John Thadeus Delane, Editor of The Times



LARGE circle, both of men of the world and of men of letters, will welcome the appearance of a life of Mr. Delane. Nearly thirty years have elapsed since his death, and the great majority of those who knew him best, and with whom his active years were spent, have passed away. But many of the younger men who knew him in his prime are still with us, and will find a rare

pleasure in renewing their associations with one of the most brilliant and most beloved characters of their remembrance, says the London Times book reviewer. It is a misfortune that the life could not be written by the hand to which it was first entrusted, that of his brother-in-law, Sir George Dasent, who was his colleague till within nine years of the close of his editorial career, and who, as the letters in these volumes show, was throughout on terms of the closest intimacy and affection with him. But, beside other objections, it is clear that insuperable difficulties would have been found in publishing the letters, and revealing the secrets, within Sir George Dasent's life, of distinguished persons then living; and even now the publication of some of the letters and statements in these volumes may be unwelcome in several quarters. It may be wished that the responsibility for the choice of such letters and for the revelation of such incidents had been in the hands of one who would have been capable of estimating the propriety of their publication from Delane's own point of view. Sir George Dasent, moreover, having himself lived through all the critical periods of Delane's life, would have been capable of describing his acts and motives with fuller sympathy than any one else. But, failing the father, we may be glad that the task has been discharged by his son, Mr. Arthur Dasent, who, from the office he has held in the House of Commons, knows something of public life, and who, of course, has had the advantage of the traditions and the private papers of his family.

It will, however, be apparent on the face of the book that these personal advantages are all that Dasent has enjoyed, and that his publication is quite independent of the paper which Mr. Delane edited. The letters which concern his connection with this journal have in fact been published without any consultation with its proprietors; and exception may well be taken to the propriety, if not to the legality, of the publication, without leave asked, of letters written, not in Mr. Delane's private capacity, but in the discharge of his office as editor. It was not simply as Mr. Delane, but as editor of the Times, that he was in confidential communication with the Queen; and though, perhaps, no great harm has been done, the courtesy of consultation with those who are officially interested in such letters might have been expected. It is, moreover, a breach of a well-recognized understanding that, in too many cases, the is disclosed, especially when the names of living persons are thus involved. In letters from Delane which indicate specifically by whom an important article was written, the name of the writer, at all events if living, should have been omitted. That in all cases the reference is more than thirty years old may minimize the offence, and we do not wish to dwell on it. But the fact remains that in too many cases secrets and confidences have been revealed without the courtes; of consulting those who are their present wardens. With this necessary protest, however, it is a pleasure to admit that the narrative is generally marked by creditable reserve and consideration, and that much has been properly held back for the present which might have touched living characters and interests too closely. On one point, indeed, more might have been said with due regard to the living representa-

tives of those who have passed away. Delane was, no doubt, during his editorship, the greater part of the Times; but he was by no means the whole of it. The successive chief proprietors under whom he worked were by no means mere wheels in the machine; and the two managers with whom he was associated were men whose judgment and collaboration were of no slight value. Nor must it be forgotten that he was assisted by a very able staff of leader-writers, foreign correspondents, and others, to whom he would have readily acknowledged his indebtedness. A great part of his power, in fact, lay in his openness of mind and his capacity to use and assimilate the thoughts of others; and though he assumed the whole responsibility of his actions, he would have been the last to ignore the guidance he derived from other minds and other

Subject, however, to these qualifications, and to some omissions which we shall point out, it is a pleasure to recognize that these volumes will afford a fair conception of Delane's chareer, and of the qualities which rendered it so signally successful and useful. The author, indeed, indulges occasionally in some exaggeration pardonable in a nephew, as when he says of his uncle:-

"How great a general or how good a judge, how noble a diplomatist or how far-sighted a minister he might have been, the world will never know; but those who worked with him by day and night knew that in his conduct of the Times he displayed by turns all the characteristics of those noble professions."

We should like to have heard Mr. Delane's own criticism of that generalization. But it is true that the foundation of his success was laid in his general qualities as a man. The author does well to dwell on his early life in the country near Ascot, on his fondness for hunting and field sports, and on the eagerness with which he maintained this love of horses and sporting all through his life. Till near the close of his life he looked much more like a country gentleman in London than like a journalist who worked all through the night. This habit not, only maintained his health and vigor, but was the key to his whole turn of mind. He was essentially a man of action, and his literary and journalistic work was merely a means to practical ends. In any crisis he was like a man in the hunting field, and rode straight after the quarry. habits were, moreover, the necessary condition for the friendly relations he maintained with the leaders of society, and enabled him to be at home, as few literary men could be, in all the great country houses. As the author observes, he never carried his literary associations with him, except as a man of unusually wide and general culture. He was thus above all things a man; and it was the manliness, the decision, the courage, the broad, human sympathy of his nature, which gave its chief character to his whole career.

Starting from this thorough English charauthorship of particular articles in the Times acter and training, we follow him, under Mr. Dasent's guidance, in the rapid growth of his associations with nearly all the leading statesmen and public men of his day. He became editor in 1841, when the Times under the second John Walter and Barnes had achieved a great position, and in 1848 we find him in intimate correspondence with Lord Aberdeen, Sir Charles Wood, the Rothschilds, and soon afterwards with Lord Clarendon, Lord Palmerston, and Disraeli. With Lord John Russell he does not seem to have had any friendly relations, and, though there was communication from time to time with Sir Robert Peel, there was no such free correspondence with him as with the other statesmen. It is remarkable that he seems to have commanded the confidence of all alike, whatever their party views or connections may have been. He and the Times at that day gave expression no doubt to public opinion, or at least to the public

opinion of the constituencies, in a degree never exhibited, perhaps, either before or since; and the object of his ministerial correspondents was partly to learn from Delane the drift of that opinion and partly to influence it; and his importance lay in his extraordinary capacity for divining what that opinion was and was likely to be. A very just remark is quoted from Mr. Mobray Morris on this point:

It is these flashes of pure intuition which save him. If he were in the habit of hesitating he would often go wrong. But, being what he is, even when taken entirely by surprise, he

rarely makes a mistake. All this, of course, was dependent to a vast extent on his living in daily intercourse with men of all kinds-men about town like Charles Greville, with whom he was closely associated, members of parliament, men of letters and science, university men and clergy-men. A single day would bring him into contact with a vast variety of characters. His horse was brought to his chambers in Serjeants' Inn in the afternoon, add he would ride it slowly down to Westminster and there spend some time in the House of Commons or House of Lords, learning the political situation of the day, then ride on quietly to Lady Palmerston's or Baroness Rothschild's, and catch the tone of social gossip, then come back to the Athenaeum or the Reform club, and learn the drift of opinion there. Besides this he had his hand on the public pulse through the correspondence which reached the papers; and the whole became formed into a clear image in his mind. He is well described by a correspondent in these pages as the best informed man in England, and perhaps in Europe. All forms of opinion gravitated naturally towards him, and his mind was independent enough to sift and balance it. He was rarely, if ever, led away by one clique of opinion, and the saying might well be applied to him that "he saw life whole." Of course it was in the main his personal character which attracted and secured all the confidences which gave him this insight into public opinion; and perhaps it should be regarded as the grand achievement of his whole life, that which made his career possible, that he commanded such trust from men of the most diverse characters, and sometimes commanded their devotion. The letters of Lord Torrington in these volumes afford, perhaps, the most striking illustration of his power in this respect. They contain the most frank revela-tions of the feelings of the Court, and are evidently written not as mere interesting gossip, but as materials for the guidance of a man on whom the writer places absolute reliance. It would seem from them that Delane was the means of conveying to the Queen, from time to time, in a singularly effective manner, the feeling of the country as to her retirement from public life, and in such delicate matters

and in any circumstances. Mr. Dasent gives also a fair conception of the main principles by which Delane was actuated in guiding the policy of his paper. There is not, throughout these letters, a single indication of party feeling or party attachment. Perhaps if his personal political position had to be stated, it would be best described in Thiers's brilliant phrase, only possible by a Frenchman in a French assembly, that "the heart of France beats centre left." But his heart beat centre left not from his attachment to any particular set of statesmen, whether Tories or Whigs, but from his devotion to the general welfare of the nation, and his desire to promote every measure which

as to her relations between the Prussian and

Holstein difficulty. Never once, apparently, in the course of these long and intricate cor-

respondence does Delane seem to have com-

promised his position by a false step. He is,

throughout, not merely a skilful editor, but

an independent gentleman, who holds his own

with dignity and independence in any society

Danish courts at the time of the Schleswig-

would advance its interests and the interests of the people at large. At the outset of the Russo-Turkish troubles in 1853 he addressed a letter to the Constantinople correspondent of the Times in a strain which admirably characterizes his unvarying point of view:-

"As it would seem that you never take the trouble of reading the opinions of the paper with which you correspond, I must begin by informing you that whatever concern it may have in the well-being of Turkey, it owes a higher duty to the people of the United Kingdom, who are willing to support Turkey as far as they conceive it to be for their interest, but acknowledge no obligation, either by treaty or by implication, to shed their blood or spend their money in its behalf. . . . No doubt the British ambassador and the handful of English and refugees at Constantinople would find their importance much increased by the exertions their countrymen might make and the millions they might spend on behalf of Turkey, but English statesmen have at least as much reason to consider Lancashire and Yorkshire, Kent and Middlesex, as Moldavia and Wallachia, and owe their allegiance to the Queen and not to the Sultan."

This passage may be compared with Bismarck's declaration that he would not sacrifice the bones of a single Pomeranian Grenadier in the Eastern question. It expresses Delane's settled and paramount point of view, from which he judged every question that arose, whether of foreign or domestic policy, whether the Corn Laws, or Reform, or Army organization, or Lord Shaftesbury's benevolent schemes. It was this which, in addition to a naturally congenial temperament, was the foundation of his close alliance with Palmerston, who was above all an Englishman and made English interests his first consideration. It was the sense that this was the guiding principle of the paper which gave it its commanding influence. Delane was never a cross-bench man, though he was never identified with either party; but he gave his support to each, as the best interests of the country at large might seem to require.

The letter just quoted has the further interest of being a brilliant example of his best epistolary style. In his writing there was never any endeavor after effect, no attempt at epigrammatic expression; but he went straight to the point and hit it hard. Several other examples of his letters to his staff are given here-some which ought not to have been given—and they are all marked by the same characteristics. The one necessity in style on which he insisted was that it should be simple and clear, and he set an admirable example in his own letters. However hastily they might have to be written, they were always so well expressed that they might have been printed as they came from his pen. It is pleasant in this correspondence to be sensible always of the style of a gentleman. There is an elevation of thought and tone in them all which is an agreeable contrast to the carelessness and slang of modern writing knew Delane well will testify that in no circumstances of strain and pressure, however severe, did he lower the high tone of his thought or conversation. The exchange of a few words with him, even at midnight, added a dignity to the subject in hand. There are few things for which the country and the press are more indebted to him than for the steadiness with which he thus upheld the literary standard of journalism and the dignities and graces of life. He thought, wrote, spoke, and acted like a gentleman, and a gentleman of the best English traditions.

All this is well brought out in Mr. Dasent's volumes; but there are some omissions and deficiencies which we lament. It ever since. . . In this frame of mind I is strange, for instance, that we have no cormeet the New Year, weary both of work and respondence to illustrate the active part which idleness, careless about society, and with fail-Delane took in supporting Mr. Cardwell's re-organization of the army in Gladstone's first even in such brilliant things as these.

ministry. Cardwell was in constant communication with him on the subject, and Delane entered into the question with the greatest earnestness and thoroughness. But what we most miss in these volumes is any adequate notice—we might say any notice—of Delane's close association with leading men of science. and his stanch support of scientific developments. Mr. Dasent would seem a little dazzled sometimes by the great society in which his uncle moved; and we are rather satiated, if not something more, by pages of extracts which recall how he dined day after day with the duke of this and the marquis of that, and met such and such lords and ladies. All that was part of Delane's business, and he did i well. But we could have spared a good deal of it to have the public told how he followed the great discoveries of that brilliant scientific era, never failed to call due attention to the records of the advance of science in the meetings of the British association, took care that due honor was rendered, at least in public opinion, to men like Faraday, Tyndall, and Huxley, and, perhaps above all, supported the advances that were being made in the science of public health. He was an intimate friend of Sir John Simon, whose privy council reports laid the foundation of the improvements in public sanitation which have conferred such infinite boons on the country. It was Delanc who, more than any one else, ensured that due attention should be paid to those reports, and thus that due action should be taken on them. We are sorry, too, to find no notice taken of his action in ecclesiastical affairs, in which he promoted the most moderate and soundest tendencies in the Church. The book, indeed, shows many marks of haste-once or twice in the evidently unconscious repetition of important quotations. But still, on the whole, the general reader may obtain from it a sufficient general view of the character which played so large a part in the life of this country for nearly forty years of the most brilliant part of Queen Victoria's reign.

thanking Mr. Dasent for lifting the veil, with fitting reserve, from the home life of the man who was known to the world only as the great editor. One short note reveals, the tragedy of his married life. "Owing to a deplorable mental failing the happiness of the union was short-lived, and Mrs. Delane was separated from her husband after a few years of married life, and placed under medical care." Thenceforth he was wedded to his paper, and a great part of the secret of his life is inshrined in that brief reference. His do-mestic happiness was with his mother and sister; and a peculiarly beautiful glimpse is vouchsafed to us of his devotion to his mother, and of his desolation when she died. We are told that in the busiest time of his life not a day passed without his writing to her, and the conclusion of a letter to her (p. 19%, vol. II.) is one of the most touching things in the book. A note in his diary at the close of 1860 may fitly close, with a touch of true human teeling, our respectiu name must ever be held in affection in this office, and, as we believe, in high honor in the records of English life. "This year," he says, "has been in one respect a most melancholy one for me; but in material respects I have very much to be thankful for. The death of my dear mother after a short illness was a blow which, although in the course of nature. found me utterly unprepared. I seem to have lost in her a motive for living-so much was I accustomed to act as I thought might please her, and to take her into account in anything I said or did. Nobody now cares about me or my aims, or my motives, and that weariness of life I had long felt has been gaining on me

We cannot conclude, however, without





A Romance of Badenoch

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