

The Examiner.

AND SEMI-WEEKLY INTELLIGENCER.

"THIS IS TRUE LIBERTY WHEN FREE-BORN MEN—HAVING TO ADVISE THE PUBLIC—MAY SPEAK FREE."—MILTON'S EURIPIDES.

NEW SERIES.

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AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF EBENEZER ELLIOTT.

THE following memoir of the life of the late Ebenezer Elliott, written by himself, in the middle of the year 1841, has been obligingly furnished to us (*The Athenæum*) for publication. Here and there we have omitted certain passages, to be found in the manuscript, which omission may appear occasionally to disturb the continuity of the narrative. But various reasons have suggested these several suppressions, which, after all, sacrifice nothing that is material or essentially characteristic of the autograph:—

Soon after my *Corn Law Rhymes* had made me somewhat notorious, I was strongly urged by sundry persons to write a history of my life; which I then refused to do, because I had nothing remarkable to relate of myself, and because I knew not that I had done aught that could reasonably induce any person to ask, six months after my death, "What sort of man was Ebenezer Elliott?" I placed, however, in the hands of my friend G. C. Holland, M. D., a series of letters, in which I narrated some incidents of my early life, that had probably influenced the formation of my mind and character, and which might form the basis of a posthumous narrative, if wanted. I embody in the succeeding narrative the substance of those letters now, following the advice which I rejected several years ago—reluctantly, for the same reasons—not that this is "a world to hide virtues in," but that I have none to hide.

Of my birth, no public registry exists. My father being a Dissenter, baptised me himself, or employed his friend, and brother Berean, Tommy Wright, the Barnsley tinker, to baptise me. But I was born at the New Foundry, Masbro', in the Parish of Rotherham, on the 17th of March, in the year of our Lord, 1781; and I narrate the fact thus particularly, that about an event of such importance, there may be no contentious ink shed by historians in times to come. Robert Elliott, my father's father, was a whitesmith, of Newcastle-upon-Tyne; a man in good circumstances, or he could not have given to his son Ebenezer, my father, what was then considered a first class commercial education, and put him apprentice to Landell & Chambers, of that great city, wholesale ironmongers, who received with him a premium of £50. His wife, who rejoiced in the pastoral name of "Sheepshanks," was a Scotswoman, and, speaking metaphorically, wore breeches, a circumstance which does not seem to have lessened the love her husband bore her; for he lamented her with tears long after she had been laid in the grave, even until the day of his death—especially when he was drunk. The ancestors of my grandfather, Elliott, I have been told—and have the honour to believe—were thieves, neither Scotch nor English, who lived on the cattle they stole from both. That my grandmother, Sheepshanks, had ancestors is probable; but of what they were neither record nor tradition had reached me—which is the more pity, because my great difficulty in writing this narrative is want of materials. Famous men are fated to have wants; but ask yourselves, ye famous! who could write your histories, if all the children of want were famous? After my father left Landell & Chambers, he became one of the clerks of the Walkers of Masbro', where he lodged with a surgeon, called Robinson; under whose roof he first saw my mother—one of the daughters of a yeoman, at Ozzins, near Pennistone, where his ancestors had lived on their fifty or sixty acres of freehold time out of mind! I think, then, I have made out my descent, if not from very fine folks, certainly from respectables, as (getting every day comparatively scarcer) they are called in these days of "ten dogs to one bone."

If famous men are fated to have wants, so are they to have misfortunes, truly such—and some of mine were born before me; for the whole life of my mother was a disease—a tale of pain, terminated by death—one long sight. Yet she suckled eleven children, and reared eight of them to adult age. From her I have derived my nervous irritability, my bashful awkwardness, my miserable proneness to anticipate evil, that makes existence all catastrophe. I well remember her sending me to a dame's school kept by Nanny Sikes—the beautiful and brave wife of a drunken husband—where I learned my A B C. I was next sent to the Hollis School; then presided over by Joseph Ramsbotham, who taught me to write—and little more. In those days, the science of monitorship was undiscovered; and, as he had seldom fewer, perhaps, than 150 scholars, of course none but the naturally clever made much progress. About this time, my poor mother, who was a first-rate dreamer, and a true believer in dreams, related to me one of her visions. "I had placed under my pillow," she said, "a shank-bone of mutton to dream upon; and I dreamed that I saw a little, broad set, dark, ill-favoured man, with black hair, black eyes, thick stob nose and top-shins: it was thy father."

And a special original my father was—a man of great virtue—not without faults. One of the latter had its origin, probably, in some superstitious reverence for the cabalistic number "three." I allude to this bad habit of ducking his children thrice, and keeping them the third time some seconds under water, when he bathed us in the canal, which produced in me a horror of suffocation that seems to increase with my years. To avoid this cruel kindness, I was obliged to shew him that I could do without his assistance, by bathing voluntarily; a consequence of which was, that, on one occasion, I narrowly escaped drowning—"the more the pity!" I have often said since. I never knew a man who possessed the title of my father's satiric and humorous powers: he would have made a great comic actor. He also possessed uncommon political sagacity, which afterwards earned for him the title of "Devil Elliott,"—a title which is still applied to him, I am told, by the descendants of persons who then hated the peer and honoured the King. He left the Messrs. Walker to serve Clay & Co., of the New Foundry, Masbro', for a salary of sixty or seventy pounds a-year, with house, candle and coal! Well do I remember some of those days of affluence and pit-coal fires—for glorious fires we had; no fear of coal bills in those days. There, at the New Foundry, under the room where I was born, in a little parlour like the cabin of a ship, yearly painted green, and blessed with a beautiful thoroughfare of light—for there was no window-tax in those days—he used to preach, every fourth Sunday, to persons who came from distances of twelve and fourteen miles, to hear his tremendous doctrines of ultra-Calvanism (he called himself a Berean) and hell hung round with span-long children! On other days, pointing to the aqua-tint pictures on the walls, he delighted to declaim on the virtues of slandered Cromwell and of Washington, the rebel; or, shaking his sides with laughter, explained the glories of "The glorious victory of his Majesty's forces over the rebels at Bunker's Hill!" Here the reader has a key which will unlock all my future politics. If ever there was a man who knew not fear, that man was the father of the *Corn Law Rhymer*. From his birth to his last gasp, I doubt whether he knew what it was to be afraid, except of poverty; about which he had sad forebodings—ultimately realised, after he had become nominal proprietor of the Foundry of Clay & Co.—the partners having sold him their shares on credit.

"Oh, blessed are the beautiful!" says Haynes Baily, uttering for ever a sentiment to which I can feelingly and inournfully respond; for, in my sixth year, I had

the small-pox, which left me frightfully disfigured, and six weeks blind: from the consequences I never entirely recovered. To them quite as much as to my poor mother's infirm constitution, I impute my nerve-shaken weakness. How great was that weakness I will endeavour to shew the reader. When I was very young—I might be twelve years old—I fell in love with a young woman, called Ridgeway—now Mrs. Woodcock, of Munster, near Greasbro'—to whom I never spoke a word in my life, and the sound of whose voice, to this day, I have never heard; yet, if I thought she saw me as I passed her father's house, I felt as if weights were fastened to my feet. Is genius diseased?—I cannot remember the time when I was not fond of ruralities. Was I born, then, with a taste for the beautiful? When quite a child—I might be seven or eight years old—I remember filling a waster frying-pan with water, placing it in the centre of a little grove of mugwort or wormwood that grew on a stone heap in the foundry yard, and delighting to see the reflection of the sun, the clouds, and the planets themselves, as from the surface of a natural fountain; for I so placed the pan that the water in it only was visible, and I seldom failed to visit it at noon, when the sun was over it. But I had also a taste for the horrible—a passion—a rage—for seeing the faces of the hanged or the drowned. I was cured of it by a memorable spectacle. A poor friendless man, who, having no home, slept in colliery hovels and similar places, having been sent, one dark night, from the glass-house, for a pitcher of ale, fell into the canal, and was drowned. In about six weeks his body rose to the surface of the water, and I, of course, ran to see it. The spectacle, which by that time it presented, was daily and nightly, whether I was alone or in the street, in bed or by the fireside, for months, my constant companion. Had this morbid propensity any relation to my solitary tendencies? Healthy man is social; but in my childhood I had no associates;—although the neighbourhood swarmed with children, I was always alone. And this is perhaps one reason why I was deemed rather wanting in intellect, and why I might really have had fewer ideas than other children of my age, for I cut myself off from all communication with theirs. But though I was alone, I had no recollection that my solitude was painful: on the contrary, I employed my time delightfully in swimming my little fleets of ships, and repairing my fortresses on the banks of the canal between the Greasbro' and Rawmarch bridges. My early fondness for carpentering is no proof that if I had been bred an engineer I should have made any improvements in machinery—for all children are more or less fond of knickknackeries; but I certainly excelled in handicrafts. I was the best kitemaker and ship-builder. Most Captains of sloops and other vessels possess a model of a ship of some sort. By borrowing such models, I completed, when I was thirteen years old, a model of an eighteen-gun ship. I gave it, many years afterwards, to a boat-builder of Greasbro', called Woffendin, who begged it of me, that it might obtain for him the office of boat-builder to Earl Fitzwilliam. He gave, or sold it to Lord Milton, the present Earl Fitzwilliam, then a youth; and it was, I believe, a few years ago still at Wentworth House.

When I look back on the days of rabid Toryism through which I have passed and consider the then almost universal tendency to worship the powers that were, and their worst mistakes, I feel astonished that a nerve-shaken man, whose affrighted imagination in boyhood and youth slept with dead men's faces, a man, whose first sensation on standing up to address a public meeting, is that of his knees giving way under him, should have been able to retain his political integrity, without adorning one article of his fearless father's creed. But, even in those days, I find, I was a Free Trader, though

I knew it not. So barbarous were some of the deeds done in that time, in the name of the law, and so painful was the impression which they had made on me when I was about sixteen years old, that I should certainly have emigrated to the United States, had I possessed sufficient funds for that purpose; nor should I, I fear, have been very scrupulous as to the means of obtaining them—so fully had the idea of emigration obtained possession of me, so passionately had my mind embraced it, and so poetically had I associated with it Crusoe notions of self-dependence and insolation. It is not improper to blush for uncommitted offences.

My ninth year was an era in my life. My father had cast a great pan, weighing some tons, for my uncle, at Thurlstone, and I determined to go thither in it, without acquainting my parents with my intention. A truck, with assistants, having been sent for it, I got into it, about sunset, unperceived, hiding myself beneath some hay, which it contained—and we proceeded on our journey. I have not forgotten how much I was excited by the solemnity of the night, and its shooting stars, until I arrived at Thurlstone, about four o'clock in the morning. It is remarkable that I never in after life, succeeded in any plan which I did not execute in a similar way. If I ask advice, either the plan is never executed, or it is unsuccessful. I had not been many days at Thurlstone before I wished myself at home again, for my heart was with my mother. If I could have found my way back I should certainly have returned; and my inability to do so (though my having come in the night may in some degree account for it) shews, I think, that I really must have been a dull child. My uncle sent me to Penistone school, where I made some little progress. At this school, one of the boys, who had a bad breath, took a liking to me. He would sit close to me, and almost poisoned me; yet at any time he happened to be absent, I felt as if I could not live: so necessary has it ever been to me to have some kind bosom to lean upon. When I got home from school I spent my evenings in looking from the back of my uncle's house to Hoyland Swaine, for I had discovered that Masbro' lay beyond that village; and ever, when the sun went down, I felt as if some great wrong had been done me. At length, in about a year and a-half my father came for me; and so ended my first irruption into the great world.

(To be concluded in our next.)

WHY.

This little word, as little almost as word may be, and pronouncable in a breath, may be termed the grand motto of the present age. People formerly used it very rarely, and never unless they happened to be unusually astonished or indignant about something. They now say why to everything; and, in fact, this monosyllable makes all the difference that is, between former ages and the present. There may still be found, in remote corners of the country, a few quiet innocent people, who never say why; but that is a very different thing from what was the case fifty or a hundred years ago. All people, of whatsoever denomination, then lived in a state of perfect unconsciousness as to the use or meaning of the phrase; everything was taken for granted; and it was looked upon as the most pestilent and ridiculous thing in the world to inquire any farther than one's neighbours. In those good old times, whatever was right. Authority of all kinds, if it only had existed longer than any one could recollect, was implicitly obeyed, and the most of men lived—we really must own the truth—in a state of shameful contentedness, as if they had not been aware that they had a will of their own. Taxes were then paid and spent, and no one thought more about it: it being spent, the great end of taxes seemed to be at