

SPECIAL
ARTICLES

Our Contributors

BOOK
REVIEWS

IAN MACLAREN.

Review in Belfast Witness.

Dr. Robertson Nicoll has been well advised in preparing this brief biography of a charming personality. Dr. John Watson, better known by his pen name of Ian MacLaren, was first and foremost a deeply religious man, and devoted Minister of Jesus Christ. Then he was also a genial humanist, a kindly humorist, a writer of books that have carried a wholesome, happy atmosphere into many thousand homes on both sides of the Atlantic. As Presbyterians we were all proud of him as an ornament of our Communion, and we understood and enjoyed his delightful books; as Christians we were thankful that such talents were consecrated to the service of God, and the salvation and succor of his fellow-men. Some things here told will supplement for many their knowledge of Dr. Watson, and surprise them considerably. That he was a Scottish Highlander on both father's and mother's side all of us knew. But many did not know that he was a Jacobite of decided principles, and took from a Jacobite song the title of his first book. In politics he was constitutionally Conservative and Imperialist; such as the Boer war he was distressed by the display of unpatriotic feelings by Little Englanders and pro-Boers, and he rejoiced when his son went to the front as a soldier of the Queen. He was saddened, as most of us were at the time, by the ravings of certain writers and speakers, who praised every other country and abused their own. It will be news, also to many that Dr. Watson had among his ancestors a Roman Catholic, and that strand entered into the twist of his temperament through life, so that after ordination he wore a hair shirt for a time, and practised some other ascetic austerities. Throughout his Liverpool Ministry he lived on friendly terms with Roman Catholics; but, indeed, he cultivated peace and goodwill towards all sorts and conditions of men. It was part of that humanism which Dr. Nicoll describes in the finest sentence in this book—"For the innocent gaiety and lighter follies of youth he had a vast tolerance, for the sudden disasters of manhood an unflinching charity, for the unredeemed tragedies of age a great sorrow."

This breadth of sympathy, no doubt born with him, was confirmed by a large and liberal education; four years at Edinburgh University, four at the Presbyterian College, a half year at Tübingen, in Germany. With all this and his own studies, which were extensive, he settled finally into a theological position, which, if it was broad, was distinctly Evangelical. While he sympathized with the spirit and attitude of the Established Church of Scotland rather than the Free Church, yet Dr. Nicoll states with full knowledge that he held tenaciously, and to the end, all the vital, spiritual essentials of Evangelical Christianity, with a special faith and hope of personal immortality. His manifesto at his first sermon in Liverpool ran—"I promise, by the grace of God, and according to my ability, to preach the Cross of Christ. The Cross, as I understand it, combines the doctrine of forgiveness and the doctrine of holiness. Christ, who is our sacrifice, is also our ideal. Pray that I may deal honestly with intellectual difficulties, and wisely with cases of conscience;

that I may speak tenderly to mourners, and simply to the children; to offer a full and free Christ to sinners, and exhorting the saints to follow Him more closely." All this, it is well known. Dr. Watson constantly and consistently carried out. We who have heard him preach can testify to the Keltic fire of his preaching, his intense yet controlled earnestness and urgency, the humanness of sympathy and tenderness that reached and touched every heart. He did not deal much in scholastic theology, but in those primal spiritual essentials which come home to every man's conscience and soul. He had no faith in sermons on Biblical criticism and philosophy. Of evangelistic preaching he said—"It has seemed to me, as a rule, careless to a scandal, and almost squalid in style, with vain repetitions of hackneyed words by way of exhortation, and incredible anecdotes by way of illustration." He attached great importance to the conduct of public worship, and prepared most carefully the prayers to be offered in church.

It is very interesting to read in this biography that the busy Minister of a large city congregation was so energetic a Pastor in systematic visitation of the people. Even after he became famous, and was pressed by extra public duty, Dr. Watson never neglected personal attention to every family and every member. We know that in New York Dr. John Hall shone in that duty; but Hall had never the literary work of Watson, which must have consumed much time and thought. His diligence in Pastoral visitation was part of his conscientious feeling that the Ministry was his real, solid work, and his books, especially his "Scottish Idylls," a sort of mere by-product. If such busy men as John Watson and John Hall make time to visit every church member, what a stimulus the example becomes to other Ministers with more time on their hands! In the public life of Liverpool Dr. Watson took a lively interest, and an active part. He did so on principle, he believed that Christianity was a social and civic power for good, and that the Christian Minister was called upon to help the cause of public and civic righteousness. As a result of this, his congregation furnished no less than six Lord Mayors of Liverpool, and on his death the city ordained a public funeral, which was witnessed and shared in by sixty thousand persons of all creeds and classes.

We have only to refer, and more briefly, to his literary labors. Under the name of Ian MacLaren he was induced by Dr. Nicoll to write sketches of Highland character, the materials of which he gathered in his first parish of Logiehead, among the Grampians. The best of these were the "Lad o' Pairie" and the country physician, "Weelum MacLure." Published in a volume—"Beside the Bonnie Brier Bush"—the book sold marvellously, 250,000 copies on this side, and nearly 500,000 in America. The Idylls were completed in a second volume, "The Days of Auld Lang Syne." A regular novel was attempted later, but was not a great success. In these books the biographer admits the writer indulged the sentimental vein, but we agree with him that the sentimental is a quite legitimate vein. It is known that another later writer produced "The House with the Green Shutters," to show up the sordid and seamy side of the Scottish character.

But if Ian MacLaren's peasants and others are all amiable and good, everyone must feel that the sordid and vulgar and irreligious people who figure in "The House with the Green Shutters" are much less typical, less true to nature than Doctor MacLure and the other inhabitants of Drumtochty. If Goldsmith's folk in the "Deserted Village" are idealized, it is much better for the people for their moral improvement and happiness that their popular writers should idealize in the manner of Goldsmith and Ian MacLaren.

Under his proper name Dr. Watson published several books, the most useful of them being "The Cure of Souls." In a delightfully human way it goes into the details of the pastoral life. It is a book that should be read carefully by all ministers of Christ. In "The Mind of the Master" he used some unguarded language which created a breeze in the Presbytery, but his explanations were accepted as satisfactory, and the matter was dropped. As to Dr. Watson's lecturing tours in America there is little need to write. He liked the crowds, the enthusiasm, the making of new friends. Certainly the lectures brought him both praise and solid pudding. But they overtaxed his strength, as in the case of Dickens before him, and on a lecturing tour he died suddenly at the early age of fifty-seven. Thus closed a career at once brilliant and useful. Watson was not a man whose great genius removes him from our sympathy and our imitation. All the more, therefore, his character and career furnish a happy stimulus to ordinary ministers. All may imitate his devotion to duty, his resolve to make his pulpit a power for good, his minute pastoral diligence, his human kindliness to all sorts of people, his cheery hopefulness and abounding good nature.

LITERARY NOTES.

"The Revocation of Treaty Privileges to Alien Subjects" is fully and ably discussed in the October number of the Nineteenth Century by the Hon. Mr. Justice Hodgins, of Toronto. "The Value of Canadian Preference," by Viscount Milner, will also be read by many in this country with no small degree of interest, in view of that nobleman's recent tour of the Dominion. In this article Lord Milner controverts the view that the preference is of little or no value, as maintained by Free Importers in England.

A good average number is the Contemporary Review for October. The articles are as follows: Great Britain and Germany, by Harold Spencer; The Alleged Transmission of Acquired Character, by Dr. W. A. Reid; Modern Priests of Baal, by Enid Campbell Dawncey; A Slump in French Socialism, by Laurence Jerrold; The Treatment of Women Prisoners, by Elizabeth Sloan Cheeser, M. B.; Proportional Representation in Belgium, by Colin H. Humphreys; The Origin of the Dog, by Woode Hutchinson, M.D.; Poor Relief in Switzerland, Part I, by Edith Sellers; The Early Days of Joseph Blanco-White, by Olive Birrell. Dr. E. J. Dillon deals with "Foreign Affairs" in his usually bright and comprehensive style; while in a "Literary Supplement" and in the "Reviews of Books" will be found a large variety of interesting matter. New York: Leonard Scott Publication Co., Publishers.