its faithful discharge. Three hours of leisure unalloyed by any alien anxiety, and looked forward to with delight as a change and recreation, will suffice to realise in literature a larger product of what is truly genial, than many weeks of compulsion." I found this to be true, in spirit and in fact. My future literary efforts were conceived in joy, and executed with pleasure. Whether they had any pecuniary results mattered little, for I had another occupation to live by.

I remember being called upon one day, at the office of the *Leeds Times*, by a gentleman from Armley, who introduced his son, a strong young fellow of about twenty, and said he wished him trained "as an editor." "An editor!" I said, "I never heard of such a thing. Why an editor?" "Well," he answered, "there are professions of doctors, barristers, and so on: why not editors?" "Simply because, like poets, editors are born, not made. A young man cannot be trained for an editor, as he can be for a doctor, or a manufacturer, or any other business." "But he *hates* business! he is a capital speaker, and wants to be an editor." "We have no openings, and we don't take apprentices." "Never mind," the father said, "let my son be admitted to the office, and let him try to do his best." We allowed him to look over the papers, and cut out paragraphs of news, and, if he could, to make a para-

graph by himself. But he was above that. The young fellow wanted to make speeches, and write articles! Of course, that could not be allowed. He soon tired of looking over the papers and cutting out bits of news; and then he disappeared. The next time I saw his name, I found he had got among the Chartists and made speeches. He could certainly speak by the yard, but there was nothing in it. He should have had his nose held to the grindstone for some years, and then probably something might have been made of him. What became of him afterwards, I do not know.

In March 1845, I was waited upon by a deputation of young men, who requested me to give them a lecture, or at all events "to talk to them a bit," at the Mutual Improvement Society which they had established in what had before been a Cholera Hospital, in St Peter's Square, Leeds. I complied with their request, and delivered an address which was afterwards published under the title of *The Education of the Working Classes*.

After citing the instances of men of worth and valour who, in the face of the greatest difficulties, had contributed to the honour of their race, enriched the literature, and advanced the science, art, and commerce of their country, I observed:—

"Now, I would not have any one here to think, that because I have mentioned a number of individuals who have raised themselves, by means of self-education, from poverty to social eminence, and even to great wealth—that these are the chief marks to be aimed at; and that the cultivation of knowledge is to be regarded only as a means of gaining a higher position in society than that which you now hold. This would be a great fallacy; and the encouragement of it could only end in disappointment.

“My object, in citing these instances, has been merely to show that adverse circumstances—even the barrenest poverty—cannot repress the human intellect and character, if it be determined to rise: that man can triumph over circumstances, and subject them to his will: that knowledge is no exclusive inheritance of the rich and the leisure classes, but may be attained by all: or, at all events, that no difficulties of situation, however great, can furnish any reason for despair.

“The education of the working-classes is to be regarded, in its highest aspect, not as a means of raising up a few clever and talented men into a higher rank of life, but of elevating and improving the whole class—of raising the entire condition of the working man. The grand object aimed at should be to make the great mass of the people virtuous, intelligent, well-informed, and well-conducted; and to open up to them new sources of pleasure and happiness. Knowledge is, of itself, one of the highest enjoyments. The ignorant man passes through the world, dead to all pleasures save those of the senses. He sees no more of the beauties of existence than if he were blind. To the man whose mental eyes have never been touched with the divine breath, the world is all empty—at best a mere gallery of pictures; while, to the intelligent, ‘earth fills her lap with splendours.’

“I regard it as discreditable to this country that, while so much has been done to draw forth the resources of its soil, so little has been done to develop the character of its people. What signifies to me the richness of our territory, if it do not produce good and wise men? What matters it that our cotton or woollen fabrics are improved, if our citizens are deteriorated? What are the perfectness and multiplicity of our productive powers, if our people are miserable, depraved, and ignorant? What though the resources of our soil, our mines, and our seas, be developed, if the intellect of our people be allowed to remain uncultivated? It is there that the true seeds of prosperity and progress lie hid. There lie the truest riches of a state—the knowledge, virtue, and character of the nation.

“It may be—nay, it will inevitably happen—that

education will teach those who suffer how to remove the causes of their sufferings ; and it may also make them dissatisfied with an inferiority of social privilege. This, however, is one of the necessary conditions of human progress. If man be degraded, he must be dissatisfied—discontented, if you will—with that condition of degradation, before he can make the necessary effort to rise out of it. It is the opprobrium of some of the most wretched and suffering classes in our land, that they are *contented* with their condition. Theirs is the satisfaction of the blind who have never known light.

“What is the great idea that has seized the mind of this age? It is the grand idea of *man*—of the importance of man as man ; that every human being has a great mission to perform—has noble faculties to cultivate, great rights to assert, a vast destiny to accomplish. And the idea has also seized hold of the public mind, that every human being should have the means and the opportunity of education—and of exercising freely all the powers, faculties, and affections of his god-like nature.

“What signifies it that our machines and our fabrics are improved and multiplied, if our men are not bettered in condition? What matters it how much steam power we employ, if it keep man more than ever yoked to the car of toil? Man, I insist, has a *right* to leisure—for the improvement of his mind as well as the preservation of his health ;—leisure to think, leisure to read, leisure to enjoy ; and the true, the benevolent, the humane, the Christian, application of James Watt’s stupendous discovery of the steam-engine would be—to abridge, instead of increasing, the toil of the labouring classes, and enable them to employ the time, thus set free, in the cultivation and enjoyment of the highest faculties of their nature. This would be the true improvement of James Watt’s splendid gift to man.”

The enthusiasm with which these lectures were received, and the rousing effect which they produced on many of the young men who listened to them (of which I afterwards frequently heard), induced me to

believe that a book written in the same spirit might be of some use; and I proceeded to carry the idea into effect. I was asked to deliver the lecture before the Mechanics Institution at Woodhouse, and before the young men connected with the Roman Catholic Church at Leeds. For I may mention that I had sympathy with all classes and sections of the community; and I believe I had friends amongst them all. I have often had Roman Catholics, Dissenters, High Churchmen, and Socialists, meeting together in the most friendly manner at my house. And I, on my part, was willing to help them all in every good work.

I went on enlarging my lecture, and delivered it at Thirsk and elsewhere. I kept adding to the examples, and entered into correspondence with men of influence and action. Some of my best illustrations were obtained in this way; and I endeavoured to work them up into a sort of continuous narrative. Then I arrived at the title by which my assemblage of facts became afterwards known—*Self-Help*; but the book so-called was not published for many years after the date of its first delivery as a lecture. In the meantime, another change in my destiny occurred.

I hope the reader does not think that I was too fond of making changes. I could not help it. I tried to make a living by physic, but failed. I tried newspaper editing; and, though it kept me, I found that it would not maintain a wife and family. I tried book-writing, and failed there too, so far as income was concerned. Another change was, therefore, necessary. Dr Mackintosh told me at Edinburgh that "a rolling stone gathers no moss." However this may be, I certainly gathered nothing by resting

and not rolling. I thought rolling was worth a trial. Change might do something for me. Idiots never change; but sensible people change for the better. Hence I changed, and now changed again; and my last change was certainly a successful one.

England was now at the commencement of the railway epoch. Since the opening of the Liverpool and Manchester line in 1830, the extension of railways had proceeded very slowly. The line connecting Liverpool with London was only opened in September 1838, on the completion of the London and Birmingham railway. I heard of the event during my first visit to London, after returning from Germany. Railways were gradually being extended in the manufacturing districts. In June 1839, the line from Manchester to Leeds was opened. In June 1840, I was invited to attend the opening of the North Midland Railway from Leeds to Derby. At the junction of the York and North Midland line, a train from York was waiting, containing George Hudson, George Stephenson, and some of the magnates of the North. I afterwards dined with the railway assemblage in the Music Hall at Leeds.

I often had the privilege of seeing and hearing George Stephenson after that event. He was a great favourite at Leeds, and was frequently invited to attend the soirees of the Mechanics Institute. He was a man of handsome presence—white-haired, blue-eyed, and ruddy—a wholesome, genial man. His addresses were very impressive. His very word “PERSEVERE!” had something inspiring in it. His advice was always most weighty, coming as it did from the fulness of his own experience.

Down to the year 1844, the extension of railways

had been comparatively moderate. But with the increase of traffic on the railways already made, and with the consequent increase of dividends, the shares rapidly rose in value, and many new lines were projected. Among the Railway Acts granted in 1845, were the Leeds, Dewsbury, and Manchester Railway (afterwards amalgamated with the London and North-Western Railway), and the Leeds and Thirsk Railway (afterwards amalgamated with the North-Eastern Railway). These two companies had offices in the same building. Railway service was so new, and the increase of new companies had recently been so rapid, that persons of experience were difficult to be had. Mr Fenton* was the secretary and assistant engineer (under Mr Grainger of Edinburgh) of the Leeds and Thirsk Railway; and as his assistant secretary, a Mr Easton, who was a man of experience, was about to leave him, he was in a great dilemma for some person to assist him in the office work. He told me of his difficulty, and said, "If you are not otherwise employed, and could come into the Leeds and Thirsk office to assist me, I should feel greatly obliged."

I considered the matter, and thought, "Shall I make this further change? Shall I leave finally the profession of medicine, in which, in course of time, I might succeed; or the profession of literature, in which I had to a certain extent failed, and where there was little probability of continual success?"

To succeed in medicine requires a great deal of time and experience; as well as, perhaps, family interest. It used to be said of doctors, that they

* Afterwards manager for the Low Moor Iron Company.

rarely got bread enough to eat, until they had not teeth to eat it. Medical men are, to a certain extent, the slaves of the public. While persons in other professions spend their evenings in peace, doctors are obliged to work by night as well as by day—sometimes by night more than by day. If they do not go to the patient who sends for them instantly, they are denounced. They are sent for at meal times, or when in church, or at night while in bed. Dr Lewins, of Haddington, used to tell this story. A ploughman, after he had done his work, took the plough-horse, and rode into the town “for the doctor.” “What’s the matter?” cried the doctor (who had been in bed) from the window. “My wife’s got a sair hoast” (or cough). “But what makes you come at this time of night?” “I thought,” said the ploughman, “that I would be sure to find you at hame!” Just so. Then a great deal of the work done for the public is gratuitous. In the case of those practising amongst the poor—which is the case with nearly all young men—they think themselves very well off if they get one-half of the amount of the bills they render, or at most three-fourths. They are regarded as friends and even angels by people when they are ill; but when the debt has been incurred they are regarded as something very much the reverse. They often get neither money nor thanks. People often doubt whether they have received value for their money. In the case of the butcher, or baker, or tailor, it is different. There was nothing, therefore, to detain me in this profession.

Then, with regard to literature—in the case of newspaper editing, the weekly quota of work must be done. The editor must write, whether well or ill,

whether he has subjects worthy of discussion or not, he must thresh his straw, though threshed so often before; a veritable task of Sisyphus, requiring much brain work, or at least brain worry, and a good deal of mental endurance. Book-writing again is, after all, but a lottery. You may succeed, if you can find a proper subject, and give enough thought and investigation to its development, which, of course, requires time and leisure. Then, suppose you have finished your book, you must wait for the results of the "half profits" system. If your bookseller fails, as was the case with the principal seller of my *History of Ireland*, all your time and labour go for nothing. The results are absolutely fruitless. This is even more unsatisfactory than the practice of medicine.

Such being the case, and having now a wife and family to support, I accepted the advice of my friend Mr Fenton, and applied for the position of assistant secretary to the Leeds and Thirsk Railway. The mayor, Mr Luckock, backed my application; and having many friends and acquaintances at the Board—amongst others, Mr Henry Cowper Marshall, the chairman, Mr Baines, senior, of the *Leeds Mercury*, and others—I was elected to that office at the end of 1845; and shortly after, on the retirement of Mr Fenton to accept a more remunerative office, I was appointed full secretary. I was now free from the turmoil of politics. I could call my evenings my own, and spend them with my family, in quiet reading and quiet thinking. Though not extraordinarily well paid, I was to a certain extent independent, as my wants were few. My work was not arduous. It was regular and systematic—some might say humdrum; yet it was full of interest.

The object of the Leeds and Thirsk Railway was to connect the manufacturing districts of the West Riding more directly with the towns and villages in Wharfedale, with Harrogate and Knaresboro' Ripon, and the coal and iron districts of the North-West of England. The line, when first granted, effected a junction with the Great North of England (now the North-Eastern) Railway at Thirsk, and shortened the distance to the north by about twenty-three miles. From Leeds, it passed over the river Aire; then due northward through the Bramley Fall sandstone, and by a tunnel of about two miles long, under the Bramhope Ridge; then across the Wharfe, by a long viaduct to Pannal, Harrogate, and Knaresboro', and Ripon, to the junction with the main northern line near Thirsk. The first sod of the railway was cut in October 1845; the foundation stone of the Wharfedale railroad was laid by Mr H. C. Marshall, in March 1846; the first stone of the Bramhope Tunnel was laid by Mr Bray, the contractor, in the following July; and the whole of the work was soon in full progress.

My business—for it was a regular plodding business—consisted in attending the meetings of the Board and taking down the minutes, in arranging the calls upon the shares in compliance with the Act of Parliament, managing the finances, the correspondence, and the various business connected with a large railway company, under the directions of the Board. It was steady, routine work, requiring application, judgment, power of organisation, and trustworthiness. In none of these, I hope, was I found deficient; though the employment was not, on the whole, of a character to bring with it any fame or special reputation.

It is not necessary for me to go through the history of this railway, with which I was connected for so many years. I may mention, however, that the principal difficulty connected with it was an engineering one. When the contractor started with the Bramhope Tunnel, he began to cut into it at both ends, and sunk eight shafts down through the ridge, from south to north, to the level of the tunnel. Engines were erected over them, to pump the water out. When the water was reached, it rushed out like a flood, drove the men out of the shafts and drowned the works. The water came from an immense distance, under the sandstone rock, from as far as Ilkley, about eight or nine miles westward, where the wells were seriously affected. More powerful engines were erected, and still the water could not be pumped away sufficiently quick to enable the workmen to proceed with the quarrying of the tunnel.

George Hudson, who then reigned supreme as Railway King in the North, and who feared the competition of the new line, declared that the Bramhope Tunnel would never be made, that there were no pumps in existence that would pump the water out of the shafts, and that the company would be bankrupt long before the tunnel could be finished. Not so fast! The Leeds and Thirsk Company did not become bankrupt, but King Hudson did before the tunnel was finished. The once omnipotent man fell from his high estate, and was hounded to death by his own toadies and sycophants.

It was a fact, however, that the company could not find engines powerful enough to pump the water out of the shafts at the north end of the tunnel. The consequence was, that the pumping engines

were stopped, and the men quarried along the drift-way, until they eventually reached the bottom of the shaft, where the water was most voluminous, and then, through the channel thus given, it flowed away in a sort of torrent at the north end, without any further necessity for pumping. This work was very tedious, and greatly protracted the opening of the railway. The directors nevertheless pushed forward the undertaking, and took measures, by raising new capital and obtaining fresh Acts of Parliament, to extend the line northward to Northallerton, Yarm, Middlesborough, Stockton, and Hartlepool. This rendered it necessary for me to be often in London, during the Parliamentary season, to give evidence before the committees, and to take the other steps with the directors and solicitor, for the progress of the undertaking.

I did not entirely leave my connection with literature. I think it was in December 1846, that a large meeting of the Manchester Unity of Odd-fellows took place in the Music Hall, at which Mr William Beckett, M.P., and Dr Hook made speeches, as well as Mr Robert Baker, Factory Commissioner, and myself. Mr Alexander Sherriffs was in the chair. He was then stationmaster at Marsh Lane, Leeds. By virtue of his ability, he was promoted step by step to be general manager of the York and North Midland Railway Company. At the end of his life, he became Member for Worcester, and was director of several companies of considerable commercial importance. The attention of Mr Edward Baines, senior, was attracted to the question by the proceedings at the above meeting. He asked me confidentially if I would furnish a series of articles on the Benefit Societies of the working-classes

for the *Leeds Mercury*; and I had much pleasure in complying with his request. The proceedings of the Oddfellows were at that time little known, and I believe the articles in the *Mercury* proved of service. Mr Baines afterwards appeared publicly at a meeting in support of the institution. I was afterwards induced to undertake the editing of the quarterly *Oddfellows Magazine*, published at Leeds; in which I inserted many articles upon "Health," "The Improvement and Education of Women," "Suggestions for the Improvement of the Rates of Contribution," "Building Societies," "Life Assurance," "The Friendly Societies Bill," "Individual Improvement and Social Advancement," "The Condition of Benefit Societies," "Provide," "Laws of Mortality and Sickness," "The True Principles of Benevolent Societies," "The Widows' and Orphans' Fund," and other similar subjects.

When William Howitt and John Saunders, with great intentions, started the *People's Journal* in 1845, the former asked me to contribute articles, and in the first year I sent three, on "Benefit Societies and Education." During the second year (1846) I sent four, on "Factory Women," "Popular Amusement and Recreation," and two brief biographies (Vincent and Cobden). In the third year, I sent two more on the subject of Factory Women, and the measures being then taken for the improvement of their moral and social condition. This useful and interesting publication having been brought to an end by a quarrel between the proprietors, William Howitt started a weekly journal of his own, to which I transferred my small services.

To the first volume of *Howitt's Journal* I contributed an article on "A Scheme of Free Libraries,"

which, I believe, had the effect of starting a system of itinerant libraries for Yorkshire, principally through the active instrumentality of Mr Hole, in connection with the Leeds Mechanics Institute. The system was taken from that established by Samuel Brown in Haddington many years before, to which I was so greatly indebted when a youth. I also published two brief biographies in the same volume. To the second volume, I contributed three more memoirs of distinguished persons; and to the third, four more; and then the publication broke down, amidst a storm of angry communications and replies from the proprietors of the two ruined journals—Howitt and Saunders. It was altogether a most unhappy termination of an originally prosperous enterprise.

In the midst of Mr Howitt's labours upon his journal, he called upon me with Miss Margaret Gillies, an old friend; and spent the night at my house while I lived at Woodhouse Cliffe, near Leeds. The two had been at Hargate Hill, near Barnsley, for the purpose of seeing Ebenezer Elliott—the one for the purpose of making some memoranda for an article, and the other for the purpose of making a drawing of the "Corn-law Rhymer," both of which appeared in *Howitt's Journal* of 3rd April 1847. They told me that Elliott was ill and suffering; but that he would be glad to see me, in memory of old times, if I could ever run over and see him at his country house. I could not find time then; but about two years later, when the late William Bridges Adams, the engineer, who supplied our railway with some rolling stock, told me that he was going over to see Elliott, and invited me to accompany him, I determined to run

over to Hargate Hill and visit the suffering and venerable poet.

It was on a Saturday afternoon, towards the end of October, that we were put down at Darfield Station on the North Midland Railway, and proceeded to walk up the hill towards Great Houghton Common. It was one of the last lovely days of autumn, when the faint breath of summer was still lingering among the woods and fields, as if too loath to depart from the earth she had gladdened. The foliage of the hedges and coppice was tinted in russet, purple, and brown, with just enough of green to give that perfect autumnal tint so lovely and pictorial. The beech-nuts were dropping from the trees and crackled underfoot, while a rich damp smell arose from the decaying leaves by the roadside.

After a short walk up the old Roman road leading into the famous Watling Street, in some places commanding beautiful views over the undulating country, we reached the village of Old Houghton, at the south end of which stands the famous Old Hall, an interesting remnant of middle-age antiquity. It was once the seat of the owner of the adjoining lands, a stern Presbyterian, but was now reduced to the condition of a public-house—"To what base uses may we come, Horatio!" Its fantastic gable ends, projecting windows, quaint doorway, diamond "quarrels," and its great size looming up in the twilight, with the well-known repute which the house bears of being "haunted," made one regard it with a strange awe-like feeling. It seemed not like a thing of this everyday world. Indeed, the place breathes the atmosphere of the olden time, which is not even dispelled by the inscription outside of "licensed to be drunk on the premises."

As it was open to the public, we entered, and then we observed a number of village labourers, ploughmen, and delvers, sitting in a boxed-off corner of the old squire's hall, drinking their Saturday night's quota of beer, amidst clouds of tobacco smoke; whilst the landlady, seated at a tap in a corner of the apartment, was dealing out potations to all comers and purchasers. A huge black deer's head and antlers projected from the wall near the door—evidently part of the antique furniture of the place; and we had a glimpse of a fine broad stone staircase winding up one of the deep bays of the Hall, evidently leading to the state apartments above. After this brief glance we proceeded up the hill to the more inviting house of the poet.

We reached it in the dusk of the autumn evening. There was just light enough to enable us to perceive that it was situated on a pleasant height near the hill-top, and commanded an extensive prospect of the undulating and finely-wooded country towards the south; while to the north there stretched away an extensive tract of moorland, covered with gorse bushes. The house we approached consisted of a simple, gable-ended, old English farm cottage, surrounded by a nicely kept garden and grass plot, with some of the late monthly roses still in bloom.

We were cordially welcomed by the poet, his wife, and two interesting daughters. Elliott looked the invalid that he was; for he was suffering from the fatal disease that soon after carried him off. He was pale and thin, and his hair was almost white. Age and suffering had deeply marked his features since I last saw him in his office at Sheffield. An anxious expression of features indicated the acute pain which

he constantly carried about with him. And yet he conversed cheerfully, and his manner was as flatteringly kind as ever.

After we had dismissed the subject of his health, the conversation ranged upon general topics; his countenance brightened up; he forgot himself and his anxieties, and seemed to become a new man. Notwithstanding his physical weakness—and he lay on an American rocking-chair propped up with pillows—his heart beat as warm and true as ever to the cause of human fellowship and universal good. The Bread Tax, which he had so often denounced, had now been repealed. He went over the old battle struggles of his life; displayed the same zeal, and held the same strong faith in the cause about which he had rhymed, long before it had seized possession of the public mind. He mentioned, what I had not before known, that the Sheffield Anti-Corn-Law Association was the first to start the system of operations afterwards adopted by the League, and that they were the first to employ Paulton as a public lecturer. But to Cobden he gave the praise of having popularised the cause, and knocked it into the public mind by dint of sheer hard work and strong practical common-sense; and to Cobden he still looked as the great leader of the day—the most advanced and influential man of his time. He was severe upon the Socialists. “What is a Communist?” he asked. “One who has yearnings for equal division of unequal earnings. Idler or bungler, he is willing to fork out his penny and pocket your shilling.”

The patriotic struggle in Hungary enlisted his warmest sympathies; and he regarded Kossuth as “cast in the mould of the great heroes of antiquity.” Of the Russian Czar he spoke as “that tremendous

villain Nicholas," and he believed him to be so infatuated with his success in Hungary, that he would not know where to stop, but would rush blindly to his ruin.

The conversation passed on towards his occupations in this remote country spot, whither he had retired from the busy throng of men, and the engrossing pursuits and anxieties of business. Here, he said, he had given himself up to meditation; nor had he been idle with his pen, for he had a volume of prose and poetry nearly ready for publication. Strange to say, he spoke of his prose as the better part of his writings, and, as he himself thought, much superior to his poetry. But he is not the first instance of a writer who has been in error as to the comparative value of his works. On that question the world, and especially posterity, will pronounce the true verdict. His wife, he said, had been his best critic. The two seemed very affectionate. She familiarly addressed him as "Ebb" or "Ebby." This sounded very oddly in my ears.

He spoke with great interest of the beautiful scenery of the neighbourhood, which had been a source to him, during his healthy period, of immense joy and delight. He said we must go and see the two great old oaks about a mile to the north, near the old Roman road, under the shadow of which the Wapentake, or muster of Weapon men, assembled in former times. In the hollow of one of these oaks, in more recent days, Nevison the highwayman used to take shelter. Then he spoke of the fine wooded country which stretched towards the south—Wentworth, Wharnccliffe, Conisborough, and the fine scenery of the Dearne and the Don; and of the many traditions which still lingered about the neigh-

bourhood, which, he said, some Walter Scott, could he gather them up before they died away, might make glow again with life and beauty.

“Did you see,” he asked, “that curious Old Hall on your way up?”

“Yes.”

“Well,” he said, “that terrible despot, Lord Strafford, married his third wife from that very house, and afterwards lived in it for some time. No wonder the country folks say it is haunted; for if it be true that unquiet, perturbed spirits have power to wander on the earth, after the body to which they were before bound is dead, then *his* could never endure the rest of the grave. After his death, the Old Hall became the property of Sir William Rhodes, a stout Presbyterian and Parliamentarian. When the great civil war broke out, Rhodes took the field with his tenantry on the side of the Parliament, and the first encounter with the Royalists took place only a few miles north of Old Houghton. While Rhodes was at Tadcaster with Sir Thomas Fairfax, Captain Grey (an ancestor of the present Earl Grey), at the head of a body of 300 Royalist horse, attacked the Old Hall; and as there were only some thirty farm-servants left to defend it, the place was taken and set on fire. Everything that could burn was destroyed. But Oliver Cromwell eventually rode down the Cavaliers with his ploughmen at Marston Moor; and then Rhodes took possession of the Old Hall, and repaired it. You would see the little chapel at its west end: that was added, and a godly Presbyterian divine was appointed to minister in it; and a road was made from thence to Driffield, to enable the people of that place to reach it by a short and convenient route.”

“I forget how it happened,” he continued, “but I believe it was by marriage, that the estate fell into the possession, in these later days, of Monckton Milnes, the father of the poet, to whom it now belongs. As Monk Frystone was preferred for a family residence, the Old Hall was allowed to fall to decay; the fine old furniture and tapestry were removed to the new house at Monk Frystone; and the Old Hall is now used as a public-house.”

And then the conversation turned upon young Monckton Milnes, his fine poetry, and his beautiful *Life of Keats*: on Keats, of whom Elliott spoke in enthusiastic terms as “the great resurrectionized Greek”: on Carlyle, whom he admired as one of the greatest of living poets, though not writing in rhyme: on the Howitts, and their fine country books: on Longfellow, whose *Evangeline*, then just published, he longed to read. Of Southey he spoke in terms of much affection. “Southey,” he said, “does not like my politics: he thinks me rabid; but he admires my poetry. I have two sons in the Church; he has gone out of his way to recommend their promotion, and secure livings for them. I am much indebted to him for his kindness and goodness. Besides, I admire his poetry and his prose, especially his *Life of Nelson*, which will perhaps live longer than all that he has written.” And thus the evening stole on with delightful converse in the midst of that quiet, happy family—the listeners recking not that the lips of the eloquent speaker would soon be moist with the dews of death.

On my return home, I sent Ebenezer Elliott a copy of Longfellow’s *Evangeline*, a shilling edition, which had just been published in England, and I received from him the following letter:—

"HARGATE HILL, NEAR BARNSELY,
"3rd November 1849.

"MY DEAR SIR,—

"If ever you can spare a little time, bring Mrs Smiles with you. I think we could keep you 'wick,' as we Yorkshire folks say, for a few days. We have always a stranger's bed, slept in every other night, and it will hold two; and though we can't go to market as you can, we are seldom without bacon and eggs. You would be quite a godsend—not that I want for society here, but it is of the wrong sort.

"How truly good you are! But I know not how to repay you for *Evangeline*—unless I send you a shilling, and that, I suppose, would affront you.

"Longfellow is indeed a poet, and he has done what I deemed an impossibility; he has written English hexameters, giving our mighty lyre a new string! When Tennyson dies, he should read *Evangeline* to Homer.—I am, yours very truly,

"EBENEZER ELLIOTT.

"My wife and daughters send their best respects to you and your lady, and it is perhaps well that the latter does not hear what they say of *you*.

"*N.B.*—They are discovering that you are a Scotsman."

But it was not to be. Poor Elliott died in less than a month from the date of his letter to me—that is, on the 1st of December 1849. The sadly pained look of his face prepared me for the event. I knew that his disease was fatal, and perhaps he knew it himself. Yet he kept up his own spirits, and the spirits of those about him, in a wonderful way. Only a fortnight before his death, his beloved daughter was married. He was supported from his bed to the window, to see the return of the party from church. The fatigue was almost more than he could bear. "My child," he said to his daughter Fanny,

"I feel so weak that an infant might fell me with a primrose." Hearing a Robin Redbreast singing beneath his chamber window, he had strength enough left to dictate to his daughter the following sweet little poem, to the air of "'Tis time this heart should be unmoved":—

"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 this life-full throng
Has past away, no more to be ;
Then, autumn's primrose, Robin's song,
Return to me."

These were his last lines.

There was a mixture of fierceness and yet of tenderness in Elliott's poetical writings. When he felt himself the champion of an oppressed class, he wrote with a welding heat, and threw out thoughts full of burning passion, "like white hot bolts of steel." Such verses sprang out of a truly noble wrath ; but better thoughts came to him in quieter times, and then he overflowed with sympathy for his fellow-men. While denouncing his opponents so hotly in political strife, he had all the while a deep well of tenderness in his heart. He used to say that he was descended from some famous Elliott, a border reiver from beyond the Tweed ; and perhaps some of the ancient bitterness still clung to him. Nevertheless, he was fearless, honest, sincere, and persevering—a fine specimen of that determined, sturdy character, which has made the North of England the hive of the world's industry. Although, like Burns, he wrote an epitaph for his own tombstone, I think that the

following lines, written nine months before his death, describe his best and truest character more fittingly.

“LET ME REST.

“He does well who does his best :
 Is he weary? let him rest :
 Brothers ! I have done my best,
 I am weary—let me rest.
 After toiling oft in vain,
 Baffled, yet to struggle fain ;
 After toiling long, to gain
 Little good with mickle pain,—
 Let me rest—But lay me low,
 Where the hedgeside roses blow ;
 Where the little daises grow,
 When the winds a-maying go ;
 Where the footpath rustics plod ;
 Where the breeze-bow'd poplars nod ;
 Where the old woods worship God ;
 Where His pencil paints the sod ;
 Where the wedded throstle sings ;
 Where the young bird tries his wings ;
 Where the wailing plover swings
 Near the runlet's rushy springs !
 Where, at times, the tempest's roar,
 Shaking distant sea and shore,
 Still will rave old Barnesdale o'er
 To be heard by me no more !
 There, beneath the breezy west,
 Tir'd and thankful, let me rest,
 Like a child, that sleepeth best
 On its gentle mother's breast.”

There is a feature in Elliott's history worthy of notice. His life proved, what has been a disputed point, that the cultivation of poetic and literary tastes is perfectly compatible with success in trade and commerce. It is a favourite dogma of some, that he who courts the muses or indulges in composition must necessarily be unfitted for the practical business of life; and that to succeed in trade or business, a man must live altogether for it, and

never rise above the consideration of its petty details. This is, in my opinion, a false and grovelling notion, and at variance with actual experience. In this matter I speak for myself, and merely use the experience of Ebenezer Elliott in confirmation of my views.

Generally speaking, you will find the successful literary man a person of industry, application, steadiness, and sobriety. He must be a hard worker. He must sedulously apply himself. He must economise time, and coin it into sterling thought, if not into sterling money. His habits tell upon his character, and mould it into consistency. If he is in business, he must needs be diligent; and his intelligence will give him resources, which to the ignorant man are denied. It may not have been so in the last century, when the literary man was a *rara avis*, a world's wonder, who was fêted and lionised until he became irretrievably spoilt; but now, when all men are readers, and a host of men have become writers, the literary man is no longer a novelty; he drags quietly along in the social team, engages in business, economises, and succeeds, just as other men do, and often to much better purpose than the illiterate and uncultivated. Some of the most successful men in business at the present day, are men who wield the pen in the intervals of their daily occupations,* some for self-culture, others for pleasure, others because they have something cheerful or instructive to communicate to their fellow-men. Shall we say that they are less usefully employed than if they had been sitting at a concert hearing a symphony, in a theatre seeing a play, at the club

* I have furnished many illustrations of this statement in *Character*, pp. 111-122.

playing whist, sleeping over a newspaper, or, after a dinner, cracking filberts over the wine, and perhaps riddling their "friends" with the sparrow-hail of next-door-neighbour scandal?

Ebenezer Elliott not only attended sedulously to his business, but improved his mind and cultivated his literary taste during the hours of leisure. He had more difficulties to encounter than most men. He was originally a dull boy, though sensitive. He was unable to learn anything, and was regarded as unconquerably stupid. He used to regard his companion, John Ross, who did his sums for him, with intense admiration. His brother Giles was very clever, and could learn anything; but he was ruined by praise, and did nothing. Giles was put into an office, in which his father was clerk, to write out invoices and post the ledger; while Ebenezer was sent into the foundry to do hard and dirty work. The positions of the two boys became completely reversed in their subsequent lives. The character of Ebenezer was formed amid the rough surroundings of the forge and the foundry, but, stimulated by the desire of excelling, he was indefatigable in study. He went into the steel and bar-iron trade at Sheffield, and by attention to his business, he realised enough for a competency, and eventually retired upon it. At the same time he gained a reputation as a poet, equal to that of the best of his time; though I do not think his merits are sufficiently esteemed. There is no complete collection of his works; nor has any complete memoir of him yet been written. I have often thought that a Life of Ebenezer Elliott, if properly composed, might prove a thrilling and inspiring book for young men. He himself once wrote the commencement of his autobiography, but

was stopped by the recollection of some terrible crisis in his life. He could not get over it, and laid down his pen in despair. I hope it may yet be possible for a life of this good man and true poet to be published. It might be equal to that of Benjamin Franklin, and much better than that of William Hutton. Elliott was, on the whole, one of the most interesting and remarkable men of modern times.

During the same year in which Elliott died (1849), I was requested to give evidence before a select committee of the House of Commons, on the Establishment of Free Public Libraries. I happened to be in London on the business of the Railway Company, and was very glad to give such information as I possessed. Mr Ewart was in the chair; Mr Disraeli, Mr Monckton Milnes, Lord Elcho, and others, were on the committee. I related briefly what I knew of the want of libraries in Leeds and the West Riding of Yorkshire; of the libraries in connection with Mechanics Institutes; of the Mutual Improvement Societies established by the working-classes and the difficulties they had in purchasing books of reference; of the want of elementary instruction in the first place; and the want of opportunities afterwards for those who have learnt to read. Mr Monckton Milnes put a curious question: "Have you found the literary habits of artisans very much affected by the circumstances of good or bad trade?" "Yes; but not to so large an extent as might be supposed. During a period of great depression, two or three years ago, several mechanics institutions were formed in villages in the West Riding, because the working people had time to spare; but as soon as the mills began running full time again, the institutions were

dropped. The people had simply employed in self-improvement the time that was liberated during the scarcity of employment in the mills." I also gave some evidence as to the uses of the system of Itinerating Libraries which had been established in Haddingtonshire; and afterwards sent in a letter giving a tabular view of the libraries in connection with the Yorkshire Union of Mechanics Institutes, which was published with the minutes of evidence and the report of the proceedings.

In the following year, a permissive Act was passed for the purpose of promoting Public Libraries, and for establishing and extending Public Museums of Art and Science in Municipal Boroughs, in the interest of the instruction and recreation of the people. I took the opportunity of publishing a letter in the *Leeds Mercury* of 9th November 1850, calling attention to these important powers, and urging their adoption in Leeds. I concluded as follows :—

"I know that the cost will be objected to. I only speak of the extreme desirableness of our having a Town Hall, with a Public Library, and accommodation for a Public Museum. What was the cost of our gaol? What of our pauper training schools? We have built these irrespective of the question of cost. Are we to have it said of us that we lack spirit to get up any public buildings, excepting they be for the purposes of accommodating criminals and paupers? Do we not owe something to ourselves and to those who are neither criminals nor paupers? Is not the founding of a Public Library as creditable, as necessary, and as beneficial, a work as the erection of a gaol? I conclude by expressing my conviction that the borough of Leeds would do itself lasting honour by taking the lead in providing a Public Library under the provisions of the Public Libraries and Museums Act of 1850."

Years passed before the Free Library Act was passed; and now it is doing good public service. My words may have been like seed cast into the ground, to bring forth fruit after many days.