

## Our Library.

No. 7.

"The Modern British Plutarch; or Lives of men distinguished in the recent History of England for their talents, virtues, or achievements. By W. C. Taylor, L. L. D., of Trinity College, Dublin, Author of 'A Manual of Ancient and Modern History.'"

A more useful and, at the same time, entertaining work could scarcely be placed upon the shelf of a library, than this excellent compend of the lives of thirty-eight statesmen, poets, philosophers, generals, etc., whose names are familiar to us as "household words," yet whose histories are seldom as well treasured up in the memory. We select the following—

"DR. ADAM CLARKE, the most learned of modern commentators on the Holy Scriptures, was the son of the parish schoolmaster of the village of Moybeg, in the north of Ireland, where he was born about the year 1760. His parents brought him up very hardily, accustoming him from infancy to bear exposure to the vicissitudes of the seasons, and to take abundant exercise in the open air. His constitution was thus gradually strengthened, and his powers of endurance became fitted for the labors of his future life. At school, his early progress was very slow; his first attempts to master any difficulty were repeatedly unsuccessful; but he had the determination to persevere, and whatever he acquired he afterward retained. He was passionately fond of reading, and devoted all the time he could spare from school, or the labors of the farm, to devouring every book of amusement or instruction on which he could lay his hand. When he was about the age of sixteen, the preaching of Mr. Barber, a zealous and intelligent member of the Methodist connection, produced such an effect on his mind, that he embraced the doctrines of that body, and abandoned the ordinary indulgences of youth to cultivate religious knowledge. His intellectual studies were not neglected; he believed that religion was intimately connected with learning and science; indeed, his own experience taught him, every advance in piety was accompanied by an increased capacity for acquiring general information.

It was the intention of his parents to put him into business; but a friend having written an account of his character and pursuits to the Rev. John Wesley, that excellent man offered to receive him into Kingswood School, that he might qualify him for the office of a Methodist preacher.

On arriving at Liverpool, he very narrowly escaped from impressment, and his remembrance of the danger he had escaped from impressment, and his remembrance of the danger he had escaped made him a firm opponent of this system of recruiting the navy. Kingswood School was at this time kept by Mr. and Mrs. Simpson, who were harsh, uncharitable, and severe, and who, consequently, were not disposed to give a kindly welcome to a new lad from the north of Ireland, who presented himself at their door, soiled by travel, and having only three half-pence in his pocket. The harsh treatment he received would have driven a person of weaker mind to despair; but he endured it patiently until the arrival of Mr. Wesley, who expressing a favorable opinion of his acquirements, led to some improvement. It was at Kingswood that Clarke first commenced his oriental studies; a half-guinea, which he picked up in the garden, and for which no owner could be found, enabled him to purchase a Hebrew grammar; and it is no wonder that, when he subsequently viewed the great results of his studies, he was led to regard the finding of the half-guinea as a special interposition of Providence.

In September, 1782, being only in his eighteenth year, and looking still younger, Adam Clarke commenced his career as an itinerant preacher, at Bradford, in Wils. Though his boyish appearance was at first rather unfavorable to the efficacy of his instructions, when his acquirements began to be better appreciated, curiosity was excited to hear the youthful preacher, and many "who came to scoff remained to pray." The few moments that could be spared from the laborious duties of his circuit were devoted to study, and an injudicious associate blamed him for bestowing attention upon human learning. The scruple thus suggested withdrew the young man for some time from the study of the classics; but Mr. Wesley having recommended him to preserve whatever knowledge he had acquired, he resumed his studies with fresh ardor.

The hardships which itinerant preachers had to endure at this period were of the most painful nature; the salary from which they had to provide books and clothes was only twelve pounds per annum; most of the congregations were poor, and many members who could afford contributions were very slow in rendering aid. Besides, the Methodists were unpopular, and the lives of the preachers were frequently exposed to the fury of angry multitudes. Adam Clarke had a full share of danger and distress, but his labors as a preacher were not interrupted, neither was his study of biblical literature discontinued. Being sent as a missionary to the Channel Islands, he obtained a little more leisure than he had enjoyed on circuit; he devoted himself to oriental studies, and his progress was truly astonishing. A little before this he had been married to Miss Cooke, whose gentle, affectionate disposition cheered him in his studies, and comforted him when he was weary.

In August, 1790, Mr. Clarke visited Dublin as a delegate to the Irish from the English Conference. While in the metropolis of his native country he founded the Strangers' Friend Society, a benevolent and highly useful institution, the rules and plan of which have been adopted in almost all of the great cities of the empire. At the same time he became eager to acquire

the elements of medical science, and having entered himself as a student in Trinity College, he attended the usual courses of lectures. His proficiency in these studies was probably not great; but some of the notes in his Commentary display considerable knowledge of chemistry.

In the year 1796, Mr. Clarke, having been appointed to the London Circuit, which afforded him large literary opportunities, began to make collections for his Commentary. He continued this labor as opportunities offered at the different places whither he was sent, and did not relax during the years 1798 and 1799, when England was afflicted with scarcity, and he and his young family had to endure a full share of the general distress. His erudition began to be generally known, and on the formation of the Bible Society he became a member of the committee. His extensive knowledge of the oriental languages was now called into active exercise, and his services in revising translations were deemed so important, that an official request was made to the Conference that he should be permitted to remain in London, instead of being transferred from a metropolitan to a provincial circuit, according to the general rule. This request was of course granted, and his labors of translation were resumed with fresh energy; offers of remuneration were made him by the Bible Society, but he refused to receive any reward. The Senate of the University of Aberdeen, however, conferred upon him the honorary title of Doctor of Laws, without solicitation and without fees.

It is not our purpose to enter into any details of Dr. Clarke's exertions as a Methodist preacher; these would only be interesting to the members of that connection, and in some cases might involve points of controversy. We need only mention, that he was indefatigable in the discharge of the duties he had undertaken, and particularly zealous in promoting missionary exertions, both by influence and example. He made several tours in Ireland, and always showed himself anxious for the spiritual welfare of his native land; he twice visited the remote Shetland Isles, and exerted himself to procure spiritual instruction for this remote and to some extent neglected portion of the British population.

Having been appointed by the Commissioners of Public Records to superintend the publication of the state papers designed to continue Rymers's *Fœdera*, Dr. Clarke exhibited his critical sagacity in detecting the falsifications of historical documents; he completely exposed the forgery of the letter pretended to have been sent from the Chief of the Assassins, or, as he was usually called in the middle ages, the Old Man of the Mountain, to Richard Cœur de Lion, which many able writers had accepted as authentic. His friends soon observed that his labors had become too great for his health, and honorably urged in a subscription to purchase for him the estate of Millbrook, near Liverpool, whither he retired in 1815. Here his biblical researches were continued with such zeal and success, that several learned bodies, including the Royal Hibernian Academy and the Royal Asiatic Society, enrolled him among their members. In 1824 he sold Millbrook and returned to London, where the last years of his life were spent in tranquil study, only interrupted when his labors abroad were likely to advance charity or promote piety. He died in September, 1832, regretted by a wide circle of acquaintance, and by all who felt an interest in biblical criticism and oriental literature.

Dr. Clarke's great work is his Commentary on the Bible, and it is a rare example of sagacity and erudition, uniformly maintained through a work that was the labor of years. No difficulty is ever evaded; where difficulties arose, the investigations of the commentator were unwearied, and the results honestly stated. It cannot be supposed that all his conclusions will be implicitly received; but those who differ from him most must confess, that his opinions were the result of profound thought, tested by the most extensive and laborious inquiry."

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D. C. VAN NORMAN, A. M.,  
Principal.

Hamilton, March 9, 1848.

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