

## Our Contributors.

### CONCERNING INDIVIDUAL EFFORT.

BY KNOXONIAN.

The General Assembly has come and gone. The brethren met, made their speeches, received and adopted reports, passed resolutions, oiled the Church machinery a little at some points, put a few new wheels on the machine, and went home most of them to resume their work and mark their ballots. It was a good-natured Assembly and did its work well. The members did not groan over deficits, nor did anybody predict that anything is going to ruin. The prophesying business in the Supreme Court is as dull as the wheat market when that important cereal brings forty cents a bushel. Nobody stands up now and declares that the colleges are going to ruin, or that some of the funds are bankrupt, or that the whole Church is lapsing into heterodoxy. The history of the past shows that our people as a whole can be trusted to do their duty, and their spiritual leaders trust them. Rare indeed are the instances in which Presbyterian people as a body have gone wrong when wisely led. Our ministers and elders have a grand army of men and women to lead, and we have a pretty strong conviction that if ever the Presbyterianism of Canada dwindles and dies, the captains, not the rank and file, will be mainly to blame.

Now that the Assembly meeting is over we would like to impress upon the minds of all the good people who read this column that, humanly speaking, success depends mainly upon individual effort. A ten days' meeting of four hundred ministers and elders is an important thing, no doubt, but the work all the year round must be done by the office-bearers and members of the Church. If the people do not work, and pay, and plan, and pray a General Assembly cannot do much for them. In fact there would soon be no General Assembly if the people ceased to take an active and intelligent interest in Church affairs. The Assembly is an important and influential body mainly because it has a large, intelligent and influential body of people behind it. The members are, of course, excellent men individually, but if you took the Church from behind them they would not loom up as much as some of them did last week. The Presbyterian Church in Canada is a pretty prominent pedestal.

The elder who works up his district properly, keeps his eye on his families, helps the weak brethren, gets the careless to attend church, visits the sick, cools down friction, and looks after the young, is doing just as important work for the Church as any elder or minister did in the General Assembly.

The Sabbath school teacher who looks well after his or her class is doing just as useful work as the Assembly's Sabbath School Committee ever did or ever will do. If the teachers and officers of each school fall in their work there will soon not be anything for the committee to report except the failure.

Mission work very properly takes up a large part of the Assembly's time and attention. The real work is done in the congregations and on the mission fields. The congregations find the money and the missionaries. The Assembly through its committees disburses the money and assigns the missionaries to their work. A report of "Home Mission night" or "Foreign Mission night" looks big in print. The actual work is done by the men and women of our congregations who are scattered over the whole of Canada. The men who give the money, the women who manage the Missionary Societies, the girls who form the Mission Bands are the real workers at home. The missionaries themselves are the real workers abroad. The officials of the Assembly are workers too, but the Assembly, as such, simply has a field day on Missions. The fact is, everything in the Church de-

pends in the last analysis on individual effort. It is easy to talk about Church Courts and committees, societies and associations, and say what wonderful things they do. Even in these organized bodies nearly everything depends on individual effort. There is no church court apart from the individuals who comprise it. Committees are made up of individual men. Societies are composed of individual men or individual women. If individuals stop working the whole machinery must instantly stop.

Let each member and office bearer of the Church feel that in his own place he has work to do, and that the welfare of the Church, humanly speaking, depends on individual exertion.

As we write thousands of Canadians are having their "moment of sovereignty." In the good old times men said to their neighbours, "Did you vote?" In these modern days you must say, "Had you your moment of sovereignty?" What these moments of sovereignty may bring at five o'clock this Tuesday afternoon no human being knows. One thing, however, we do know, and that is that the future of our country depends mainly on the intelligence, industry, thrift, enterprise and moral worth of our people. When the bell rings at five o'clock this evening it may be Tupper or it may be Laurier; it may be the N. P., or freer trade; it may be coercion for Manitoba, or a settlement of the school question in some other way, but much as governments may do to help or hinder a country its future depends mainly on the character of individual citizens.

But we must go to the polling booth and have our "moment of sovereignty," and then go out on the concessions and do pastoral work in the afternoon as an illustration of our theory of individual effort.

### THE LIFE OF JOHN STERLING.

BY REV. W. G. JORDAN, B. A.

In these days when there is so much reviewing of new books, and when so many people gain whatever knowledge they possess of contemporary literature from the "views and reviews" furnished by journals and magazines, it may be well sometimes to pay a tribute to the past by reviewing a book that does not force itself upon us with the pretentious claim of novelty. And even in a journal, the greater portion of whose space is devoted to direct evangelical teaching, or to the discussion of Church questions, it may not be amiss to have an outlook towards that realm which belongs more strictly to literature than to theology. Biography is acknowledged to be a very important branch of literature, the story of any man who has faced the battle of life with real earnestness is sure to furnish helpful lessons. Many books of this class have a very short day and then cease to be, the new claimants for attention are so numerous that only a few biographies can according to the law of "the survival of the fittest" reach the rank of classics, and enjoy an enduring fame. It is generally agreed that Carlyle's life of Sterling owes more of its interest to its writer than to its subject, as "In Memoriam" speaks to us more of Tennyson than of Arthur Hallam.

But there is a sad, sweet interest about the life of this young man who was both fortunate and unfortunate; and it certainly mirrors for us one form of the battle between faith and unbelief which goes on in every society, and in every awakened soul. "On September 18th, 1844, Sterling passed out of life to be enrolled with Edward King and Arthur Hallam in the select list of those who have owed their fame to their friends." We have already admitted the substantial truth of this statement, but feel that there must have been something noble about a man who inspired the enthusiastic affection of some of the greatest thinkers of the present century. If his life was more in the promise than the performance, more in the capacity than the expres-

sion, are there not many striving souls who fall utterly in the effort to express their deep life, and is not our faith in the great future on the one side a cry for the completion of lives which have here been but an inspiration and a hope?

J. S. Mill at one time thought of writing a biography of Sterling. The memoir written by Archdeacon Hare was expected to serve all practical purposes, but it was considered so unsatisfactory by many competent judges that Carlyle felt himself compelled to take up the task. Hare's book we have not had the good fortune to see, and so cannot pass any judgment upon it, but we are told on good authority that "elegant, interesting and affectionate as it is, it has been completely obliterated by Carlyle's." Carlyle himself tells us that the Archdeacon's work was done in a manner surely far superior to the common, in every good quality of editing; and visibly everywhere bearing testimony to the friendliness, plcity, perspicacity and other gifts and virtues of that eminent and able man." But the complaint was that Sterling's life had been written from a purely ecclesiastical standpoint, "as if religious heterodoxy had been the grand fact of his life." Hence his friend must sorrowfully undertake the sacred task of setting forth the real facts of the case, and give the whole life in its true proportions from a different position. Very good, but no man can jump off his own shadow, and even the "man of letters" has his limitations and his aversion to religious newspapers and Heresy-hunters may form a bias of another kind.

However, we did not set out with the intention of discussing this book from the point of view of the Church of England or any other Church. Though our opinion on the point is not of much importance, we rejoice in it as a beautiful piece of literary work, on the whole sober in its style and tender in its tone. It came upon the world, at the first, as a glad surprise. Many who had judged the author to be a raving maniac, delighting in fiery denunciation of men and things, were ready to acknowledge that here the struggles of a gentle, gifted spirit were depicted with true sympathy and quiet strength. There was in the volume little trace of the two styles which have been defined as "Æschylous and Buriæschylous," but all through a chastened tone as of one in the presence of friendship and death. In other words the style is appropriate to the matter in hand, and what greater compliment can be paid to any style. As to the substance of the book, it is a real biography of the man whose name it bears, while it indirectly reveals the author's attitude and spirit towards the great questions which must always awaken interest and produce controversy, whether they appear in philosophic or poetic form or are dressed in ecclesiastical garb. It has been pointed out that the introduction of two such strong personalities as Coleridge and Captain Sterling threaten to throw the real subject into the shade, but Carlyle has skillfully taken care that his friends should have due prominence in the essay dedicated to his name.

It seems strange to find a biography beginning with the opinion, "How happy it comparatively is for a man of any earnestness of life to have no biography written of him; but to return silently with his small *sorely-spoiled bit of work to the Supreme Silences*, etc," and with the acknowledgment, "That Sterling's performance and real or seeming importance in this world was actually not of a kind to demand an express biography, even according to the world's usages. His character was not supremely original; neither was his fate in the world wonderful"—but so it is, for Carlyle is not as any other man. Of more interest, perhaps, to us now are the following statements: "Of all men he was the least prone to what you could call scepticism, diseased self-listenings, self-questionings, impotently painful dubitations, all this fatal nosology of spiritual maladies, so rife in our day, was eminently foreign to him." "It is by no means as a vanquished *doubter* that

he figures in the memory of those who knew him, but rather as a victorious *believer*, and under great difficulties a victorious *doer*."

With these general warnings, we pass on to "John Sterling and his Pilgrimage through our Poor Nineteenth Century." This is sketched from birth to death: the school days and college life, the entrance into the Church, and speedy flight from it, the many wanderings in search of health, the social relationships, literary ventures, and poetic aspirations; all these are set forth in short space but with great clearness and vividness. Carlyle gives a brief sketch of the father, Edward Sterling, "the Thunderer of the *Times* newspaper," and pays this tribute to the mother: "A fine, tremulously sensitive nature, strong chiefly on the side of the affections, and the graceful insights and activities that depend on these—truly a beautiful, much-suffering, much-loving house mother." Sterling was fortunate in his parents, in his worldly position, in his friends, but in spite of all these things, which men value so much, a short life that was spent partly in fleeing from death, and partly in struggling after an unattainable ideal, comes to us with an unexpressible note of sadness.

We cannot dwell at length upon his college days at Cambridge, where he had Julius Hare as tutor, and as friends F. D. Maurice and others who afterwards attained some prominence in literature or theology.

Two glimpses we bear away from this period—the delicate young man standing with heroic self-forgetfulness in the river, handing out buckets of water to quench a fire in one of the college buildings; and the brilliant debates speaking of the Church with "a black dragon in every parish, on good pay and rations." Then comes the difficulty in choosing a profession. We need not discuss the biographer's treatment of the three great "professions," since he admits that Sterling was unfit for them as they for him. "In Parliament such a soul put into a body of due toughness might have carried it far." "In lucid, ingenious talk and logic, in all manner of brilliant utterance and tongue fence, I have hardly known his fellow." But as Sterling has not got "the body of due toughness," the only form of public life that suited him was "the anarchic nomadic, entirely aerial and unconditional one called literature." So here we have Maurice and Sterling in the character of journalists, sustaining for a while the *Athenæum*, which was then in its days of infancy and weakness. As Sterling about this time came under the influence of Coleridge, we have a chapter on that great thinker, in which we learn what his admirers thought of him, and what Carlyle thought of him. "He was thought to hold, he alone in England, the key of German and other Transcendentalisms; knew the sublime secret of believing with the 'Reason' what the understanding had been obliged to fling out as incredible; and could still, after Hume and Voltaire had done their best and worst with him, profess himself an orthodox Christian," etc. "A subtle, lynx-eyed intellect, tremulous, pious, sensibility to all good and beautiful; truly a ray of empyrean light;—but imbedded in such weak laxity of character, in such indolences and esurieneces as had made strange work with it. Once more the tragic story of a high endowment with an insufficient will." This chapter in which, as Mr. Garnet says, "Coleridge is clothed in purple for the sacrifice," demands a careful reading from the student of literature and theology, but it is not likely that John Sterling could ever have accepted it as a full and sufficient account of Coleridge.

Those who want Romance will find it in the account of Sterling's Relationship to the Spanish Exiles, telling how he narrowly escaped being shot by a marine policeman, and how afterwards in his West Indian solitudes, when he hears of fifty five Spaniards and one Englishman (his cousin Robert Boyd, whom he had thoughtlessly killed in that foolish and fruitless enterprise) doomed to instant military execution, and cries "—"