

L I F E
 OF
 JOHN HORNE TOOKE

CHAPTER I.

FROM 1736 TO 1765.

*Of the Birth and Family of Mr. Horne—His
 Education and early Views—He obtains the
 Living of New Brentford—First Journey to
 France.*

BOSSUET remarks, in the most useful but least popular of his works *, that the study of history appertains, in a peculiar manner, to princes. Plutarch, on the other hand, has demonstrated, by his own example, that biography is adapted to all ranks and conditions of life; and this position has been amply confirmed by the testimony of our own Bacon lord Verulam, than whom, a greater authority cannot be quoted, by a reference to any age or country.

* Discours sur l'Histoire Universelle, p. 1.

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It is no unpromising symptom of the present times, that the latter still continues to be a popular pursuit, and forms, at this day, a favourite amusement with almost every description of readers: for we are told, by a writer whose very name is always pronounced with respect, that it was cultivated with zeal and diligence in the virtuous times of the Roman republic; but under the emperors first declined, and then fell into disuse*.

Different periods exhibit different models for this species of composition. As we approach the heroic ages, great, useful, and generous actions, constitute the chief features, while, in latter times, the splendour of birth and the pomp of fortune are generally invoked to give grace and dignity to the portrait. The ancients, as usual, seem to have been far more simple chaste, and correct, in these particulars, than ourselves. The great biographer of Chæronea candidly confesses, that even Hercules himself was not altogether of divine extraction; he allows that the family of Themistocles was too obscure to confer distinction †; he admits, that Camillus, denominated “the second founder of Rome,” was the first who brought the Furii into

* Tacit. Annal.

† Plut. in Vit. Themis.

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notice ; while he frankly avows, that Caius Marius was the son of a peasant, and Phocion, the offspring of a turner. Of the two greatest orators that Greece and Rome ever witnessed, it has never been denied, that the father of the one was a sword-cutler at Athens, while that of the other is generally supposed to have been a fuller at Arpinum.

The moderns, on the contrary, evince a feverish sensibility in respect to birth and family : on this subject, they have generally sacrificed fidelity to vanity, and attributed a portion of that merit to genealogy, which strictly appertains to virtue alone. This bad taste appears to have been originally imbibed during the middle ages, when the small portion of wealth, talents, and knowledge, then called into existence, was confined to one small, privileged class. Accordingly, the heroes of chivalry and romance were always sure to dazzle by the lustre of their descent, which appeared still more brilliant, when superadded to the splendid achievements of remote progenitors. To approach nearer to our own days, their biographers, with some hesitation, and not until after having invoked the aid of *collateral gentility*, reluctantly acknowledge, that the tuneful Pope was the son of an obscure linen-draper ; and that the father of the illus-

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trious Milton had earned his bread as a humble money-scrivener. Even Benjamin Franklin himself, although in dress a Quaker, and in politics a republican, seems not a little solicitous about his descent, and is eager to deduce some trifling consequence from the original signification of his very name. It is only of late, and after the lapse of more than a century, we have been permitted to learn, that the mother of the Protector had been a brewer, at Huntingdon; and the grandmother of queen Anne a *tub-woman*, who carried beer about in the metropolis, before the introduction of drays!

The various orders of knighthood established throughout Europe, have also contributed not a little to encourage this propensity; while a college of arms has been erected in every polished state for the avowed purpose of perpetuating it. In this country, now that our heralds no longer make their periodical visitations, much, of course, is left to speculation; and the quarterings of a new family, are supposed to be to the full as vendible, as the carriage on which they are emblazoned.

But, notwithstanding the ominous aspect of public affairs, and the querulous disposition produced by the portentous times in which we live, it is not to be denied, that the situation of

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mankind has, on the whole, been considerably meliorated; while new, as well as more liberal modes of thinking, have, of late, been gradually introduced. Riches and instruction are now more generally diffused; excellence, of every kind, entitles the fortunate possessor to the esteem of his contemporaries; while education, when extended to the higher branches of learning and science, seems actually to confer a species of nobility, which is only another term for distinction. Thanks, then, to the more generous notions of the present times! the adventitious aids of birth and fortune are no longer absolutely necessary to obtain respect. And a man of talents, like him, of whom we are about to treat, may contemplate the humble station of his forefathers, with the same noble contempt that Cicero did the *vetch* on the nose of his ancestor*, whence his family was ever after designated.

After these preliminary observations, I hasten, without hesitation, to relate, that John Horne, better known of late years by the appellation of

* Pliny supposes, that the person who first bore this name, originally derived it from a species of pulse (*cicer*) in the cultivation of which he had been employed. The Fabii, Lentuli, and Pisones, so illustrious in ancient history, also obtained their respective appellations from the humble esculents, *beans*, *tarcs*, and *peas*.

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John Horne Tooke, was the son of a poulterer in Newport Market. He was born in Newport Street, Westminster, on the 25th of June, 1736, as appears from the register of the parish of St. Anne, Soho, and christened on the succeeding day; a circumstance which seems to indicate, either that his life had been in immediate jeopardy, or that he was of so puny and delicate a frame, as to render a speedy dissolution probable.

Mr. Horne, the father, whose name also was John, had a large family; and the following authentic account of his children, by Elizabeth his wife, has been communicated to me, by one of his descendants:—

1. Benjamin, the eldest son, settled at Brentford, in the county of Middlesex, where he acquired considerable wealth and eminence as a market-gardener, in what is technically termed the *fruit-line*. It was he who first introduced the pine-strawberry, from Saratoga, in North America, through the kind intervention of the earl of Shelburne, afterwards created marquis of Lansdowne. That nobleman, being greatly addicted to horticulture before he entered on the career of politics, and finding him an ingenious man, delighted in his conversation, and slept frequently at his house. On these occa-

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sions, Mr. Benjamin Horne not only deemed himself highly honoured by the notice of a person of such distinction, but was also considerably benefited in consequence of the present just alluded to, and might have obtained a very large fortune from the exclusive monopoly of a fruit possessing such exquisite flavour and perfection, had not his grounds been repeatedly plundered by some of his neighbours, who thus risked all the rigours of the law, to procure a few *runners of the new sort*, and rival, as well as undersell him, at Covent Garden market. He died in the prime of life, after having acquired a very considerable property; and, leaving no children behind him, bequeathed his estate, both real and personal, to his immediate relatives.

2. Thomas, the second son, originally bred a fishmonger, afterwards followed his father's trade, as a poulterer, and succeeded him in the same shop and business. He is represented as a strong-minded man, but entirely regardless of his pecuniary concerns. Accordingly, he either lost or squandered the whole of his patrimony, and at length retired on an annuity of seventy pounds, left him by his elder brother; but, as this proved insufficient to support his extravagant course of life, he was admitted, and died

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in the almshouses provided by the liberality of the company of fishmongers, for their decayed brethren.

3. John, the subject of these memoirs.

4. Mary, the eldest daughter, who was considered a beauty, married a wine-merchant in Argyle Street, familiarly known among his acquaintance by the appellation of "honest Tom Wildman;" he is frequently noticed in Mr. Wilkes's letters. His son, a very respectable and intelligent man, after occupying a place in the Custom House, during a period of more than thirty years, is now a brewer at Chelsea.

5. Sarah, who is still alive, married the late Dr. Demainbray, who formerly occupied an honourable and confidential situation about the person of the present king; assisted in his majesty's education, and was always treated with particular attention. He enjoyed a place in the Custom House of 1,500*l.* per annum; and his son, the rev. Stephen Demainbray, has, for many years, superintended the Royal Observatory at Kew.

6. Elizabeth, a woman of considerable wit and vivacity, became the wife of Mr. Clarke, a haberdasher, in Leicester Fields;

And, 7. Anne, the fourth daughter, who still survives, married Mr. Dicker, a colourman,

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whose father was the tenant of the elder Mr. Horne, and lives on her fortune, which is said to be pretty considerable.

A tradition still exists in the family, that their ancestors possessed great wealth, and were settled on their own lands, at no great distance from the metropolis. A more ingenious biographer, by a plausible reference to county histories, might have been able, perhaps, to have traced their origin to a pretty remote period, and, with the aid of a little seasonable conjecture, it would have been easy to have ascertained the loss of the patrimonial estates during the wars between the rival Roses. Or the industry of a modern genealogist might have contrived, from the identity of names, in addition to some trivial and incidental circumstances, to have shed the lustre of episcopacy on their race, and, by means of Dr. George Horne, bishop of Norwich, reflected a borrowed renown on his new relatives. But such arts, even if allowable, are unnecessary here, for the Grammarian, who forms the subject of the present volumes, is fairly entitled to be considered as a *noun substantive*, whose character and consequence might be impaired, rather than increased, by the addition of any unnecessary adjunct.

I am enabled, however, without any viola-

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tion of truth, to assert, that, notwithstanding the elder Mr. Horne reared and educated a family of seven children, he found means to acquire a considerable fortune, at the same time that he obtained a fair and honourable character for himself. At the solicitation of his wife, who is said to have been an amiable and benevolent woman, he became a liberal subscriber to the Middlesex Hospital; and such was his reputation for wealth and integrity, that he was elected the first treasurer of that excellent institution.

It will perhaps create a smile, when I add, that this worthy tradesman was not only a military man, but an officer; for his son once assured me, that he was honoured with a commission in the *Trained Bands*, and that he himself recollected to have accompanied his father part of the way to oppose the grandson of James II, who had then invaded Scotland. This, perhaps, is the identical "March to Finchley," ridiculed by a comic painter* of that day with more graphic wit than sterling patriotism. The event took place in 1746, when the subject of this memoir was only nine years old.

* The celebrated William Hogarth.