

The life of James Wilson : who has been blind from his infancy; author of Original poems, History of the blind, &c.;

Contributors

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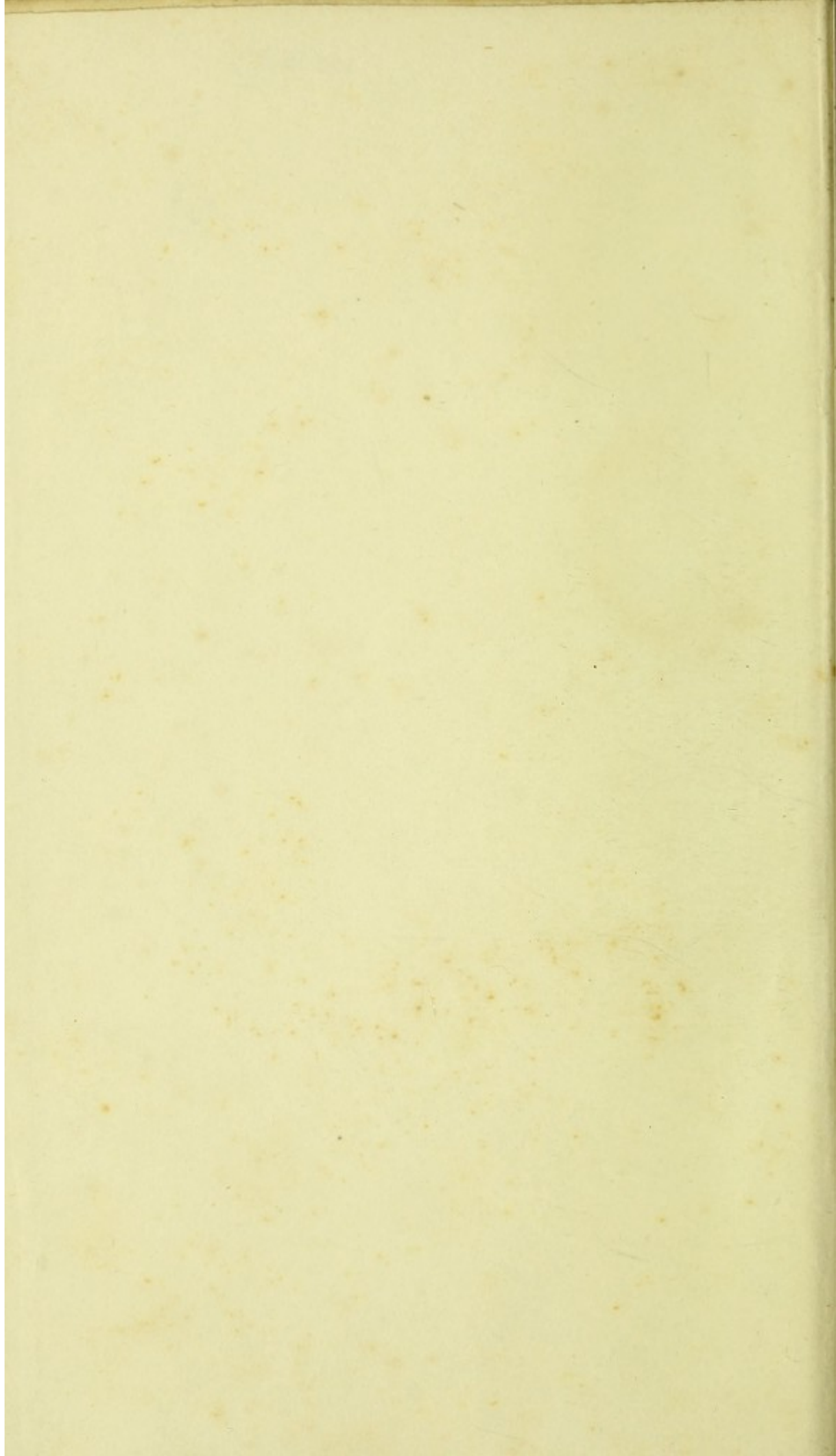
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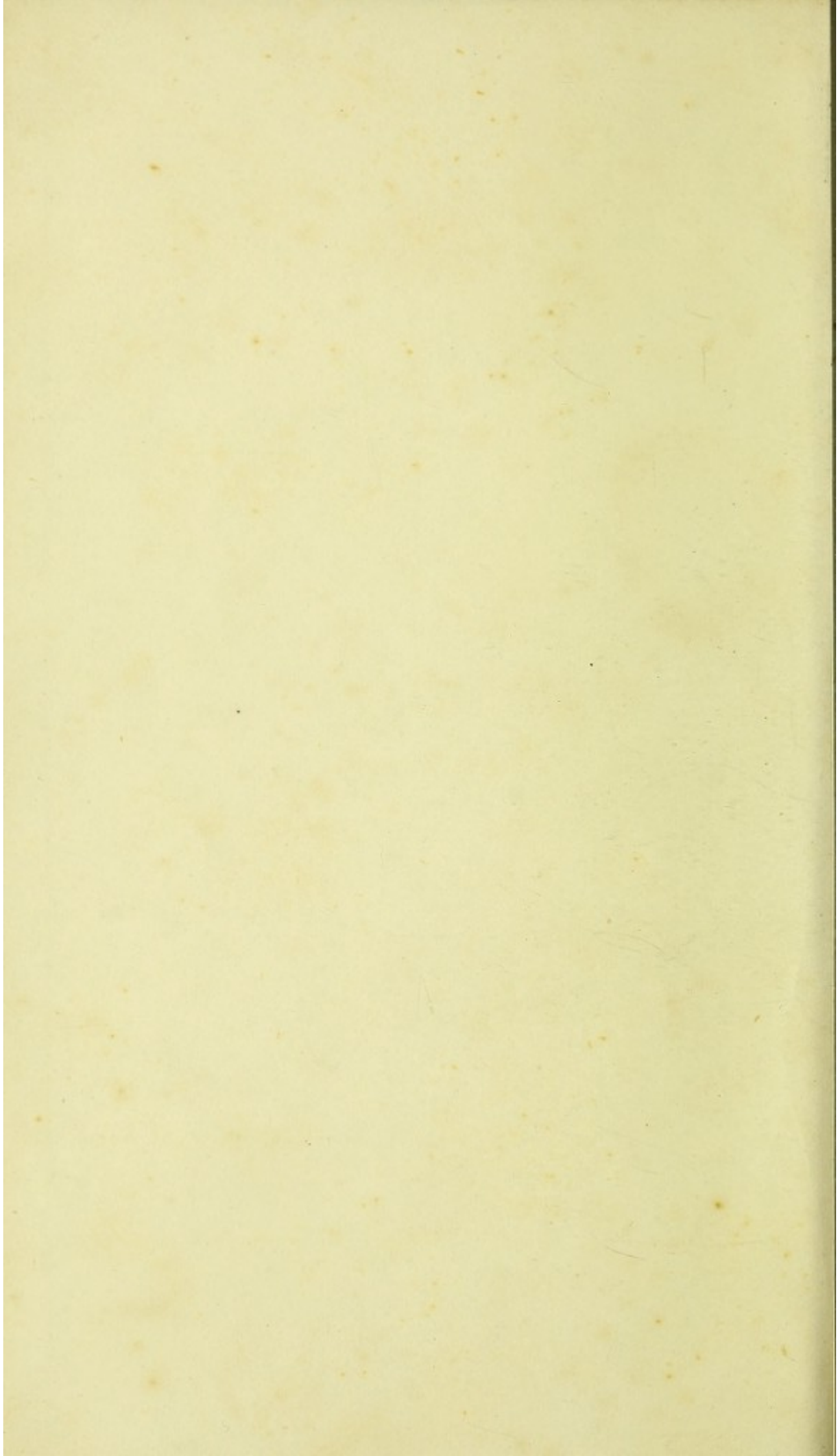
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LIFE OF
JAMES WILSON,
THE BLIND AUTHOR.

THE
JAMES WILSON
THE BIRD AUTHOR

THE LIFE
OF
JAMES WILSON,

WHO HAS BEEN

BLIND FROM HIS INFANCY ;

AUTHOR OF

ORIGINAL POEMS, HISTORY OF THE BLIND, &c.

“ But what avails it to record a name
“ That courts no rank among the sons of fame ? ”

BIRMINGHAM:
PRINTED BY J. W. SHOWELL, 26, UPPER TEMPLE-STREET.

1842.

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THE YEAR

JAMES WILSON

PRINTED FROM THE PRESS

OF THE

AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF THE ARTS



PRINTED BY J. W. GOWAN, 25 NASSAU STREET, N. Y.

PRINTED BY J. W. GOWAN, 25 NASSAU STREET, N. Y.

1881

TO THE READER.

BEFORE I introduce myself to the reader, I wish to call his attention to the following interesting letters :—

FROM ROBERT SOUTHEY, Esq.

“ Keswick, June 30, 1834.

“ I have read Mr. James Wilson’s account of his own life with much interest ; it is indeed a narrative which may very properly accompany the lives of those persons who, being blind, have nevertheless rendered themselves remarkable by their attainments, and thereby show how much may be performed by patient and ingenious industry under the most unfavourable and discouraging circumstances.

“ This testimony is given in the hope that it may be useful to him in his travels.

ROBERT SOUTHEY.”

FROM CAPTAIN BASIL HALL, R.N.

“ 132, George-street, Edinburgh,
Monday, 10th July, 1837.

* * * * *

“ Dear Sir,

“ I have read your ‘ Life ’ with much interest, and I may add instruction, for it is always instructive to see that cheerfulness and contentment are the result of virtuous actions ; and that generous and manly efforts in a good cause, though they may not always be crowned with what the world calls success, never fail, if duly persevered in, to secure that peace of mind, which is, after all, the best kind of success, even in a worldly point of view. But in such a case as yours, this perseverance requires no small faith in the principles upon which it rests.

“ I have not had time to read your larger work, which my children have carried off to the country, but I shall go through it with attention, and I have no doubt with advantage as well as amusement.

“ I return the copy of the ‘ Life ’ which you were good enough to lend me, and remain,

“ With sincerest good wishes,

“ Your most obed. humble servant,

“ BASIL HALL.”

LINES AT PARTING ;
 BY THE REV. THOMAS GRINFIELD.

“ Dear blind JAMES WILSON, think me not unkind,
 If scarcely can I pity thee, though blind ;
 Thy blindness is thy blessing. Had'st thou sight,
 Ne'er had thy soul been thus enrich'd with light.
 Ne'er had'st thou won thy thousand scatter'd friends,
 Where *English, Irish, Scottish* ground extends.
 Now is thy full-fraught memory a store
 Of Biographic and Historic lore ;
 Now the sweet Poets in thy bosom find
 A living home, and revel in thy mind :
 There, sage intelligence, and laughing wit—
 There, truth and kindness, peace and patience, sit.
 And pious Faith, twin'd with her sister Hope,
 Holds to thine inward eye her telescope,
 And shows the better world, where all is light,
 That knows not blindness—day that fears not night.
 —Evening, with thee, was wafted on the wing
 Of converse, such as left nor stain, nor sting.
 Long may'st thou *here* a blind-fold pilgrim rove ;
 Blessing and bless'd ; while all that know thee, love ;
 Then meet thy gather'd friends in one bright home
 above.

“ THOMAS GRINFIELD.”

“ June 27th, 1842, CLIFTON.”

LINES BY THE REV. C. J. FYNES CLINTON.

“ Behold a man who long hath lived in night,
Illumin’d yet with more than common light ;
Illiterate—yet much in letters skill’d ;
Unread—whose mind with various lore is fill’d ;
And who, although he ne’er a book hath seen,
Yet long a vocal library hath been !
A good divine, with Scripture truth well stor’d,
Who ne’er o’er Inspiration’s page hath por’d.
Strange contradictions !—how to truth agree
These words, we learn from Wilson’s history :
In him we see a man whom God hath taught,
And in his soul a calm submission wrought.
A compensation for the loss of sight,
God hath bestow’d in ‘marv’lous’ inward ‘light’ !
God’s other gifts he hath *more* priz’d and us’d,
Because one *usual* gift hath been refus’d.
His mind—enlighten’d with no common ray,
Can trace *this* light to th’ want of light of day.
Let Wilson teach those bless’d with vision’s sense
How great the grasp of zeal and diligence ;
Before *their* pow’r hills vanish—vallies rise,—
Through Grace’s aid they can e’en reach the skies.”

The Provincial Press, throughout England, as well as that of Scotland, has been unanimous in their praise of the "History of the Blind," as will be seen from the following extracts:—

OPINONS OF THE PRESS.

"To appear as a labourer in the garden of literature under his disadvantages, and in an age when literature is advancing with such rapid strides, must seem a bold proceeding—yet this boldness deserves encouragement, and this encouragement we are sure will be awarded in the present instance; for it will be as delightful an occupation to read the very interesting book before us, as it has been to the author to render it worthy of public esteem: and if its readers could imbibe from its perusal, some of that spirit of love and goodwill to all mankind which breathes through the whole work, we are sure they will arise from this volume informed in mind, and improved in feeling."—*Doncaster Gazette*.

"As a work of literary merit, it needs no commendation; it exhibits correct sentiments, just views of the subjects which fall in the author's way, and has, as might be expected, a romantic interest about it to the reader—abounding in the most curious, instructive, and delightful incident. No one, we will venture to say,

can open the unassuming Memoir of its author, with which the volume is prefaced, without being interested in the man, and having every better sympathy of his nature enlisted on behalf of the patient suffering and intrepid enterprize of that interesting class of our fellow-beings."—*Aberdeen Journal*.

“Here we have a Blind Biographer of the Blind,—one who both records and exemplifies the mental acquisitions which may be made by men entirely deprived of the most important sense through which knowledge is usually gained. Led by a natural sympathy, he has searched the annals of past times, for the most illustrious examples of blind men, who have attained eminence in any line by their talents. The volume is full of interesting facts, as may well be imagined. No person can read it without receiving much pleasure and instruction. The author is a man of worth, as well as of talent; and though not favoured by fortune, he seems to be happy in the possession of cheerful piety, and intellectual resources.”—*Leeds Mercury*.

“He not only earned his livelihood by his industry, but obtained a very extensive acquaintance with literature. A few years ago he compiled this work, of which the fourth edition is now before us. In the biography which he gives of himself and others, his piety, humility, sound sense, extensive information, and good taste,

are everywhere manifest. A more interesting book we have seldom read, and we most heartily recommend it, and the author to the kind attention of our readers."—*Sheffield Independent*.

“From this period, his life presents a succession of struggles to obtain knowledge and a virtuous independence; and, although he is more sparing in his details of the mental process by which his education was carried on, and of his ideas and feelings in relation to the external world, than we could wish, the description is interesting, and considering his peculiar condition, valuable. The manner in which the whole of the work is executed is highly creditable; and regarded as the production of a blind and self-educated man, wonderful. We would especially recommend the lives of Blacklock and Huber as examples of the author’s powers.”—*Montrose Review*.

“This work exhibits a vast deal of careful and anxious research into the biographical history of these talented, but unfortunate men. The author has gleaned his information from the best authorities; and by judiciously condensing and arranging his materials, has produced a work at once attractive for its novelty, and the amount of interesting information it conveys regarding the distinguished individuals whose history it records.”—*Scotsman*.

“It has been the object of the author to give the lives of these individuals and their distinguishing characteristics in one neat and portable volume : and the manner in which he has accomplished this task, especially when we consider that he has himself been blind from his infancy, reflects great credit on his talents, zeal, and perseverance. Having ourselves the pleasure of his acquaintance, we can undertake to say that he is a most modest, deserving, and unassuming character.”—*Liverpool Mercury*.

“His, however, has neither been an idle or a useless life. He has copied the ant for the industry with which he has collected and stored materials for the improvement and delight of his own mind ; and, although labouring under the discouraging defect of sight, he has succeeded in producing a volume of lives of eminent blind persons, which will be found worthy of the perusal of any individual, whatever may be his acquirements.”—*Glasgow Courier*.

“Here is a curious book ! A History of the Blind, written by a blind man ! And a very respectable book it is, even were it the production of a man with all his faculties entire ; but considered as the work of one who from childhood has been blind, it cannot but be looked upon with wonder and admiration, and excite the deepest interest wherever it is known. We have seen and

conversed with him : and have found him a shrewd, sensible, and modest man ; intelligent, full of information upon many subjects, and well versed in most topics of general conversation.”—*Carlisle Journal*.

“ *Wilson’s Biography of the Blind*.—We are happy to add our testimony in addition to that of many of our contemporaries to the merits of this record of the talents, perseverance, and virtues of those who, like our author, have encountered the vicissitudes of life under the calamity of blindness. It is not only an interesting but instructive book, shewing the powers of the mind under one of the greatest discouragements, and the possible attainment of knowledge, notwithstanding that the access of wisdom is, at one entrance, quite shut out. In no one instance is this better exemplified than in the life of the author, an account of which prefaces his book, which, as a record of the pursuits of knowledge under difficulties, aggravated by blindness, has, we venture to say, scarcely a parallel.”—*Ipswich Journal*.

the first of these was the discovery of gold in California, which led to the great gold rush of 1849. This was followed by the discovery of silver in the same region, and the discovery of copper in Arizona. These discoveries led to the rapid development of the West, and the establishment of many new cities and towns. The West was also the site of many important events, including the Gold Rush, the California Gold Rush, and the discovery of gold in California. The West was also the site of many important events, including the Gold Rush, the California Gold Rush, and the discovery of gold in California.

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THE LIFE
or
JAMES WILSON.

I WAS born May 24th, 1779, in Richmond, State of Virginia, North America. My father, John Wilson, was a native of Scotland. His family was originally of Queen's-ferry, a small village in Fifeshire, about eleven miles from Edinburgh; he had an uncle who emigrated to America when a young man, as a mechanic, where, by honest industry and prudent economy, he soon amassed a considerable property. He wrote for my father, who was then about eighteen years of age, and promised to make him his heir in case he would come to America. My grandfather hesitated for some time, but at length consented, and preparations were accordingly

made for my father's departure, who sailed from Greenock, and arrived safe at Norfolk; from whence he was forwarded by a merchant of that place, and soon reached Richmond, where he was gladly received by his uncle. This man being in the decline of life, without a family, and bowed down by infirmities, now looked upon his nephew as the comfort of his life, and the support of his declining years, and therefore entrusted him with the entire management of his affairs, which he had the happiness of conducting to the old man's satisfaction. Thus he continued to act till the death of his uncle in 1775, when he found himself in possession of £3000 value, in money and landed property.

Prior to this event, my father, on a visit to Baltimore, got acquainted with my mother, Elizabeth Johnson. To her he was introduced by an intimate friend, a Mr. Freeman, whom I may have occasion to mention hereafter. His uncle, on hearing this, could not bear the idea of a matrimonial connexion during his life, and so stood as a grand barrier to the completion of his wishes; but at the decease of the old man, being left to think and act for himself, as soon as his affairs were settled, he hastened to Balti-

more, where the long-wished-for union took place.

Shortly after his marriage he returned again to Virginia. His whole mind was now bent to the improvement of his plantation, and the acquiring of a paternal inheritance for his offspring. Flushed with the hope of spending the eve of life on a fertile estate that amply rewarded the hand of industry, of spending it in the bosom of his family, and of tasting the pleasures which domestic retirement affords, he followed his avocation with alacrity, and could say in the midst of his enjoyments,—

“The Winter’s night and Summer’s day,
Glide imperceptibly away.”

But, alas, how uncertain are human prospects and worldly possessions! How often do they wither in the bud; or bloom like the rose, to be blasted when full blown! How repeatedly do they sicken, even in enjoyment, and what appears at a distance like a beautiful verdant hill, degenerates on a closer survey into a rugged barren rock!—This moment the sky is bright, the air is serene, and the sun of our prosperity beams forth in unclouded splendour; and in the next blackness and darkness envelope us around, the

cloud of adversity bursts upon our devoted heads, and we are overwhelmed by the storm. It was so with my father, and, of course, the misfortune was entailed on me.

The disturbance which took place at Boston was at first considered only a riot ; but it shortly began to assume a more formidable aspect. The insurgents were soon embodied throughout all the Colonies, and the insurrection became general. Between them and the loyal party, no neutrality was allowed, and every man was finally under the necessity of joining one side or the other. For some time, indeed, my father strove to avoid taking an active part, but he was soon convinced that this was totally impossible. Many of his early friends had embraced the cause of the Revolutionists, and were very anxious that he should join their party. To excite him to this, several advantageous offers were made to him, and when this expedient failed, threats were resorted to. Exercising the right which belongs to every man, in politics, as well as in religion, I mean the right of private judgment, he in conjunction with a number of his neighbours, enrolled himself in a corps of volunteers, for the joint purpose of defending private pro-

perty, and supporting the royal cause. The iron hand of war was now stretched out, and unrelenting cruelty had taken possession of the hearts of those persons towards each other, who were formerly united by the ties of neighbourly affection; consequently a band of enraged incendiaries, about 150 in number, mostly black slaves belonging to the neighbouring planters, no doubt, excited by their masters, attacked my father's house in his absence, plundered it of every valuable article, and finally burned it to the ground. From this alarming catastrophe, my mother and a few domestics narrowly escaped with their lives, and were obliged to seek shelter in the neighbouring woods, where they were exposed to the inclemency of the weather during a severe winter night. It would indeed be painful to me to enter minutely into the sufferings of my parents at this eventful period. Suffice it to say, they were stript of their all, and were left destitute and forlorn.

Down to the period of which I am now speaking no political question had ever given rise to more controversy than the American war. It is not my business to enter into a discussion of the subject; all that remains necessary for me

to say, is a word or two in relation to my father's political conduct. That man who would not rejoice in being able to speak well of a departed parent, is not entitled to the name of man, and cannot be characterised by the feelings common to our nature. It affords me, then, a degree of pleasure to reflect, that my father must have acted throughout from principle. On this point, I am perfectly satisfied when I consider him rejecting emolument, despising threats, volunteering in the royal cause, forsaking his own home, and thereby leaving his family and property exposed, braving every danger, serving during five campaigns, and continuing active in the cause he had espoused, as long as he could be useful to it.

Being attached to that part of the army under the immediate command of Lord Cornwallis, he was taken prisoner when that gallant General was compelled to surrender to a superior force. His health, during these disasters, was much impaired, and on being liberated, he now thought of returning to Europe, in hopes that the air of his native country would restore him to his wonted state of health and vigour.

My mother was now residing near New-York, in the house of a friend, and thither he directed his steps. There he abode for a year, and found his health so much improved, that he determined to lose no more time in America, and so prepared to re-cross the Atlantic—

“And anxious to review his native shore,
“Upon the roaring waves embarked once more.”

Bound for Liverpool, under the guidance of Capt. Smith, the vessel set sail, and my parents bid a final adieu to the shores of Columbia;—what his feelings were at this crisis, it would be difficult to describe. Separated from that country in which his best hopes centered—cut off from the enjoyment of his legal possessions, without a probability of ever regaining them—impaired in his constitution, and crossed in all his former prospects, we may view him mourning over his misfortunes, and devising plans for his future exertions. It is true, he might have consoled himself with the pleasing reflection, that he was now about to revisit his native land, to meet with his nearest relations and best friends, and to spend the remainder of his days in the place of his nativity, in peace and safety; but how vain and transient are the hopes of mortal man!

All his joys and sorrows, hopes and fears, anxious cares, and premature plans, were shortly to terminate with him, and I was to be left at four years of age, destitute of a father. They had scarcely lost sight of land when his disease returned with increased violence, and twelve days after the vessel left New-York, he expired. The reader will not consider my situation utterly deplorable, while he thinks that still I had a mother to take care of me, and to assist me in my childish years. True, I had a mother, and a mother who survived my father; but it was only for twenty minutes!—for she, being in the last state of pregnancy, the alarm occasioned by his death brought on premature labour, and terminated her existance. Thus, on a sudden, I lost both father and mother, saw them sewed up in the same hammock, and committed to a watery grave.

“ My mother, when I learned that thou wast dead,
Say, wast thou conscious of the tears I shed?
Hover'd thy spirit o'er thy sorrowing son,
Wretch, even then, life's journey just begun?
Perhaps thou gav'st me, though unfelt, a kiss,
Perhaps a tear, if souls can weep in bliss—
Ah, that maternal smile, it answers—YES.”

Here my misfortune did not end; I was seized by the small pox, and for want of a mother's

care, and proper medical aid, this most loathsome disease deprived me of my sight. After a long and dangerous voyage, it being a hurricane almost all the time, the Captain was obliged to put into Belfast harbour, as the ship had suffered much in her masts, rigging &c., and the crew were nearly exhausted. When we arrived there, I had not recovered from the effects of my late illness, the symptoms of which were at one period so violent, as to threaten instant dissolution; to make me the more comfortable, I was sent immediately to Belfast. The following circumstance is still fresh in my recollection: the vessel was four miles from the town, and one of the seamen, who had been my nurse from the time of my mother's death, and who, during the passage, rendered me all the assistance which his situation allowed, kept me on his knee in the boat, and this kind-hearted individual administered the only cordial he possessed, which was rum and water.

There was no time lost by Captain Smith in applying to the church-warden in my behalf, and, in order to prevent me from becoming a charge to the parish, he deposited in his hands a sum of money, sufficient to pay the expence

of supporting me for five years, and I was soon provided with a nurse.

The reader, by this time, will be curious to know how I came by the information contained in the preceding pages. I am indebted for these particulars, at least so far as they concern my family's misfortunes in America, to the kindness of Mr. Freeman, who came passenger in the same ship. With this worthy gentleman, my mother had remained during my father's absence, and as I have already observed, she was received as one of the family, and treated with all that humanity and attention which her forlorn situation required. Mr. Freeman had been the sincere friend of my father from a short time after he landed in America; their age and their pursuits were the same, and their habits, tastes, and dispositions were congenial. Under these circumstances, a friendship was commenced, which, through a long series of vicissitudes and misfortunes, remain unbroken—a friendship which only ended with my father's life. Although, at one time, party politics ran high, and although my father joined the royal standard, while Mr. Freeman was a zealous republican, such were the liberal sen-

timents of this gentleman, that he never entertained towards his friend the least hostile feeling; and when my father was injured in his property, and persecuted for his opinions, he was always sure to find an asylum under the roof of this good and worthy man. While the vessel in which I came to Ireland was under repair, he and his family resided at Palmer's Hotel, Belfast, where, in the hearing of Mrs. Palmer, he related the particulars of his early acquaintance with his deceased friend, and the subsequent misfortunes which befel him in America, till the time of the mournful catastrophe which I have already described; this he did in such a simple and affecting manner, as not only caused him to shed tears himself, but also produced the same emotion in those who heard him.—Some important papers belonging to my father were preserved by Mr. F., and given to the church-warden. They consisted of old letters, and a journal which my father had kept from the time of his departure from Scotland till he left America, in which every particular connected with his history, during that eventful period, was carefully noted; but Mr. Scott, the church-warden, without examination, pronounced them totally useless, and they were sent

home to my nurse in the trunk with my clothes. The poor old woman was unable, herself, to ascertain their contents, nor did she ever think of shewing them to any intelligent person who could turn them to my advantage; she considered them mere waste paper, and used to light her pipe with them, and roll her flax while spinning. A little play-fellow of mine, who sought my company after school hours, for the purpose of getting me to tell stories to him, (for I was at that time famed over the neighbourhood for my legendary tales) would occasionally read to me such scraps of my father's letters and journal, as he found scattered about the room. From this circumstance, I still remember the names of Generals Howe, Clinton, and Robinson, which occasionally occurred, and with whom my father had corresponded, during the course of his military services in America.— Much blame has been attached to Mr. Robert Scott, for not having had my case more narrowly enquired into, while Captain Smith and Mr. Freeman were in Belfast. From the testimony of two such respectable individuals, and the information the above documents would probably have afforded, my claims might have been substantiated, and a compensation ob-

tained for me in lieu of my father's services, and the losses he sustained during the revolutionary war. But Mr. Scott, being a man of the world, thought he had fulfilled his duty when he had provided me with a nurse, and seen me comfortably lodged. Some years after, on being spoken to respecting his conduct in this affair, he replied "that he had enough business of his own to attend to, without giving himself unnecessary trouble." Thus was I neglected, at a time when something might have been done for me, by those whose duty it was to take care of me; but I was an infant, an orphan, and a stranger, and there was no one to step forward on my behalf. Mr. Freeman, to whom I owe so much, and whose memory I shall always cherish with the most grateful recollection, was so ill, during his stay in Belfast, that he was confined to his room. As soon as the vessel was refitted, he proceeded with his family to England, promising Mr. and Mrs. Palmer, on his departure, to write concerning me, and to take me back with him to America, having only come for the benefit of his health, and being about to return as soon as a change should take place for the better. His intention, he said, was to place me under a proper master, and have me taught mu-

sic ; but I never heard from him after, and from the state of his health, when he parted with me, I conclude that he has long been dead.

The ship being now completely repaired, the benevolent Captain and kind-hearted crew left me in Belfast a total stranger. No one knew me, or had ever heard anything of my family. My situation at this time was truly pitiable, as I was deprived of my parents at the time I most required their care ; still, however, I was under the protection of a merciful Providence, “ who can temper the wind to the shorn lamb.” In His word He has promised to be a Father to the fatherless, and to me this gracious saying has certainly been fulfilled. Many of the first families in the kingdom I can rank among my kindest friends ; and to nothing can I attribute this, but to the influence of His providence, who inclines the hearts of men to that which is pleasing in His sight.

My nurse was a good-natured old woman, and the anxiety which she shewed for my recovery, was much greater than could have been expected from a stranger ; night after night she sat by me, attended to my calls and administered to my wants, with all that maternal ten-

derness which a fond mother manifests to the child of her bosom. The prayers which she offered up in my behalf, and the tears of sympathy which stole down her aged cheek, bespoke a heart that could feel for the miseries of a fellow-creature. Contrary to all expectation, I recovered, and in the course of a few months I was able to grope my way through the house alone. Shortly after this, my right eye was couched by the late Surgeon Wilson, and in consequence of this operation, I could soon discern surrounding objects and their various colours. This was certainly a great mercy, for, though the enjoyment did not continue long, yet the recollection of it affords me pleasure even to the present day.

One day, when about seven years of age, as I crossed the street, I was attacked and dreadfully mangled by an ill-natured cow. This accident nearly cost me my life, and deprived me of that sight which was, in a great degree restored, but which I have never since enjoyed: thus it was the will of Providence to baffle the efforts of human skill, and to doom me to perpetual blindness; and it is this reflection that enables me to bear my misfortune without repining. And thank-

ful do I feel for my preservation through the many trying scenes of difficulty and peril to which I have been exposed ever since the days of my childhood. May I never forget the goodness of that beneficent Being to whom I owe so much; whose tender mercies are over all his works; and to whom, for favours and blessings, past and present, I would ascribe the homage of a humble and grateful heart.

—————“Fond memory here revives
 “Each dream-like image of the days gone by;
 “What time on other shores, * * * *
 “I chased the scaly brood, or mid the throng
 “Of giddy school-boys, sported in the waves,
 “Or with young triumph saw the tiny ship,
 “Fair miniature of such as bear afar
 “The thunder of Britannia, in the race
 “Shoot past her rivals.”

When I was about eight or nine years of age, I was not only projector, but workman, for all the children in the neighbourhood. I amused myself occasionally in constructing little windmills, cars, and ships. A kind friend made me a present of a little ship, a perfect model of the Royal George, which was lost at Spithead, and this toy was esteemed by me as one of the most precious gifts I could possibly receive. Having made myself perfectly acquainted with

its structure, I thought of making one for myself, upon the same principle. I procured a piece of wood, and with no other tools than an old knife, a chisel, and a hammer, completed, (not, however, without the loss of some blood,) my first attempt at ship-building. This pleased my juvenile companions so well, that I had every day numerous applications for ships. They procured me the wood, and my ambition was not a little augmented, when I found that I was applied to by boys considerably my seniors, and possessing many advantages of which I never had to boast; before I resigned this trade, I completed my fourteenth ship. There was in the neighbourhood a piece of water, about one hundred feet in circumference, appropriated to the accommodation of some flocks of ducks and geese. In the evening we were accustomed to dispossess these hereditary occupiers of their native element, and form our fleet into two divisions; the English were distinguished by red and blue streamers—the French, by white. Two boys, with their breeches rolled up to their knees, were generally employed to direct the movements of each squadron, he on the right being distinguished by the name of Admiral, and the boy on the left by that of Commodore.

The plan of attack was, that each ship should be so far from her companions, as to preserve the regular sailing distance, and at the commencement of the action, the English vessels were so placed as always to have the weather-gage of the enemy. Each English ship formed a triangle with her two French opponents, and so, when the wind blew, she passed between them, and this was called breaking the line. It was the duty of the Admiral and Commodore of each fleet, at this alarming juncture, to restore order, and form the lines anew. The English were drawn up in the same position which they occupied at the commencement of the action; the French were placed about two feet in advance, with their sterns towards the English, and the wind filling the sails of both equally, caused the French to fly and the English to pursue. At this moment the shout of triumph was raised, and the joyful cry of victory! victory! burst forth from the infant multitude who were witnesses of our naval exploit.

“ Loud shouts of triumph from the victors rise,

“ Roll'd o'er the main, and echo to the skies.”

I have been somewhat particular in my de-

tails of these Lilliputian engagements, hoping that it may prove useful, in case this little book should chance to fall into the hands of any benevolent person, who might read it to some blind boy, to whom it might serve as a stimulus to spur him on to similar amusements. It could not fail to produce, to such a boy, a two-fold advantage, as the exercise would be conducive to his health, (which he could not expect to enjoy sitting in the chimney-corner, brooding over his misfortunes,) and it would effectually destroy that timidity and melancholy which are generally the fruits of a sedentary life, and would inspire him with a confidence and courage, which he could not expect to attain in an inactive state.

A few years after this event, my foster-mother died, and again I was left forlorn and without a friend. In this precarious state, the only means I had of obtaining subsistence were apparently ill-suited to my situation. The reader may, perhaps, smile when I inform him, that at this time I was considered by many as a man of letters, and that I earned my bread in consequence of my practical engagements in relation to them. This, indeed, was the case; for

I was employed to carry letters to and from the offices of the different merchants in the town and neighbourhood. My punctuality and despatch in this respect were much in my favour, so that I was generally employed in preference to those who enjoyed the use of all their senses. In the course of time my sphere was enlarged, and often, on important business, I have borne despatches to the distance of thirty or forty miles. This was certainly not a little extraordinary, in a place where the confusion and bustle of business subjected me to so many dangers.

Being advised to attempt the study of music, I made an almost hopeless effort, as I had no person to instruct me; but, although I could only scrape a few tunes which I had learned by ear, this did not prevent me from being called on occasionally to officiate at dances. For no matter how despicable the musician, or insignificant his instrument, the sound operates like an invisible charm—elevates the passions of the lower orders—makes them shake their grief and their cares off at their heels, and, moving “on the light fantastic toe,” causes them to forget the bitterness of the past, and

prevents them from brooding over the prospect of future evils.

“ And happy, though my harsh touch, falt’ring still,
“ But mock’d all time and marr’d the dancer’s skill ;
“ Yet would the village praise my wond’rous power,
“ And dance, forgetful of the noon-tide hour.”

I soon found, in consequence of this avocation, that I was exposed to numerous vices. I was obliged to associate with the dregs of society, to witness many scenes of folly and great wickedness, and to stay out late at nights, and thus expose myself to dangers of different kinds. As my feelings were continually at variance with this occupation, which I adopted more from necessity than from choice, I soon gave it up, and composed a farewell address to my fiddle.

The family in which I lived was both poor and illiterate, and hence I was a considerable time before I acquired any taste for knowledge. They were generous and humane to all who required their help, and were also strictly honest in their dealings, and would not defraud on any account whatever. I am happy to have it in my power to notice these traits of character, which certainly reflect credit on their

memories; yet, praiseworthy as these may appear, they were deficient in their duty to me, so far as the improvement of my mind was concerned. It was painful, indeed, in my youth, to behold both in towns and villages, the ignorance and wickedness which prevailed among children of both sexes—swearing, lying, and throwing stones; and the feelings of the passengers, while walking along, were not only pained by their profane language, but their personal safety was also in danger, from the stones which were carelessly and mischievously flung around. But, thanks be to God, this evil is at length disappearing; the remedy applied has been successful, and that remedy is the Sunday School. In the districts where these institutions are established, the children, both in their appearance and manners, have undergone a great change for the better. Instead of injuring their neighbours, and breaking the Lord's Day, they are now taught to read the Scriptures, which, under the Divine blessing, qualifies them to fill the various situations in society. They are here taught that stealing is sinful, and that lying, swearing, and bearing false witness, subject them to the wrath of Heaven. They are also taught to honour their

parents, that they may obtain the blessing which God has promised unto the children of obedience, "and that their days may be long in the land, which the Lord their God giveth them;" and they are likewise strictly enjoined to observe the Sabbath-day. These doctrines may be lightly looked upon by some, but it is in a breach of these laws, and a disregard of these truths, that all the crimes originate, which disgrace the character of man, and degrade him below the beasts of the field.

I present these circumstances to my reader, that he may know the kind of society in which I mingled during the first fifteen years of my life. It cannot be imagined that much information could be derived from such a source as this.

About this time I began to pay some attention to books; but my first course of reading was, indeed, of very indifferent description, as I was obliged to listen to what was most convenient. However, I made the best of what I heard, and in a short time, in conjunction with a boy of my own age who read to me, I was master of the principal circumstances in Jack the Giant

Killer, Valentine and Orson, Robinson Crusoe, and Gulliver's Travels. The subject of these formed my taste, was swallowed with avidity, and inspired me with a degree of enthusiasm which awakes even at the present day, on hearing a new and interesting work read. These, however, were soon laid aside for novels and romances, several hundred volumes of which I procured and got read in the course of three years; and, although there are few passages out of all I heard then which I think worth a place in my recollection now, yet, at that time I was well acquainted with the most interesting characters and events contained in these works. My present dislike to this kind of reading I do not entertain without reason; for, first, a great deal of precious time is thereby lost that might be more usefully employed; secondly, the judgment is left without exercise, while the passions are inflamed; and thirdly, those who are much in the habit of novel reading, seldom have a taste for books of any other kind, and hence their judgments of men and things must differ as far from his who has seen the world, as most novels differ from real life. I am well aware that some of them are well written, and display ability in the author, have the circumstances well disposed, the characters ably

delineated, and the interest preserved till the final close of the last scene, which generally proves impressive and affecting. But to what does all this tend? (Except in recording the customs and manners of the times which they represent,) only to mislead the imagination, to foster a morbid sensibility to fictitious woe, and a romantic admiration of ideal and unattainable perfection, without strengthening the judgment, cultivating active benevolence, or a just appreciation of real worth. In contrasting the characters of Tom Jones and Sir Charles Grandison, with those of the Duke of Sully and Lord Clarendon, we observe a striking difference between the real and fictitious personages; yet, the mere novel reader is neither improved nor amused in reading the lives of these illustrious characters, while the tear of sympathy steals down his cheek, as he pores over the imaginary sufferings of the heroes and heroines of romance. There are, I know, many novels to which the above observations do not apply, particularly some of modern date, which are very superior to those above mentioned; but still the best, even of these, present overcharged pictures of real life, and, in proportion as they are fascinating, they indispose the mind to more serious reading.

I now engaged with Mr. Gordon, Editor of the Belfast News-Letter, to deliver the papers to subscribers on the days of publication. Half a dozen papers, and two shillings per week, were my wages in this service. The papers I lent to tradesmen at a halfpenny an hour, and when the time allotted to the first set of customers was expired, it afforded me an agreeable exercise to collect and distribute them to others. While in this employment, I had sometimes to go four or five miles into the country; but, having an accurate knowledge of the surrounding neighbourhood, and being well acquainted with every gentleman's seat in the vicinity of Belfast, however remotely situated from the public road, I was able to execute my business with exactness and despatch.

I hope the account of the following adventure will be acceptable to my readers, as it will illustrate what I have said, respecting my perambulations through the town and neighbourhood where I was reared.

On a winter's evening, in 1797, as I stood in one of the principal streets, I was accosted by a person, who, in the southern accent, enquired

its name. After I had imparted the desired information, he told me that he was a soldier, and belonged to a detachment of the Limerick Militia, which had marched into Belfast that day. "I went out," said he, "to look for the sergeant, to get the pay, and being a stranger in the town, I lost myself; I left my wife and my firelock in the lodging house, and I forgot the name both of the street and of the people that own the house. I have been wandering about these two or three hours, and nobody can tell me where they are." I enquired, if he had observed any particular building near the place where he left his wife. "I believe," replied he, "after turning one or two corners, I observed a church." I considered for a moment, in which of the streets in that quarter there was a lodging house, and recollected that a Mrs. Tawny kept a house of entertainment in William-street. I bade him follow me, and took good care to keep before him, that he should not discover that I was blind. At that time there were no houses on the S.W. side of William-street; and fronting the houses on the N. E., there was a deep ditch, which served as a receptacle for all the nuisances of the neighbourhood. As the night was very dark, and there were no lamps in that

direction, his eyes were of no service to him whatever; consequently he resigned himself entirely to my guidance. We had to cross the puddle already mentioned, by six stepping stones; and though there was no danger whatever of being drowned, it was more than probable that, had the soldier got a dip, his plight, on coming out, would have been far different from that in which he appeared at parade. I groped with my staff for the first stepping stone, and getting on it, I took hold of his hand, and bade him put his foot where mine was, warning him at the same time, of the consequence of not balancing well. In this manner I conducted him from one stone to another, till I landed him safely on the opposite side, and was highly diverted to hear him observe, that my eyes were better than his. I brought him to Mrs. Tawny's, and left him standing at the door, while I went in to make the necessary enquiry. I soon learned that I had guessed right, for I found his wife almost in despair at his absence, but I bade her be of good cheer, for I had brought her husband to her; and so saying, I called him in. His wife was rejoiced to see him again, and saluted him, by crying out, "Bless me, dear Barney, where have you been? I thought you

were lost!"—"Arrah, my dear, I couldn't find my way back," said he, "if it hadn't been for this decent man, that shewed me the house." "And more shame for you," said the landlady, "for you have your eye-sight, and yet you must be guided to your lodging by a blind man." On hearing this, they were both astonished, and began heartily to bless themselves. As their astonishment, however, subsided, the hospitality of their Irish hearts began to display itself; for, on discovering that I was only a mortal being, and partook of the same nature and appetite as themselves, I was cordially pressed to stay and partake of the fare, that Barney, in all his peregrinations through the streets, had taken good care to bring safely to his wife, I, however, declined the kind offer, and left them to drink their tea themselves, and enjoy the happiness that succeeds, when groundless fears and trivial disappointments have vanished away.

At this time the French Revolution gave a sudden turn to the posture of affairs in Europe, and every mail which arrived brought an account of some important change in the political state of that unhappy country. All the powers on the Continent now armed against France,

and she, on her part, received them with a firmness which reflected honour upon her arms. The public mind at this period was agitated, and the wisest politicians of the day were filled with alarm, and dreaded the consequences which were likely to result, from a revolution that threatened every government in Europe with a total overthrow. For my part, I had little to lose as an individual, and the only concern I felt was for the safety of my country; politics therefore became my favourite study, and I soon got acquainted with the passing news of the day.

A late writer, in speaking of memory, calls it "the storehouse of the mind;" but it has often been compared to a well-constructed arch, on which the more weight is laid, the stronger it becomes. This I found to be the case with mine, for the more I committed to it, the more I found it was capable of receiving and retaining. In what manner ideas of extrinsic objects, and notions of certain relations, can be preserved in the mind, it is impossible to determine; but we are sure that the thing is so, though the manner be unknown to us. As ideas and recollections are merely immaterial things, which can

in no wise partake of the known properties of matter, so, the receptacle in which they are lodged, must be of a similar nature. That matter and spirit are united, we have no reason to doubt; for the pleasures of memory, in the moment of reflection, are evidently operative on the body, inasmuch as its motions and gestures are expressive of the inward feelings of the mind. As the memory, therefore, is more or less capacious, as the store of ideas laid up there is greater or less, and as they are pleasing or unpleasing in themselves, so the impressions derived from memory, are either powerful or weak, either pleasing or painful. As my taste always inclined to literature, and the knowledge of things valuable in themselves, the remembrance of them is, consequently, a never failing source of amusement to me, whether I be found "in the void waste, or in the city full."

"Oh, Memory! how pure, how exquisite are thy pleasures!
"To thee, and to thy sister Hope, the bright handmaids who
"support us through the rude path of existence, how deeply
"are all men indebted!"

It was now, indeed, that I was able to appreciate the pleasures of memory in a superior degree, for I knew the names, stations, and Admirals, of almost all the ships in the navy, and was also acquainted with the number, facing,

and name of every regiment in the army, according to the respective towns, cities, or shires from which they were raised. I served, of course, as an Army and Navy List for the poor in the neighbourhood, who had relations in either of these departments, and was capable of informing them of all the general news.

The following anecdote shews the powers of my memory at that period. Being invited by a friend to spend an evening at his house, I had scarcely sat down when three gentlemen entered; and the conversation turning on the news of the day, I was requested by my friend to repeat the names of as many of the ships of the British navy as I could recollect, telling me at the same time that he had a particular reason for making the request. I commenced, and my friend marked them down as I went along, until I had repeated six hundred and twenty, when he stopped me, saying I had gone far enough. The cause of the request was then explained. One of the gentlemen had wagered a supper that I could not mention five hundred; he, however, expressed himself much pleased at his loss, having been, as he acknowledged, highly entertained by the experiment.

Although, at this time, I had little relish for any other kind of reading but newspapers and novels, yet I was not wholly insensible to the charms of poetry. I amused myself with making verses at intervals, but I could never produce any thing in that way which pleased myself. My acquaintances, particularly the young people, gave me sufficient employment in composing epigrams, love songs, epistles and acrostics, in praise of their sweet-hearts. Many of those juvenile productions are still extant, and, though miserable in themselves, continue to find admirers among those classes for whom they were composed.

“ The lovely maniac fled the haunts of men,—
“ Traced the sea-beach, or sought the lonely glen.”

The first of my productions which met the public eye, was “ An elegy on the death of an unfortunate Female.” This poor maniac was known for more than twenty years in the neighbourhood of Belfast, by the appellation of Mad Mary, and was at last found dead in the ruins of an old house, where she had taken refuge during a stormy winter night. This little piece being much noticed, on account of the subject

having excited a general interest, I was advised to collect my best productions, and give them to the public. Encouraged by the patronage of a few generous individuals, I set about the work, which in few months made its appearance.

I will now, for the amusement of my readers, insert a few extracts from this little collection.

Ah! you, who sport in pleasure's morn,
 Who ne'er have felt a pain,
 Who never trod on trouble's thorn,
 Or heard affliction's plain ;

And you, whom Heaven has doubly blest
 With light—Oh, gift divine !
 And whom misfortunes never press'd
 With misery's sons to join :

Ah! did you know what others feel,
 Beneath the shafts of woe,
 You'd kindly blunt the pointed steel
 That's aim'd from sorrow's bow.

AN ADDRESS TO THE SUN.

Oh! glorious orb! thy genial rays
 Promote and renovate my lays;
 Though HE, who gave thee all thy charms,
 Has folded me in darkness' arms.

But on that day when thou shalt shine
No more, in native beams divine ;
When Erin's self, my muse's pride,
Shall be o'erwhelmed in ruin's tide ;
And mankind summon'd from the tomb
To hear their everlasting doom ;
The veil that now enshrouds my eyes
From viewing **THEE** and ambient skies,
Shall be withdrawn, while 'fulgent day
Shall o'er my eye-balls lambent play.

TO MEMORY.

COME MEMORY, and paint those scenes
I knew when I was young,
When meadows bloomed, and vernal greens,
By Nature's band were sung.

I mean those hours which I have known,
Ere light from me withdrew—
When blossoms seemed just newly blown,
And wet with sparkling dew.

Yet, ah ! forbear, kind Memory cease
The picture thus to scan !
Let all my feelings rest in peace,
'Tis prudence' better plan ;

For why should I on other days,
With such reflections turn,
Since I'm deprived of vision's rays,
Which sadly makes me mourn ?

And when I backward turn my mind,
I feel of sorrow's pain,
And weep for joys I left behind,
On childhood's flowery plain ;

Yet now, through intellectual eyes,
Upon a happier shore,
And circled with eternal skies,
Youth sweetly smiles once more.

Futurity displays the scene,
Religion lends her aid,
And decks with flowers for ever green,
And blooms that ne'er can fade.

Oh, happy time ! when will it come,
Then I shall quit this sphere,
And find an everlasting home,
With peace and friendship there ?

Throughout this chequer'd life 'tis mine
To feel affliction's rod ;
But soon I'll overstep the line
That keeps me from my God.

A DREAM.

Night o'er the sky her sable mantle spread,
And all around was hushed in sweet repose,
Nor silence suffered from intrusive noise ;—
Save now and then, the owl's unpleasing scream,

From yon old pile of ancient grandeur sent,
Broke in, obtrusive on the tranquil hours ;
Reflection took my mind, and o'er my thoughts
Unnumbered visions flit with rapid speed ;
I thought on man, and all his childish joys,
From rosy infancy to palsied age—
And oft the sigh of recollection stole,
Then heaved my breast with sorrow's poignant throb ;
For ah ! I feel what some have never felt,
That is, to be in one continued night,
From January's sun, till dark December's eve ;
And strange it is, when sleep commands to rest,
While gloomy darkness spreads her lurid veil,
That then by being blind, I suffer most !
O sight ! what art thou ? were my final words,
When sleep with leaden fingers sealed my eyes—
Now free from care, and tumult's torturing din,
Young fancy led me from my humble cot ;
And far from space, where suns unnumbered burn,
I with her took a grand excursive flight,
Then back again to Erin's hills of green,
I with her wandered ; nor did night, nor gloom,
One step intrude to shade the prospects round.
I saw sweet Scarvagh, in her loveliest garb,
And all her trees in summer's dress were clad ;
Her honoured mansion, seat of peace and love,
Gave rapture to my breast, for there I've found
True hospitality, which once did grace
The halls of Erin's chiefs of old ;
But soon, alas ! the hum of nightly bands,
And vagrants, strolling on in quest of sin,
Bore fancy from me with her golden train,
And once more left me in the folds of night.

VERSES

ON THE

RICHMOND NATIONAL INSTITUTION FOR THE BLIND,

IN IRELAND.

You from whose eyes the tender tear,
Can gently drop for human woe,
Oh! pour your soft compassion here,
And here your generous boon bestow.

O think what joys to you are giv'n,
Which they must never hope to share.
To view the bright expanse of heav'n,
While sweet emotion speaks in prayer.

For them the morning's rosy light,
In vain the glowing east o'erspreads ;
To them the empress of the night
In vain her silvery lustre sheds.

The blossoms of the scented spring
In vain their silken leaves unfold ;
And o'er each mead profusely fling
Their varied tints of living gold.

In vain the twilight shade descends
In magic softness, pure, serene ;
In vain the star of evening blends
Its dewy light to gild the scene.

Let infidels, presumptuous ask
With reason's boasted pride elate,
But be the Christian's sacred task,
To cheer his brother's hapless fate.

Be yours, with liberal hand, to prove
The feelings of a grateful mind,
Be yours, by acts of pious love,
To soothe the sorrows of the blind.

Be his, to speak the Saviour's name,
To hearts that catch the joyful sound,
To kindle pure devotion's flame,
And shed immortal glory round.

Thus, when the veil of darkness spread,
In all the gloom of endless night,—
“Let there be light,” Jehovah said,
Creation heard, and all was light.

On the above passages the reader is left to comment as he thinks proper. Composed by one destitute of sight, of learning, and even of an intelligent friend who could correct my compositions, they must, of course, stand very low in the scale of merit. Still, however, they were of service to me, and I found the public rather disposed to pity, than to censure, an humble individual so far beneath the notice of the critic.

Lord Cornwallis, who succeeded Earl Camden in the vice-royalty of Ireland, in making the tour of that kingdom in 1799, arrived at Belfast. This appearing a favourable opportunity, I was determined to petition his Excellency in relation to the losses of my family in America. A petition was accordingly drawn up, stating my father's possessions in that country, his services in the army, and his death on his passage returning to Europe, as already related. This petition I put into the hands of the late George Joy, Esq. who kindly offered to present it, bidding me to call on him the next day; I did so, but to my utter disappointment, I found that Mr. Joy, on dressing for dinner, the preceding evening, had unfortunately forgotten my petition, in the pocket of his coat which he had worn in the morning. Disappointed in this quarter, I resolved on following his lordship to Annadale, the seat of the late Honourable Chichester Skeffington, as he had left Belfast for that place at seven o'clock in the morning. I did so, and again I was fated to feel the bitter pang of disappointment; for, on arriving at Annadale, I was informed, that his Excellency had, a few hours before, left that for Dublin. Thus terminated the only hope I ever had of obtaining an inde-

pendence ; but, as there was no use in repining, I endeavoured to submit to the disappointment with resignation.

At this time I turned my attention to a new occupation, and fixed on that of an itinerant dealer ; for this purpose I borrowed a few pounds from a friend, with which I purchased a stock of such hardware articles as might suit the country people.

“ Being at the bottom of fortune’s wheel, every new revolution might raise me, but could not possibly depress me lower ;” and hence I commenced my peregrinations in the country. While employed in this way, I had an opportunity of meeting with a variety of characters, and of mingling in different societies. It is but justice here to remark, that among the peasantry of Ulster, I have met with many individuals, whose good nature, benevolent dispositions, and kind hospitality, were not only an honour to their country, but even to human nature.

While vending my hardware through the country, I found this occupation ill-suited to my circumstances ; I was exposed to many in-

conveniences, and experienced much fatigue and distress, both of body and mind. The want of sight made it difficult for me to steer my course aright, and I was often exposed both to hardships and danger. Many a time have I heard the thunder roll over my head, and felt the teeming rain drench me from head to foot, while I have unknowingly passed by a place of shelter, or stood like a statue, not knowing which way to turn, though within a few paces of a house. Still, however, while reflecting on all these circumstances, and on the sympathy which I was sure to meet with after my sufferings, I have been often led to conclude that the balance was in my favour, when compared with many who enjoyed the use of every sense; there is no rose without its thorn, neither is there any state without its comforts. While travelling, I was in little danger from horses and carriages in motion, as the noise warned me of their approach; hence, if I was injured, it was generally from something at rest. It may be imagined, however, that I was not much exposed to harm in the day-time, nor will it be supposed, that any person could be so cruel as intentionally to injure a blind man; yet I have suffered repeatedly from the intem-

perance of some, and the brutality of others ; and, had I entrusted entirely to the good nature of the multitude, I might have been ridden down oftener than the mind would be willing to suppose.

In the early part of my life, I prided myself much on my activity as a pedestrian. I have frequently travelled through a part of the country with which I was totally unacquainted, at the rate of thirty miles in a day ; but this was only in cases of emergency, for my usual rate was fifteen to twenty miles per day ; this, however, is too much for a person of my situation, for supposing a blind man sets out to travel alone on foot, to a distance of twenty miles, he will experience much more fatigue, and go over more ground than one will do who has his sight, in a journey of twice that length. This is evident, from the zig-zag manner in which he traverses the road, and as Hammond says, in his description of the drunken man, staggering home, "from the serpentine manner in which he goes, he makes as much of a mile as possible." In the summer time, the blind man is subject to shock his whole frame, by trampling in the cart ruts that are dried upon the road,

and in the winter, he travels through thick and thin; it is impossible for him to choose his steps, and at that season of the year the water is collected into puddles, which he cannot avoid; and, hence, in walking to a distance, he is sure to wet both his feet and legs, which is not only disagreeable, but frequently injurious to the health. At one time he bruises his foot against a stone; at another time he sprains his ankle; and frequently, when stepping out quickly, his foot comes in contact with something unexpectedly, by which he is thrown on his face. Thus, in travelling on foot, he labours under various disadvantages, unknown to those who are blest with the sense of sight.

The above accidents, however, are not the only misfortunes connected with the state of the blind; in walking alone, he often wanders out of his direct way, sometimes into fields, and sometimes into bye-paths, so that the greater part of the day may be spent before he can rectify his mistake. Often have I been in this predicament myself, and frequently have I sat a considerable part of the day, listening by the way-side for a passing foot, or the joyful sound of the human

voice ; and sometimes I have been obliged, in the evening, to retrace the ground I had gone over in the morning, and thus endured much fatigue of body and mind before I could regain the road from which I wandered. How different, then, is my situation from his who has his sight : from the impediments which cause me so much pain, he is happily exempt ; while he pursues his journey he can trace the various beauties of the surrounding scenery ; the picturesque landscape, the spreading oak, the flowing brook, the towering mountain that hides its blue summit in the clouds, the majestic ocean dashing on the “shelly shore,” and the vast expansive arch of heaven, bespangled with innumerable stars, have all, for him, their respective beauties, and fail not to awaken pleasing and agreeable reflections ; but to the blind, these pleasures are unknown, the charms of nature are concealed under an impenetrable veil, and the God of light has placed between him, and silent, but animated nature, an insuperable barrier.

“ While to the breezy upland led,
At noon, or blushing eve, or morn,
He hears the red-breast o'er his head,
While round him breathes the scented thorn ;

But oh! instead of Nature's face,
Hills, dales, and woods, and streams combined;
Instead of tints, and forms, and grace,
Night's blackest mantle shrouds the blind."

A blind person always inclines to the hand in which his staff is carried, and this often has a tendency to lead him astray, when he travels on a road with which he is unacquainted. But were there no danger arising from this, still, from his situation, he is liable to imminent dangers on his way, from which nothing can preserve him but an all-directing Providence; and this I have frequently experienced.

In a cold winter evening, as I travelled to Lisburn, I happened to wander from the direct road into a lane, which led immediately to the canal. Unconscious of the danger to which I was exposed, I was stepping on pretty freely, when my attention was suddenly arrested by a cry of "Stop! stop!" Of the first and second call I took no notice, as I judged some other person was addressed; but at the third warning I stopped, when a woman came running up almost breathless, and asked me where I was

going; I replied, "To Lisburn." "No," said she, "you are going direct to the canal, and three or four steps more would have plunged you into it." My heart glowed with thankfulness to the all-wise Disposer of events, and to the woman who was made the instrument of my preservation. She said, she happened to come to the door to throw out some slops, when she saw me posting on; and thinking, from my manner of walking, that I was intoxicated, she became alarmed for my safety, as a person had been drowned in the very same place, not many days before.

About three miles from Strabane, at the little village of Clady, there is a bridge across the Finn. I had just passed along it on my way to Strabane, when a man enquired if I had been conducted over by any person; I replied in the negative. "It was a fortunate circumstance then, indeed," said he, "that you kept the left side, for the wall is broken down at the right side, just above the centre arch, and the river is there very rapid, and the bank on each side steep. Had you fallen in, you must have been inevitably lost."

The following instance of Providential preservation is still more singular than either of the preceding. From Ballymena, I was one day going out to the Rev. Robert Stewart's. At the end of the town, the road divides, one branch leads to Ballymena, and the other to Broughshane. In the Forks an old well was opened for the purpose of sinking a pump. It being two o'clock in the day, the workmen were all at dinner, and I was groping about with my staff to ascertain the turn of the road, when a man bawled out to me to stand still, and not move a single step. I did so; when he came forward, he told me that two steps more would have hurried me into a well eighty feet deep, and half full of water. He held me by the arm, and made me put forth my staff to feel, and be convinced of my danger; when I found that I was actually not more than one yard from the edge, the blood ran cold in my veins; I was scarcely able to stand erect—

“And every limb, unstrung, with terror shook.”

These are but a few of the numerous instances of hair-breadth escapes, which I have experienced in my peregrinations through life.

When in the slippery paths of youth,
With heedless steps I ran ;
Thine arm, unseen, conveyed me safe,
And led me up to man.

When, from this point, I survey the uphill road of life, over which I have passed, in the course of my pilgrimage ; when I think of the many dangers to which I have been exposed, both by land and water ; the very remembrance of those things, even at this distance of time, makes me shudder. These reflections bring before my mind, in all its force and beauty, that gracious promise, "I will bring the blind by a way that they know not ; I will lead them into paths that they have not known." Only, "Be strong, and of a good courage ; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed : for the Lord thy God is with thee, whithersoever thou goest." In the course of my life I have had many mercies to be grateful for ; good health has not been among the least of the blessings I have enjoyed. I am now between sixty and seventy years of age. During the whole of that period, I have never had recourse to medical advice. To add to this, I have always been blest with a cheerful and contented mind,

with an uncommon flow of spirits. I could laugh and joke with the most of people. Often, in returning, wet and weary, from one of those long journeys, which I was obliged to take in search of employment, when seated at my own fireside, surrounded by my family, the toils and fatigues I had undergone were all forgotten, and I enjoyed my frugal meal with a degree of pleasure, perhaps unknown to those who dine at the tables of kings and princes. How thankful ought I to be to the Giver of all Mercies, who has looked out, and provided for me, as he has done, and has, as it were, led me about by the hand, from the days of my infancy to the present hour, in health and safety! And in the language of the Psalmist, I can truly say, "Goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life." Reader! whoever thou art, may you and I, and all who are near and dear to us, in this world, be enabled to realise the concluding sentence of the inspired writer, that is, "May we dwell in the presence of the Lord for ever." Amen.

In the year 1800, there was an institution established in Belfast, for the purpose of instructing those who were deprived of sight, in

such employments as were suited to their unfortunate situation; it was styled, "The Asylum for the Blind." As it is of vast importance to the well-being of society, that all who have not independent fortunes should be enabled to support themselves by their own industry, for which the blind are seldom qualified, owing to their unhappy state, and the want of a suitable education, this Asylum promised to be of the greatest utility. I was entered on the books of the Institution as an apprentice, and continued in it, until within a few months of its dissolution. When I left the Asylum, I proposed working on my own account, and having acquired a partial knowledge of the upholstery business, I was soon employed. My friends exerted themselves on this occasion to promote my interest, and though there were several individuals who had learned the business in the same Asylum, and who could work better than I, yet I generally had the preference. Many of my friends went so far as even to contrive work for me, for which they had not immediate use, merely to keep me employed. Although my pecuniary circumstances were not much improved, yet, I now experienced a greater share of happiness than I had ever

enjoyed before. I was in a situation that afforded me better opportunities of acquiring knowledge than I had ever possessed; previously to this time I also met with much friendship from many to whom I was but very little known; and when it was understood that I was desirous of information, I generally received assistance in this way, even where I could not have expected it; either the lady of the house in which I was employed, or one of the children, generally read to me while I was at work. Thus I improved my mind, while labouring for my support. Time glided pleasantly away, no room being left for idle speculations or gloomy forebodings.

In 1803, a number of young men formed a Reading Society in Belfast, and, although they were all mechanics, yet some of them were also men of taste, and possessed considerable talents. Into this society I was admitted a member, at the same time that I was kindly exempted from the expense attending its regulations. One of the members was a man of the most extraordinary character I had ever known; and, therefore, I attached myself to him. To good-nature, he united an original genius,

good taste, and great sensibility; and, had an early education been his lot, or had his mind been sufficiently expanded by study, he would have become an ornament to society; but he was totally devoid of ambition, and never had a wish to rise above the rank of an humble mechanic. This man proposed to read to me, if I would procure books: our stated time for this employment was from nine o'clock in the evening until one in the morning, in the winter season, and from seven until eleven in the summer; when I was not particularly engaged, I frequently attended him at other intervals. At breakfast he had half an hour allotted to him, at dinner a whole hour, and every minute of this was filled up, for he generally read to me between every cup of tea. By this means I committed to memory a vast collection of pieces, both in prose and verse, which I still retain, and which have been, until the present hour, a never-failing source of amusement to me. The more I heard read, the more my desire for knowledge increased, while I learned, at the same time, that "the more a man knows, he finds he knows the less."

So ardent and steady was my desire for

knowledge at that time, that I could never bear to be absent a single night from my friend; and often, when walking in the country, where I could have been comfortably accommodated, I have travelled three or four miles, in a severe winter night, to be at my post in time. Pinched with cold, and drenched with rain, I have many a time sat down and listened for several hours together, to the writings of Plutarch, Rollin, or Clarendon. For seven or eight years we continued this course of reading; but to give a catalogue of the authors we perused in that time, would be foreign to my present purpose: suffice it to say, that every book in the English language, which we could procure, was read with avidity. Ancient and Modern History, Poetry, Biography, Essays, Magazines, Voyages, Travels, &c. were among our studies.

How precious these opportunities were, and how dear the recollection of them are to me even now, can only be adequately understood by the few who have realized similar enjoyments, and can indulge in similar recollections.

Thus, and otherwise, I was enabled to collect

a number of miscellaneous facts in sundry departments of knowledge, but without being in the possession of the links necessary to bind them together, and form them into a connected system. But even as detached facts they were valuable; and when I obtained one fact that seemed new, striking, and important, I felt a thrill to my very soul, as if I had found a blessing: and so I had.

“ And thou, sweet Poetry, thou loveliest maid,
“ Still first to fly where sensual joys invade.
“ Unfit in these degenerate times of shame
“ To catch the heart, or strike for honest fame.”

Good poetry is one of the richest traits that a cultivated mind can possibly enjoy. To poetry I was devoted from my youth—not as an author, but an admirer. In the course of my acquaintance with this delightful art, I selected a large number of choice pieces, which I considered to contain the beauties of all the authors I had heard read. Those treasures I laid up in the storehouse of my memory: and they were to me, upon all occasions, a never-failing source of intellectual enjoyment.

At night, when in bed, I repeated poetry to myself, until I fell asleep. When travelling alone on the public road, I beguiled away many a tedious mile by poetry. When seated on the outside of a stage coach, while my fellow-travellers were admiring the beauties of the surrounding scenery, I was regaling my mind with some of these splendid descriptions in which the poets of all ages and every country have indulged with so much rapture and delight—I mean “the glories of the rising and the setting sun.” My merit, if merit I have any, consisted simply in this:—in the first place, it pleased Providence to give me an insatiable desire for knowledge; secondly, kind friends were willing to encourage that desire, by reading to me; thirdly, I was gifted with a powerful memory, that retained every thing that was presented to it. I, being poor, and having no books of my own, I was obliged to make my memory my library: and she was ever faithful to the trust committed to her keeping. There is a paper in the *Adventurer*, which was written about the time I was born, and which I think will describe my literary pretensions much better than anything which I can say of myself. It is as follows:—

“To read the works of celebrated writers, to comprehend their systems, and retain their reasonings, is a task by no means equal to common capacities ; nor is he to be counted either idle or useless, who has stored his mind with these treasures, and can retail them out to others, who have less time and less inclination for such studies.”

But to resume : I continued, occasionally, to compose some pieces of poetry, consisting, principally, of songs, written on the wit and good humour that prevailed in the club of which I was a member, with a few prologues to plays that were performed by the young men in the neighbourhood, for charitable purposes. These I collected together to prepare them for the press, but on examination, I found they had many faults, which had at first escaped my notice ; and though warmly urged by my friends to give them to the public, yet I was so well convinced they were destitute of merit, that I committed them to the flames, with the first two acts of a play, called “The Irish Exile’s Return.”

The person to whom I had entrusted the

management of my little domestic concerns, did not hesitate to take advantage of my ignorance of such affairs, as well as my situation. Many of my friends felt for me, and strongly advised me to marry, as I should be more comfortable, and be out of the power of such unprincipled people. They said, that could I meet with a sober steady woman, who would be likely to make a good wife, the change would be advantageous to me in more respects than one. I objected to this proposal, on the ground of my inability to provide for a family; the precarious manner of earning my subsistence put such a change beyond my expectation—it was enough for me to suffer alone—I could not think of entailing misery upon others. This they could not deny; but they then reasoned in this way; no one required the kind assistance of an affectionate wife more than a blind man; that I had not one friend, one relative to look after me. What then would become of me in my old age? I should be helpless in the extreme. These, and many other arguments, were used, to induce me to assent to a measure which they thought would finally conduce to my happiness. Their anticipations have since been fully realized—I am happy. I had the

pleasure of being known, for some time, to a young woman who lived in the neighbourhood ; having met her occasionally at the house of a friend, whom I used to visit. Her plain sense and unassuming manners, recommended her to my notice ; but what most endeared her to me was her filial piety. Her aged mother and she lived together, loved and respected by all who knew them ; and without any other dependence than the work of her own hands, she supported herself and parent. I thought that she, who was such an attentive and feeling daughter, must necessarily make an affectionate wife—and in this opinion I was not disappointed. Filial affection is so endearing a virtue, that, whenever we meet with an instance of it, whether in an exalted or an humble station, the exhibition of it must be, to the benevolent mind, a source of the highest gratification. It is a duty which our gracious and kind Creator has enjoined us to fulfil, commanding us in his holy word “to honour our father and mother,” as an inducement or motive to the performance of which, he has promised that our “days shall be long in the land ;” and he who has promised this, is able and willing to perform it.

I addressed a copy of verses to her, who had now become the object of my affection, which were printed in the first collection of my Poems. They had the desired effect—they produced an impression, which never has been, and I may venture to say, never will be effaced. After the expiration of two years, our correspondence happily terminated, and we were married on the 27th of November, 1802. Though she could boast of no high descent, no shewy accomplishments, nor of having brought me a fortune, yet she was possessed of such qualities as every virtuous mind will admire:—she was sober, modest, and unassuming; and though her education was not according to the rules laid down by Mrs. Hamilton, yet she understood, in her own way, the principles of domestic economy, prudence and frugality. Well has the wise man described a virtuous woman, when he says—“Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies.”

We have now lived forty years together, happy in each other's society; and though we have had many trials in the course of that time, such as the loss of children, bad health, and distressed circumstances, a murmur has never

escaped her lips. In our pilgrimage here below, these little crosses are necessary—they teach us to know ourselves. Were we to pass the little time, which is allotted to us in this world, without trials and afflictions, we should soon forget that we are dependent creatures; but a merciful Providence has wisely guarded us against this danger, by letting us feel our infirmities, and how little we can do for ourselves. We are assured in the word of God, that he never afflicts his creatures but for their good, and when these visitations are sanctified by his Holy Spirit, they then become profitable to us,—they wean us from the world, and we become tired of its flimsy joys, and imaginary pleasures; we learn from them—“that here we have no abiding city—but we seek one to come.”

We have had eleven children, of whom four only are now alive; and, with the exception of the diseases common to children, those living are all healthy and stout. It is certainly one of the greatest blessings which parents can enjoy, to see a vigorous offspring rise around them, and to listen to their innocent prattle. How often have I been struck with the force

and beauty of that passage in holy writ, where Jesus, in order to teach humility to his disciples, "called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them." To descend from the Divine Author of our religion to creatures like ourselves, we read in Cox's life of that pious reformer, Melancthon, that he was particularly fond of his children; and, notwithstanding the multiplicity of his engagements, the discharge of which, in those perilous times, was attended with difficulties and danger, he would often descend from that lofty station, where genius and public opinion had enthroned him, to the more endearing scenes of domestic retirement. A Frenchman one day found him holding a book in one hand, and with the other rocking his child's cradle. Upon his manifesting considerable surprise, Melancthon took occasion from this incident, to converse with his visitor on the duties of parents, and on the regard of Heaven for little children, in such a pious and affectionate manner, that his astonishment was quickly transformed into admiration. Sully tells us, that Henry IV. used to steal from the pomp and pageantry of a Court, to amuse himself with his children. On one occasion, a gentleman, who waited upon his

Majesty, was told that he was in the Great Gallery—the Courtier found his way to the apartment, and on his entrance, how was he surprised, when he found this great man playing with his children, having one of them on his back, and chasing two others along the Gallery. The Monarch asked the Courtier if he was a father; being answered in the negative, “Well,” said Henry, “this is a pleasure which none but a father can feel.”

“There is in childhood a holy ignorance—a
“beautiful credulity—a sort of sanctity that we
“cannot contemplate without something of the
“reverential feeling, with which one should ap-
“proach beings of a celestial nature. The em-
“press of divine nature is, as it were, fresh on
“infant spirit—fresh and unsullied by contact
“with this withering world, one trembles lest an
“impure breath should dim the clearness of
“its bright mirror; and how perpetually must
“those—who are in the habit of contemplating
“childhood, of studying the characters of little
“children—feel and repeat to their own hearts,
“‘of such is the Kingdom of Heaven.’ Aye,
“which of us, of the wisest amongst us, may
“not stoop to receive instruction and rebuke

“ from the character of a little child?—Which
“ of us, by comparison with its sublime simpli-
“ city, has not reason to blush for the littleness,
“ the insincerity, the worldliness, the degene-
“ racy of his own? How often has the inno-
“ cent remark, the artless question, the natural
“ acuteness of a child, called up into older
“ cheeks, a blush of accusing consciousness?
“ How often might the prompt, candid, honor-
“ able decision of an infant, in some question
“ of right and wrong, shame the hesitating, cal-
“ culating evasiveness of mature reason.”

“ So that the philosophical beholder

“ Sigh'd for their sakes—that they should e'er grow older.

The first of my literary acquaintances of any respectability, was John Lushington Reilly, Esquire, of Scarvagh, to whose family I was warmly recommended, by a lady who introduced me as a lover and composer of poetry. In this gentleman's house I was employed for some time, and during my residence there, I was not treated as a common workman, but was highly entertained by Mr. and Mrs. Reilly, who had the goodness to read to me by turns, whilst I was at work; and in their absence, a

person was appointed to supply their place. Here there was a fine library, where I first met with Spencer's Fairy Queen. When I left home, I did not expect to remain at Scarvagh longer than three or four weeks at farthest, but such was the partiality of that worthy family for me, that I was detained there for nearly three months. On taking leave of my benefactors, Mr. Reilly observed, that I ought not to be tired of them, as they were not tired of me. To Mr. Reilly I addressed a few verses on his return from the army, which appeared in the second edition of my Poems. I had listened with much pleasure to the Treatise on Solitude, by that inimitable philosopher, Zimmerman ; but, although I had learned from books to imagine the pleasures of solitude, yet I never had an opportunity of experiencing its enjoyments, until my residence, at that time in the country. Some of our busy town's-people shudder at the idea of a country life, and conclude that the want of variety would render them miserable in retirement ; but the happiness of such is derived from bustle and confusion—from sources unstable as the wind, and nature is to them destitute of charms. It was not so with me ; the murmuring of the streams, the rustling of

the leaves, the singing of the birds, the lowing of the cattle, and bleating of the lambs, each had for me its charms, and excited in my mind the most pleasing sensations. As nature is superior to art in all her operations, so are the pleasures derived from the one far superior to the pleasures derived from the other, and every man of experience will acknowledge, that independently of religion, there is not any thing which affords such delight to the contemplative mind, as the works of creation.

“ By boundless love, and perfect wisdom formed,
“ And ever rising with the rising mind.”

From Scarvagh, I went to Drumbanagher, the seat of John Moore, Esq. where I was employed for some time. Mr. and Mrs. Moore were particularly attentive to me, and shewed me much kindness; and after spending some time in a few other gentlemen's houses, I returned home.

In 1812 I became acquainted with the late ingenious Miss Balfour. This lady was the author of several interesting works, in both prose and verse. I was introduced to her by John

Templeton, Esq. of Malone, a gentleman whose literary and scientific acquirements are too well known to require any eulogium from such an humble individual as I am. Miss Balfour felt much for my situation, and endeavoured, by every means in her power, to promote my interest. She offered to teach me grammar—and in order to encourage me, she said it would only require three weeks or a month at most; and as soon as I had attained a knowledge of the English language, she proposed to teach me French; but owing to the narrowness of my circumstances, I could not afford to devote to those studies the time which they would have required. I had a large family depending on me for support, for which I had no means of procuring bread, but by my own industry; and my poor wife having been long afflicted with bad health, was unable to render me any assistance: and to add to this, was often employed in the country. Had I then turned my attention to these studies, my children might have starved; and I was, therefore, obliged to decline this friendly offer, of which I was desirous to avail myself, as it might have been of much future advantage to me. This was one of the greatest sacrifices I ever made. It is true I

had a few friends who, had they been acquainted with these circumstances, would have been sorry to let me lose such an opportunity—but I was too sensible of their kindness—and was therefore unwilling to make any further claims upon their bounty.

“ From what blest spring did he derive his art—
 “ To soothe our cares, and thus command the heart ?
 “ How did the seeds lie quickening in his brain ?
 “ How were they born without a parent's pain ?
 “ He did but think—and music did arise,
 “ Dilating joy, as light o'erspread the skies ;
 “ From an immortal source, like that it came ;
 “ But light we know—this wonder wants a name !
 “ What art thou ?—from what cause dost thou spring,
 “ O music ! thou divine, mysterious thing ! ”

While I was travelling in the county Westmeath, I stopped for some time at the house of a friend, in the neighbourhood of Nobber. I went to visit the spot rendered famous by being the birth-place of Carolan, one of the most extraordinary geniuses that any age or country has yet produced. He was one of the last and most celebrated of the Irish Bards, whose compositions have been as much admired for their

extraordinary variety, as for their exquisite melody—he is said to have composed upwards of four hundred pieces. This account, however, is perhaps exaggerated ; but be this as it may, our national music has been greatly enriched by his productions. But it was not only in the composition of music that he distinguished himself—his poetry is also fine, for he wrote according to nature. Speaking of his loss of sight, he says—

“ Even he, whose hapless eyes no ray
“ Admit from beauty’s cheering day ;
“ Yet, though he cannot see the light,
“ He feels it warm, and knows its bright.”

And, to use the language of the poet, “his compositions are like dreams of joy, that are past, pleasant, and mournful to the soul.” I am sorry to say, that we know but little of the history of this extraordinary genius. It appears that he spent his life as an itinerant musician, and was made welcome at the houses of the great ; and there, with the tales of other days, enlivened the convivial hours. It reflects no great credit on the times in which Carolan lived, that he was suffered to live in poverty, and die in obscurity ; but it has been too fre-

quently the lot of great geniuses to meet with neglect while living, and when dead to be lamented, and admired, as if mankind knew not their value until they were gone, and posterity were willing to compensate for the injuries they had experienced through life, by erecting to their memories splendid monuments. A trifle bestowed on them, while living and starving in an empty garret, would have rendered them more essential service, than all the sums lavished on the decorations of Westminster Abbey, to which they are insensible.

“ One night I dream’d I lay most easy,
“ Down by a murmuring river side—
“ The lovely banks were spread with daisies,
“ And the streams did gently glide.”

OLD BALLAD.

I remember once conversing with a friend, on the nature of dreams. He asked me, if the blind ever did dream. I answered, “ that the blind was as susceptible of dreams as those who were blessed with sight.” “ But,” said he, “ we dream of objects familiar to the vision; and, as the blind are strangers to those objects, I was at a loss to know of what their dreams consisted.” I told him, I would endeavour to

explain:—The blind may be divided into two classes. The first are those who never remember to have seen the light. When *they* sleep, they never dream of visible objects. Their dreams are always made up of conversations, or feeling the objects about them, or groping their way to some particular place. The second class are those who remember to have seen the light. *They* frequently dream of scenes once familiar to them; and in their sleeping hours, their imagination returns to those beloved objects with unmixed pleasure and delight. I, myself, often dream of that happy period, when I enjoyed the blessing of sight; and though the season was of short duration, yet, what I then saw of the beauties of nature, has been engraven on my memory in lasting characters. In sleep I frequently return to the scenes of my childhood. Then is presented to my imagination all those rural objects in their pristine freshness and beauty; the daisy-enameled field, the primrose banks, and the hawthorn in full blossom; and that sweet little stream, in whose limpid waters I have so often paddled, with the companions of my infant days. A few weeks ago, I had a dream: when I thought I was in the neighbourhood where I was brought up.

The sun beamed forth in unclouded splendour. Methought I saw the wind gently shake the trees, and turn up the white side of the leaf, on the road before me. I fancied that I saw people abroad, taking the air, and their clothes fluttering in the breeze. On the opposite side of the river, was a beautiful range of green sloping hills, variegated with corn-fields, groves and white-washed houses. I forgot in my sleep that I was old and blind. I ran, leaped, and shouted with joy; when, to my great disappointment, I awoke, and all this fair scene was lost, and in the words of the poet, "Left the world to darkness and to me."

" Now free from care, and tumult's torturing din,
" Young fancy led me from my humble cot,
" And far through space, where suns unnumbered burn,
" I with her took a grand excursive flight,
" Then back again to Erin's hills of green,
" I with her wandered; nor did night, nor gloom,
" One step intrude to shade the prospects round.
" I saw sweet Scarvagh, in her loveliest garb,
" And all her trees in summer's dress were clad;
" Her honour'd mansion, seat of peace and love,
" Gave rapture to my breast, for there I've found
" True hospitality, which once did grace
" The halls of Erin's chiefs of old;—
" But soon, alas! the hum of nightly bands,
" And vagrants, strolling on in quest of sin,
" Bore fancy from me with her golden train,
" And once more left me in the folds of night."

The sense of sight is not the only one of which I am deprived, for I never remember to have enjoyed that of smell. In my opinion, this sense can be more easily dispensed with, than any of the other four. I remember a lady of my acquaintance, who possessed this sense so exquisitely, that the least disagreeable odour was so offensive, as to produce a severe headache ; when she understood that I was destitute of what she possessed in so extraordinary a degree, she observed, very justly, “ it is well for you ; for if you have no pleasure from that source, you have no pain.” When spring unfolds itself in all its genial influences, it is, no doubt, pleasant to range through the country, and inhale the fragrance arising from the shrubs and flowers ; but on coming into a large town or populous city, the circumstances are entirely changed, and the effluvia arising from the narrow lanes and alleys become exceedingly disagreeable.

The improvement of my mind, by the acquisition of useful and substantial knowledge, now engrossed my attention. To attain this, I knew that books and conversation were the only means, and, therefore, I carefully cultivated the

friendship of such persons as were distinguished by their taste and intelligence. I was very fortunate in getting acquainted with a number of individuals, whose literary acquirements and love of virtue, reflected honour on their names. In the society of such persons, I could not fail in acquiring much mental improvement, and their conversation, remarks, and advice were of great use to me.

It has been remarked by an elegant writer, that geography is the eye of history—the latter recording the time, and the former the place, in which any remarkable event has happened. To be acquainted with the names, situations, and boundries of places, together with the tranactions of other years, forms now an essential part of a good education. To the blind, in this respect, a large field is laid open, and if a good memory accompanies conversation, and to hearing history and geography read, they may lay up a store that will not fail, as a source of amusement, both to themselves and others. In these two branches of knowledge I was very assiduous, and find, that to the present day, my memory is exceedingly tenacious of what I then learned. In relation to geography, I became

acquainted with every place of note in the habitable globe, so that, on being examined by some who were either curious, or doubtful of my knowledge, my descriptions have been found to coincide with the best constructed maps.

Wisdom is the great end of history: it is designed to supply the want of experience; though it enforce not its instruction with the same authority, yet it furnishes us with a greater variety of information than it is possible for experience to afford, in the course of the longest life. Its object is to enlarge our views of the human character, and to give full exercise to our judgment on the affairs of men.

Let us hear what PLUTARCH says upon the subject:—"I live," says he, "entirely upon history; and while I contemplate the picture that it presents to my view, my mind enjoys a rich repast from the representation of great and virtuous characters. If the actions of men produce some instances of vice, corruption, and dishonesty, I endeavour, nevertheless, to remove the impression, or defeat its effect. My mind withdraws itself from the scene, and free

from every ignoble passion, I attach myself to these high examples of virtue, which are so agreeable and satisfactory, and which accord so completely with the genuine feelings of our nature."

CICERO has also justly observed, that history is the light of ages, the depository of events, the faithful evidence of truth, the source of prudence and good counsels, and the rule of conduct and manners.

Respecting history, the reader will best judge of the power of my memory by the following relation.—To a few select friends who wished to prove my knowledge of English history, I repeated, to their entire satisfaction, an epitome of the history of England, from the Norman conquest till the peace in 1783, including invasions, conspiracies, insurrections, and revolutions; the names of all the Kings and Queens, the year of their accession, the length of their reigns, and the affinity each had to his predecessor, together with the names and characters of all the great statesmen, heroes, philosophers, and poets, who flourished in the different reigns. In consequence of this, and

different rehearsals, I was termed, "The Living Book," and "A Walking Encyclopædia;" to others, my knowledge, in such circumstances, appeared as a prodigy, but to myself it proved a source of consolation, and beguiled many a tedious hour.

"Tho' darkness still attends me,
It aids internal sight;
And from such scenes defends me,
As blush to see the light.

"No weeping objects grieve me;
No glitt'ring fop offends;
No fawning smiles deceive me;
Kind darkness me befriends.

"Then cease your useless wailings,
I know no reason why
Mankind, to their own failings,
Are all as blind as I."

The circle of my acquaintance was at this time greatly enlarged, and I had the honour of ranking among my friends some of the most distinguished characters of this country. Among these was Dr. Percy, Bishop of Dromore. This great man was the last of that illustrious school of which Johnson, Goldsmith, and Burke, were members. His fine taste and literary talents

were accompanied by sweetness of temper and a benevolent disposition. From the Rev. H. Boyd, (a gentleman well known in the literary world as the translator of the Italian Poet, Dante, and author of some other original works of great merit) I received the most marked attention. His kindness, and that of his family, indeed, I cannot easily forget; on several occasions he has rendered me very essential services, and it yields me no small degree of pleasure to reflect, that I still enjoy the friendship of a man as eminently distinguished for his virtues as for his talents.

There are few blind persons who are not blessed with strongly retentive memories, and added to this, their ear is open to all the variety of sweet sounds; but the sense of sight gives to the mind a more ample range, lays open the book of universal knowledge, which, to the blind, is covered over with an impenetrable veil. The art of printing, which has diffused knowledge to an extent unknown even to the brightest ages of antiquity, sheds not its enlivening rays for their instruction and amusement. Ever dependent on the generosity of others, the streams of knowledge flow to

them through narrow and irregular channels ; but Providence, in all things just, deprived them of one perceptive power, seems to have bestowed an additional vigour on those which remain. I have often experienced much difficulty in procuring readers, for it would have been unreasonable to expect persons to forego their pleasures, or quit their business, in order to gratify me ; yet some have done both, for my amusement. Men, however, vary in their tastes with respect to books, as they do with regard to food ; some readers can find no charms in poetry, others can find no interest in biography, and some have a particular aversion to books of a philosophical nature—and I was, therefore, necessitated to adopt the subject which best agreed with the taste of my readers. From these circumstances, I was generally obliged to listen to two or three different kinds of books in a day :—for instance, history before breakfast ; natural philosophy during the day ; poetry in the evening ; and, by way of dessert, a few passages from some of our sentimental writers.

THE DEAF AND DUMB.

Dr. Gilly, in his Essay, entitled a "Parallel on the Blind and Dumb," speaking of these unhappy mutes, he says—

"People are constantly asking us, which are the most unhappy—the Deaf and Dumb, or the Blind? To what is the gaiety of the one, and the profound melancholy of the other, owing? we shall resolve this question to the advantage of the blind: because we really think them less unhappy—strangers to all that passes around them. The deaf and dumb, who see everything, enjoy nothing; like Tantalus, whom fiction represents as devoured by an inextinguishable thirst, in the midst of water—they are continually subjected to cruel privations; an insurmountable barrier separates them from the rest of mankind. They are solitary in the midst of us, unless we borrow that artificial language which the talent and charity of their ingenious teacher has created for them; and the habit which they have of reading the countenances, is even very often a subject of anxiety to them—they do not always guess right; doubt

and uncertainty increase their impatient suspicions; a serious cast, like melancholy, then invades their countenance, and proves that with us they are in a real state of privation, obliged to concentrate their thoughts in themselves;—the activity of their imagination is thus greatly increased, and as attention and judgment necessarily follow the preception of ideas, they fatigue themselves prodigiously. Few deaf and dumb persons, therefore, are to be found in the list of longevity, because the frictions are too lively, and to use a common but exact expression, “the sword wears the scabbard.”

It appears that, as the attention of the blind is not diverted by objects presented to the sight, they are peculiarly fitted to attain perfection in whatever is conveyed to the mind by oral instruction. Some of the best poets and musicians that have ever appeared in the world, were men from whom the fair face of nature was shut out, who never saw the refulgent sun dart his rays through the opening clouds, tinging with rosy light the hills and plains, and gladdening all animated nature. How many thousand objects which give pleasure to the beholder present themselves on every side, but

the rich variety of colours which decorates the ample field of nature, is displayed in vain before the blind, and to them this fair scene is shrouded in universal night.

Never had the blind so powerful an apologist, so eloquent an eulogist, as in that prime ornament of their afflicted family, MILTON; who, in that noble descant on his loss of sight, which occurs in his "Second Defence of the People of England," speaks to this effect, in words of the purest and strongest Latin:—

"And surely we blind are not the last care
"of God. Woe, woe, to him who mocks—to
"him who harms us! *Us*, whom the Divine
"law, the Divine power, has not only shielded
"from injury, but has rendered almost sacred!
"He seems, indeed, to have brought this dark-
"ness upon us, not so much by the bedimming
"of our eyes, as by the overshadowing of His
"heavenly wings; a darkness which He not
"seldom illumines with interior and far more
"gracious light. So may I be consummated
"by this infirmity! So may I be thus irradi-
"ated by obscurity."

The state of my affairs at this time wore rather an unfavourable appearance. The profits arising from my publications were very small; they did little more than satisfy the demands of the printer and paper manufacturer. I wished, above all things, to select a subject on which I could employ my mind more extensively than it had hitherto been engaged, and having devoted much of my time to the study of biography, I found, on acquaintance with this useful branch of history, that there were many in all ages, and in every country, who had laboured under the same calamity with myself, and who had eminently distinguished themselves by their attainments in literature and science. I thought, if these were collected together, and moulded into a new form, it might not only become an amusing, but, a useful work, so far as it would show what perseverance and industry could do, in enabling us to overcome difficulties apparently insurmountable. It concerned not me at what time of life, or by what cause they lost their sight, provided that they distinguished themselves after they became blind. My chief object was to prove the energy of the human mind, under one of the greatest privations to which we are liable in this life. In contem-

plating the lives and characters of these illustrious individuals, who had devoted their time and applied their talents to promote the happiness of their fellow-creatures, we shall find, that they have been, considering their number, as usefully employed as any class of men, with whose works we are acquainted. Poets, the foremost in renown, have been incapable of the perception of external objects. The two finest poems in the world, the "Iliad" and "Paradise Lost," are the immortal productions of the blind. The eyes of Homer and Milton rolled in vain, and found no dawn; yet in the forcible expression of the latter, were their minds "inly irradiated," and they have sung of things invisible to mortal sight.

These two great epic poets, like Saturn and Jupiter, in the planetary system, shine bright stars of excellence, round which, inferior orbs for ever move in dull succession. Homer and Milton have long held the first rank among poets. The vigour of their minds; the brilliancy of their imaginations; the flights of their genius, like those of inspiration, extended to the very boundaries of time and space.

“Is not each great, each amiable muse,
“Of classic ages in thy Milton met?
“A genius, universal as his theme;
“Astonishing ‘as chaos, as the bloom
“Of blowing Eden fair, as Heaven sublime.”—

THOMPSON.

It has not been only in the different departments of literature that they have distinguished themselves, but also in the more extensive fields of science and of the arts, they have reaped honours which will transmit their names to the remotest posterity.

It was partly with a view of rescuing my fellow-sufferers from the neglect and obscurity in which many of them were enveloped, that I undertook the present work—an undertaking attended with immense labour and much research, to one like me, which will readily be allowed, when it is considered I had often to depend on the good nature of strangers for such books as were necessary for my purpose, and even for readers and amanuenses. However, after wading through innumerable difficulties, which nature and fortune threw in my way, the work made its appearance in 1820, in one volume, 12mo., containing nearly 400 pages, closely

printed. The reception it met with from the public was gratifying to my feelings, and far surpassed anything I could have expected.

A history of the blind, by a blind man, excited a good deal of curiosity among the reading portion of the public, and called forth the sympathy of several benevolent individuals in favour of its afflicted author.

When I was in Edinburgh, Mr. C., the celebrated phrenologist, asked me for a cast of my head, to which I consented; but, at the same time, I told him I did not pretend to know anything of the science. The following remarks on this subject appeared in the Phrenological Journal :—

“His temperament is bilious-nervous; his head is large; and the organs of individuality, size, weight, and locality, are very much developed. The constant and very vivid exercise of these organs seems to have caused them to attain a larger size than probably they would otherwise have reached; while the organs of colouring are very obviously stunted in their

dimensions, from want of exercise. His eyes have suffered so much from disease, that it is difficult to judge accurately by their appearance of the size of the organ of language: but it appears to us to have been well developed. The extraordinary cultivation of it, joined to his favourable temperament, which gives at once strength and sensibility, and the aid afforded by his large individuality, account for his extraordinary powers of memory. He is modest and intelligent in conversation, and altogether is a very interesting person."

Phrenological Journal, June, 1836.

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Mr. B., a gentleman in Gloucestershire, who has devoted much of his time to the study of phrenology, also took a cast from my head. In a letter to a friend, he says:—

“Prestbury, November 22, 1841.

“Dear Sir,

“I take leave to introduce to your
“notice, a case of considerable interest in the
“person of Mr. Wilson, the blind traveller.”

“ He is one of those examples of the power
“ of organization to overcome the immense dif-
“ ficulties presented by his privation. The effect
“ of exercise, and the want of it, are finely illus-
“ trated. All the perceptions (save only colour)
“ being in a high state of activity in his brain.”

“ Mr. Wilson will be found a highly intelli-
“ gent, yet a perfectly unassuming person. A
“ little work which he has written, and from the
“ sale of which he principally derives support,
“ will be found replete with interesting matter,
“ and to be highly creditable to his moral, as well
“ as to his intellectual character.”

“ Trusting that I have not presumed too far
“ on your kindness,”

“ Remain, yours, very faithfully,

“ R. B.”

The following rhyming letter was written by
one of the Society of Friends, in favour of
James Wilson, the author of the History of
the Blind :—

Pray read this, and look,
For the bearer will brook
To be gaz'd on, because he can't see :
He's blind of both eyes,
Yet, what may surprise,
Much further than many can see.

And now he is bound,
On a very long round,
To get names, written down upon paper,
And a book he will print,
With biography in't—
Not of Grafton, or Junius, or Draper ;

But of men who were wise,
Like himself, without eyes ;
Yet could many things do without sight,
Quite as well as the few
Who of eyes have full two,
Yet need a wax candle at night.

Then help him, I pray :
And by night and by day
He'll be sure to consider thy kindness,
And grateful he'll be—
Or, if not, tell it me,
And I'll wish him made well of his blindness.

He's a good honest man—
And, whenever he can,
He loves to hear reading from books ;
And though he can't see,
Yet I truly tell thee,
That intelligence beams in his looks.

Old Johnson he knows,
 And the ten gouty toes
 Of the tosser of pots, Sheridan ;
 He of Shakspeare can tell,
 And knows Milton as well
 As he does every other great man.

Sir Walter the Scott,
 It is James Wilson's lot
 To know just as well as another ;
 And the long William Pitt,
 Who in Commons did sit,
 He loved just as well as his brother.

If more thou would'st know,
 Then ask him to go
 And stay for some evening to talk ;
 But let not thy wine,
 Though excellently fine,
 Make his legs quite too blind for a walk.

Two more, and I've done—
 For the thread I have spun,
 Of my rhyming, this whimsical night ;
 Give him help on his way,
 And be glad of the day
 He presented himself to thy sight.

And remember, 'twas I
 (My name by and by)
 Who sent this good man for a squeeze
 Of thy *true English hand* ;
 So no more—but command
 Thy olden friend, *Joseph Humphreys*.

Claremont, 20.—3rd Month, 1824.

Verses in imitation of "John Anderson, my Joe," addressed to James Wilson, by one of the Society of Friends:—

Jamie Wilson ! Jamie Wilson, when first I saw thine eyes,
 I deem'd not thou could'st write a book,
 I knew not thou wert wise ;
 But soon I found that thou could'st ken
 More than a many see,
 For who could write about the blind,
 James Wilson, well as thee.

Thou see'st the rain-bow in the sky,
 The rain-bow of thy mind,
 Thou see'st the sun at noon-day bright,
 Altho' thou art so blind ;
 Thou see'st the lark ascend the sky,
 As well as hears his strain,
 James Wilson will I deem, thy blindness gives no pain.

Jamie Wilson ! Jamie Wilson, there was a time when thou
 Knew not what care nor trouble is,
 When sun-shine lit thy brow ;
 But thy hair is frosted over,
 And brooding care has made
 The sun-shine of thy early days,
 A dim and misty shade.

Jamie Wilson ! Jamie Wilson, I bid thee farewell now,
 May smoother paths lie in thy way,
 May peace sit on thy brow ;
 But may'st thou in thy wanderings,
 Nay, wheresoe'er thou roam,
 Remember that thou hast a friend—
 A friend in many a home.

The following Testimonial is from a medical gentleman of high standing:—

“ I beg most respectfully to state that I have known the highly-gifted James Wilson, for some time, and that every statement in his life, from all my enquiries, is completely borne out, and not over-drawn; and when I consider that he has been blind from three years of age, I am much astonished at his powers as an Historian, Geographer, and a Poet; but, what is of far more importance, his unaffected piety, reverential love and attachment to our pure, Apostolic, Anglican Church; and it is with much confidence I make this statement, and that I have seen a letter to him from our highly-gifted Poet, Southey, doing much honour to his heart and feelings.

“ ROBERT BRIEN,

“ Surgeon, R.N. & M.R.C.S.”

“ London,

“ June 14th, 1841.”

It is pleasing, to a pious mind, to contemplate the footsteps of an all-directing Providence, to trace the progress of the human mind in various relations, and become acquainted with the actions of individuals, who have laboured under great difficulties.

The present Memoir is offered to the reader as a simple, unvarnished tale, and is calculated to awaken those sentiments of sympathy, which are common both to the peasant and philosopher.

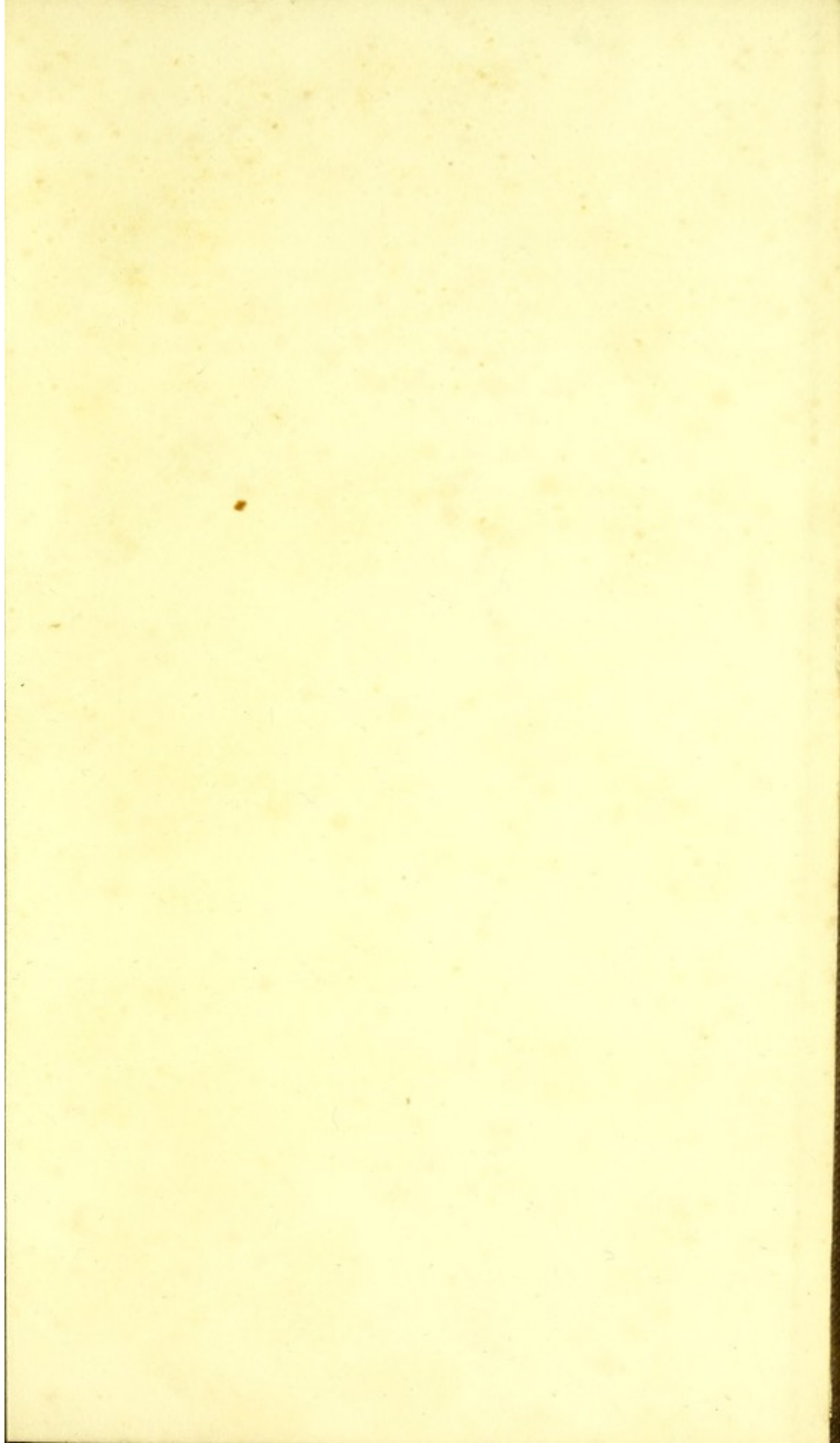
To have reflected on the goodness of Divine Providence, from the first hour of my existence, through a period of nearly seventy years; on the numberless preservations from danger, which, through that course of time, had threatened my life or my happiness; and on the many positive blessings with which I had so long been favoured; could not, I believe, have failed to excite a lively and extraordinary sense of the unmerited goodness of God to me, and would probably have proved a peculiarly animating source of humble and grateful recollection.

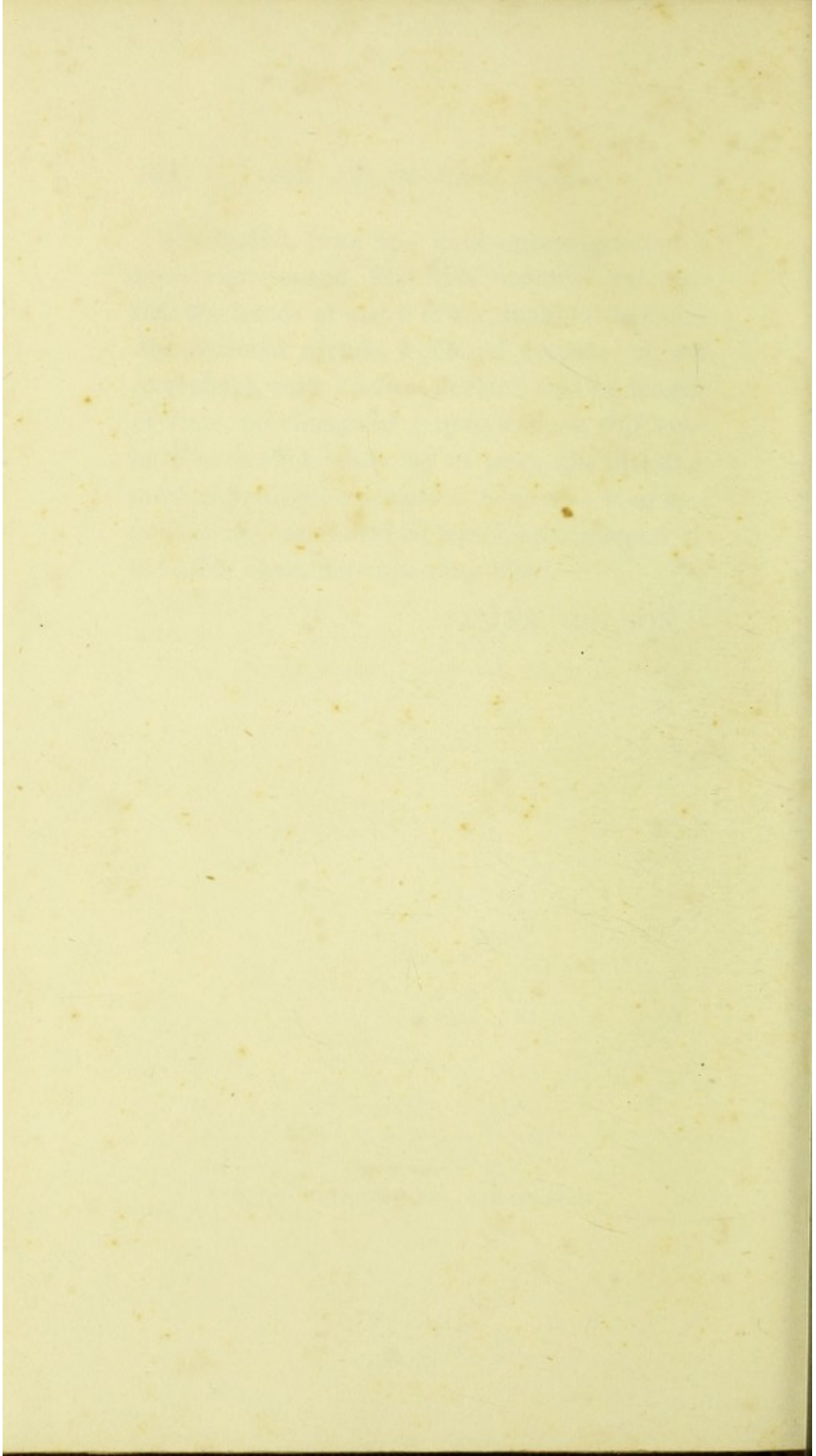
“ My God, my Father, while I stray
“ Far from my home, on life's rough way,
“ O teach me from my heart to say,
“ Thy will be done.

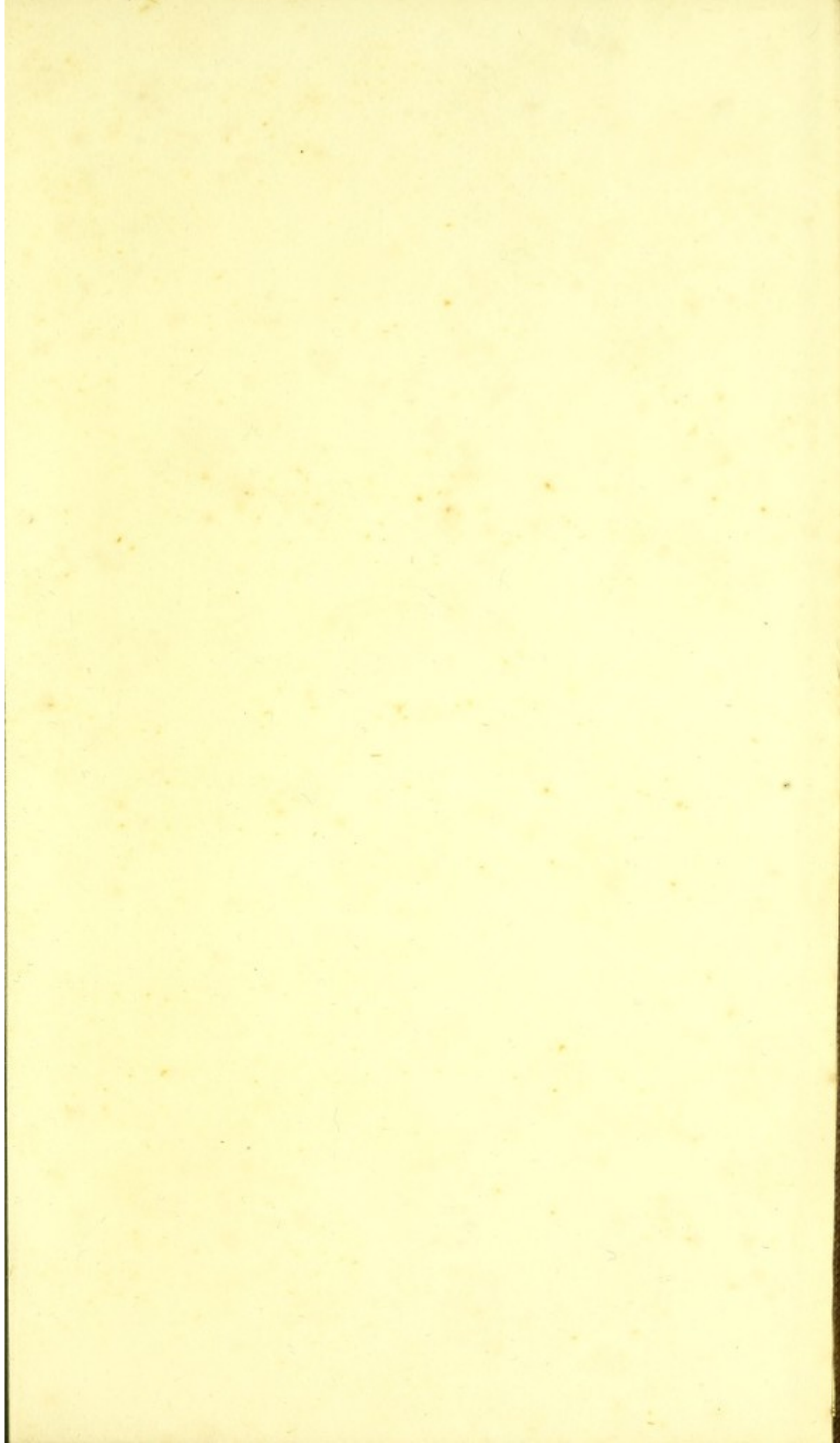
“ Though dark my way, and sad my lot,
“ Let me be still, and murmur not,
“ And breathe that prayer divinely taught—
“ Thy will be done.”

Persuaded, from the kind encouragement I have experienced, that this narrative will fall into the hands of many of my distinguished and disinterested friends, I should consider myself ungrateful, were I not to declare, that no length of time, no change of circumstances, will ever be able to efface from my memory, the pleasing recollections of unmerited kindness so long experienced ; recollections which are stamped in indelible characters upon my heart.

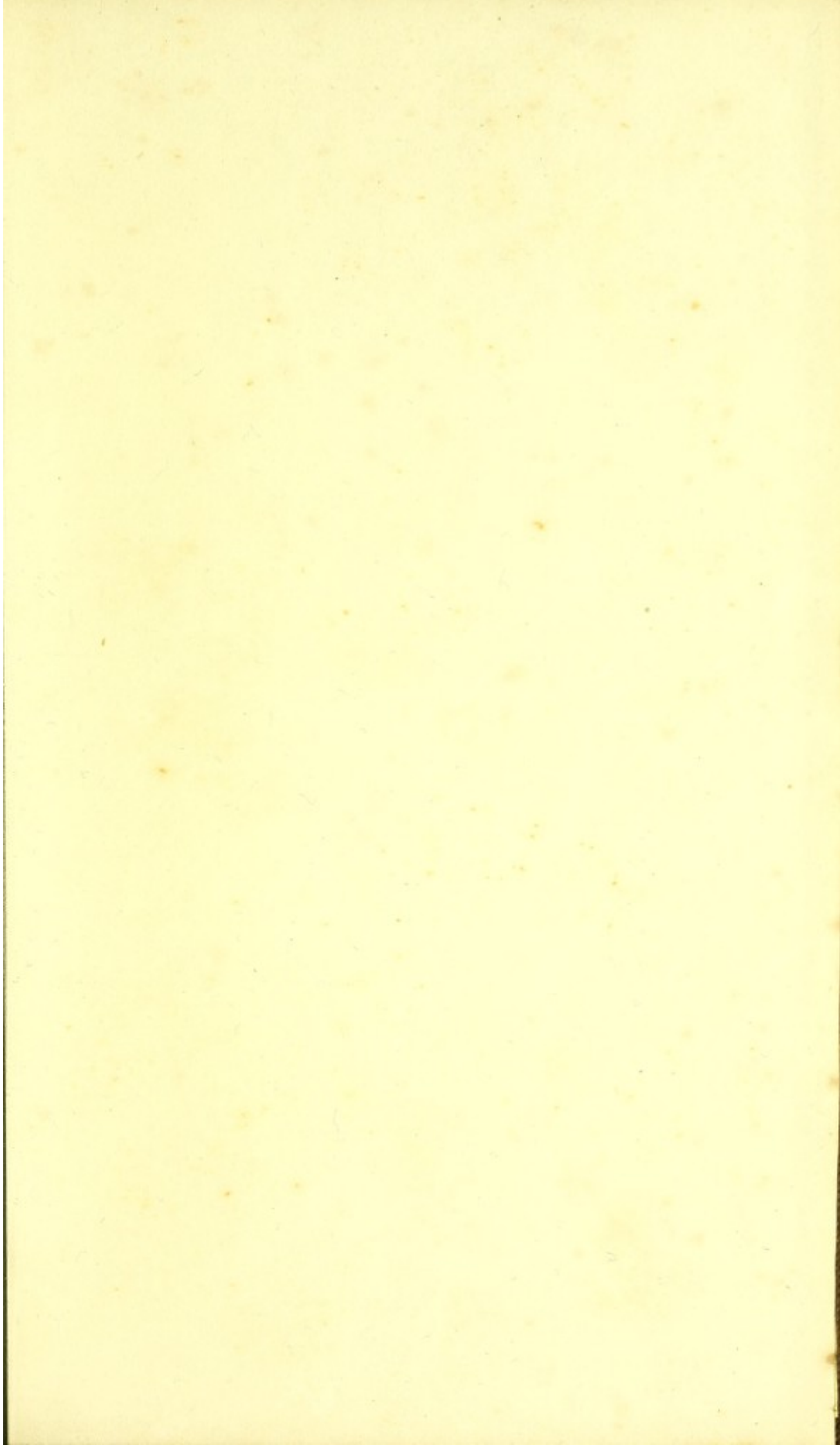
JAMES WILSON.







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