

**THE LIFE AND WORKS OF CHARLES  
KINGSLEY IN NINETEEN VOLUMES,  
VOLUME VIII, ALTON LOCKE, TAILOR  
AND POET AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY, IN  
TWO VOLUMES - VOL. II**

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The life and works of Charles Kingsley in nineteen volumes, volume VIII, Alton Locke, Tailor and Poet an autobiography, in two volumes - Vol. II by Charles Kingsley

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**CHARLES KINGSLEY**

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## CHAPTER XIV

### A CATHEDRAL TOWN

AT length, the wished-for day had arrived ; and, with my cousin, I was whirling along, full of hope and desire, towards the cathedral town of D\*\*\*\*—through a flat fen country, which, though I had often heard it described as ugly, struck my imagination much. The vast height and width of the sky-arch, as seen from those flats as from an ocean—the grey haze shrouding the horizon of our narrow land-view, and closing us in, till we seemed to be floating through infinite space, on a little platform of earth ; the rich poplar-fringed farms, with their herds of dappled oxen—the luxuriant crops of oats and beans—the tender green of the tall-rape, a plant till then unknown to me—the long, straight, silver dykes, with their gaudy carpets of strange floating water-plants, and their black banks, studded with the remains of buried forests—the innumerable draining-mills, with their creaking sails and groaning wheels—the endless rows of pollard willows, through which the breeze moaned and rung, as through the strings of some vast Æolian harp ; the little island knolls in that vast sea of fen, each with its long village street, and delicately taper spire ; all this seemed to me to contain an element of new and peculiar beauty.

‘Why !’ exclaims the reading public, if perchance it ever sees this tale of mine, in its usual prurient longing after anything like personal gossip, or scandalous anecdote—‘why, there is no cathedral town which begins with

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a D! Through the fen, too! He must either mean Ely, Lincoln, or Peterborough; that's certain.' Then, at one of those places, they find there is a dean—not of the name of Winnstay, true—'but his name begins with a W; and he has a pretty daughter—no, a niece; well, that's very near it;—it must be him. No; at another place—there is not a dean, true—but a canon, or an archdeacon—something of that kind; and he has a pretty daughter, really; and his name begins—not with W, but with Y; well, that's the last letter of Winnstay, if it is not the first: that must be the poor man! What a shame to have exposed his family secrets in that way!' And then a whole circle of myths grow up round the man's story. It is credibly ascertained that I am the man who broke into his house last year, after having made love to his housemaid, and stole his writing-desk and plate—else, why should a burglar steal family-letters, if he had not some interest in them? . . . And before the matter dies away, some worthy old gentleman, who has not spoken to a working man since he left his living, thirty years ago, and hates a Radical as he does the Pope, receives two or three anonymous letters, condoling with him on the cruel betrayal of his confidence—base ingratitude for undeserved condescension, etc. etc.; and, perhaps, with an enclosure of good advice for his lovely daughter.

But wherever D\*\*\*\* is, we arrived there; and with a beating heart, I—and I now suspect my cousin also—walked up the sunny slopes, where the old convent had stood, now covered with walled gardens and noble timber-trees, and crowned by the richly fretted towers of the cathedral, which we had seen, for the last twenty miles, growing gradually larger and more distinct across the level flat. 'Ely?' 'No, Lincoln!' 'Oh! but really, it's just as much like Peterborough!' Never mind, my dear reader; the essence of the fact, as I think, lies not quite so much in the name of the place, as in what was done there—to which I, with all the little respect which I can muster, entreat your attention.

It is not from false shame at my necessary ignorance,