

FEW PERSONAL NOTES OF AMELIA BLANDFORD EDWARDS.



ONE day, whilst living at Hampstead, a friend, Eliza Miteyard, named by Douglas Jerrold "Silverpen," called upon me and asked if she might introduce a young literary fellow-worker at the British Museum, who lived in the heart of the city and had very little change of air or scene.

The day was soon named for the introduction to the young student, who was named Amelia B. Edwards.

Her appearance was pleasing. She was of medium height, and had a fine intellectual forehead; her eyes were grey, and never at rest; they were always taking in objects and looking into your brain—nothing escaped their notice. Her mouth and chin were well shaped.

We took a fancy to each other, and she became a constant inmate of our house and our intimate friend. She was a great lover of nature. My sister took her to see Hampstead Heath, and was greatly amused by her saying, "I feel quite giddy going up and down these hillocks." Little did we think that she was destined to become a great traveller! Birds were a great joy to her, and she frequently addressed the public, asking them to feed the feathered songsters when snow was on the ground and to put water for them.

Her home life was happy but very quiet and monotonous. She was an only child; her father had been a Peninsular officer; her mother was a very clever woman—descended from the Walpoles. Her means were not abundant, and she wished to add to her purse in order to buy books, which were a part of her existence. One day there was a prize offered for a story on temperance, and, although only nine years old, Miss Edwards wrote one, and, to her delight, gained the prize. At eleven she wrote a tale called "The Egyptian Princess"—this showed an early taste for the subject of Egyptology, which was to make her name famous.

She had great talent for drawing and

painting, and her sketches of the Nile and of Italy are beautiful, though she had had very little education from artists.

She studied music under Mrs. M. Bartholomew; she played the organ for years in one of the London City churches. She was a born teacher; her lessons on harmony were most interesting, and she induced even the least promising of her pupils to try their hands at composition.

Her library was her hobby and delight, and at one time she was in the habit of buying rare editions and having them handsomely bound. She had hundreds of books, but no catalogue; still she knew what books she possessed and where to find them. She had a shelf for Homer and the classics, and one for her own published books.

Miss Edwards was a most careful writer; her manuscripts were very neat and contained very few erasures. She spared no trouble and read up her subjects with great diligence. She writes, in one of her letters, "I require some accurate knowledge of the politics of the last hundred years—before I write the history of Italy. I am doing the miscellaneous things now; a few more pages are wanted—sea songs, drinking songs, about sixty pages of political songs—so I think four weeks of 'hard labour' will complete the book." She wrote short histories of England and of France. She has tried her hand at every sort of literature.

She was a constant contributor to *Chambers' Journal*. She translated Béranger's troubadours' songs; she wrote political leaders for newspapers, criticisms on the drama, reviews, words for songs which have been set to music, and numerous tales and novels. Her first novel was *My Brother's Wife*, a real life-history, published by Routledge; it was translated into Spanish. Several of her books have been translated into French and German, and have had an extensive sale. Tauchnitz has just published some of her best works—*Barbara's History, A Thousand Miles up the Nile, Untrodden Peaks and Unfrequented Valleys, Pharaoh's Fellahs and Explorers*, illustrated from her original sketches, four hundred of which she made during her sojourn of two years in Egypt.

The following extract from a letter shows what an appreciation she had of good writers. "I have the fourth volume of *Modern Painters*, by Ruskin, and am absolutely luxuriating in it. That man is the greatest poet of his age. I do not agree with his philosophy, his aesthetics or his religion once in a hundred pages, yet I read and re-read him with delight. Every sentence is an outpouring from the finest mind, the most childlike heart, the most fervent brain in all our literary world. His very errors are delightful from their innocence and their enthusiasm, and no language that I have ever yet read, whether moulded into prose or poetry, approaches the glowing eloquence of his pen—the loftiest

and the lowliest alike command his sympathies, and summon forth the marvellous imageries which inform every thought and sentence with beauty. At times one feels Ruskin is mad and has no common sense perhaps, but is uncommon poetry; there is a method in his madness which reaches almost to the divinity of inspiration and bears him up oftentimes to the gates of Heaven. I assure you such is the elevating tone, the loveliness, the sculptured purity of Ruskin's thoughts, that I believe no one could read his works without feeling the better and the wiser for them." Her admiration of Browning was great.

Miss Edwards taught herself hieroglyphics, and was complete mistress of Egyptian inscriptions and papyrus manuscripts. During her sojourn in Egypt she made a valuable collection of MSS., vases, instruments, mummies, jewels, etc. She was so deeply interested in the monuments and temples, that in 1883 she founded the Egypt Exploration Fund, which, by the munificent aid of Sir Erasmus Wilson, has now become a national undertaking. She writes, "I want to enlist my friends' sympathy and co-operation in this work, which is the great work of my life, to which I have devoted years and sacrificed everything—time, health, and the most lucrative branch of literature, taking in hand Egyptology, which does not pay at all." She writes, "All my time and all my energies having been swallowed up by the gratuitous work I have been doing for the last five years. I have lost from £700 to £800 a year." It was three years before she could enlist the interest of Mariette Pasha, Marquis and others. The labour has been great but successful. "My dream has become a reality." All who visit the Egyptian collection in the British Museum will be greatly struck and deeply grateful for all she has accomplished by founding the Exploration Fund, which is doing marvellous work. All her colleagues miss her wonderful power of organisation, tact and knowledge and influence. She left money to found a professorship of Egyptology, for which she lectured in America—"A Series of Lectures on Egypt and her Arts." She had £1,500 offered her and all her expenses besides. She unhappily met with a severe accident—fell and broke her arm in two places. Unwilling to disappoint the public, she lectured the same evening on which the accident occurred. She had had two subsequent accidents to the same arm. Her health was greatly affected by the accident and the fatigue of lecturing and travelling, and she died from an attack of bronchitis in 1892.

For the last twenty-five years of her life she scarcely put out her lamp before two o'clock in the morning. She enjoyed a joke immensely, and often made clever caricatures, a few of which have been published in THE GIRL'S OWN PAPER.

ESTHER DU BOIS.

