

viii THE LIFE OF WILLIAM COBBETT

Rev. W. Polwhele, &c. &c., as well as letters from Windham, Burdett, Major Cartwright, and Jefferson. All these letters, with a few exceptions, are now printed for the first time.

It was after reading the great mass of Cobbett's unpublished correspondence that I decided to write a biography of this man, who, born "at the plough tail," as he put it, raised himself to a position from which for years he exercised an influence as far-reaching as that of any personage in the Kingdom, and who, learning English grammar at the age of twenty-three, before he reached middle-age was acclaimed in two continents as one of the most effective writers of strong and racy English.

In writing an account of the life of Cobbett, it is very easy to yield to the temptation to follow him into the innumerable questions in which he was interested, but I have endeavoured to avoid this pitfall, and to tell a straightforward story. It has, indeed, been my object to allow Cobbett to tell his story in his own words, and with this object I have drawn freely upon his correspondence.

The principal authorities for Cobbett's life, besides his correspondence, are (i) *The Life and Adventures of Peter Porcupine*, in which pamphlet he replied, in 1796, to those who slandered him during his first sojourn in the United States, taking for his motto, "Now, you lying Varlets, you shall see how a plain tale shall put you down"; and (ii) the numerous autobiographical passages in his various writings, especially in his contributions to the *Political Register*, his *Advice to Young Men*, and his *Rural Rides*. Biographical information is also to be gleaned from William Windham's *Diary*,