

same mother ; the one a *bastard* (and by a parson too), the other a *legitimate child* ; the former wild, disobedient, and squandering ; the latter steady, sober, obedient, and frugal ; the former everything that is frank and generous in his nature, the latter a greedy hypocrite ; the former rewarded with the most beautiful and virtuous of women and a double estate, the latter punished by being made an outcast. How is it possible for young people to read such a book, and to look upon orderliness, sobriety, obedience, and frugality as *virtues* ? And this is the tenor of almost every romance, and of almost every play, in our language. In *The School for Scandal*, for instance, we see two brothers ; the one a prudent and frugal man, and, to all appearance, a moral man, the other a hare-brained squanderer, laughing at the morality of his brother ; the former turns out to be a base hypocrite and seducer, and is brought to shame and disgrace ; while the latter is found to be full of generous sentiment, and Heaven itself seems to interfere to give him fortune and fame. In short, the direct tendency of the far greater part of these books is to cause young people to despise all those virtues, without the practice of which they must be a curse to their parents, a burden to the community, and must, except by mere accident, lead wretched lives. I do not recollect one romance nor one play in our language which has not this tendency. How is it possible for young princes to read the historical plays of the punning and smutty Shakespeare and not think that to be drunkards, blackguards, the companions of debauchees and robbers, is the suitable beginning of a glorious reign ? ¹

For Shakespeare, then, Cobbett had no admiration, and he certainly scored a point when he wrote that "after it had been deemed almost impiety to doubt of the

¹ *Advice to Young Men*, par. 311.