

**THE LIFE AND WORKS OF CHARLES
KINGSLEY IN NINETEEN VOLUMES.
VOLUME VII; ALTON LOCKE: TAILOR
AND POET, AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY, IN
TWO VOLUMES, VOL. I**

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The life and works of Charles Kingsley in nineteen volumes. Volume VII; Alton Locke: Tailor and Poet, an autobiography, in two volumes, Vol. I by Charles Kingsley & Alton Locke

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CHARLES KINGSLEY & ALTON LOCKE

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PREFATORY MEMOIR

THE tract appended to this preface has been chosen to accompany *Alton Locke* in order to illustrate, from another side, a distinct period in the life of Charles Kingsley, which stands out very much by itself. It may be taken roughly to have extended from 1848 to 1856. It has been thought that they require a preface, and I have undertaken to write it, as one of the few survivors of those who were most intimately associated with the author at the time to which the works refer.

No easy task ; for, look at them from what point we will, these years must be allowed to cover an anxious and critical time in modern English history ; but, above all, in the history of the working classes. In the first of them the Chartist agitation came to a head and burst, and was followed by the great movement towards association, which, developing in two directions and by two distinct methods—represented respectively by the amalgamated Trades Unions, and Co-operative Societies—has in the intervening years entirely changed the conditions of the labour question in England, and the relations of the working to the upper and middle classes. It is with this, the social and industrial side of the history of those years, that we are mainly concerned here. Charles Kingsley has left other and more important writings of those years. But these are beside our purpose, which is to give some such slight sketch of him as may be possible within the limits of a preface, in the character in which he was first widely known, as the most out-spoken and powerful of those who took the side

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of the labouring classes, at a critical time—the crisis, in a word, when they abandoned their old political weapons, for the more potent one of union and association, which has since carried them so far.

To no one of all those to whom his memory is very dear can this seem a superfluous task, for no writer was ever more misunderstood or better abused at the time, and after the lapse of almost a quarter of a century the misunderstanding would seem still to hold its ground. For through all the many notices of him which appeared after his death in January 1875, there ran the same apologetic tone as to this part of his life's work. While generally, and as a rule cordially, recognising his merits as an author, and a man, the writers seemed to agree in passing lightly over this ground. When it was touched it was in a tone of apology, sometimes tinged with sarcasm, as in the curt notice in the *Times*—‘He was understood to be the Parson Lot of those “Politics for the People” which made no little noise in their time, and as Parson Lot he declared in burning language that to his mind the fault in the “People’s Charter” was that it did not go nearly far enough.’ And so the writer turns away, as do most of his brethren, leaving probably some such impression as this on the minds of most of their readers—‘Young men of power and genius are apt to start with wild notions. He was no exception. Parson Lot’s sayings and doings may well be pardoned for what Charles Kingsley said and did in after years; so let us drop a decent curtain over them, and pass on.’

Now, as very nearly a generation has passed since that signature used to appear at the foot of some of the most noble and vigorous writing of our time, readers of to-day are not unlikely to accept this view, and so to find further confirmation and encouragement in the example of Parson Lot for the mischievous and cowardly distrust of anything like enthusiasm amongst young men, already sadly too prevalent in England. If it were only as a protest against this *surtout point de zèle* spirit, against which it was one of Charles Kingsley’s chief tasks to fight with all his strength, it is well that the facts should be set right.

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This done, readers may safely be left to judge what need there is for the apologetic tone in connection with the name, the sayings, and doings of Parson Lot.

My first meeting with him was in the autumn of 1848, at the house of Mr. Maurice, who had lately been appointed Reader of Lincoln's Inn. No parochial work is attached to that post, so Mr. Maurice had undertaken the charge of a small district in the parish in which he lived, and had set a number of young men, chiefly students of the Inns of Court who had been attracted by his teaching, to work in it. Once a week, on Monday evenings, they used to meet at his house for tea, when their own work was reported upon and talked over. Suggestions were made and plans considered; and afterwards a chapter of the Bible was read and discussed. Friends and old pupils of Mr. Maurice's, residing in the country, or in distant parts of London, were in the habit of coming occasionally to these meetings, amongst whom was Charles Kingsley. He had been recently appointed Rector of Eversley, and was already well known as the author of *The Saint's Tragedy*, his first work, which contained the germ of much that he did afterwards.

His poem, and the high regard and admiration which Mr. Maurice had for him, made him a notable figure in that small society, and his presence was always eagerly looked for. What impressed me most about him when we first met was, his affectionate deference to Mr. Maurice, and the vigour and incisiveness of everything he said and did. He had the power of cutting out what he meant in a few clear words, beyond any one I have ever met. The next thing that struck one was the ease with which he could turn from playfulness, or even broad humour, to the deepest earnest. At first I think this startled most persons, until they came to find out the real deep nature of the man; and that his broadest humour had its root in a faith which realised, with extraordinary vividness, the fact that God's Spirit is actively abroad in the world, and that Christ is in every man, and made him hold fast, even in his saddest moments,—and sad moments were not infrequent

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with him,—the assurance that, in spite of all appearances, the world was going right, and would go right somehow, 'Not your way, or my way, but God's way.' The contrast of his humility and audacity, of his distrust in himself and confidence in himself, was one of those puzzles which meet us daily in this world of paradox. But both qualities gave him a peculiar power for the work he had to do at that time, with which the name of Parson Lot is associated.

It was at one of these gatherings, towards the end of 1847 or early in 1848, when Kingsley found himself in a minority of one, that he said jokingly, he felt much as Lot must have felt in the Cities of the Plain, when he seemed as one that mocked to his sons-in-law. The name Parson Lot was then and there suggested, and adopted by him, as a familiar *nom de plume*. He used it from 1848 up to 1856; at first constantly, latterly much more rarely. But the name was chiefly made famous by his writings in *Politics for the People*, the *Christian Socialist*, and the *Journal of Association*, three periodicals which covered the years from '48 to '52; by *Alton Locke*; and by tracts and pamphlets, of which the best known, *Cheap Clothes and Nasty*, is now republished.

In order to understand and judge the sayings and writings of Parson Lot fairly, it is necessary to recall the condition of the England of that day. Through the winter of 1847-8, amidst widespread distress, the cloud of discontent, of which Chartism was the most violent symptom, had been growing darker and more menacing, while Ireland was only held down by main force. The breaking out of the revolution on the Continent in February increased the danger. In March there were riots in London, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Liverpool, and other large towns. On April 7th, 'The Crown and Government Security Bill,' commonly called 'The Gagging Act,' was introduced by the Government, the first reading carried by 265 to 24, and the second a few days later by 452 to 35. On the 10th of April the Government had to fill London with troops, and put the Duke of Wellington

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in command, who barricaded the bridges and Downing Street, garrisoned the Bank and other public buildings, and closed the Horse Guards.

When the momentary crisis had passed, the old soldier declared in the House of Lords that 'no great society had ever suffered as London had during the preceding days,' while the Home Secretary telegraphed to all the chief magistrates of the kingdom the joyful news that the peace had been kept in London. In April, the Lord Chancellor, in introducing the Crown and Government Security Bill in the House of Lords, referred to the fact that 'meetings were daily held, not only in London, but in most of the manufacturing towns, the avowed object of which was to array the people against the constituted authority of these realms.' For months afterwards the Chartist movement, though plainly subsiding, kept the Government in constant anxiety; and again in June, the Bank, the Mint, the Custom House, and other public offices were filled with troops, and the Houses of Parliament were not only garrisoned but provisioned as if for a siege.

From that time, all fear of serious danger passed away. The Chartists were completely discouraged, and their leaders in prison; and the upper and middle classes were recovering rapidly from the alarm which had converted a million of them into special constables, and were beginning to doubt whether the crisis had been so serious after all, whether the disaffection had ever been more than skin deep. At this juncture a series of articles appeared in the *Morning Chronicle* on 'London Labour and the London Poor,' which startled the well-to-do classes out of their jubilant and scornful attitude, and disclosed a state of things which made all fair-minded people wonder, not that there had been violent speaking and some rioting, but that the metropolis had escaped the scenes which had lately been enacted in Paris, Vienna, Berlin, and other Continental capitals.

It is only by an effort that one can now realise the strain to which the nation was subjected during that winter and spring, and which, of course, tried every individual