

THE LIFE
OF
JOHN LOCKE,
WITH EXTRACTS FROM
HIS CORRESPONDENCE, JOURNALS,
AND
COMMON-PLACE BOOKS.
BY LORD KING.

LITERIS INNUTRITUS, EOUSQUE TANTUM PROFECI UT VERITATI UNICÈ LITAREM.

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*Fac Similes of the Hand Writing of
John Locke, Sir Isaac Newton & the Earl of Shaftesbury.*

*your memory is very
weak, such simple Ideas quickly fade & vanish
quite out of your understanding, & leave it as
clean without any footsteps or remaining
characters, as shadows doe fly over the face
of comets, & your mind is as void of them as
if they never had been there.*

*The Ideas of will of children of our youth
doe before us, & our minds represent often
to us those words to wit we are approaching
where huge y^e broff & marble remains yet
the misapprehensions are effaced by him & your
imagery mends away. The pictures drawn
on our minds are laid in fading colours
& if not sometimes refreshed ^{vanish} fade & disappear*

Your most humble servant

Is Newton

Your most affectionate friend

& servant

Shaftesbury

THE LIFE

OF

JOHN LOCKE.

THE state of the coin had for a long time very much engaged Locke's attention; the first of his treatises upon that subject was published in 1691, and the farther consideration in 1695, for the purpose of correcting the false ideas then universally prevalent.

Whenever there is considerable distress in the public affairs,—if trade is embarrassed, if the currency is disordered, if the finances are deranged,—there are always to be found men, who from ignorance or interest, are ready to recommend what they are pleased to call the easy, practical, and natural remedies, which in the end generally aggravate the evils they were supposed to cure. Under a despotic Govern-

remove what I see is so fixed, the project of alteration of the standard.

“ I am,

Your most humble servant,

J. SOMERS.”

In the “ Farther Consideration on raising the value of Money,” published 1695, addressed to Sir John Somers, he endeavoured to strip the question of hard, obscure, and “ doubtful words wherewith men are often misled and mislead others.” He condemns the nefarious project of raising the denomination and altering the standard as a fraud upon all creditors, and justly considers it as “ THE MEANS OF CONFOUNDING THE PROPERTY OF THE SUBJECT, AND DISTURBING AFFAIRS TO NO PURPOSE.”

The advice of Locke was followed, and the great recoinage of 1695 restored the current money of the country to the full legal standard.

The difference between the embarrassments which affected the currency in the reign of King William, and those which have occurred in our own time, may be thus stated: the coin at the period first mentioned, had been deteriorated by the frauds of individuals and the

neglect of the public; but when the evil was felt, and the remedy pointed out, the Parliament, notwithstanding the pressure of the war and the false theories of the practical men of those days, applied the proper remedy at the proper time before any great permanent debt had been incurred. In our own time the depreciation of the currency was entirely to be attributed to the Bank and the Government. The paper-money of a banking company without the one indispensable condition of security against excesses, *payment in specie on demand*, was in an evil hour substituted in place of the King’s lawful coin; and in order that the Minister might avoid the imputation of being an unskilful financier, who borrowed money on unfavourable terms, a debt of unexampled magnitude was accumulated in a debased currency, to be ultimately discharged by payment in specie at the full and lawful standard. It must be confessed, that by the tardy act of retributive justice which was passed in 1819, the punishment inflicted upon the nation was in the exact proportion to the former deviations from good faith and sound principle, and we may at least hope that the severity of the penalty will prevent for the future a repetition of the same folly.

Respecting the other subject of the treatise, viz. "Consideration on lowering the rate of Interest," the author asks this question: "Whether the price of the hire of money can be regulated by law?" The same question, after the lapse of 130 years, we may still continue to repeat with the same success. He then shows that the attempt "to regulate the rate of interest will increase the difficulty of borrowing, and prejudice none but those who need assistance."

In the same year he was appointed to a seat at the Council of Trade. Sir John Somers writes to inform him of the King's nomination, and to make excuse for using his name without his "express consent."

Sir Wm. Trumbull communicates the same appointment by the following letter.

"SIR, Whitehall, May 19, 1696.

"BESIDES my particular obligations to thank you for your kind letter to me, I am now to call upon you in behalf of the public, whose service requires your help, and consequently your attendance in town. The Council of Trade (whereof you are most worthily appointed a member,) must go on with effect, or the greatest inconveniences and mischief will fol-

low. I hope your health will permit you to come and make some stay here; and what reluctancy soever you may have to appear among us, I know your love to your country, and your great zeal for our common interests will overcome it, so that I will trouble you no farther till I can have the happiness of seeing you here, and assuring you by word of mouth that I am unalterably

Your most faithful humble servant,

WILLIAM TRUMBULL.

"My wife will have me send her humble service to you."

After holding the appointment at the Board of Trade for a short time, his increasing infirmities made him wish to resign it, and he communicated his intention to Lord Keeper Somers, by letter, dated 7th Jan. 1696-7.

"MY LORD,

"SOME of my brethren, I understand, think my stay in the country long, and desire me to return to bear my part, and to help to dispatch the multitude of business that the present circumstances of trade and the plantations fill their hands with. I cannot but say they are in the right; and I cannot but think, at the

same time, that I also am in the right to stay in the country, where all my care is little enough to preserve those small remains of health, which a settled and incurable indisposition would quickly make an end of anywhere else.

“There remains, therefore, nothing else to be done but that I should cease to fill up any longer a place that requires a more constant attendance than my strength will allow; and to that purpose, I prevail with your Lordship to move his Majesty, that he would be pleased to ease me of the employment he has been so graciously pleased to honour me with, since the craziness of my body so ill seconds the inclination I have to serve him in it, and I find myself every way incapable of answering the ends of that commission. I am not insensible of the honour of that employment, nor how much I am obliged to your Lordship’s favourable opinion in putting me into a post, which I look upon as one of the most considerable in England. I can say that nobody has more warm wishes for the prosperity of his country than I have; but the opportunity of showing those good wishes, in being any way serviceable to it, I find comes too late to a man whose health is inconsistent with

the business, and in whom it would be folly to hope for a return to that vigour and strength which such an employment I see requires. It is not without due consideration that I represent this to your Lordship, and that I find myself obliged humbly and earnestly to request your Lordship to obtain for me a dismissal out of it. I wish your Lordship many happy new years, and am, with the utmost acknowledgment and respect.”

LORD KEEPER SOMERS TO MR. LOCKE.

“SIR,

26th Jan. 1696-7.

“MY great fatigue, joined with a very great indisposition, must make my excuse for being so slow in returning an answer to your very obliging letter. I am very sorry for your ill health, which confines you to the country for the present; but now you will have so much regard to yourself, your friends, and your country, as not to think of returning to business till you are recovered to such a competent degree, as not to run the hazard of a relapse. As to the other part of your letter, which relates to the quitting the commission, I must say you are much in the wrong, in my opinion, to entertain a thought of it; and I flatter my-

self so far as to believe I could bring you over to my sentiments, if I had the happiness of half an hour's conversation with you. These being my thoughts, you cannot wonder if I am not willing to enter upon the commission you give me, of saying something to the King of your purpose. But when the new commission is made, and the establishment fixed, and the Parliament up, and you have had the opinion of your friends here, I will submit to act as you shall command me. In the mean time give me leave to say, that no man alive has a greater value for you, nor is with more sincerity than myself, Sir,

Your most faithful servant,
J. SOMERS."

DRAFT OF LOCKE'S ANSWER TO
LORD KEEPER SOMERS.

" MY LORD, Feb. 1, 1696-7.

" I KNOW nobody that can with so much right promise himself to bring me over to his sentiments as your Lordship, for I know not any one that has such a master-reason to prevail as your Lordship, nor any one to whom, without attending the convictions of that reason, that I am so much disposed to submit to

with implicit faith. Your Lordship, I perceive, from several positions takes a different view of the same thing; and since your Lordship, who always speaks reason, is always also ready to hear it, I promise myself that the propositions I made would not appear to your Lordship altogether unfit, had I an opportunity to offer to your Lordship all the considerations that moved and hold me to it. The obliging promise your Lordship has been pleased to make me in the honour of yours of the 25th of January, that when I have had your Lordship's opinion, you will not refuse me the favour I have asked, if I shall then continue my request, sets me at rest for the present; and a word from your Lordship that you will have the goodness to let me have notice time enough to lay before your Lordship what weighs with me in the case, before any thing can be done either in making a new commission, or fixing the establishment, will ease your Lordship of any farther importunity from me; and then I who am so much in your favour, shall not alone of all the subjects of England, apprehend that, upon a fair hearing, your Lordship will not allow the equity of my case. Untoward health, which complies no more with good manners than with other obligations, must be my ex-

cuse to your Lordship for this last, as well as it was a great cause of my first request to you in this affair. If my ill lungs would permit me now presently, (as becomes me) to come to town and wait there the opportunity of discoursing your Lordship, I should not have reason as I have to desire to quit this employment. The great indulgence your Lordship expresses to my infirm constitution, makes me hope it will extend itself farther; it cannot, I think, do less than make your Lordship bethink yourself of a man to substitute in the place of a shadow. I cannot make an equal return to your Lordship's concerns for my health, since my country's welfare is so much interested in your Lordship's preservation, mixing with my concern for your late indisposition, will not suffer my good wishes for the confirmation of your strength to be purely personal to your Lordship, though nobody can be more than I am,

&c. &c."

In the following year King William ordered Locke to attend him at Kensington, desirous to employ him again in the public service. However flattering the King's intention towards him must have been, the state of his

health prevented him from accepting the honour that was designed him: he writes to the Lord Chancellor Somers, probably from Oates.

"Jan. 28, 1697-8.

"MAY IT PLEASE YOUR LORDSHIP.

"SUNDAY, in the evening, after I had waited on the King, I went to wait upon your Lordship, it being, I understood, his Majesty's pleasure I should do so before I returned hither. My misfortune in missing your Lordship I hoped to repair by an early diligence the next morning, but the night that came between destroyed that purpose and me almost with it. For, when I was laid in my bed, my breath failed me; I was fain to sit up in my bed, where I continued a good part of the night, with hopes that my shortness of breath would abate, and my lungs grow so good-natured as to let me lie down to get a little sleep, whereof I had great need; but my breath constantly failing me as often as I laid my head upon my pillow, at three I got up, and sat by the fire till morning. My case being brought to this extremity, there was no room for any other thought but to get out of town immediately; for, after the two precedent nights without any rest, I concluded the agonies I laboured under

so long in the second of those, would hardly fail to be my death the third, if I stayed in town. As bad weather, therefore, as it was, I was forced early on Monday morning to set out and return hither.

“ His Majesty was so favourable as to propose the employment your Lordship mentioned; but the true knowledge of my own weak state of health made me beg his Majesty to think of some fitter person, and more able, to serve him in that important post; to which I added my want of experience for such business. That your Lordship may not think this an expression barely of modesty, I crave leave to explain it to your Lordship, (though there I discover my weakness,) that my temper, always shy of a crowd of strangers, has made my acquaintances few, and my conversation too narrow and particular, to get the skill of dealing with men in their various humours, and drawing out their secrets. Whether this was a fault or no to a man that designed no bustle in the world, I know not. I am sure it will let your Lordship see that I am too much a novice in the world for the employment proposed.

“ Though we are so oddly placed here, that we have no ordinary conveyance for our letters from Monday till Friday, yet this

delay has not fallen out much amiss. The King was graciously pleased to order me to go into the country to take care of my health: these four or five days here have given me a proof to what a low state my lungs are now brought, and how little they can bear the least shock. I can lie down again, indeed, in my bed, and take my rest; but, bating that, I find the impression of these two days in London so heavy upon me still, which extends farther than the painfulness of breathing, and makes me listless to every thing, so that methinks the writing this letter has been a great performance.

“ My Lord, I should not trouble you with an account of the prevailing decays of an old pair of lungs, were it not my duty to take care his Majesty should not be disappointed, and, therefore, that he lay not any expectation on that, which, to my great misfortune, every way, I find would certainly fail him; and I must beg your Lordship, for the interest of the public, to prevail with his Majesty to think on somebody else, since I do not only fear, but am sure, my broken health will never permit me to accept the great honour his Majesty meant me. As it would be unpardonable to betray the King's business, by undertaking

what I should be unable to go through; so it would be the greatest madness to put myself out of the reach of my friends during the small time I am to linger in this world, only to die a little more rich, or a little more advanced. He must have a heart strongly touched with wealth, or honours, who at my age, and labouring for breath, can find any great relish for either of them."

King William, who was subject to the same asthmatic complaint, is said to have conversed with Locke respecting his treatment of his own disorders. The King, when he was told that a very strict abstinence afforded the only relief, acknowledged that the advice was very good, but, like other patients, did not resort to that disagreeable remedy. Having refused the employment which the King had designed for him, he now determined to resign that which he for some years held, and for the same reason.

The asthmatic complaint, to which he had been long subject, making a continued residence in London, particularly during the winter season, very distressing to him, he had for some years taken up his abode with Sir F. and Lady Masham, at Oates, near Ongar, in Essex,

where he was perfectly at home, and enjoyed the society most agreeable to him; as Lady Masham, the daughter of Cudworth, is said to have been a woman of great sense and of most agreeable manners. Their intimacy seems to have been of long standing by the following letter of Locke to her brother, Mr. Cudworth, dated 1683, which is interesting, as it affords a proof of the great activity of his mind in the search for every sort of knowledge.

"SIR,

London, 27th April, 1683.

"THOUGH you are got quite to the other side of the world, yet you cease not to make new acquisitions here; and the character you have left behind you, makes your acquaintance be sought after to the remotest parts of the earth. There is a commerce of friendship as well as merchandise; and though nobody, almost, lets his thoughts go so far as the East Indies, without a design of getting money and growing rich, yet, if you allow my intentions, I hope to make a greater advantage by another sort of correspondence with you there. In the conversation I have had the happiness to have sometimes with your sister here, I have observed her often to speak of you with more

tenderness and concern than all the rest of the world, which has made me conclude it must be something extraordinary in you which has raised in her (who is so good a judge) so particular an esteem and affection, beyond what is due to the bare ties of nature and blood. And I cannot but think that your souls are akin, as well as your bodies, and that yours, as well as hers, is not of the ordinary alloy. I account it none of the least favours she has done me, that she has promised me your friendship; and you must not think it strange, if I presume upon her word, and trouble you with some inquiries concerning the country you are in, since she encourages me in it, and assures me I shall not fail of an answer.

“ Some of those who have travelled, and writ of those parts, give us strange stories of the tricks done by some of their jugglers there, which must needs be beyond legerdemain, and seems not within the power of art or nature. I would very gladly know whether they are really done as strange as they are reported; and whether those that practise them are any of them Mahometans, or all (which I rather suppose) heathens, and how they are looked on by the Bramins, and the other people of the

country; whether they have any apparitions amongst them, and what thoughts of spirits; and as much of the opinions, religion, and ceremonies of the Hindoos and other heathens of those countries, as comes in your way to learn and inquire. It would be too great kindness, if you could learn any news of any copies of the Old or New Testament, or any parts of them, which they had amongst them, in any language, in those Eastern countries, before the Europeans traded thither by the Cape of Good Hope. I should trouble you also with inquiries concerning their languages, learning, government, manners, and particularly Aureng Zebe, the Emperor of Hindostan, since I could promise myself a more exact account from you than what we have in printed travels; but I fear I have been more troublesome than what you will imagine will become a man that does but now begin to beg your acquaintance. If I have trespassed herein, you must excuse it to the little distinction I make between you and your sister; you must conclude I forgot myself, and thought I was talking to, and (as I used to do) learning something of her; and 'tis to the same account I must beg you to place the obligation you will lay on me, by procur-

ing and sending hither an answer to the inclosed letter, directed to Mrs. Richards. Her husband died going to the East Indies, in a ship that set out hence about Christmas was twelvemonths, where he was to have been factor, somewhere in the Bay of Bengal, for the Company. His wife and two daughters, who were with him, went on their voyage; where she settled herself, and remains now, you will easily know. I beg the favour of you to get the inclosed conveyed to her, and an answer from her, which be pleased to direct to be left for me either with Mr. P. Percevall, at the Black Boy, in Lombard-street, or Mr. S. Cox, at the Iron Key, in Thames-street, London.

“ And now, having been thus free with you, ’tis in vain to make apologies for it; if you allow your sister to dispose of your friendship, you will not take it amiss that I have looked upon myself as in possession of what she has bestowed on me; or that I begin my conversation with you with a freedom and familiarity suitable to an established amity and acquaintance; besides, if, at this distance, we should set out according to the forms of ceremony, our correspondence would proceed with

a more grave and solemn pace than the treaties of princes, and we must spend some years in the very preliminaries. He that, in his first address, should only put off his hat and make a leg, and say your servant, to a man at the other end of the world, may, (if the winds set right,) and the ships come home safe, and bring back the return of his compliment, may, I say, in two or three years, perhaps, attain to something that looks like the beginning of an acquaintance, and by the next Jubilee there may be hopes of some conversation between them. Sir, you see what a blunt fellow your sister has recommended to you; as far removed from the ceremonies of the Eastern people you are amongst, as from their country; but one that, with great truth and sincerity, says to you,

I am, &c.

J. L.

“ One thing, which I had forgot, give me leave to add, which is a great desire to know how the several people of the East keep their account of time, as months and years; and whether they generally agree in using periods answering to our weeks; and whether their arithmetic turns at ten as ours doth.”

