



T H E
L I F E
O F
J O H N M E T C A L F .

J O H N M E T C A L F was born at Knaref-
borough, on the 15th of August, 1717.
When four years old, he was put to school
by his parents, who were working people,
and continued at school two years: He was
then seized with the small-pox, which ren-
dered him totally blind, though all possible
means were used to preserve his sight.

About six months after recovering from
the small-pox, he was able to go from his
father's house to the end of the street, and
return, without a guide; which gave him

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much spirit and satisfaction.—In the space of three years he was able to find his way to any part of the town of Knaresborough ; and had begun to associate with boys of his own age, going with them to seek birds' nests, and for his share of the eggs and young birds he was to climb the trees, whilst his comrades waited at the bottom, to direct him to the nests, and to receive what he should throw down ; and from this he was soon able to climb any tree he was able to grasp. He would now ramble into the lanes and fields alone, to the distance of two or three miles, and return. His father keeping horses, he learned to ride, and in time became an able horseman, a gallop being his favourite pace. His parents having other children, at the age of thirteen had John taught music, at which he proved very expert ; though he had conceived more taste for the cry of a hound or a harrier, than the sound of any instrument.

A gentleman at Knaresborough, of the name of Woodburn, was master of a pack of hounds :—This gentleman encouraged
Metcalf

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Metcalf very much, by taking him to hunt with him, and was always very desirous of his company. Metcalf kept a couple of very good hounds of his own.

Mr. Woodburn's hounds being seldom kennelled, Metcalf used to take several of them out secretly along with his own, about ten or eleven o'clock at night, (the hares being then feeding); but one of the young hounds happening to worry a couple of lambs, it caused him to discontinue that practice.

When about fourteen years old, his activity of limbs, and the good success with which his exploits were usually attended, consoled him so greatly for the deprivation of fight, that he was led to imagine it was in his power to undertake any thing, without danger: the following adventure, however, caused him to alter his opinion of its value.

There happened to be a plumb-tree a little way from Knareborough, where there had been a house formerly.—One Sunday, Metcalf and his companions (who were skilled in

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matters

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matters of this sort) would go there, to get some of the fruit ; in these cases, Metcalf was always appointed to ascend, for the purpose of shaking the trees. He was accordingly sent up to his post ; but in the height of the business, his companions gathering below were suddenly alarmed by the appearance of the owner of the tree, and prepared to quit the ground with all expedition:—Metcalf thus left to himself, soon understood how matters were going, though the wind was high, which prevented him from hearing distinctly ; and being inclined to follow his comrades, in making his retreat he fell headlong into a gravel-pit belonging to Sir Harry Slingsby, and cut a large gash in his face, without, however, receiving any other injury than a stun which for some time hindered his breathing, and kept him motionless on the ground.—His father being rather severe, Metcalf was afraid to go home, lest his wound should lead to a discovery of the prank he had been engaged in.

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Soon after this, (though not easily dismayed) he and some other boys were completely alarmed :—The church-porch at Knaresborough being the usual place of their meeting, they one night between eleven and twelve o'clock assembled there ; Metcalf being generally the chief projector of their plans : They determined to rob an orchard ; which having done, they returned to the church-porch to divide their booty. Before their return, a circumstance had happened to which they were strangers, but to the discovery of which the following little incident led, though not immediately : There being a large ring to the church-door, which turned for the purpose of lifting the latch, one of the party took hold of it, and, by way of bravado, gave a loud rap ; calling out, "*A tankard of ale here !*" A voice from within answered, very loudly, "*You are at the wrong house.*" This so stupified the whole covey, that none of them could move for some time. At length, Metcalf said, "Did you not hear something speak in the
A 3 church ?"

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church?" Upon this, they all took to their heels, and ran till they got out of the church-yard, Metcalf running as fast as any of them. They now held a consultation on the subject of their fright, all equally wondering at the voice, and none able to account satisfactorily for it—One supposed that it might have been some brother wag, who had put his mouth to the key-hole of the North door; but to this it was objected, that the reply was too distinct and too ready to have come in that way. At length, however, their spirits being a little raised, they ventured again down the flagged pavement into the church-yard; but when they came opposite to the church, they perceived a light, so great as inclined them to believe that the church was on fire. They now re-entered the church-porch, and were nearly determined to call the parson; when somebody within lifting the latch and making a great noise, they again dispersed, terrified and speechless. One of the party, (whose name was Clemishaw) a son of the sexton, ran home, and in a desperate fright got into bed

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bed with his mother ; all the rest, at the same time, making the best of their way.

The cause of this panic was as follows :— An old lady, wife of Dr. Talbot, (who had for many years enjoyed the living of Spoforth) dying, and her relations, who lived at a great distance, being desirous to arrive before her interment, ordered the body to be kept ; this being too long the case, and the neighbours perceiving a disagreeable smell, a request was sent to the Rev. Mr. Collins, who ordered the sexton to be called up to dig the grave in the church immediately: the sexton had lighted a great number of candles : so much for the supposition of the church being on fire ; and the grave-digger was the person whose voice had so terrified the apple-merchants, when they knocked. Such, however, was the impression, that pranks of this nature were not repeated.

About the year 1731, Metcalf being then fourteen years of age, a number of men and boys made a practice of swimming in
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the river Nidd, where there are many deeps convenient for that purpose.—Metcalf resolving to learn that art, joined the party, and became so very expert, that his companions did not chuse to come near him in the water, it being his custom to seize them, send them to the bottom, and swim over them by way of diversion.

About this time, a soldier and another man were drowned in the above deeps: the former, it was supposed, was taken with the cramp; the latter could not swim. Metcalf was sent for to get up the bodies, and at the fourth time of diving succeeded in bringing up that of the soldier, which, when raised to the surface, other swimmers carried on shore; but life had quite left it. The other body could not then be found.

There are very frequent floods in the river Nidd; and it is a remarkable fact, that in the deep places, there are eddies, or some other causes of attraction, which will draw to the bottom any substance, however light, which comes within their sphere of action. Large pieces

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pieces of timber were often seen to be carried down by the floods ; these, on coming over the deep places, were stopped for the space of a moment, and then sunk. Upon these occasions, Metcalf would go down and with the greatest ease fix ropes to the wood, which was drawn up by some persons purposely stationed on the banks.

In the year 1732, one John Barker kept an inn at the West end of the High Bridge, Knaresborough. This man was a manufacturer of linen cloth, and used to bleach his own yarn. At one time, having brought two packs of yarn to the river to wash, he thought he observed a number of wool-packs rolling towards him ; but on a nearer view it proved to be a swelling of the current, occasioned by a sudden and very violent rain in the neighbourhood. He had not time to remove his yarn, so that it was swept away, and carried through the arches of the bridge, which stands on a rock. A little below there is a piece of still water, supposed to be about twenty-one feet in depth : as soon as the
yarn

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yarn got to this, it sunk, except a little which caught the skirts of the rock in going down. Metcalf being intimate with Barker, and calling at his house a few days after the accident, found him lamenting his loss. Metcalf told him that he hoped to recover his yarn for him, but Barker smiled at the supposed absurdity of the proposal: finding, however, that his friend was resolved on a trial, he consented. Metcalf then ordered some long cart-ropes to be procured, and fixing a hook at one end, and leaving the other to be held by some persons on the High Bridge, he descended, and hooking as much of the yarn as he could at one time, he gave orders for drawing up. In this way the whole was recovered, with very little damage.

Some time after this, Metcalf happened to be at Scriven, at the house of one Green, an innkeeper.—Two persons then present had a dispute concerning some sheep which one of them had put into the penfold. The owner of the sheep, (one Robert Scaif, a Knareborough man, and a friend of Metcalf's) appeared