

CHAPTER III.

EXETER.

WHILE his mind was in this propitious state, Kitto was introduced to Mr Groves, a dentist, residing at Exeter. Mr Harvey had hinted at a University education for him, and believed that he had sufficient interest to obtain a fellowship. But Kitto's other friends would not entertain such a proposal. He was, therefore, left free to form an engagement with Mr Groves, who had heard something of his history, and had judged favourably of him, from having seen one of his letters to Mr Flindell, editor of the *Western Luminary*. Mr Groves offered to instruct Kitto in his profession, to board him, and give him for his services, £15 the first, and £20 the second year, with prospect of higher remuneration. Kitto accepted the offer, and this engagement was the turning point in his career. It deepened and sealed his piety, and ultimately led him to the East, in preparation for the great work of his life. He had already written a paper on the Antinomianism of Dr Hawker, which shows some familiarity with Scripture, though not a very distinct conception of some portions and aspects of the scheme of grace. But the example of Mr Groves quite electrified him, and every fibre of his heart vibrated under the living impression. A vital and decided change passed over him,—the result of long preparation and prayer.

His mind had been always susceptible of religious impression, but it had not yet quickened into life. The blade had shot up, but there now began to appear the ‘full corn in the ear.’ He had put on record, before he left the hospital, a specimen of his prayers, in a style of no ordinary magnificence—a specimen which becomes a moral and intellectual wonder, when we consider the upbringing and the circumstances of him who wrote it—a boy, rendered totally deaf by an accident, suffered to grow up uneducated, made a pauper by his father’s vices, and now learning an humble trade in a workhouse:—

‘MORNING PRAYER.

‘King of the Universe! I, an atom of that universe, dare humbly pray Thee to incline Thy ear, while at Thy footstool I confess that I am a wretched sinner; that I have broken Thy laws, and Thy commandments I have trodden under my feet; that I have slighted Thee, my Maker; that I have not done my duty to Thee, my neighbour, or myself; that I have deserved nothing at Thy hands but Thy displeasure. I have wasted the precious moments which Thou gavest me to

LIFE OF JOHN KITTO

improve. I have murmured at Thy decrees, because Thou, in Thy mercy, wast pleased to afflict me, and because Thou gavest me to drink of the cup of affliction. I have not loved Thee as Thou oughtest to be loved. I have suffered impure desires and evil passions to influence my actions. In short, O Lord, I am a miserable self-convicted sinner. I have deserved Thy wrath and fearful indignation; and I do not remember one good action that ever I did, which makes me know that Thou alone canst save me. Therefore, Almighty God, overburdened as I am with sin, I dare humbly sue Thee to pardon my sins; remember not against me my iniquities, but blot them from the book of Thy remembrance, and erase them from the tablets of Thy memory. Hear me, O God, when I cry to Thee for that mercy I do not deserve. Give me, most merciful Father, the gifts of Thy grace. Give me repentance, for, without Thy aid, I cannot repent of my sins nor abide by my purpose of leading a new life; without Thy aid I cannot know myself. Give me, Eternal King, faith, that no doubts may obtrude themselves, that I may believe in Jesus Christ, and keep Thy law. Do Thou also grant unto me, O Lord, content, that I may be satisfied with whatever situation in life it be Thy pleasure to assign me, and that I may be convinced that whatsoever Thou doest is for my benefit; and that I may thank Thee even for the rod with which Thou dost chastise me.

‘I most humbly entreat Thee, Omniscient God, to grant me strength to resist the allurements of sin, Satan, my own flesh, and mine own thoughts, that I may not give way to temptation, but resist it. Take from my breast, O Lord, this heart—harder than adamant, black with impurity, and stubborn—and, O Lord, substitute in its place a heart purified in the blood of Jesus.

‘Inspire Thou those under whom I am placed with kindness unto me, and give me, O Lord, power to please them. Shed over me Thy grace, and reveal Thyself unto me, through Jesus Christ, in whom alone we can know Thee, and that I may become a new being, casting off all evil habits and unholy feelings, and conduct myself as beseemeth a being whom Thou hast redeemed. Guide Thou my steps in the way which, though to mortal eye it is rough and unpleasant to the sense, leads to everlasting life. And do Thou, Almighty Power, give me strength to avoid the road which appears to abound with unalloyed pleasure, but which leads to eternal death.

‘If it be Thy pleasure to give me hereafter affluence, grant that I may not abuse Thy bounty; if poverty, grant that I may not murmur;—but I pray Thee, O Lord, grant me not riches nor poverty—yet not my will, but Thine always be done, for Thou knowest what is for my benefit better than myself.

‘Bless, O God, my benefactors, relatives, and friends. Teach me how to pray unto Thee, in spirit and in truth.

LIFE OF JOHN KITTO

‘Grant me, O Lord, I humbly entreat Thee, grace that I may so conduct myself here on earth, that when it is Thy pleasure to take me hence, I may die with the conviction that my sins are pardoned, and that at the last I may be able to exclaim, “O death! where is thy sting? O grave! where is thy victory?”’

‘Lord! be merciful to me, a sinner, and grant that I may be one of that happy number to whom it shall be said, “Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.” I ask from Thee not, O Lord, worldly blessings. I ask of Thee neither fame, nor riches, nor honours, but, Lord, I ask of Thee a pure and contrite spirit. I ask of Thee patience, to bear with resignation whatsoever afflictions Thou art pleased to send me.

‘I thank Thee, O Father, for the manifold favours I have received from Thee. I thank Thee for life, health, friends, connections. I thank Thee that Thou hast forbore hitherto to punish me as my sins have deserved. I thank Thee for all the good I have enjoyed, or may enjoy hereafter; particularly for the protection Thou hast afforded me heretofore, especially in the past night; and I humbly pray Thee to continue my Protector through the coming day, and grant that at the end thereof, I may look back on a well-spent day. These, and all other favours, which are for my good, I pray Thee grant in the name of Thy beloved Son, Jesus Christ, Who loved our souls so well, that He took upon Himself our sinful nature, bled for our sins, bore Thy anger in our stead, and suffered death for our iniquities, and Who taught us, in the perfect form of words, to say, “Our Father Which art in heaven,” etc.

‘The above is not all that I pray for, only a brief view of the principal heads. What say you to it, dear Harry? Not worthy the being to whom it is addressed?’

But in Exeter a great spiritual advance had been made, experience had ripened, and he discloses himself to Mr Burnard, June 1824:—

. . . ‘When I look back, I am surprised at the very great change which has taken place in my views since I came hither—a change which I had never anticipated—a change which clearly convicts me, in many former instances of my life, of folly and impropriety—and a change which, I hope, will ultimately, under Divine teaching, make me wise unto salvation, and enable me to become a Christian, and an useful member of society. To what is this change to be imputed? Perhaps to a more exclusive contemplation of Divine things, to a more attentive study of the Word of Life, to abstraction from many temporal things which at Plymouth too deeply interested me and engrossed my thoughts, to my intercourse with Mr Groves; but chiefly, I conclude, to the grace of God, who has at length permitted that “day-spring from on high” to arise, for the *appearance of which I have long prayed*, and which, when fully risen, will enable me to behold the beauty of holiness in all its glory and perfection, and by the

LIFE OF JOHN KITTO

strengthening influence of the Holy Spirit, to pursue that light which will then be revealed more completely than at present.

Again, writing to the same correspondent, in September, he reverently marks his first sacramental enjoyment:—

‘Since I wrote last, I have for the first time partaken of the Communion, and the day in which I did so was one of the most pleasant in my life—most particularly was it distinguished by that absorbing and sublime devotional feeling which it is my most earnest desire may ultimately become the continual feeling of my daily life, repelling worldly affections and earthly wishes, and making me perpetually act and think from the simple motive of love to our Divine Master.

. . . ‘You must be sensible, from the tone of my letters to yourself and those which you may have seen of mine to other persons—that the John Kitto you will see, is rather a different person from the John Kitto you have seen; and I am sure you will rejoice with me when you understand that this is not a mere alteration of the external manners or appearance, but an alteration most deeply felt in the heart, and entering into every feeling, every passion of the mind, insomuch that I should now be disgusted with much in which I once delighted, and many things are now most pleasant and delightful, which once were indifferent to me.’

Kitto got on well with Groves, as his Diary shows:—

‘*May 19.*—Troubles of Latin.—Surely this ineptitude must lower me in Mr Groves’ estimation.

‘*May 22.*—Mr G. desired to know if I was happy in my situation with him. I replied “that it was beyond my anticipations, and equalled my wishes.” It would be ungrateful were I to express myself dissatisfied with his disinterested and zealous endeavours to promote my happiness and comfort. He added, “That it would be a subject of great regret, if any consideration should induce me to wish to leave the bosom of a family, to every member of which I was an object of interest and attachment.”’

During his residence at Exeter, Kitto corresponded regularly with his Plymouth friends, upon a variety of themes, and treats, for example, in a series of letters, the topic of capital punishments. Subjects seem to have been proposed to him from time to time; and his style, through exercise, acquired considerable freedom and energy. He was in the habit of distributing tracts in Exeter, and he was often pained by the scenes of profligacy which he witnessed—such as ‘fellows emerging from a beer-house, and fighting in the street.’ ‘My dear sir, my heart is quite sick when I contemplate such scenes of brutal violence. Reflecting on this state of things, it is the duty of every one whom the Holy Ghost has en-

LIFE OF JOHN KITTO

lightened, whatever his rank or degree may be, to devote himself exclusively to the service of his Master, and to aid His great cause to the utmost stretch of his power. . . . Now, my dear sir, of what I have said I would make personal application, and addressing the Master, say, Behold me, then, my Father! I offer myself, and all that Thou hast made me, to Thee. Send me where Thou wilt, do with me what Thou wilt, and require my services as Thou mayest, I thank Thee that Thou hast made me willing to obey Thy summons; and, Eternal God, so prosper me, as by Thy grace I seek, above all things, Thy glory and Thy honour.²⁹

The portion of his Diary which describes his sojourn at Exeter, concludes with the following prayer:—‘Almighty and ever-living God, who madest all things, and lovest all that Thou hast made, deign to incline Thine ear to the prayer of a sinner, who thus humbly, at Thy footstool, entreats of Thee, not this world’s goods, or its pleasures, or its honours, but that portion of Thy grace, that infusion of Thy Spirit which maketh wise unto salvation. Grant me these, Righteous Father, and nothing more do I entreat of Thee, for in these all lesser blessings are included. If it be Thy good pleasure that I should drink to the dregs that bitter cup of adversity, of which I have already drunk so largely, proportion my strength to the trials which Thou givest me to undergo; make me submit, in humble acquiescence, to Thy chastening rod, and make me, in circumstances of apparent sorrow, to exclaim, “Father, if it be Thy pleasure, take this cup from me; nevertheless, not my will, but Thine be done.” But if, on the other hand, Thou bestowest upon me those things which men so highly seek and desire, O grant that they may have no injurious effect; that they may not draw my heart from its hold on Thee, and that I may feel myself nothing more than the steward of Thy bounties, and the deputed dispenser to the poor, the unhappy, and the destitute, of a portion of those blessings which Thou mayest give to myself, or rather which Thou hast deigned to give me in trust. If what I have asked be for my good, grant it, O Father, for the sake of Jesus Christ.—Amen.’

That Kitto had surrendered the ‘fortress of his silence,’ prior to the time he left Plymouth, is evident from some statements in what he calls his ‘Private Diary.’ Who his ‘little flame’ was, we know not, except by name. He was always fond of female society—he loved sisterhood. An impression had been made upon him, which cost him no little pain, when with ‘many terrible conflicts’ he sacrificed it on what he believed to be the shrine of duty, and in obedience to the warnings of Mr Groves.

‘April 24.—Visited H. this evening; communicated as much as I thought necessary of my Exonian destination. She did not seem much more pleased

LIFE OF JOHN KITTO

with it than with the more superb University plan, an insight into which I gave her. Well, whatever happens, God preserve her, and make her happy, and while she is so, I can never myself be completely miserable.'

We have given the previous extract, simply to show that, while so many painful circumstances had conspired to make Kitto solitary and dull, and force him into a lonely and self-devouring asceticism, he had neither sunk into moroseness, nor avenged himself by a scornful misanthropy. He could not exclaim, 'man delights not me, nor woman neither,' for, to his benefactors of the one sex he was sincerely grateful, as his letters testify, and there was one in the other sex who had power to attach him, and charm him out of his solitude, and of whom he says, after the correspondence had been broken off,—'she clings to my heart with a force almost irresistible.' He had pleaded, and that powerfully, for this attachment, against the remonstrances of Mr Burnard. This susceptibility of a first love shows that his heart had not been utterly wrecked by his bitter experiences. He had been saved from himself even when a hard and dry incrustation seemed sometimes to be gathering about him. 'Nay,' he says in his volume of Essays, published soon after (p. 85), 'marriage is in general the principal component part of a happy home.' In an Essay on Beauty (p. 102), he declares, 'I am an enthusiastic admirer of personal beauty. Expression is to beauty what the soul is to the body. I now repeat, I am an enthusiastic admirer of female loveliness. . . . Mental charms in a woman will give pleasure and excite admiration, when the attractions of beauty and youth exist no longer.'

About this time, in the beginning or spring of 1825, the volume of Kitto's Letters and Essays just referred to, was published.³⁰ Neither title-page nor preface has any date. The duodecimo, of 210 pages, was patronised by above 400 subscribers. It is premised that the volume does not 'consist of papers composed expressly for publication. They are selections from letters which he wrote in the workhouse, and essays with which he exercised his fondness for literary occupations, and they were chosen from the mass of his writings, rather to give an impression of the character of his mind and talent, than as conveying any particularly striking or original views of the subjects of which it treats. . . The volume is now offered to the public in the hope that it may justify the attention that has been paid to the merits of this deserving young man, and that it may be the means of affording him encouragement in the pursuit of that line of conduct by which he now gratifies his friends.'

It may be well to pause for a moment over Kitto's earliest production, as the index and fruit of his mental progress; and as many of its sections are autobiographical, we may find confirmation of the statements we have already made, and learn how, in the dawn of his release, he regarded his previous hardships,

LIFE OF JOHN KITTO

what trains of reflection they suggested, what circles of emotions they produced, what lessons he extracted from them, and what share they had in directing and moulding his subsequent career.

And first, there was realized, to some extent, another and early dream of Kitto, which he has given in his Work-house Journal, with considerable pictur-esque ness and power. He represents himself as being in a book-shop, ‘and well-dressed’—a sly hit at the poor-house uniform. He is surveying on the counter his own journal in a published form, when a family enter the shop—a sage father, a flauntily-dressed elderly lady, with their son and daughter, both dressed as a dandy and dandyzette.’ The young coxcomb laughed outright as he took up the volume. When asked what excited him, he read the title-page of my unfortunate book—“Journal and Memoranda of a Man with Four Senses, by John Kitto, Shoemaker, Pauper,” etc. “Was there ever such a thing heard,” continued he, “as for a pauper! a shoemaker! to write anything proper for the perusal of a man of sense!” adjusting the ribband of his quizzing-glass, with the air of a person well satisfied with his own sense. “No, certainly,” said his mother, “and I would wager a guinea that it may be classed among the Methodistical jargon which the authors are pleased to call Journals, and of which so much has been obtruded on the public.” “I, too, would wager a guinea,” said the young lady, “that in this bantling of *wax* there are no tender embarrassments—no ghosts—no tears of sensibility—nor any duels—for nothing but the most gross vulgarity can be expected from this son of the awl.”—“Yes, indeed! was ever such extravagance heard of, as for a shoemaker, an occupation found only among the very dregs of the vulgar, to pretend to write a book? I should not now wonder, ’pon my honour, if the barber should favour us with a treatise on beards the sign-dauber with a history of painting—or even the catgut-scaper with a history of music,” concluded the young gentleman, with a loud and long “He! he! he!” at his own wit; “for,” added he, “they may as readily do it as a pauper write a Journal.” The grave looking old gentleman, who had attentively listened to all that had been said, advanced towards the rest and said, “Ladies and young man, I must dissent from what all of you have said” (an angry and satirical “indeed!” proceeded from all three at the same time)—The old gentleman, not noticing this interruption, proceeded—“Particularly with regard to what has been said about the incapability of mechanics. For, from my own experience, I can assure you that I have met with genius, probity, and honour, in many instances, among what you are pleased to call the dregs of the people. I have always looked upon an honest mechanic, though even a shoemaker, as a much more useful member of society than he who, blessed with affluence, holds time a burden—who lives merely to circulate that which

LIFE OF JOHN KITTO

would make hundreds happy, and who spends every hour, every day, in what is falsely called pleasure, and who lives for not one of the ends of his creation; who, so far from improving that *time* which every hour shortens, thinks himself happy when he has hit on an idea to kill that time of which he is not certain of a moment's continuance. But the best way to convince you of your error is to give you examples of genius amongst the lower classes. I will mention but a few names of the many that occur; as, for instance, R. Bloomfield, Burns, Chatterton, G. Morland, Savage, Lloyd, Otway, and Shakspere. I scarce need have told any but you that most of these were poets—very celebrated poets, and more particularly that Bloom-field was a shoemaker—the fourth was one of our best English painters—and yet none of these were bred in affluence, nor were their talents cultivated by education. But with regard to the book, the merits of which you have decided without opening its pages, I have read it, and though written by a pauper, it does not sink *much* below mediocrity—the misfortune of the author renders it in some measure interesting; the language is simple, the orthography not very incorrect; it has some humour; learning cannot be expected; yet the author is not ignorant, and he seems an honest youth, with sentiments much above his condition. Upon the whole, it is better than could be expected from one of his years and situation; and if it does no good, it will have the negative merit of doing no harm, and it shall be placed in my library.””

He who could so express himself was on the high way to write a book, and leave behind him the flannel jacket and leathern apron’—the badge of poverty and St Crispin, and must soon cease to be ‘shoemaker and pauper.’

The volume bears witness to his multifarious reading. One wonders how he had found time to run through so many books, and read them so carefully as to be able to make such frequent and pertinent allusions to them. The amount of his reading would not have dishonoured a university student; nay, few of them lay in such a stock of general information. In metaphysics, intelligent and distinctive reference is made to Malebranche and Hume, Reid and Stewart, Berkeley and Des Cartes, Locke and Stillingfleet. Lord Bacon and Madame de Stael are familiarly quoted. In an essay on Sublimity, where he refers to the fine arts, he contrasts the Tuscan and Doric orders of architecture with the Gothic, especially as seen in Westminster Abbey, and in the ruins of Tintern and Glastonbury; tells what the pencil of Salvator Rosa achieved, and what Gainsborough could effect; assigns their respective positions to Titian and Raphael; then passes on to sculpture, criticising the Apollo Belvidere, the group of the Laocoön, and the Choragic monument of Lysicrates. His papers, entitled ‘Rabnah and Abdallah,’ are rather happy imitations of the once famous Jewish apologetics of

LIFE OF JOHN KITTO

Hawkesworth and Johnson, and many of the ‘desultory reflections,’ which conclude the volume, are terse, pointed, and memorable. Kitto denies imitation in style, but many of his first compositions controvert the statement. He fell unconsciously into such imitations. What he had been reading deeply interested him, and left its impress on his next composition, while inability to hear his own sentences prevented him from detecting the similarity. Does not the following sentence sound like a piece of a Saturday Spectator?

‘When we consider the numberless claims that the Deity has to our gratitude, our adoration, and our love—what a great Friend, a merciful Father, and a bounteous Benefactor He has been to us, and that on Him depends everything we value and desire—the coldness with which we sometimes perform our religious duties appears to me truly strange and unaccountable.’

Would not the following pass for a portion of the Rambler?

‘It were well, perhaps, if the wealthy and the prosperous could have a periodical fit of misfortune, which, independent of its other uses, would give them an opportunity of discovering who were their real and who their pretended friends.’

There occurs also in the Workhouse Journal a pretty good imitation of Sterne, in an account of a real occurrence. Kitto describes a poor fellow who, from a double amputation, shuffled along on his knees, but did not beg. A marine, passing him, poured the whole contents of his pocket into the maimed man’s hand, went away, and wiped his eyes, as if he thought a tear disgraceful. ‘Thou wast wrong, generous soldier! That tear, that action did thee more honour in my eyes than if thou hadst slain with thine own hand thousands of thy fellow-men, and wert therefore called a hero! Thou, noble veteran! wast more charitable and more praiseworthy than a rich man if he had given fifty pounds. Thou gavest thy little all. In the perils of war, and temptations of peace, God be with thee, generous marine!’ Kitto was fond of Shakspere, and specially fond of Spenser; and his proneness to form allegories, and shape his fancies into dreams, arose probably from this last predilection.

His deafness laid him under the necessity of writing. The thoughts of his heart struggled for utterance; and what could not be spoken, must at least be written. Had he been able to converse freely, his feelings would have sooner expended themselves, and when afterwards committed to writing, would have lost somewhat of that intensity which characterised them. But his emotion, unwasted by oral expression, appears on paper with undiluted strength. Even his ordinary thoughts, pent up within him, and turned over again and again, and examined on all sides, in prolonged and undisturbed reflection, assumed a mature fulness and symmetry when his pen gave a deliberate and final utterance

LIFE OF JOHN KITTO

to them. This record of his inner history is striking and characteristic:—‘I never was a *lad!* From the time of my fall, deprived of many external sources of occupation, I have been accustomed to *think*, to find sources of occupation within myself; to think deeply; think as I read, as I worked, or as I walked. Even in my sleep I dreamt; the addresses, letters, sermons, puns, bon-mots, and tales, I have composed in idea, would, if committed to paper, fill a folio. While other lads were employed with trifles, I thought as a man, felt as a man, and acted as a man.’ Yet the appetite for human intercourse led him again and again to write as if addressing another party in an ideal dialogue; and the same yearning for social speech prompted him to write formal letters to himself, specimens of which are inserted in this published collection. The solitary boy created an imaginary companionship. Some of his letters and papers, illustrative of previous parts of his life, have been spoken of already, such as his letter to Mr Flindell on the moral dignity of a missionary, and his essay on suicide. There is, in fine, an excellent paper in the volume, suggested by a passage in Bishop Hall’s ‘Balm of Gilead,’ which unfolds much of his inner thoughts. In harmony with what the good bishop has said, he delivers his own experience:—

‘Next in pre-eminence in the list of misfortunes, after blindness, comes deafness. To me the whole world is dumb, since I am deaf to it. No more the music of the human voice shall charm. All around, below, and above me, is solitary silence—ever-during silence—stillness unbroken. Words of advice, of comfort, of instruction or reproof, to me convey no knowledge, nor make me wiser, better, or more happy. For me the feathered warblers tune their little throats in vain! To me the violin or the harp gives no music; the deep-toned bell and the pealing organ, no sound. Behold the people crowd to the house of God, to hear the preacher display the riches of redeeming love; but if I go I hear not his words, which to me alone are profitless; I hear not his voice, which only to me is mute. I am now a mere cipher among men—of no value, importance, or estimation. My door is shut, and ever barred against the entrance of knowledge; and in no capacity can I hope to be a useful member of the community. Liable to continual mistakes and mortification—cut off from social communication—incapable of receiving pleasure from many of the impulses of sympathy, and of enjoying congenial intercourse—a being completely solitary and desolate, life would be robbed of all its sweets did there not exist some

“Motives for consolation.”

Some of these consolations are mentioned by the pious prelate:—“Had it

pleased God to shut up both senses from thy birth, thy estate had been utterly disconsolate; neither had there been any access for comfort to thy soul: and if He had done so to thee in thy riper age, there had been no way for thee but to live on thy former store: but now that He hath vouchsafed to leave the one passage open, it behoves thee to supply the one by the other, and to let in those helps by the window which are denied entrance by the door.”” Kitto then proceeds with his comment:—‘An anonymous author tells us that “The way to be happy, is to look down on those who suffer, and not up to those who shine in the world.” This I hold to be an excellent maxim, and, to be consistent with it, though I cannot look much lower than myself, instead of lamenting the loss of my hearing, I will rejoice that I am not blind. I thank Thee, O my Father! that Thou didst rather close the doors than the windows of knowledge and delight; and that, having barred the doors, Thou didst not also darken the windows. If I were both blind and deaf, in what a wretched situation should I be! If both the windows and doors were shut, whereat could knowledge enter? It has been my earnest endeavour, since my fall, to “supply the one sense by the other,” and to give entrance at the window to as much information as I could possibly obtain. If I could not read, how deplorable would be my condition; and I earnestly entreat all who may chance to read this, of whatever condition, sex, or degree, that they will not be backward in lending me *books*; for if they attentively reflect on my situation, they will perceive that no other sources of information, knowledge, or instruction, and, I might add, of amusement, are left open to me than those which books afford. Without books, I should quickly become an ignorant and senseless being, unloving and unloved, if I am not so already. I apprehend that I have sometimes offended my acquaintance, by the importunity with which I have solicited the loan of books. But if I had a house full of books myself, and knew any person to whom they would be so necessary as to me, and who would make so good a use of them as I do, I would not stay to be entreated, nor scruple to lend any, or all of them, in succession, to such a person. What earthly pleasure can equal that of reading a good book? O dearest tomes! Princely and august folio! Sublime quarto! Elegant octavo! Charming duodecimo! Most ardently do I admire your beauties. To obtain ye, and to call ye mine, I would work day and night; and to possess ye, I would forbid myself all sensual joys. . . . The Almighty afflicts but to bless. Notwithstanding that His judgments often seem harsh and severe to those who are afflicted, they are in reality just and merciful. It is mercy in Him when He sends us one evil to preserve us from some greater and more serious ill. How do I know but that God permitted my deafness as an instrument through which I might be saved from some far worse evil, which He foreknew would have happened to me if I had continued

LIFE OF JOHN KITTO

possessed of my hearing. But be that as it may, while I regret the loss of a valuable sense, can I ever forget to thank Thee, O my Father! that, when I fell, I did not lose my reason or life instead of my hearing? Never!¹

Such, then, was Kitto in his twentieth year—an unfortunate and feeble stripling, who had sunk into poverty and wretchedness, nay, had fallen so low as to dwell in a workhouse to acquire a trade, and thus become, as the guardians thought, provided for. Now, through his talents and character, he has emerged into a position of respectability, has turned his busy reading to good account, is the author of a handsome volume, patronised by many of the clergy, and by peers and peeresses of the realm, and is talked about as a kind of prodigy. The Hospital of the Poor's Portion is proud of him, and he is in the way of higher preferment, though as yet his friends discern not his ultimate career, nor does he himself foresee the rugged and devious path by which he must reach the great labour of his life. Yet he hints to Mr Burnard that he is in high hopes of prospective authorship. ‘If my days be lengthened, nothing is more likely than that I shall publish again; but never will I publish, unless it be something far more worthy of attention than this; but I question whether my next publication, however superior to this it may be, will be equally well supported.’ Right, and yet wrong. His next publication was both vastly superior and far better supported. But he did not as yet even dream of it, for it was the Pictorial Bible with which his name has become identified, nor was he then trained and equipped for such an undertaking.

A fortunate change speedily took place in Kitto’s condition. Mr Groves had been for some time contemplating the work of a missionary for himself, and had kept terms at Trinity College, Dublin, to prepare for episcopal ordination. As, therefore, his residence in Exeter could not be of long continuance, he was anxious to secure some settled mode of subsistence for his assistant. Several plans were proposed, to enable him, if he should abide by his vocation as a dentist, to practise either in Plymouth or the metropolis. But a wise Providence had otherwise determined. Mr Groves had learned that the presses at several stations of the Church Missionary Society were in need of hearty workmen, and, knowing the devotedness of Kitto’s spirit, and his vast admiration of evangelical labour, he proposed that he should take part as a printer in the great missionary enterprise. Kitto caught at the proposal, and thus addressed Mr Woollcombe:—

Exeter, June 1825.

SIR,—To you and my other friends I feel it necessary to write, before the recurrence of the periods respectively assigned, in order to communicate a cir-

cumstance, for which you are more prepared than any of the other gentlemen to whom I am about to write. From something which passed when I had the honour of waiting on you whilst I was at Plymouth, in November last, you are, I presume, sir, sufficiently aware of the high interest which I felt in relation to the general subject of missions. And, indeed, from a letter written before I had the least idea of coming hither, it will probably have appeared that my mind was early impressed with a sense of the great privileges and importance of the missionary character. Will not these circumstances, sir, have operated on your mind as preparatives for the intelligence, that I hope myself to be permitted to occupy the high station of a labourer in the vast field of missionary exertion? That is the intelligence I write to communicate. And, requesting to be allowed to suppose, for a moment, the existence of a common feeling in relation to *one great object* between us, I may be allowed to anticipate your sympathy in the gratification which I derive from having enlisted under the banners of The Church Missionary Society. Attached as I am to the soft domestic charities of life, and open as my prospects of being permitted to enjoy them were, it cannot be necessary that I should inform you, sir, that nothing but a deep sense of the duty which I owed to Him who has been so very good and merciful to me, and an ardent desire to contribute the humble offering of my individual exertions to the great, the noble cause, of assisting to dispel that darkness which is so deeply to be deplored, could have induced the offer of my services to that Institution. At a time like this, which may not improperly be considered a crisis in every point of view in which it can be contemplated, I think it very essential that every Christian should assist the mighty energies now in active operation, by the practice of that absolute and exclusive self-devotion to the service of the Almighty, the principles of which the Scriptures so strongly inculcate and enforce. Hence I rejoice in an occasion of practically demonstrating the *reality* of that willingness, which I have not been backward in professing, to appropriate myself, and every talent which God has committed to my trust, to the cause of Him from whom all things are derived, and whose right they therefore are. To do this is my honour, the highest honour I can attain—my privilege, my duty; and to it every rational consideration suggested to my mind—every *proper* feeling of my heart—irresistibly impels me, in spite of a certain degree of reluctance which I have naturally experienced at the idea of entering on a career of high moral responsibility and active exertion. Instead of these general statements and reflections, it will, perhaps, sir, be more necessary that I should enumerate the leading features of the circumstances under which I live. It having been discovered that the Church Missionary Society was in want of printers in various of its stations, the idea occurred to Mr Groves that I might be

LIFE OF JOHN KITTO

very useful in such a capacity, and that I seemed peculiarly adapted for such a situation. When I had properly considered the suggestion, I eagerly entered into the idea it contained. Being satisfied, then, that this must be a most *useful* sphere of action, it of course became my duty to labour in it. Mr G. therefore wrote to Mr Bickersteth, the secretary, offering my services to the Society. No answer was immediately received, but Mr Groves received an intimation from a third person, which induced him to go to London. He was there enabled to put the affair in a more desirable chain of operation than it had previously been; but the question was reserved for the decision of the Committee, which was held the week before last. On Friday evening information was received that the Committee did not consider my deafness as any material impediment to my usefulness as a printer at one of the Society's stations. They wish me, therefore, to come to London, where I am to be instructed in the business by Mr Watts, their printer. Printers are much needed in Calcutta, Malta, and several other places; and if I go out under the Society, my employment will be to superintend the operations of the natives in the printing establishments. I know nothing, sir, in which I could be more useful than this; and to be useful is the only object, if I had any preference at all, for which I should wish to live. Even in a temporal point of view, if my mind had even adverted to such a consideration, this would be no undesirable provision, as the Society takes care of its labourers in cases of inability arising from sickness, age, or any other cause equally unavoidable with these. Certainly I do not, sir, expect that, either in London, or on any of the Continents, I shall not have many trials and difficulties to sup-port; but I hope and believe that He who has hitherto been with me will give strength and patience sufficient for me in *all* the varied circumstances of action and of being to which He may see fit to call me.—I remain, Sir, your greatly obliged and obedient servant,

‘J. KITTO.’

Kitto was accepted by the Board in London, Mr Groves making a liberal offer of fifty pounds a year, for two years, towards the defraying of his expenses. In July 1823 he took up his residence at the Missionary College in Islington, and was assigned to the care of Mr Watts to learn printing. What trades he had passed through already—barber, shoemaker, dentist, and now a printer! The last, however, was viewed by him in a spiritual aspect. He was qualifying, as he imagined, for the purpose of circulating the Bible and religious books. The work was, therefore, to his liking. He had thought of various projects before he left Mr Burnard’s, and suggested to Mr Harvey³² that active measures should be taken to procure me some situation, before the money be exhausted, which you

LIFE OF JOHN KITTO

have with so much trouble collected'... 'Food and clothing are my only objects.' He had at that time a strong desire to be attached to some gentleman's country residence, as he was willing to work for his maintenance in any humble capacity, provided all his time was not occupied, but some of it left for his own literary pursuits. He had a strong aversion to either editorial or subordinate connection with a newspaper, but would not have demurred to being 'connected with Mr Drew and the Imperial Magazine.' Other schemes were afterwards started in his fertile ingenuity, but none of them were adopted. Such a place as that which he had so recently held under Mr Groves had never once been thought of, and his position in Islington as a printer, in connection with the Church Missionary Society, was as remote from his usual anticipations. The calculations of his own prudence had all been defeated, and he could not but feel that, as a ward of Providence, his steps had been under the leading of a kind and invisible Hand. The unschooled cobbler of the Plymouth Work-house was now an honoured inmate of Islington College.

LIFE OF JOHN KITTO

FOOTNOTES

29 Letter to Mr Barnard, 24th March 1825.

30 Essays and Letters by John Kitto, with a Short Memoir of the Author. Plymouth.

31 This Essay is dated Plymouth Workhouse, Feb. 16, 1823.

32 Library, September 30, 1823.