

LIFE OF JOHN KITTO

CHAPTER II.

THE WORKHOUSE.

SOME stratagem was necessary to secure the lad's entrance into the workhouse, for he was wild and shy; and when he learned that he was in virtual captivity, his sorrow was without bounds. But the wayward and defiant pauper submitted, in course of time, to the salutary curb; and he was in need of it, for he had long moved simply as it pleased him, and acted under no law but that of his own moods, which brooked neither challenge nor control. Not only were the order and discipline of the workhouse of essential service to him, but his fellowship with the other boys was also of immense advantage. It revealed to him various aspects of human nature, and tended to soften such misanthropic asperities as solitude is apt to produce. It gave employment also to his pen, and his facility of composition eventually drew attention to him. He had been going down the valley of humiliation, and the workhouse was the lowest step but one in the descent. For there was still another, and a deeper one; but it was the last, and the next step beyond it commenced the uphill journey. Kitto's desultory life, prior to his entry into the workhouse, would never have brought him into observation; but now his power was more concentrated, and he gradually came into closer contact with the benevolent Governor and the Board of Guardians. If he felt acuter misery, he had also acquired a keener power of telling it; and such a power in such a narrator, could not but excite surprise. If he had to make complaints, his fearless utterance usually secured redress; and if he was obliged to enter into self-vindication, the cleverness of his advocacy was at least as conspicuous as the rectitude of his conduct.

Mr Roberts, who was governor of the workhouse at the time of his admission, treated him kindly, and permitted him some indulgences, even so far as sleeping at home; and Mr Burnard, his successor, was Kitto's kind friend and sympathizing correspondent through his whole eventful career. The youth was set to learn the making of list-shoes, under Mr Anderson, the beadle, and he grew, in no long time, to be a proficient in the business. Probably his friends were happy that now he might be able at least to maintain himself, and that there was something between him and abject penury. Within a year of his entering the workhouse, he began to keep a journal, and this curious and extraordinary document¹³ is the best record of this portion of his life and progress. For this purpose, therefore, we shall freely employ it.

It might perhaps be supposed that a lad, brought up as John Kitto had been, in comparative pauperism, should be a stranger to delicacy of feeling. It might be imagined that the hardship of his condition could not but blunt any mental refinement, and that therefore now, within the walls of a workhouse, he had more

LIFE OF JOHN KITTO

than ordinary reason for contentment among boys of his own years and class. What is thus surmised might be true of many, perhaps of the majority, in Kitto's circumstances; but it was certainly not true of him. He was painfully conscious of his degradation. In spite of all he suffered, he never sank into callousness. What he might have been ever stood out to him in sad contrast to what he was, and his present condition was out of all harmony with his ideal prospects. He felt, and he keenly felt, so that in his Journal, when he becomes sentimental or sketchy at any time, or describes what enjoyments he coveted, or what anticipations feasted him, he suddenly and testily checks himself, and cries, 'But what has a workhouse boy to do with feelings?' or, 'The word pauper sticks in my throat.'

The interesting quarto is styled, 'Journal and Memorandum, from August 12, 1820, by John Kitto, jun.' The motto on the title-page might have been ascribed to undue self-appreciation, had it not been vindicated by his subsequent career—

'Full many a gem of purest ray serene,
The dark unfathomed caves of ocean bear,
Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
And waste its sweetness on the desert air.'

The volume is, 'with reverence, inscribed to the memory of Cecilia Picken, my Grandmother, and the dearest friend I ever had,' etc. It was an odd thing for a pauper boy to think of such a project as keeping a diary. It shows, at least, that his mind was stirring, and that he was resolved to exercise himself in observation and in composition. When was a journal compiled in such circumstances—amidst such physical and social disadvantages—by a deaf boy in a poorhouse, of whom no higher estimate was formed, than that he might be a passable shoemaker, and for whom no loftier wish was entertained than that he might be able to maintain himself by his craft, and without being an expense to the community! Compassion was felt for him, but no hopes were cherished about him. Men blamed the father and pitied the child, and then thought no more of him, but as the victim of complicated and repeated misfortunes.

As to his motive in writing it, he says, that as he had no time to finish his drawings, and they did not sell when finished, and as he could not command a sufficient quantity of books, so he thought that writing was a good substitute, both for painting and reading. He adds, too, that he adopted the plan of a journal as a useful thing—as something to instruct others years hence (if he should be spared), in the misfortunes and sorrows of his early years, while he admits that there may be a little bit of human vanity in the resolution. But the Journal has realized its purpose. What, in fact, would the record of his early life be without it?

LIFE OF JOHN KITTO

The following is his description of himself—racy and rather picturesque, though several features of the external portraiture were subsequently modified or toned down by the higher physical culture which he afterwards enjoyed:—

‘Yesterday I completed my sixteenth year of age, and I shall take this opportunity of describing, to the best of my ability, my person, in which description I will be no egotist. I am four feet eight inches high; and, to begin with my head, my hair is stiff and coarse, of a dark brown colour, almost black; my head is very large, and, I believe, has a tolerable good lining of brain within. My eyes are brown and large, and are the least exceptionable part of my person; my forehead is high, my eyebrows bushy; my nose is large, mouth very big, teeth well enough, skin of my face coarse; my limbs are not ill-shaped; my legs are well-shaped, except at their ends they have rather too long a foot; when clean, my hands are very good; my upper lip is *graced*, or rather disgraced (as in these degenerate days the premature down of manhood is reckoned a disgrace!—how unlike the grave and wise Chinese, who envy us fortunate English nothing but our beards) with a beard.’

There was indeed something peculiar in his appearance:—

‘*March 30.*—I observe that my decorated lip exposes me to observation, and that when I walk along the streets, all men, women, and children, do me the honour to stare me in the face. I got leave to come out this afternoon, and shaved myself with my father’s razor.’ In a fragmentary autobiography, dated June 26, 1823, he writes,—‘My manners are awkward and clownish. I am short in stature, stoop much in walking, and walk as though I feared I should fall at every step, with my hands almost always, when I walk, in my pockets.’

‘*October 7.*—When I go any where, I am almost afraid to meet any of my own sex; there is, it seems, something about me that exposes me to observation, and makes me stared at; and I find, by experience, that the best way to come off well, is not to avert the face, but to look unconcerned, stare at them in return, and assume an impudent look. What a world is this, in which modest bashfulness is contemned, and impudence caressed!’

His deafness, ‘laboured asthmatic breathing,’ and apparent powerlessness, often made him the butt of the other boys in the hospital, and he was obliged to make sudden and smart reprisals.

‘*October 12.*—When afterward, in the evening, Torr was making faces at me again in the court-yard, I could bear it no longer, but gave him such a blow as made him fall down. You cannot imagine, Madam,¹⁴ how this seeming trifle provoked me.

‘*October 22.*—I today experienced the truth of the maxim, that meanness is a medal, the reverse of which is insolence. When I was waiting under the porch till Mr Burnard should pass by, to ask leave to come out, one of the blue-coat boys,

LIFE OF JOHN KITTO

named Peters, kept making faces at me. At first I treated his foolery with the contempt it deserved, by taking no notice of it. But at last he provoked me so far, by attempting to pull my nose, that (though no boxer, and not over courageous) I gave him a blow on the forehead, with such good will, as made him reel to the opposite wall, and brought the water into his eyes. When I had done so, I fully expected a return of the favour, but he, so far from resenting it, desisted from his foolery, and soon sneaked off.

‘March. 21.—At eight o’clock, as we were going to prayers, Rowe gave me an unprovoked blow on the back, and ran away. I pursued him, and hemmed him into a corner, when, finding he could not escape, he placed himself in a pugilistic attitude; but a few blows made him stoop to defend his ears, and at the same time to pick up a bone and a large cinder to throw at me. While I was disarming him of those missile weapons, I was attacked in the rear by ten or twelve boys, who delight in mischief. Having disarmed Rowe, I turned against my new opponents, and, discharging a bone at one, and a cinder at another, and some blows among the rest, put them all to flight.’

Sometimes, when bad boys were flogged, Kitto was selected to hold their legs, probably because, from his inability to hear their cries, he was under no temptation to slacken his grasp. The next extract is a reflection, in his own style, upon his early disaster.

‘October 9.—I found, on coming to my senses, that I had just been bled, and that by my fall I had lost my hearing, and from that time to this there has

“Not to me returned
The sound of voice responsive, no feast divine
Of reason, nor the ‘flow of soul,’ nor sports
Of wit fantastic: from the cheerful speech
Of men cut off, and intercourse of thought
And wisdom.”¹⁵

‘I did not entirely recover my strength till eight months after, four of which I kept my bed from weakness, during which time I had leeches applied to my temples and under my ears, also an issue on my neck, besides taking plenty of nauseous physic—all to no purpose as to my deafness, for I do not expect to hear any more. Ever since, after dark or sunset, and in a great measure in the day, I have always had an irregular uneven pace and a labouring gait, and after dark I stagger like a drunken man. Thus, you see, no sooner had youthful fancy begun to sport in the fairy fields of hope, than all my hopes anticipated, and present pleasures and happiness, were, by this one stroke, destroyed. O! ye millions, who enjoy the blessing of which I am deprived, how little do ye know how to appreciate its enjoyment! Man is of such a fickle nature, that he ever slightes the pleasures he has, to sigh for

LIFE OF JOHN KITTO

those he has not. However, I will attempt to give you an idea of my deprivation. Fair lady, how should you like to forego the incense of flattery (so gratifying to female vanity) offered you by the admiring throng? I believe, my Lord, you would regret being deprived of the fulsome adulation offered you daily by abject (pardon me, my Lord) sycophants. Sir, who are you? What are those who extol you to the skies? You are a wonder, I must own—a rich poet. Yet, remember, it is not to your poetical or personal merit they pay homage, but to your wealth you owe it; nor forget that such men as those who flatter you, could suffer, unmoved, an Otway, a Chatterton, and many others, to die unpitied”—I had almost added, “unknown”—the former of want, and the latter of ——; but let me not withdraw the veil benevolence has thrown over his memory. Should you, Sir, like to be deprived of this degrading flattery? Ye men of genius, and of wit! Ye patriots and statesmen! Ye men of worth and wisdom! Ye chaste maids and engaging matrons! And ye men of social minds ‘Should you like to be

“From the cheerful speech
Of men cut off, and intercourse of thought
And wisdom?”

If not, guess my situation, now I am grown somewhat misanthropic, with no consolation but my books and my granny.’

He had passed through the fire, and the smell of singeing was upon him. But he never sank into

‘A grief without a pang, void, dark, and drear,
A stifled, drowsy, unimpassioned grief,
Which finds no natural outlet, no relief
In word, or sigh, or tear.’

Strange it is to find the editor of the Pictorial Bible thus recording of himself:—

‘I was today most wrongfully accused of cutting off the tip of a cat’s tail. They did not know me who thought me capable of such an act of wanton cruelty.

‘*June 2.*—I am making my own shoes.

‘*June 9.*—I have finished my shoes—they are tolerably strong and neat.

‘*August 14.*—I was set to close bits of leather.

‘*August 15.*—Said bits of leather that I had closed, were approved of, and I was sent to close a pair of women’s shoes, which were also approved of.

‘*August 16.*—I was most unaccountably taken from what I had just begun to learn, to go to my old work (making of list shoes), in which I am perfect as it is possible to be. S—— who, without being acquainted with the structure of a list shoe, dictates to us who are, without any authority but that of being a man (a very little one too), and bids us, under pain of the stirrup, make a pair of shoes per di-

LIFE OF JOHN KITTO

em, which is particularly hard on me, who, besides doing my own work, am obliged to teach the rest.

'November 14.—I forgot to mention that, on Monday, I had been a year in the workhouse, during which time I have made seventy-eight pairs of list shoes, besides mending many others, and have received, as a premium, one penny per week.

'November 20.—Set to tapping leather shoes today.'

In striking contrast with these revelations about list and leather, tapping and closing, waxing and sewing, occurs the following entry, which proves that the mind of the pauper shoemaker was not only busy, but stretching far above and beyond the walls of the workhouse:—

'I burnt a tale of which I had written several sheets (quarto), which I called "The Probationary Trial," but which did not, so far as I wrote, please me.'

The discipline of the workhouse was occasionally administered in profusion, and on a somewhat miscellaneous principle. He records that, on one occasion, having finished his shoes, and when he was waiting for the soles of others to be cut out, he began to 'write a copy' for Kelly, and had only written one letter, when the beadle came in, and 'gravely gave us a stirruping all round'—idleness being the alleged ground of the castigation.

Among the most interesting entries in the Journal, are those relating to his grandmother, who had nursed and watched him with more than maternal fondness and self-denial, and whom he regarded with more than filial affection. On the first page occurs the following entry, which we copy as it stands:—

'1819.—Granny has been absent in Dock this 2 days. Tho' but for so short a period I severely feel her absence. If I feel it so acutely now, how shall I bear the final separation when she shall be gone to that "undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveller returns?" She cannot be expected to live many years longer, for now she is more than 70 years of age. O, Almighty Power, spare yet a few years my granny—the protector of my infancy, and the . . . I cannot express my gratitude. It is useless to attempt it.'

His interviews with this relative are the epochs of his life. He carefully notes her gifts to him, is rejoiced when she is pleased, and sadly dismayed when he hears of her being in a 'fine taking' about any domestic occurrence. After numerous incidental allusions, he writes:—

April 16.—Granny is worse again. She seems almost unconscious of everything; yet she knows me, for she held out her hand to me when I was going.

April 17.—She does not know me!—she is speechless. Aunt tells me that the surgeon has given her over—that—she is dying.

April 18.—She is dead.'

This was the sensitive and affectionate boy's first great sorrow.

LIFE OF JOHN KITTO

April 20, Good Friday.—Being now a little recovered from the first shock, I have, after several attempts, summoned courage to detail particulars. On Wednesday evening, when I came out [from the workhouse], I trod softly up stairs lest I should disturb her repose. Useless precaution! Aunt met me at the head of the stairs, in tears. I entered;—a white sheet over the bed met my view. She was dead ‘Think you I wept? I did not weep! Tears are for lesser sorrows; my sensations were too powerful for tears to relieve me. The sluices of my eyes were dried! My brain was on fire! Yet I did not weep. Call me not a monster because I did not weep. I have not wept these four years: but I remember I have, when a boy, wept for childish sorrows. Then why do I not weep for this great affliction? Is not this a contradiction? Am I hard of heart? God forbid that tears should be the test, for I felt—I felt insupportable agony.

‘Even to an indifferent person the sight of a dead person awakens melancholy reflections; but when that person is connected by the nearest ties—oh, then—when I saw the corpse—when I saw that those eyes which had often watched my slumbers, and cast on me looks of affection and love, were closed in sleep eternal!—those lips which often had prest mine, which often had opened to soothe me, tell me tales, and form my infant mind, are pale and motionless for ever!—when I saw that those hands which had led, caressed, and fed me, were for ever stiff and motionless—when I saw all this, and felt that it was for ever, guess my feelings, for I cannot describe them. Born to be the sport of fortune, to find sorrow where I hoped for bliss, and to be a mark for the giddy and the gay to shoot at—what I felt at the deprivation of my almost only friend, the reader can better conceive than I can describe. Yet that moment will ever be present to my recollection to the latest period of my existence. Gone for ever! that is the word of agonizing poignancy. Yet not for ever—a few short years at most, and I may hope to meet her again—there is my consolation. Joyful meeting! yet a little while to bear this

“Fond restless dream which idiots hug,
Nay, wise men flatter with the name of *Life*,”

and we may meet again. Already I anticipate the moment when, putting off this frail garb of mortality, and putting on the robe of immortality, of celestial brightness and splendour, in the presence of our God we may meet again—meet again, never to part; never again to be subject to the frail laws of mortality—to be above the reach of sorrow, temptation, or sickness—to know nought but happiness—celestial happiness and heaven! Accursed be the atheist who seeks to deprive man of his noblest privilege—of his hopes of immortality—of a motive to do good, and degrade him to a level with the beast which browses on the grass of the fields. What were man without this hope? I knelt and prayed for her departed spirit to Him in whose hands are life and death, and that He would endue us with resigna-

tion to His decrees, for we know that He had a right to the life which He gave.⁴ Her countenance is not in the least distorted, but calm and placid, like one asleep.

*‘April 23, Easter Monday.—*The day before yesterday being the day prior to my grandmother’s funeral, and not being certain that I should be able to come out early enough to be present, as it would take place at nine o’clock, I determined to take what might eventually be a last view of the revered remains. I raised the cloth—it was dusk—the features were so composed that I was for a few moments deceived, and thought it sleep. I pressed my lips to her forehead; it was cold as monumental marble!—cold for ever! A thousand recollections rushed upon me, of her tenderness and affectionate kindness to me. She, who was now inanimate before me, was, a short time since, full of life and motion; on me her eye then beamed with tenderness, and affection dwelt in each look. When I was sick, she had watched my feverish pillow, and was my nurse; when I was a babe, she had fondled, caressed, and cherished me; in short, she had been more than a mother to me. And this friend, this mother, I never was to behold again. A thousand bitterly pleasing instances of her kindness to me occurred to my recollection, and I found a kind of melancholy pleasure in recalling them to remembrance. I gazed on each well-known feature. I kissed her clay-cold cheek and pallid lips. I remembered how often my childish whims had vexed her. I remembered how I had sometimes disobeyed her earnest and just commands. I mentally ejaculated,

“O that she would but come again
I think I’d vex her so no more.”

Fruitless wish! Will the grim tyrant death give up his prey? Will the emancipated soul return to its dreary prison? Ought I to wish it? “No!” said reason; “No!” said religion: such a convincing “No!” they uttered, that I blushed for the wish. Shall I, a frail mortal, wish that undone which my Maker has done, and by implication censure His decrees? If (as we may hope) she be happy, will she not grieve to see us repining at her bliss? I will try to be resigned. I thought of all this; but yet I did not weep; for ‘twas not a tear—my eyes water sometimes; I did not weep; it certainly was not a tear that fell from my eyes as I leant over the open coffin, but it was probably caused by my looking stedfastly at one object. I continued bending over the coffin till darkness hid the features entirely from my sight, and then tore myself away.’

Who would surmise that these paragraphs, so fluent and correct, so vivid and tender, were written within the walls of a workhouse, by a deaf and disabled strippling, almost uneducated, wholly unpractised in composition, and seated, in pauper livery, on a tripod from morning till night, working at a list shoe on his lap?

*‘April 24.—*About a quarter past eight on Easter Sunday, my father went to Mr Barnard, and got leave for me to come out. Crape was put round my hat. . . How

unable are the trappings of woe to express the sorrow doubly felt within! . . . I looked once more and for the last time on the corpse, once more and for the last time pressed her cold lips, and then she was shut from my view for ever! I felt a something at my heart that moment, which baffles description. I felt as though I could have freely given my life to prolong hers a few years. What! had I viewed for the last time her who was my only benefactor, parent, and friend, and was I never to see her more? “No!” whispered doubt; “Yes!” said faith; and she was right. . . At the appointed time we walked in “sad array” behind the coffin—first, Uncle John and Aunt Mary. . . There were about forty persons present: the service was read by Dr Hawker’s curate; the coffin was deposited in the grave and covered with earth. . . The moment in which the coffin which contains the remains of a beloved relative, is hid from our sight, is, perhaps, a moment of greater agony than at their demise, for then we have still the melancholy consolation of contemplating the features of the beloved object; but when that sad and gloomy comfort is taken from us, the feelings of our loss occur with accumulated force; we consider what, a short time since, the contents of the coffin were, and what, in a short time, they will be; we consider that, in our turn, we shall be conveyed to a similar, if not to the same place, and in our turn be wept over with transient tears, and soon be forgotten. I thought the man almost guilty of sacrilege, and could have beaten him, who threw the earth so unconcernedly on her remains. “Why does he not weep?” I internally asked. “Why does not every human being join with me in lamenting her loss?”

‘But I shall not attempt to describe my feelings; they were such, that the moment when I stood on the brink of the grave, eagerly looking on the coffin till the earth concealed it, I shall never forget till the hand that writes this shall be as hers, and the heart that inspires it shall cease to beat. When we came home I felt a kind of faintness coming over me, and if Aunt Mary had not timely rubbed my temples with cold water, I should have fainted. Grandmother is buried on the left hand side of the aisle, opposite the steeple, near the church door (Charles’ Church), beneath the headstone erected to the memory of her grand-children.’

Still Kitto could freely criticise the perfunctory manner in which he thought the funeral service had been gone through. But the next entry reveals the lacerated state of his heart, and opens up a glimpse of his unhappy home.

‘*April 27.*—In consequence of the loss of this revered relative, I already begin to feel a vacuum in my heart, which it is impossible to describe. Who shall supply her place? Nature points to my mother. . . While she (grandmother) lived, I had no cause to regret the want of kindness in any other person. But now, alas! she is gone, and I feel myself an isolated being, unloving and unloved; for whom this world, young as I am, has few charms. . .

‘When I return from the restraint of the workhouse, the rooms look desolate, for she is not there. She who greeted me with looks and smiles of affection is not there! She who prepared my tea, and rejoiced if she had some little delicacy to offer me, is not there! She who chode me if I left her even a short time, is not there! In short, she who loved me, is not there! Who shall supply her place? My mother, or my aunt? My mother! it must be so, it shall be so. To do her justice, she has been very kind to me since the sad event, and so has aunt. Yes, mother has been very kind. She knows, amongst other things, that my grandmother’s death would deprive me of the means of getting almost the only thing I value—books: therefore, with great kindness and consideration, my father wrote, by her direction I suppose, “I will give you the money to get the books.” “Indeed,” I said, “but do you know how much it will come to?” “No.” “Why, you know,” I said, “I have got a penny per week at the work-house, and I change my books (two vols. small, or one large vol.) three times a week, and pay a penny each time that penny will pay but for one of those changes.” Father wrote, “You shall never want twopence the week.” Was not this kind? very kind, I think. I shall have no occasion to put their kindness in this last instance to the test as yet but will this kindness last? Will they not, when they think the edge of my grief is blunted, relapse into their former indifference? I expressed this doubt to my mother. She assured me of her continued kindness, and that she would see this last act of it duly performed. I would have said, but did not—O, my mother! representative of the dear friend I have lost, would that I were certain that this kindness would continue; would that I were certain that your present kindness would never cease, and that while I am in need of your aid, you will continue to accord it to me and then, when manhood shall have nerved my arm, and age have enfeebled yours, and you will need the aid of your children, how happy shall I be, and how shall I exult to be able to step forward and say, “My father, and my mother! while I was yet a boy and needed your help, you granted it me; then, O may parents, how I longed for opportunity to show my gratitude! The time is come, and now you need it; as you once offered me your aid, so now I offer you mine, henceforth let all mine be yours.” . . . I think I could love my mother almost as well as I did love my grandmother.’ And in his mother’s old and infirm days he did verify his wish.

‘*June 10.*—I have been to aunt’s; was received kindly; before I came away uncle wrote, “You must come out here as often as you can, for it was the dying request of your grandmother that we should be kind to you.” And did she think of me! to the last anxious for me—interested even in death for my welfare! and making friends for me! My only friend! my revered benefactor! my dearest grandmother! in death didst thou think of me! Oh that I had been present! Yet, no, I could not have borne it. Father receive her soul into Thy mercy, and guide my steps in the intricate paths of human life, beset as it is with thorns and briars, with

temptations and sorrows: and if it be Thy pleasure that I should drink the cup of human misery and affliction to the very dregs—even then, Lord, in the midst of all, grant me strength that I may not swerve from Thy will, nor murmur at Thy decrees; for well I know that whatsoever Thou doest is just and right, and that, though Thy commandments teach me to resist the dominion of my senses, they, in the end, lead to the eternal mansions of the blessed. I humbly pray Thee, my God, that there I may at last arrive, through Jesus Christ, and there meet her who has gone before me.’

He had sad doubts that the affection now shown by some of his nearest relatives would soon cool, and he felt that then he should be desolate indeed. Thus he sobs—‘Why do I feel? why dare I think? Am I not a workhouse boy? My father, if you could but imagine what, through your means, I suffer, you would—Begone pen, or I shall go mad.’

Whatever appealed to Kitto’s eye gratified him; and among his ocular amusements, the ‘shows’ at Plymouth fair occupied a prominent place. A fair was great or small, in his boyish estimation, in proportion to the number and splendour of such exhibitions. What he saw he describes in his journal with picturesque minuteness: the transparencies and pictures; an ill-looking pock-marked dwarf,’ or a giantess so plump and fleshy as to ‘make the mouth of an anatomist water.’ The various devices and blazonries, stars and fireworks, first on the conclusion of Queen Caroline’s trial, and then at the King’s coronation, were a special treat to him. But his deafness occasionally filled his soul with sad regrets. The constables had on one occasion collected into the workhouse all the unfortunate women of the town. Kitto gazed on the scene with melancholy, and moralized upon the lost creatures ‘covered with shame, abandoned by friends, shunned by acquaintances, and thrown on the wide world—insulted with reproach, denied the privilege of penitence, cut off from hope, impelled by indigence, and maddened by despair.’ After service, one of the best gentlemen in Plymouth addressed them, so that many of them wept, as well as five-sixths of all the people in the room. ‘Even I,’ he adds, ‘had almost wept from sympathy.’ In recording this, there came upon him at once the overpowering sense of his own desolation. And he writes, October 1, in touching moans:—‘Yet I alone was insensible to the inspiration that flowed from his lips. To all, insensible! Devotion! oratory! music! and eloquence! To all of ye alike insensible!’

In a similar cheerless spirit he soliloquizes:—

‘. . . I should be inconsolable under my great misfortune, were it not for the conviction, that it is for wise purposes the Almighty Power has thought proper to chastise me with the rod of affliction. And dare I, a worm, the creature of His will, to repine at His behests? Besides, He has declared, “Those whom I love I rebuke and chasten.” But whither do I wander? Dare I to think that an accident was His

infliction? Dare I to hope that the Omniscient will deign, when I pray, to attend to my supplications? I dare not—'twere presumption—'twere almost impiety—to think *He* would incline His ear to such a one as *me*—*me*, of all my species created the inferior—*me*, whom each eye views with contempt—who am mocked, buffeted, and despised. And why am I thus treated with contumely? Because I am—unfortunate! And does misfortune render me inferior in Thy eyes, O my God? No, for Thou hast said, Thou art no respecter of persons. Thou hearest alike the king on his throne, and the beggar on his dunghill. Though man treats me with contumely, Thou wilt not be less merciful. Pardon my doubt, which had dared to prescribe limits to Thy mercy, and endue me with resignation to kiss the salutary rod with which Thou (I dare almost say it) chastisest me. . . I fear I am deplorably ignorant in religious matters.'

The language employed in the preceding and succeeding paragraphs is scarcely that of a quiet resignation, but rather of a stubborn acquiescence. The youth who had suffered such degradation from a father's intemperance as now to be a pensioner on a public charity, and who had, by a mysterious Providence, been suddenly bereft of a precious faculty, succumbed, indeed, to his lot, but at first with seeming reluctance, and with a strange curiosity to 'cast the measure of uncertain evils.'

'1821, *January* 1.—Welcome 1821! Though thy greeting is but rough (uncommonly cold), boding a year of as great events as thy predecessor, I pray God that, as I am conscious I have but ill performed my duty as an accountable being the preceding year, and that my lot in life is but low, He will deign to look on the most humble of His creatures, and blot out of the book of His remembrance the sins I have committed heretofore; to endue me with fortitude to bear with resignation whatsoever misfortunes may yet assail me, and to enable me to resist temptation, the allurements of vice, and even my own thoughts when they lead to ill; and to enable me, if it be His pleasure, to drink the cup of misfortune to the very dregs, without repining; and, finally, through all my life to make me bear in mind that this life is but a probationary trial, to fit us for a greater and a better state hereafter.'

Kitto's powers of composition were in the meanwhile improving, and he criticises public characters in a free and independent style. The first sentence of the following description is felicitous. It was inserted in his diary on learning the Queen's acquittal. Many glowing sentences were written at the period: the eloquent declamation and satire of Brougham and Penman thrilled the nation; but the hearty and stirring tribute of the obscure workhouse cobbler has never been printed before.

'*November* 14.—Bells ringing, flags flying, and almost every person rejoicing, on the occasion of innocence and the Queen being triumphant; for the bill of pains

and penalties was withdrawn on Saturday, November 10th, by the Earl of Liverpool, from the House of Peers. The day on which the Queen was victorious over slander and revenge will ever claim a distinguished place in the annals of this country—a day on which slander, perjury, and guilt were vanquished by innocence and truth. This trial has been such a one continued scene of iniquity as has not been equalled since the time of the Tudors (except in the instance of Charles I. and Louis XVI.) Last week has shown these are not such days as those unenlightened days in which the tyrannic Henry swayed despotically the symbol of mercy—those days when Britons could tamely see an innocent Queen (Anne Boleyn) led to the scaffold on a pretended charge of adultery. No! Such days are over; and now the generous character of Britain will not suffer an unprotected female to be persecuted with impunity. Not unprotected neither! She cannot be called unprotected who has the hearts of two-thirds of all Britain warmed with enthusiasm in her cause; and experience has shown that their hearts are no despicable protection. The conclusion of this iniquitous transaction has overwhelmed the enemies of the Queen with shame and confusion. Greater part of Britain will be illuminated in the course of the week—Plymouth on Wednesday.

‘16th.—Plymouth was illuminated last night.’

The next excerpt, in a different strain, is a meditation on the death of Napoleon. It betokens the interest taken in public matters by the young recluse, who never saw a newspaper to read till he was nearly twenty years of age.’

‘July 6.—Learned that Napoleon Buonaparte died on the 6th of May, of a cancer in his stomach. He was ill forty days. I doubt not but that the public journals, newspapers, etc., have detailed all the particulars of his exit from the theatre of the world, in which he has shone as a meteor—a meteor of destructive influence; and I shall only give a few observations on his character, according to my idea of it.¹⁷ That he had talents, no man who has attentively considered his conduct and character can doubt; but such talents! He was an innate tyrant—he introduced himself to notice by his eminence in adulation and cruelty. That he was a cruel man, his conduct has always shown. Witness the dreadful Bridge of Lodi, the massacre of Jaffa, and the poisoning his own sick soldiers. He was more than suspected as the murderer of the Duke d’Enghien. I consider him as a man who, from the earliest period of public life, was resolved to let no considerations of honour, religion, humanity, or any other consideration, to interfere with his advancement. Nor did they interfere. He certainly had not always thought of obtaining the sovereign power; but his ambition for sovereignty arose from circumstances, step by step. After the abolition of royalty and nobility, and the declaration of equality, he was resolved to admit of no superior. That he was ungrateful, may be seen by his treatment of his former patron. One or two centuries hence, and even now—if we knew not its reality—it would be considered as an improbable fiction, belonging

to the ages of romance, that a man of obscure origin should thus become the ruler of nearly all Europe—thus realize the visions of Don Quixote, and reward his Sanchos with kingdoms at his pleasure—thus spread desolation, fire, and sword, where nought but peace was known before;¹⁸ that a man—a simple man—an unsupported man should thus make princes crouch at his footstool, and should have his will obeyed as a law. How many thousands of widows and orphans has he not made? A lesser villain would have been hanged for the thousandth part of his crimes; yet he has his admirers. Notwithstanding what has been said by many to the contrary, I allow him the meed of personal courage, and that he was grateful when he could gain nothing by being the contrary. He was an hypocrite and an infidel; for he has different times been of almost all religions, Mohammedan included. He was generous by starts—condescending when Emperor—irritable, hasty, insolent, and choleric. It will not be considered as the less extraordinary part of his story, that, in the end, he was unfortunate—obliged to abdicate his throne, and was twice banished; but, above all, that this man—this Napoleon Buonaparte—died in his bed of a cancer, while the great and the good Henry died by the hand of an assassin, and the meek Louis died on a scaffold!! On the whole, it may be said of Buonaparte, that he was a glorious villain!!¹⁹

And yet, amidst all the youth's dejection, there were forereachings of spirit, anxious anticipations, the picturings of possible propitious circumstances. His highest ambition at this time was to have a stationer's shop and a circulating library, with twelve or fourteen shillings a week. His anxious question was, 'When I am out, how shall I earn a livelihood?' Shoemaking could yield but a slender remuneration; and as he had been taught to make coarse shoes alone, he could only expect small wages. Yet he thought that he might travel, and that some kind gentleman might take him, even though it was in the humble capacity of a servant, 'to tread classic Italy, fantastic Gaul, proud Spain, and phlegmatic Batavia'—nay, 'to visit Asia, and the ground consecrated by the steps of the Saviour.' This odd anticipation of Asiatic travel was wondrously realized, for a 'kind gentleman' did afterwards take him to the banks of the Tigris.

The long and heavy affliction of Kitto had brought him under religious impressions. He had felt the Divine chastening, and stooped to it. It was a necessity to which he was obliged to yield, and, as he could not better himself, he bowed, though he sometimes fretted.

'O nature,' he exclaims, 'why didst thou create me with such feelings as these,' which spring from 'superiority of genius?' 'Why didst thou give such a mind to one in my condition? Why, O Heaven, didst thou enclose my proud soul within so rough a casket? Yet pardon my murmurs. Kind Heaven! endue me with resignation to Thy will.'

LIFE OF JOHN KITTO

But a quieter emotion gradually acquired the ascendancy within him, and he strove to feel that it was the hand of God his Father which had placed him beyond the reach of sound or echo. His knowledge of the Bible began to produce its quickening results, and his spirit was infused into the forms of religion. He wished earnestly to be confirmed, and made the necessary application. He was found to be deficient, when first examined, in some portion of the Catechism; but he adds, 'I learnt the Catechism perfect,' and he was then approved by Mr Lampen, the officiating minister of St Andrews. Yet at the first occasion on which he attended, he was not confirmed; the bishop, and 'the man with the gold lace cloak,' with the crowds about him, divided his attention, while his want of hearing prevented him from understanding and following the order of the ceremonial.

Mr Nugent, teacher of one of the schools in the hospital, began at this time to pay special attention to him, wrote out some theological questions for him to answer, and promised to be his friend. Mr Burnard's interest was also increased by reading certain papers of Kitto's, suggesting a plan of judicature among the boys. He proposed to the thoughtful projector, a short time afterwards, to write lectures to be read to them, 'respecting their duty in the house, and their future conduct.' This proposal agreeably surprised Kitto, and he could not contain himself: 'You can scarcely imagine, my friend, how this letter delighted me, and set me a walking up and down the court with uncommon quickness, eagerly talking to myself. Take a bit of my soliloquy: "What! I, John Kitto, to write lectures to be read to the boys! Mr Burnard seems to think me competent to it too!" rubbing my hands with great glee.' The youth was filled with gratitude to both these gentlemen, formally adding Mr Nugent to the list of his benefactors, and saying, in the fulness of his heart, of Mr Burnard, 'I wish, I wish his life was in danger, and I could risk my own to save him. That won't do either—too much danger for him.' This feature of Kitto's character grew with his growth, and in his last work he lays down the true doctrine: 'He who most clearly sees God as the source of his blessings, is the man who will be most grateful to the agents through whom these blessings come to him.'²⁰ Kitto, on one occasion, hints that he did not like to see Mr Burnard whipping the boys, for it was so unlike his generous nature.

The boys used to tease Kitto a good deal, when the eye of their superiors was withdrawn, till his patience was at length exhausted, and he made a formal complaint to Mr Burnard. The 'frisky letter,' as one of the accused styled it, was at once acknowledged, and his tormentors were severely cautioned as to their misconduct, and prohibited from indulging any longer in such wanton cruelty and sport.

He was becoming, as we have said, more and more anxious about his religious duties. He speaks, under date of October 12, of its being one of the inconveniences of the workhouse, that he was not able to kneel when prayers were publicly

read, but resolves to begin on that day to pray ‘with himself’ in the morning, ‘inclining one knee against a chest’ which was under the window.

Kitto’s dealings with his father are much to his credit. We give two extracts, the first a specimen of humour, and the second of integrity:—

‘*February 17, 1821.*—The week before last, father wrote on the table with chalk, “You never gave me anything to drink yet.” I went, gravely, and emptied out a cup of water, and gave it to him, and said, “There—drink.” He blushed deep at this pun, and said no more about it.’

‘*October 7.*—Father wrote a paper as follows, and wanted me to give it to Mr Barnard:—“Sir, I should be much obliged to you if you will be so good as to give a ticket for a shirt, as I am out of work.—Jn. Kitto.” “Father, thou sayest the thing that is not—you are not out of work.” “You must give this paper to Mr Barnard.” “Are you out of work, father?” “No.” “Then, do you think that I will deceive my benefactor, and permit you to say, through me, that you are? I will not give it to him.” So I said, and so I did. . . . I am inclined to think that I was right. My duty to my parents shall never interfere with that to God.’

Though Kitto felt the restraint of the workhouse, he had become reconciled to it. He was at times, indeed, anxious to quit it, and at other times willing to remain when liberty was offered him. His father on one occasion held out some hopes to him, and, though he refused at first to leave, yet he soon altered his mind, and became very desirous to get out. But his father had changed his purpose, if ever he had seriously entertained it, and the lad was sorely disappointed. The father put forward a variety of objections, but the excited son rebutted them all in succession. ‘Liberty,’ he cries, ‘was my idol—liberty, not idleness. If it were not for the bounty of the kind Mr Barnard, the workhouse would be insupportable. Methinks when I am out of the house, I breathe almost another air. . . . Like the wolf in the fable, I would rather starve at liberty than grow fat under restraint.’ Believing that his father was only ‘seeking causes’ against his getting out, he waxes warm, and tells him, ‘There is no fear of my starving in the midst of plenty—I know how to prevent hunger. The Hottentots subsist a long time on nothing but a little gum; they also, when hungry, tie a tight ligature round them. Cannot I do so too? Or, if you can get no pay, take me out without, and then I will sell my books and pawn my neckerchiefs, by which I shall be able to raise about twelve shillings, and with that I will make the tour of England. The hedges furnish blackberries, nuts, sloes, etc., and the fields turnips—a hay rick or barn will be an excellent bed. I will take pen, ink, and paper with me, and note down my observations as I go—a kind of sentimental tour, not so much a description of places as of men and manners, adventures, and feelings. Finally, me and father said much more.’ The debate was resumed a couple of months afterwards, and Kitto still thought himself ill-used, his father having raised ‘false hopes’ within him. He admits, that, in displaying

LIFE OF JOHN KITTO

such pertinacity, he was in the wrong; 'for, upon the whole,' he writes, 'I am not dissatisfied with my present condition.' But he drew up what he calls 'articles of capitulation,' and presented them to his parents, insisting that his father, when he agreed to any of them, should write 'granted' opposite to it, while his mother was to make a cross to signify her assent. The principal heads were—that he should be taken out on the 1st of April 1822, or sooner if he was maltreated; that his boxes and papers were not to be rummaged at home; that he was not to be interrupted in his studies; and that, if he died, his body was not to be taken from the workhouse to the grave, but first carried home, and thence conveyed to the place of interment, 'in New Churchyard, beside granny.' The last of the stipulations reveals his suspicions, for it is, 'that you be kind to me.' To all these articles the parents agreed. The curious document thus solemnly concludes:—'We, the undersigned, do hereby promise to abide by what we have in the above promised to perform, and if we in the least tittle infringe it, we do consent that John Kitto, junior, shall do as he has said; as witness our hands this sixth day of August, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and twenty-one. On the part of John Kitto, junior,

JOHN KITTO, Jun.

On the part of J. and E. Kitto, seniors.

JN. KITTO.

+ ELIZABETH KITTO, her mark.'

He adds, however, that by this formal arrangement he 'gained nothing more than before.' But he was soon released in a manner, and with a result, that he little anticipated.

It was quite common with the guardians of the poor-house to apprentice the boys under their care to tradesmen in the town. They were anxious, as Mr Burnard expresses it, that Kitto should 'learn a trade, so that he might be able to support himself without parish relief.'²¹ This was a kind and considerate motive on their part. It was, in fact, the only design which they could legitimately entertain. That the lad should not be a burden to society or to them, that he should be able to maintain himself by honest handicraft, that at least he should not return to them and be a pensioner on their bounty—was the loftiest purpose they could form for him. Therefore Anderson, the beadle, taught him shoemaking, and he made great progress. To perfect him in his trade, he was then indentured, on the 8th November 1821, to one John Bowden, who had selected him for his proficiency, and in spite of his infirmity. He was to remain under this engagement till he was twenty-one years of age, and he was now about seventeen. The guardians probably congratulated themselves that they had done their duty to their ward, John Kitto, and that they had fitted him to be a useful member of society. They had got him capricious and wayward, and now they turned him out a quiet and thoughtful youth,

who had shown some mental power, was inordinately fond of reading, and had subjected himself to an excellent moral discipline. Probably they lamented, at the same time, that his deafness would exclude all rational hopes of elevation and progress.

By this time, as we have seen, Kitto had subdued his spirit to the routine and degradation of a poorhouse life. He was even comparatively contented among his pursuits and associates. And yet, though he had found such an appreciation of his talents as might have ministered to his youthful vanity, and not a few indulgences were given him, still he seems sometimes to have regarded the hospital as a species of Bastille, and he rejoiced in the idea of quitting it. He was periodically anxious to be gone; grumbled that his father had not kept his word and taken him out; nay, he threatened again and again to run away, though he usually laughed to himself at such a clumsy mode of exit and escape. The first offer to remove did not tempt him, for it presented, in fact, few inducements; so that he hesitated, but afterwards consented. And then the idea of finally quitting such a domicile filled his spirit with exultation, and, with a flourish of his pen—not elegant, indeed, but expressive—he writes:—

EPOCHA.

‘I am no longer a workhouse boy—I am an apprentice.’ He felt that he had risen a step in society, that he had ceased to wear the badge of serfdom, and that he was once more master of himself, save in so far as he was bound by the terms of his indenture. What we have said is quite consistent with his indifference when the proposal was originally made. He said ‘No’ to Bowden’s first invitation; but some of the boys, ‘aside,’ held out the inducement of food, clothes, money, and freedom; ‘I pleaded deafness.’ ‘I do not care,’ he replied to repeated questions, ‘I would as soon stay as go.’ Some time was spent in negotiations, and at last his coy reluctance was overcome. He never was easily induced to change his habits, and this inflexibility of nature did, for the moment, almost conquer his oft-expressed desire to get out of confinement. His own exclamation, however, leaves no doubt of his rapture—‘I am no longer a workhouse boy!’ The going home at night, the possession of his evenings for himself, the power of reading in his own garret without molestation, the dropping of the poorhouse uniform, food in plenty, and good clothes—these formed an irresistible temptation. ‘Therefore, on Friday 2,’ he records, ‘I gave a paper to Mr Burnard expressing that desire, and soliciting his aid to my being apprenticed.’

The only objection to Kitto’s leaving the workhouse was made by Anderson, and that was because the hospital could not afford to dispense with his services, since he was the only boy perfect in the making of list shoes. Nay, Anderson af-

terwards wished to get him back for the same reason, but Bowden was too shrewd and selfish to part with him.

Kitto had, during his residence, become attached to many things about the workhouse; and, in the prospect of quitting it, he relates—‘So I went and took a farewell look of the bed on which I used to sleep, the tripod on which I had sat so many hours, and the prayer-room. I shook hands, in idea, with the pump, the conduit at which I washed, the tree against which I leaned, nay, the very stones on which I walked. . . I then took a final leave of the hospital, and we went to Mr Bowden’s house again, when I was aproned and seated, and set to rip off the old tap of a boot.’

But the hopes of the buoyant apprentice were soon and terribly blasted. His next year’s journal opens in a tone of hopeless anguish. He had been delivered into the hand of a brutal tyrant—one who hoped that the infirmity of his apprentice would disable him from making any complaint, and prevent him from obtaining any redress. Bowden’s previous apprentice had also been deaf, and we cannot suppose that his treatment differed from that suffered by his successor. But the poor creature had not a tongue to tell, nor a pen to reveal his woes. Bowden, on looking round the busy inmates of the hospital, selected John Kitto, not simply because he discerned him to be the best work-man in it, but because he imagined that his deafness, like that of his predecessor, might enable his master to work him beyond right, and punish him without limit, and yet run no risk of being himself detected and exposed. A speechless apprentice he had found to be a helpless victim, who could neither murmur under exhaustion, nor appeal against stripes. The six months of his apprenticeship with Bowden formed the most miserable period of Kitto’s existence. He groans mournfully indeed:

‘*January 19.*—O misery, art thou to be my only portion! Father of mercy, forgive me if I wish I had never been born. O that I were dead, if death were an annihilation of being; but as it is not, teach me to endure life; enjoy it I never can. In short, mine is a severe master, rather cruel.’ The retrospect of two months is sad as he gives it. Bowden threw a shoe at his head, because he had made a wry stitch, struck him again and again—now a blow on the ear, and now a slap on the face. He wept at this unkind usage. ‘I did all in my power to suppress my inclination to weep, till I was almost suffocated: tears of bitter anguish and futile indignation fell upon my work and blinded my eyes. I sobbed convulsively. I was half mad with myself for suffering him to see how much I was affected. Fool that I was! O that I were again in the workhouse!’

‘*December 12.*—My head ached, and yet they kept me to work till six o’clock, when they let me come away. I could eat nothing.

‘*January 14.*—He threw the pipe in my face, which I had accidentally broken; it hit me on the temple, and narrowly missed my eye.

January 16.—I held the thread too short; instead of telling me to hold it longer, he struck me on the hand with the hammer (the iron part). Mother can bear witness that it is much swelled; not to mention many more indignities I have received—many, many more; again, this morning, I have wept. What’s the matter with my eyes!

‘I here leave off this Journal till some other change, or extraordinary misfortune takes place!’

Such is the melancholy end of the Workhouse Journal.

He did not know what awful thing was to happen him, for he had been tossed about like a ball, and he could not predict where next he should either alight or rebound. He could not bear up. He had already suffered much. He had felt in former days the pang of hunger and the cold of nakedness. But now he was oppressed, overwrought, and maltreated,—for sixteen and often eighteen hours of the twenty-four, did his master force him to drudge, and all the while strike and buffet him without mercy. Work-house boys have few to look after them, and fewer still to interfere for them. And why should Kitto be any exception? The slavery could not be endured. He had been all the while devoting his spare hours to mental labour—and even this luxury was at length denied him. To keep himself awake for study, he had to torture himself by several cunning appliances. He was willing to have wrought twelve hours, so to have some time for reading, thankful to snatch a brief period for sleep. But to toil from six in the morning to ten at night left him so exhausted, that only by a painful effort could a little space be given to reading and thought. This tyranny preyed upon his mind, such castigations galled him, the long hours of labour, and the short intervals left for study, oppressed and fretted him. His nervous system was shattered, trains of morbid reasoning usurped supremacy over him, conscience was perverted by sophistical ingenuities, and his spirit, weary and worn out, looked to suicide as its last and justifiable refuge. The crisis came; but, as in the case of Cowper, a watchful Providence interposed, and Kitto lived. In the volume of essays which he published on leaving the workhouse, there are two papers on suicide. In the first, the sin is set in its true light; in the second, it is described more leniently, and much in the way in which, in the period of his misery and gloom, he had gradually brought himself to contemplate it. In illustration of his remarks, he gives, under the assumed name of William Wanley, a portion of his own biography, detailing his dark sensations, how he formed the purpose of self-destruction, justified it, and resolved to carry it out. But the attempt failed. The valuable life which was about to fall a sacrifice to wretchedness and despair, was preserved for higher ends, and did work them out, till God’s time came for its final release.

The Life and History of Wanley were his own, and he formally identifies them. He tells Mr Woollcombe, some years afterwards (December 1825), that ‘his mind

was darker and more wretched than anything he had ever read of”—that ‘the letter of Wanley was no posterior fabrication, no picture of imagined anguish, but emanated from a warm and loving heart, every vein and fibre of which seemed lacerated with misery too highly for the highest powers of language to express.’ In sending the Essay and Letter of Wanley to Mr Woollcombe, prior to their being printed, he wrote this admission:

‘*January 8, 1824.*—You will experience no difficulty in discovering the identity of Wanley. Though he is happier, very much happier, now than at any period during the last half of his life, all his endeavours cannot prevent the occurrence of that melancholy which predominated once so absolutely over him. . . The event which I have narrated is one which he now contemplates with grief, and on which he looks back with the greatest repentance.’ In a brief sketch of his early life, written just before he left the workhouse, he confesses more explicitly—‘The life of misery I led reduced me to such a state of despair, that I twice attempted my liberation from his [Bowden’s] tyranny by a means that I now shudder to think of.’

The complaints of Bowden’s apprentice against his master became at length the subject of judicial investigation. The trial was adjourned in the first instance, and one of those times of ‘despair,’ to which Kitto refers in the previous sentence, happened in this interval of suspense, when, misunderstanding the forms of procedure, he believed that he had been formally condemned to be sent back to undergo, without hope or respite, Bowden’s cruel and lawless oppression. But at length he obtained redress. The instrument of his slavery, ‘with its formidable appendage of seals and signatures,’ was cancelled, after his case had been fully heard before the magistrates, with whose sanction he had been originally indentured. In his appeal to them Kitto acquitted himself to admiration. He wrote so fluently and so correctly as to astonish the bench. His pen delivered him from bondage, and gave him the consciousness of possessing an undeveloped power. He became aware that he could not only think but express his thoughts—that he could not only feel, but give fitting language to his emotions. The gentlemen, who tried the case, wondered, questioned, sympathized, applauded, and set him at liberty, but did not trouble themselves much more about him. They must have thought him a bold and bright little fellow, who was armed with a rare power of self-defence, and would not be easily put down; but, while they delivered him from the tyrant, they took no steps to improve his condition. They had only a very partial acquaintance with him, and probably judged that the workhouse was his happiest asylum.

Thus Kitto returned to the hospital, and was set down again to his former occupation to be perfected in it—still for the avowed purpose of enabling him to earn an honest livelihood. He received many minor privileges, for which he was thank-

ful. Bright visions of the future began, however, to cheer him. He thought himself destined to something. What might he not do? Might he not write or compose a work? Be it in poetry or in prose, might it not immortalize his name? What should hinder the achievement? Might not every obstacle be surmounted, and John Kitto become an author known to fame? Thanks to Bowden's outrage. It stung him into life. He began to criticise some things he had written, and pronounce them trash,—the first sign of growing taste and judgment. He had proposed a higher standard for himself, and now laboured to come up to it. His reading had enabled him to judge of style, and had supplied him with many illustrations. His awakened power longed for exertion, but he knew not as yet where to find the proper field for it.

The experiences of this period are thus delineated by him:—'I had learned that knowledge is power; and not only was it power, but safety. As nearly as the matter can now be traced, the progress of my ideas appears to have been this—Firstly, that I was not altogether so helpless as I had seemed; secondly, that, notwithstanding my afflicted state, I might realize much comfort in the condition of life in which I had been placed; thirdly, that I might even raise myself out of that condition into one of less privation; fourthly, that it was not impossible for me to place my own among honourable names, by proving that no privation formed an insuperable bar to useful labour and self-advancement. . . . To do what no one under the same combination of afflictive circumstances ever did, soon then ceased to be the limit of my ambition.'²²

But he must, in the meantime, learn his craft, to please Mr Burnard and commend himself to the guardians. He and they, however, were fast diverging in purpose. They thought of him as a shoemaker; he pictured himself as an author. They saw him on 'the tripod;' he beheld himself at a desk. They strove to give him the ability of making a shoe; he dreamed of the power of producing a book. But immediate duty must be attended to, and Kitto passed more months in the workhouse. Again and again did he enjoy his solitary walls—a favourite scene of recreation being the Hoe, a magnificent parade, with the sea and breakwater before it, the ships and docks on one side of it, and, to the right, the classic groves and shady retreats of Mount-Edgecumbe.

The style of his correspondence at this epoch indicates higher moral health, and a more refined taste. The cloud was passing away, and his mind was possessing itself 'in patience.' His fevered brow was cooler, and the dew had fallen on his parched heart. He knew not what was before him, but he was becoming equal to anything that might occur. Though he was conscious of talent, there was no inflation of pride, for he was resolved to refuse no offer that might promise to be of advantage. He knew that only step by step could he reach the summit; nor did he seem to be devoured by eagerness for elevation. Probably, however, he was dis-

appointed that nothing further was done for him. But he had awakened interest on his behalf—such interest as sufficed, when a project was started for his benefit, to crown it with success. His case was matter of wide notoriety; yet no one stepped forward to lend a helping hand to the deaf and lonely aspirant.

But Mr Harvey came at length to the rescue. This famed mathematician and man of science had observed Kitto's demeanour in a bookseller's shop, and anxiously inquired about him. Learning his history and circumstances, his benevolent heart knew no rest till he had interested others on Kitto's behalf, and induced them to contribute something, either money or stationery, to the studious youth's assistance. Mr Nettleton also, of the 'Plymouth Weekly Journal,' inserted some of his compositions in that paper. So that Kitto became known, was more and more asked after, and a deeper anxiety being excited, a few friends issued a joint circular on his behalf, the language of which shows the favourable impression which his character and talents had created. The following is the circular referred to:—

'The attention of the public has lately been drawn, by some Essays published in the Plymouth Weekly Journal, to the very extraordinary talents of JOHN KITTO, who is now a pauper in the Plymouth workhouse. He is about eighteen years of age, and has been nearly four years in the workhouse, to which he was reduced by the inability of his parents to maintain him, after his having lost his hearing by a fall from a house in Batter Street, where he was employed as an attendant on the masons. This loss of hearing has been accompanied with other bodily infirmities; but he has been thus so entirely thrown on the resources of his mind, that he has cultivated his intellectual faculties with singular success, and gives promise of making very considerable attainments. An inquiry into his conduct and general character has proved most satisfactory to the undersigned, who are thus led to believe that he must greatly interest those who feel for the difficulties under which virtue and talents labour when they have to struggle with poverty and misfortune. He has of late been employed as a shoemaker in the workhouse, and in that capacity he has given proofs of great skill and industry; but it seems desirable that he should be placed in a situation more consistent with his feelings and abilities, and to which his deafness might not render him incompetent. It has been suggested that, as a temporary measure, application should be made to the Committee of the Plymouth Public Library, to employ him as a Sub-Librarian; and that a sum might be raised, by small subscriptions, to enable him to obtain board and lodging in some decent family, until something permanently advantageous should be suggested. In the meantime, although he could not be in the receipt of a salary, he would have opportunities of improving himself, and would be enabled to direct the powers of his mind to those pursuits in which he is so well qualified to excel, and in which, perhaps, the world may find his usefulness, and he himself a merciful and abundant compensation for all his deprivations. Great reliance may be

LIFE OF JOHN KITTO

placed on his industrious habits, and it is confidently believed that small contributions from several individuals would enable him to get over the chief impediments to success in a way for which he seems so peculiarly well qualified. The undersigned, who have carefully examined into his character and acquirements, are anxious to give the strongest testimony in his behalf; and will receive, with great pleasure, any contributions, pledging themselves to use the utmost discretion in their power in the application of any money that may be thus entrusted to their management. JOHN HAWKER, HENRY WOOLLCOMBE,²³ WILLIAM EASTLAKE, THOMAS STEWART, JOHN TINGCOMBE, GEORGE HARVEY, ROBERT LAMPEN.—*Plymouth, 26th June 1823.*'

This modest narrative and appeal were successful, and the governor and guardians of the workhouse subscribed five pounds to the fund. On the 17th of July, the following entry is found in the workhouse Minutes:—'John Kitto discharged, 1823, July 17. Taken out under the patronage of the literati of the town.' Kitto was then boarded with Mr Burnard, and had his time at his own disposal, with the privilege of using the public library. A great point was thus gained for him. He was released from manual labour, and had all his hours for reading and mental improvement. He must have been aware that efforts were making for him; and this knowledge, acting on a sanguine temperament, seems to have originated and moulded the following dream, as he calls it, and which, though probably a waking reverie, is very remarkable as a true presentiment—a correct delineation of his subsequent career. It is dated three days prior to his discharge, and occurs in a letter to Mr Tracy:—

'Methought (this is the established language of dreamers I believe) I was exactly in the same situation in which I really was before I slept, and indulging the same reflections, when there suddenly appeared before me a being of more than mortal beauty. He was taller than the sons of men, and his eye beamed with celestial fire; a robe of azure hue, and far richer than the finest silk, enfolded his form, a starry zone of glittering gems encircled his waist, and in his hand he bore a rod of silver.

'He touched me with his rod, and gently bending over me, he said, "Child of mortality, I am the Angel Zared, and am sent to teach thee wisdom. Every man on his outset in life proposes to himself something as the end and reward of his labours, his wishes, and his hopes; some are ambitious of honour, some of glory, and some of riches. Of what art thou ambitious, and what are the highest objects of thy earthly hopes?"

'I was astonished at the visit and the words of the angel, and replied not to his demand.

“Thou canst not readily find, O child of the earth, words to express the scenes which thy fancy has drawn. It matters not; I know thy wishes, and will give thee possession of the state that is the highest of which thou art ambitious.”

‘He touched me with his rod, and my form expanded into manhood; again he touched and then left me. On looking around me, I found myself seated in a room, two of the walls of which were entirely concealed by books, of which I felt myself conscious of being the owner. On the table lay letters addressed to me from distant parts of the Island, from the Continent, and from the New World: and conspicuously on the chimney-piece were placed several volumes, of which I was conscious that I was the author, and was also sensible that the house wherein I was, was mine, and all that was in it. I went forth into the street. Ridicule no longer pointed her finger at me; many whom I met appeared to know and esteem me, and I felt conscious that I possessed many sincere and disinterested friends. I met a blind fiddler, and placing my hand instinctively in my pocket, I found that it lacked not money. I returned, and exclaimed, as I took Caesar’s Commentaries, in their original language, from the shelf, “Now at last I am happy!” but before I had concluded the word, the Angel Zared again appeared before me, and touching me with his silver rod, restored me to the state in which he found me.

‘I felt a momentary sensation of disappointment and regret at the transition, till the angel spoke to me, and said,—

“Listen to my words, O child of mortality, while I withdraw, as far as I am permitted, the veil of thy future destiny. Thou hast been afflicted with misfortune, and taught in the school of adversity. Think not that HE, who made thee and me also, regards with displeasure those whom He purifies by sorrows, or that those are His peculiar favourites who are permitted by Him to enjoy the good things of this world. Whenever thou findest thyself inclined to murmur at the dispensations of Providence, recollect that others, greater, better, and wiser than thou art, have suffered also,—have suffered more than thou hast, or ever wilt suffer.

“The time approaches when thou shalt attract the notice of thy superiors, who shall place within thy reach the means of acquiring that knowledge for which thou thirstest. They will transplant thee into a soil fit for thee, and if thou attendest well to the cultivation of thy intellectual and moral faculties, thou mayest perhaps become a permanent occupant of a station like that which I have permitted thee to enjoy for a moment. I say, perhaps, for only He knows, in whose breast is hid the fate of worlds, whether thou art to live beyond the day on which I visit thee; but of this I am permitted to assure thee, that the period of thy sojourn on earth will not be, at the furthest, very many years.

“Be not, O son of earth, dejected, if thou again meetest with disappointments and misfortunes; neither suffer prosperity too highly to elate thee; and in every situation, and in every moment of thy life, remember that thou art mortal, and that

LIFE OF JOHN KITTO

there is a God and a hereafter. So live, that thou mayest not fear death, at whatever moment he may approach thee; and if thus thou livest, thou wilt have lived indeed—” Zared perhaps would have spoken longer, but a book falling from the shelf upon my head, I awoke, and, as honest John Bunyan says, behold it was a dream!’

One might say to such a wondrous dreamer—

‘Thy life lies spread before thee as a sheet
Of music, written by some gifted hand,
Unsounded yet: to longing, listening hearts,
Translate its small mysterious silent notes
Into full thrilling chords of life and power.’

He was now afraid of being overrated, and to show that he was not unduly lifted up by his good fortune, we may quote what he says to Mr Harvey:—

June 15, 1823.—‘I sometimes doubt the efficacy of any trifling abilities I possess to retain that patronage with which you honour me. I have not mentioned my unattractive person or clownish manners as likely to operate in the least with a gentleman of your good sense to my disfavour.’ Or again, he writes to the same correspondent, Sept. 30, of the same year, ‘I apprehend that you are not disappointed on discovering that I am not one of those meteors which sometimes emerge from darkness, and illumine the hemisphere of science with their blaze. On two subjects I am not indifferent. I wish to be known in the world. I wish to get myself a name, and to be esteemed by the wise, the learned, and the good. But even this wish is inferior to that which I have to extend my knowledge, and to compensate, by literary acquirements, for the deprivation under which I labour.’ On June 23, he chides Mr Burnard, for having altered his style of address to the pauper boy who had risen in rank:—‘Will you permit me to find fault with the address, “Mr John Kitto?”—how cold and formal! From any other person I might not object to it, but from you, my earliest and best friend, it must not be. Call me, I entreat you again, plain John Kitto, or, if possible, by some more affectionate appellation.’ His hopes were not yet very high, and this is his humble solace— ‘I am perfect in my trade; and should circumstances send me back to the workhouse, I hope in Mr Burnard for all his former kindness and attention.’

Kitto’s mind was at this time specially sensitive, and somewhat irritable. There was the prospect of relief, but it might not be realized; the blessing of elevation was close upon his grasp, but yet not within it. A few of his Essays had appeared in the papers, and some people suspected that he had been assisted in their composition. On this point he was exceedingly tender, as the following letter to Mr Burnard indicates:—

‘July 22.—Public Library.

SIR,—I am not happy: I am very uneasy—more than uneasy, or I should not now write to you. Pardon me, sir, if I write incoherently, for I address you under the impulse of feelings that have recently been wounded to the quick. Those gentlemen were in the right who foretold that I should meet with disappointments. I went down stairs to read last evening, when it grew dark. I had not been there long before a gentleman came in, who, after having read a few minutes, asked me whether I could hear loud sounds? My answer to this, and other interrogations much more disagreeable, were perused with so evident an intention of finding fault, that it mortified me in the extreme. The pencil was slowly traced beneath the lines; each word was weighed in the scale of grammatical nicety, and one was found to be improper. I observed, in answer to one of his questions, that I had not, till within these few days, begun to study grammar, and that I did not think it fair that I should be judged by rules with which I was unacquainted. He replied, “You are in the right, I believe; but how came you to write so correctly in the Essays in the newspaper? Did any one correct them for you?” I leave you to judge, sir, whether this was a proper question for a gentleman, and a stranger, to make. I replied in the negative, adding, that “I repeatedly transcribed them, improving and correcting them each time, till I thought them sufficiently accurate. In the two first Essays, however, the editor corrected some errors in punctuation, and he prefixed the quotation from Anon. to my Essay on Home; but, in the Essay on Contemplation, he, at my desire, made no correction or alteration whatever, further than adding three lines from Shakespeare to it as a motto.” Yet I believe that Essay is the best. Do you not think so too, sir? . . . It was very evident, by his triumphant exhibition of a grammatical error and other circumstances, that he was, beforehand, determined to find fault, and that he departed with a very contemptuous opinion of me and my abilities. Whatever was his intention, it is certain that he has made me very uneasy, and greatly discouraged me; for, undoubtedly, “the scoff of pride” is not celebrated for its powers of stimulation.’

At this juncture, and while his plans of life were still uncertain, a proposal was made to publish a volume of his Essays. But he scrupled at the censorship of his friends, and wished the papers to be left wholly to his own taste and selection. He had no objection that Mr Lampen should read and revise them, provided that he himself might finally bestow upon them ‘additional corrections and improvements.’ But before the volume was published another change had taken place in his social position, and he had mounted another step upwards.

His time, meanwhile, being fully his own, was principally spent in the Public Library, and he was not less miserly in the distribution of it than formerly. He devised various means of economising it, such as forming a diagram of method, marked with different colours; lamented that of late he had been in bed full seven hours, while six were quite sufficient; resolved against heavy dinners; would like

a little ale, but would prefer a small quantity of wine to his frugal and solitary meal, and so hoped to be able to read or write, with little interruption, from nine in the morning till five in the afternoon. Conscientiously did he occupy his leisure. While he was free to choose any line of study, he decidedly preferred literature to science. Opening his mind to Mr Harvey (June 1st), he declares of Natural Philosophy, 'I have no desire to make any particular branch of it my study. As I have but few hours in the day at my own disposal, and when I attain to manhood am likely to have still fewer, it would be absurd in me to hope to succeed (even if I had the inclination) in such branches of philosophical and scientific research, as geometry, chemistry, electricity, and others equally abstruse, which are calculated only for men of great talents, and those who have been blessed with a liberal education.' 'Mine,' he explains to Mr Woollcombe (Sept. 25), 'is a mind not adapted to scientific pursuits. Man, I have repeatedly said, and that which relates directly to him, shall be the chief subjects of my research. Let chemists analyse the elements in their alembics, but let me analyse the passions, the powers, and the pursuits of man in the alembic of the mind.' Accordingly he gave himself to reading chiefly in metaphysics. "The novels, the poems, and the periodicals slept quietly on the shelves." History, also, occupied a portion of his time, and he retained through life his liking for it. But the metaphysical theories with which he came in contact, ultimately perplexed him, and he abandoned the pursuit. Yet, before he laid it aside, he had gathered from it 'some useful knowledge, acquired some useful habits, and drawn some useful conclusions.' His mind liked to store itself with information, rather than penetrate into profound questions, or range among subtle hypotheses. His intellectual nature was not fitted to deal with such subjects, and his metaphysical studies were pursued, not for the love of mental science, but for the sake of general knowledge. Instinctively he valued the palpable more than the abstruse, and immediate utility outweighed, in his estimate, every form of speculation. He was, indeed, in danger of being injured by the desultory nature of his exercises, for when any mental pursuit ceased to delight him, he was at once inclined to abandon it. He did not relish mathematics, for 'he pursued the steps to the demonstration without pleasure or curiosity.' He resolved to go through Euclid, but was easily seduced from the task; and at length confessed, that whenever he ventured over the Asses' Bridge, he usually 'fell into the water.'

But he thought of 'beginning Latin,' and of 'possessing the Greek language also.' Though he had been, and was still, so voracious a reader, he knew that the mere perusal of books was not to be identified with intellectual improvement. He puts the case strongly:—'Were it possible for one man to read all the books which have been printed, from Caxton to Bensley, that man might still be a block-head. For reading the thoughts of other men will not in itself enable us to think justly

ourselves, any more than the wearing of a Chancellor's wig would endue us with the legal knowledge of a Lord High Chancellor.'²⁴

He had not been long boarded with Mr Burnard, when his constitutional monitor spoke to him, as it afterwards did, periodically, till his death. In a letter to Mr Harvey, August 13, he laments:—

'Since Tuesday night I have experienced more illness than within an equal space of time since my fall. Sickness is well calculated to produce wise reflections and conclusions in the mind. In the fervour of my hopes, and in the anticipation of future attainments and subsequent usefulness, I had almost forgotten that it was in the power of death to prevent their fulfilment.

'You may, perhaps, sir, also say, that my trifling illness does not justify an anticipation of early dissolution. On such a subject no one can speak with certainty; yet I may be permitted to say, that I believe my demise will be at no distant period; and, indeed, I think that, at no other time, it could be more eligible than now. Were my decease to take place at present, sympathy might shed a tear over my grave, and I might be lamented by the benevolent, the pious, and the learned, as one who, had he lived, might have been a useful member of society. In after life I may be exposed to criminal temptations, which I may not have power to resist. I may form ties which it would be agony to tear asunder; and I may have miseries to endure of which I have now no conception, all of which my demise now would prevent. I imagine you pause here, and take up your pen to ask me, "Are you then tired of life, and do you wish for death?" Oh no, sir, I wish to know, and to communicate my knowledge. I would live, could I command it, till time shall have covered my head with hoary honours. I would live till I had learned how to die with a well-grounded hope of future bliss. The reasons above alluded to are by no means such as to make death desirable. It would be absurd to wish for death in order to avert evils, the occurrence of which is no more than probable. However, the frequent thoughts of death will certainly render his approach less terrible when he ultimately arrives.

'Considered abstractedly from the probability of my early dissolution, I think my future prospects very invigorating indeed. Henceforth I shall not look too anxiously on the future, but rely on that Great Being who has been so merciful to me, and hope that He will enable me to be happy in any condition which I may be called to occupy.'²⁵

With all his high prospects, a feeling of gloom occasionally stole over him—the shadow of his earlier sensations. To such despondency he makes frequent allusion. He was tormented by fears, and he wisely advised himself to take long walks, and unbend his mind, by partaking of any harmless amusements.²⁶ But, with all his dark tendencies, his gratitude was great. When he looked on what he had been, felt what he had become, and hoped what he might yet be, his spirit was

LIFE OF JOHN KITTO

filled with thankfulness; and he describes his emotions, in a letter, published in his earliest volume:

TO MR WILDE.

Plymouth Public Library, Oct. 16, 1823.

‘DEAR SIR,—With much pleasure I avail myself of the first opportunity of returning my grateful acknowledgments for the attention you have shown to my accommodation and comfort in the library; and, at the same time, of saying something about myself. When I recollect (and can I ever forget?) how miserable I once was; how I was exposed to ignominy, to insult, neglect, and oppression, my joy is great to have escaped such evils, and my heart expands with gratitude towards those disinterested individuals who have rescued me from them.

‘In the most enthusiastic of my reveries, I never imagined that I should ever be as I now am, or that I should attract that attention which has been, and is directed towards me. I wrote; I endeavoured to acquire knowledge, because my deafness had divested me of all relish for common amusements, because I could find no other enjoyment or occupation equally interesting, and because the employment of my few leisure hours and moments gave me the satisfactory consciousness of spending my time well, without having the most distant idea that this occupation of my leisure would lead to the beneficial results to which it has led.

‘An unprepossessing exterior, and deportment somewhat singular, made me to be persecuted and despised by my equals and superiors in age, who knew me no further than as they saw me, or thought me a being not far removed from idiocy. Misery, sir, had rather quickened than blunted the native sensibilities of my heart; and great as my sufferings were, I probably felt them more acutely than many others would have done in the same circumstances.

‘Amidst all these troubles, however, my thirst for knowledge was not destroyed. My closet was my only refuge, and a book, when I could procure it, my only consoler; for there were none to enter into my feelings or sympathize with me, and by deafness I was cut off from social intercourse with every human being.

‘Thus unhappy as I was, if you can form an idea of my situation, you can also conceive the satisfaction which I felt when I suddenly became an object of attention and commiseration to those who have assisted to rescue me from the state in which they found me, and placed me in that which I now occupy. I, the lowly being who, a few days before, was unnoticed and unknown, now became an object of curiosity and wonder to persons who would never have become acquainted with my existence, or have heard my name mentioned, if some trifling circumstances, which I should denominate accidents if I had not been accustomed to

trace the finger of an overruling Providence in many of those events, which the irreligious, the ignorant, and the careless, call by the name of chances, had not introduced me to the notice of those who have made me known to others.

‘It must be evident, however, that this is not my final destination; and I feel no other anxiety or uneasiness than as it respects futurity. The vast ocean of human life lies before me, and my only wish is that my little bark may in future escape those dangers by which it was once assailed, and that it may proceed in peace and comfort, undisturbed by the blasts of adversity, till it ultimately rest in the quiet haven of the grave.’

One can scarce wonder at the following wish, expressed by such a child of misfortune and poverty, who had never handled a piece of money of any value. It occurs in a Journal that dates from February 19, 1824, to April 3:—

‘I have some time been desirous of consulting my kind and zealous friend, Colonel Hawker, on the propriety of my desiring to have at Whitsuntide and Christmas, or any other two periods of the year, a sovereign, but I have been loath to mention it to him, for he has lately, and indeed always, been so attentive to my wishes, that I am unwilling again to make so great a claim on his consideration. I do not think that Mr Woollcombe or Mr Lampen would make much if any objection to it; but, perhaps, Mr Hawker might, and I am not willing to make a proposal which there is any probability of his rejecting, for if he disapproves of it, I shall not mention it to any other person. I should not be so reluctant, if it were not for the great increase which has been kindly and spontaneously made to my weekly stipend. Well, and what do you want with twenty shillings twice a year? Why, as to that, it is partly a wish of having what I never had before, for I never touched a note in my life, nor a piece of gold coin, but once, which was ten years ago, when I was permitted to hold a seven-shilling-piece in my hand for a few seconds. I wish also to have a small sum always at hand, to answer any particular want which may occur. I should also, with part of it, purchase some old books, and thus gradually increase my little store. With half of it, ten shillings, I have no doubt of being able to purchase, at my old acquaintances, ten or twelve volumes of books. I could also supply myself with some minor articles of clothing out of it, and thus prevent the necessity of too frequent applications to Mr Hawker and the other gentlemen on that account.’

Amidst all this anxiety for himself, his wants, and prospects, it is pleasant to find Kitto ‘looking on the things of others.’ His favourite subjects of composition had been, and still were, childhood and affliction.²⁷ He wrote of the former with a kind of melancholy pleasure, and of the latter in a tone of earnest commiseration. His life had been a companionship with grief, and such an experience taught him to enter readily into the trials of ‘brethren in tribulation.’ Sickness had often visited him, and death had once ‘come nigh unto him;’ nay, had laid in the tomb his

aged and beloved grandparent. He had often craved for sympathy toward himself, and therefore he was forward to express his condolence with those who sorrowed, and mingle his tears with those who wept. He records in his Journal the death of Mr Burnard's son, and adds, under a twinge of despondency, 'I consider his fate as enviable; and nothing but the consciousness that it is my duty to support the life which my Creator gave, prevents me from being absolutely weary of my existence, and anxious to quit it.' But he who had called himself 'John, the Comfortless,' essayed to comfort the bereaved mother:—

'April 29, 1824.

'DEAR MADAM,—That at the present moment I write to you with reluctance on the subject you suggested, I must candidly acknowledge. At an earlier period it would have been more proper than now, and I should at such a period have written, had I not been deterred by the reasons I mentioned to you. The natural effect of time is to soften that grief which every afflictive occurrence inspires; I should therefore have deemed it a duty to avoid the mention of any circumstances likely to revive that intensity of sorrow which time must necessarily in some measure have ameliorated, had you not expressed a willingness to receive any communication on the subject I might make. That your son should be lamented by you, is natural—perfectly natural. Robert was a son of whom any parent might be proud; and had he lived, and enjoyed health, there could be no doubt of his proving a blessing to all connected with him, and an honour to human nature, if, as nobody denies, human nature can be adorned by piety, talent, and virtue. These are just causes for the sorrow you felt and continue to experience; but I cannot persuade myself that any causes can justify unjust repinings, overstrained lamentations, and rebellious murmurings at the dispensations of that Almighty Providence which never acts but for the good of its creatures. Let it not be imagined that I suppose you feel in this manner. Far from it! you feel only a just and natural grief. But if I indeed thought so, I would say so. Recollect the state in which he spent the last year of his life, and say whether you should have preferred to have had him live for years in this state of mental and bodily anguish? for, doubtless, independent of his personal sufferings, he endured much in being cut off from nearly all the gratifications and enjoyments which render life desirable. Do you believe him happy? Undoubtedly. Well then, is it kind to repine at his happiness? Supposing, and there is no absurdity in the supposition, that his immortal part be conscious of your actions, can it be thought that his felicity receives any increase from seeing the relatives whom he loved, lament as those who have no hope, and murmur at the dispensations of that Gracious Being who has mercifully seen fit thus early to reward his virtues, by taking him from a state of anguish to one of unutterable felicity? Far from it; on the contrary, I conceive this consciousness, if it be indeed

LIFE OF JOHN KITTO

possessed by disembodied spirits, to be the only alloy of which their present happiness is capable; and, therefore, if it were possible that any being should have rejoiced in the death of your son, that being would be in reality less his enemy than you who thus bewail his loss. Loss! Who has lost? What is lost? Has he lost anything? Yes, he lost mortality, he has lost pain, he has lost all the miseries of human life,—these are his losses; but he has in compensation for these losses, gained,—but his gains I will not attempt to enumerate, for only a disembodied spirit can describe those pleasures, which only a disembodied spirit can enjoy. And you, have you lost anything? No, nothing has been lost, your son has gone a journey, and you know that he is happy, eminently happy, in the country which he inhabits. You know also that a great many years cannot elapse before you will be sent for to the same happy regions, where you will dwell for ever with him, without fear of further separation. But supposing for a moment that you had lost anything by the demise of your son, you are certain that he has gained; and could you in that case be so selfish as to repine at your own individual loss, when the same cause has rendered your child so supremely happy? If you could, it would not be acting the part of a mother and friend. Such, my dear madam, are some of the reflections which I would have suggested to your consideration, if I had supposed that in your instance they had been requisite. As my own sentiments respecting death are pretty well known, I shall not now intrude on you any longer than to assure you that I am, yours most respectfully,

JOHN KITTO.’

‘To Mrs BURNARD

Kitto’s continued and prayerful study of the Bible, with the assistance of the best Commentaries which he could procure, was greatly blessed, for there seems to have been all this while the steady growth of religious principle within him.

‘*April 2.*—I am in a state which I cannot exactly describe. I become every day more sensible of my own neglect of the duties due to the Almighty, and of my offences against His commandments. I have not that due sense of His mercy, His love, and His benevolence, which I ought to have. I do not form a proper estimate of the vanity of human life, and the contemptible nature of human pursuits, compared with those of a spiritual order. I have not that overwhelming sense of my own religious and moral criminality which I ought to possess, nor have I that effectual and lively faith in Jesus Christ without which everything else is of no value. It is true that I believe Jesus Christ to be the Son of God, that He existed with the Father from all eternity, and that it is only through His atoning blood that we can hope for mercy and forgiveness; I believe all this, but this theoretical faith I feel to be utterly insufficient, unattended by practical results, and these practical

results I do not experience. There is an internal monitor within me, independent of the written words of inspiration, which makes me fully assured that of myself I can do nothing—that my own efforts are contemptible—and that through a Mediator, and a Mediator only, I can hope for salvation. That Mediator is Jesus Christ; through Him I may obtain mercy and pardon, and His righteous blood can wash away my sins. But I do not feel myself sufficiently grateful to Him, having sufficient faith in Him, sufficiently desirous of living only for Him and to Him, or feel Him absolutely necessary to me. Should I not pray for all this? I have—I have—but I cannot pray as I ought to pray. I cannot draw nigh to God in spirit and in truth. I do not approach Him with a humble and contrite spirit, and with that awful veneration which I ought to experience. The busy thoughts of the world and literary subjects intrude, and call off my attention from the solemn occupation in which I am engaged, and thus I rise from my knees more guilty than when I began to kneel. O my God! Enable me distinctly to discern the path in which I should walk, and give me strength to pursue it.’

He reveals also to Mr Burnard, April 9, the nature of the emotions which gave birth to such sentiments. ‘My uneasiness is not the cause, but the effect of the humiliating sense under which I labour, of my own moral and religious imperfections.’ ‘It originates in a lately awakened sense of my unworthiness. I am afraid that mine is a cold theoretic belief, rather than an effectual and saving faith.’

This anxiety of soul quickened him, taught him from experience the value of prayer as a means of relief, and led him to read the Scriptures with still greater relish and constancy. The idea of becoming a missionary struck a chord in his bosom. When he heard the question thrown out, ‘Might not Kitto become a useful missionary, if he studied with effect the only book of sound principles and perfect science ever written?’ he caught at the suggestion, and nobly expressed himself on the character and aims of the missionary enterprise, in a letter to Mr Flindell on the subject.²⁸ Nay more, he was on fire at the thought of becoming a minister. In his Diary, March 31, we note this meditation—

‘*Apropos* of Kirke White—I learn that his deafness was one of the reasons which induced him to relinquish the study of the law for the clerical profession. Till I had learnt this, I had understood that a defect of hearing was an insurmountable bar to entering into Holy Orders. Were it possible, O my God! that I could become a minister of Thy Word; that I could be permitted to point out to erring sinners the paths of peace and salvation, what more could I desire of Thee? If an ardent zeal for the salvation of souls, if an unshaken belief in the faith promulgated by Jesus Christ and His apostles, if a fervent attachment to the Scriptures, and if a deep sense of the natural depravity of human nature, are qualifications for the ministry, then I am so qualified. How truly happy should I be in some retired and obscure curacy, where I should have no other business but the delightful one of

LIFE OF JOHN KITTO

instructing others in their duty to God and their fellow-men, and in which I should have sufficient leisure to read, to study, and to write!’

LIFE OF JOHN KITTO

FOOTNOTES

13 Kitto mentions, in a letter to Sir Burnard, from Baghdad, that he had found some of his early papers, which had escaped the flames to which, some time previously, he had committed his early MSS. The papers thus accidentally preserved, seem to have been the workhouse Journal.

14 The diary often addresses some ideal personage.

15 Imitated from Milton, by Miss Palmer.

16 This language is only, in Kitto's case, the vehement expression of attachment and sorrow. It meant little more than an earnest hope that his grandmother had gone to heavenly glory.

17 The page is adorned with a portrait of Napoleon, done in glaring colours, and looking rather fierce, and is said by Kitto to be copied from a plate in Barre's Rise, Progress, etc., of Buonaparte's Empire.

18 Switzerland.

19 It would seem that Kitto had been reading a well-known passage in Milton, one of his favourite poets:—

‘Might only shall be admired,
And valour and heroic virtue called;
To overcome in battle, and subdue
Nations, and bring home spoils with infinite
Manslaughter, shall be held the highest pitch
Of human glory, and for glory done
Of triumph, to be styled great conquerors,
Patrons of mankind, gods, and sons of gods.
Destroyers rightlier called, and plagues of men.’

20 Daily Bible Illustrations, vol. i, p. 393.

21 Letter to Mrs Kitto, written after Dr Kitto's death.

22 Lost Senses—Deafness, pp 82, S3.

23 Mr Woolcombe, whose early and continued attentions to Kitto were as stimulating as they were kind, was the founder of the Plymouth Institution, a promoter of literature and the arts, and connected with all the philanthropic movements and societies of the neighbourhood. He was a highly respectable solicitor, and an alderman of the borough, in which he had great and merited influence.

24 Essays, p. 209.

25 Essays, p. 30.

26 Essays, p. 48.

LIFE OF JOHN KITTO

27 A. series of brief essays on 'Childhood' were addressed by him to Mr Woollcombe, and many of his earlier compositions take the form of letters or addresses to the afflicted.

28 Essays and Letters, p 49.