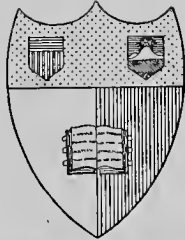




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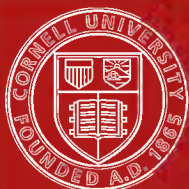
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WILLIAM COBBETT.

A BIOGRAPHY.

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MR. WILLIAM COBBETT.

WILLIAM COBBETT:

A BIOGRAPHY.

By EDWARD SMITH.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

London :

SAMPSON LOW, MARSTON, SEARLE, & RIVINGTON,
CROWN BUILDINGS, 188, FLEET STREET.

1879.

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“It is not by his faults, but by his excellences, that we measure a great man.”

G. H. LEWES (*On Actors, &c.*).

“Fear never but you shall be consistent in whatever variety of actions, so that they be each honest and natural in their hour. For of one will, the actions will be harmonious, however unlike they seem.”

R. W. EMERSON (*Essay on Self-reliance*).

“My good blade carves the casques of men,
My tough lance thrusteth sure,
My strength is as the strength of ten,
Because my heart is pure !”

TENNYSON (*Sir Galahad*).

NOTE TO THE PRESENT EDITION.

THE acknowledgments which have been made of the value and utility of this book, in spite of its numerous defects, are very gratifying. One cannot help feeling extreme pleasure at being told that he has performed a public service, in the endeavour to put into a better light the sayings and doings of William Cobbett.

In the belief that this story needed no preliminary thrusting forth of the author's own ideas, I relinquished the idea of furnishing a Preface. But I now see that an author must always make provision for a large number of careless and ignorant readers ; who, evolving from their inner consciousness some rapidly-generalized notions of what an author ought to say, have neither time nor inclination to discover what the author really does say. I am led to this observation for the following reason :—

Several persons have been so considerate as to remind me that Lord Dalling was already in the field. Now, I had no wish to enter into competition with Lord Dalling. He wrote several very brilliant essays concerning Cobbett and others ; and it would be difficult to find their superior in polish, in animation, in their power over the reader's mind. There, however, we must stop. Lord Dalling did not, and could not, understand William Cobbett. His aristocratic views of things, and the highly-cultivated tone of his mind, kept

him in a sphere whence it was almost impossible to emerge. He could not sympathize with Cobbett. And all the mistaken ideas current in the minds of his class concerning the non-Whig reformers, are reproduced in full by Lord Dalling. His point of view, and his motives, are different from mine; I repeat, therefore, that I am not in competition with him.

Coming, however, to matters of fact, the case is different. In matters of fact concerning Cobbett's life and doings, I would respectfully beg the reader to believe that the following pages must supersede those of any clever essayist who is content to derive his materials from impeachable sources. There are many such second-hand "essayists." There is a deal of trash put forth now-a-days under the heading of "Sketches," and "Lectures," and so forth. It is abundantly clear, from the experience of this generation, that your popular "sketcher" may say just what he likes; and as, according to the familiar fable, an audience once possessed of an idea of the inestimable talents of a mimic is often in no mood to listen to a *genuine squeak*, there is something of temerity in the attempt to counteract erroneous impressions, however derived. The conflict of statement between myself and the sketchers is sometimes great enough; but I never wished to make capital out of other people's fallacies. It is only under provocation that this kind of protest is now uttered. The objects aimed at, from the first, were to place fairly upon record,—first, the circumstances under which this singular character was evolved; and, secondly, the work which Cobbett ultimately did for his country's benefit.

And, with reference to that work, let me remark that it is idle for traditional politicians to repeat their stale inquiry as to the tangible results of Cobbett's life. The simple answer is, that he was the barometer of popular opinion, more or less, for thirty years.

E. S.

LONDON, *October*, 1879.

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