

HENRY WARD BEECHER. *By John Henry Barrows. New York and Toronto: Funk & Wagnalls Co. Pp. 541.*

To write the life history of Henry Ward Beecher is no mean task. The component parts of this truly wonderful life were so many, varied, and surpassingly great that to grasp, fix, and properly portray them would tax the skill of any man. It was like a great organ, with its many keys, over which the fingers sweep easily and gracefully, evoking music which thrills, moves, and lingers long in memory's halls, but which, however deep and abiding the impression, cannot be adequately described.

On the other hand, it was a life so full of real or apparent contradictions that the listener, whilst filled with admiration, was compelled frequently to ask the unwelcome question, Is this a discord? Toward the latter part of his life, as all know, he diverged in mode of presentation—which was misunderstood—or in belief, from the generally accepted lines of orthodoxy. To explain all these and account for them has greatly added to the work of the biographer. His contention that Henry Ward Beecher was a much-reviled man will, with explanations, be admitted; for whilst he was, in certain circles, the most popular of men, in the camp of the enemy he was the object of their most bitter hatred and misrepresentations, which has led to his being misjudged by those whose knowledge of him has been derived wholly from such sources.

He finds himself engaged in more congenial work when he comes to speak of Beecher's labors for the emancipation of the slave, in whose behalf he wielded a sword of true Damascus steel, which struck terror into the hearts of those who were trafficking in human beings. He did more, perhaps, than any other agency to bring about the downfall and annihilation of a system which had been a foul stain upon the Christian civilization of America.

One cannot but admire the truly Christian spirit in which he endeavors, with extreme delicacy, to lift the dark cloud which, toward the close of day, hung over this great life, dimming its splendor and filling with sadness the hearts of his many admirers.

Some will, perhaps, think that he has manifested too great anxiety to exonerate his hero from all blame. If this be a fault, then it is one which, inclining to leniency and Christian charity in judging the motives of others, will be cheerfully forgiven. May it not be that he is stating a truth not generally known, nor as fully admitted as it should be, that Henry Ward Beecher was a much misjudged because a much misreported and misrepresented man?

As to the literary character of the work, Mr. Barrows has given us a most brilliant book, written with a ready pen, which never walks with heavy