

genius of Shakespeare surpassing that of all the rest of mankind ; after he had been called the '*Immortal Bard*,' as a matter of course, as we speak of Moses and Aaron, there having been but one of each in the world ; after all this, comes a lad of sixteen years of age, [who] writes that which learned doctors declare could have been written by no man but Shakespeare."<sup>1</sup> It is thoroughly in keeping, however, with the contradictory nature of Cobbett's character that he who exclaimed that Shakespeare was over-rated should show a thorough acquaintance with the works of that author, and should draw on him again and again for appropriate quotations ; and that he, who had not a good word for the master-dramatist, should break through his rule of all work and no play to go to the theatre. "I was, until the birth of my third son, a constant haunter of the playhouse, in which I took great delight," he confessed in later life ; "but when *he* came into the world, I said, 'Now, Nancy, it is time for us to leave off going to the play !' "<sup>2</sup>

Cobbett became famous not merely, as he asserted, because he was industrious, an early riser, sober, economical, and persevering, but because he had, beyond all question, been gifted with a streak of genius. He was, however, a little jealous of this endowment, and preferred to assume that his rise in the world was due entirely to the character that it was his proudest boast to have moulded. Within the limits of a single paragraph he has epitomised the struggles and achievements of his life :—

Thrown (by my own will, indeed) on the wide world at a very early age, not more than eleven or twelve years,

<sup>1</sup> *Advice to Young Men* (ed. 1837), par. 79.

<sup>2</sup> *Rural Rides* (ed. Pitt Cobbett), ii. 333.

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