

## Current Literature.

### A Noted Missionary.

JOHN G. PATON. An Autobiography. Edited by his brother. First and Second Parts. New illustrated edition. Toronto: Fleming H. Revell Company. \$2.00

THE appearance of a new edition of the autobiography of John G. Paton, the missionary, shows that the keen interest with which they were first received remains undiminished in these remarkable volumes. At a time when the veteran missionary is travelling in Canada, renewing his appeal on behalf of his life work, it may be appropriate, as it must always be interesting, to give the reader a few facts of his early life and of the steps by which he was led in the providence of God to dedicate his life to the work of a missionary. He tells us that he was born in a cottage on the farm of Braehead, in the parish of Kirkmahoe, near Dumfries. His father was a stocking manufacturer in a small way. His native spot he loved intensely, and after an interval of sixty years he travelled to see it with a longing sweetened by the tender associations of childhood, but only to meet with disappointment, for the lowly cottage had been razed and the place was desolate. His reflections are pathetic as well as wise and patriotic: "Of ten thousand homes in Scotland, once sweet and beautiful, each a little possible paradise in its own well-cultivated plot, this is true to-day; and where are the healthy, happy, peasant boys and girls that such homes bred and reared? They are sweltering and struggling for existence in our towns and cities. I am told that this must be—that it is all the result of economic laws; but I confess to a deepening conviction that it need not be, and that the loss to the nation as a whole is vital if not irreparable." The author gives a happy and graphic picture of peasant life and rural scenery of Torthorwald, where his parents took up residence when he was about five years old. His home there a "but" and a "ben," was a veritable sanctuary where the boy learned to love the Lord, led and guided by the example and precept of parental piety. "Never," he says, "in temple or cathedral, on mountain or in glen can I hope to feel that the Lord God is more near, more visibly walking and talking with men, than under that humble cottage roof of thatch and oaken wattles." Mr. Paton sprang from a stock inured to hardship and nursed to endurance. His grandmother was descended from a Galloway family that fought and suffered for Christ's Crown and Covenant in Scotland's "killing time;" and his grandfather was a roving sailor on a British man-of-war, and was a prisoner on the ship of the famous pirate Paul Jones. Others of his relatives were more or less distinguished for their courage and during, and the fortitude and calm patience which we meet with in the future missionary amid unparalleled dangers and vicissitudes in the New Hebrides were to no small degree inherited from the forbears who knew not the fear of danger. The influence of the mother was thorough. This description and tribute indicate where was to be found the silken cord which bound the strong, true man: "A bright-hearted, high-spirited, patient-toiling, and altogether heroic little woman, who for about forty-three years made and kept such a wholesome, independent, God-fearing and self-reliant life for her family of five sons and six daughters, as constrains me, when I look back on it now, in the light of all I have seen and known of others far differently situated, almost to worship her memory."

Of what led to his parents' marriage the story disingenuously told by Mr. Paton is too good to pass by even at the risk of encroaching too much on space:—

Their house was on the outskirts of the moor, and life for the young girl there had not probably too much excitement. But one thing had arrested her attention. She had noticed that a young stocking-maker from the "Brig End," James Paton, the son of William and Janet there, was in the habit of stealing alone into the quiet wood, book in hand, day after day, at certain hours, as if for private study and meditation. It was a very excusable curiosity that led the young bright heart of the girl to watch him devoutly reading and hear him reverently reciting (though she knew not then, it was Ralph Erskine's "Gospel Sonnets," which he could say by heart sixty years afterwards, as he lay on

his bed of death); and finally that curiosity awed itself into a holy respect, when she saw him lay aside his broad Scotch bonnet, kneel down under the sheltering wings of some tree, and pour out all his soul in daily prayers to God. As yet they had never spoken. What spirit moved her, let lovers tell—was it all a devotion, or was it a touch of unconscious love kindling in her towards the yellow-haired and thoughtful youth? Or was it a stroke of mischief, of that teasing which so often opens up the door to the most serious step in all our lives? Anyhow, one day she slipped in quietly, stole away his bonnet, and hung it on a branch near by, while his *trance of devotion made him oblivious of all around*; then from a safe retreat she watched and enjoyed his perplexity in seeking for and finding it! A second day this was repeated; but his manifest disturbance of mind, and his long pondering with the bonnet in hand, as if almost alarmed, seemed to touch another chord in her heart—that chord of pity which is so often the prelude of love, that finer pity which grieves to wound anything nobler or tenderer than ourselves. Next day, when he came to his accustomed place of prayer, a little card was pinned against the tree just where he knelt, and on it these words:—

"She who stole away your bonnet is ashamed of what she did, she has a great respect for you, and asks you to pray for her, that she may become as good a Christian as you."

The family worshipped at the Reformed Presbyterian Church at Dumfries, the minister of which then was Rev. John McDiarmid, a man well calculated to inspire young Paton with thoughts of devoted piety and a yearning after an ideal of Christian character. At this time the parish school was fortunate in being taught by an accomplished scholar, who sent pupils direct to the university, but owing to a brutality of temper, his usefulness was greatly marred. Paton, who could not endure the rough treatment, had to leave school, and instead of going to the university from school, he remained at home and learned his father's trade, at the same time studying his Latin and Greek rudiments; for, before he was twelve years of age, he had resolved in his own mind that he would be a missionary or a minister. Saving a little money at his trade, he attended Dumfries academy. The stocking-making was now given up, but not the struggle for education, which poverty made severe, but useful in after life. His first work as a missionary was a distributor of tracts and district visitor in Glasgow; and it was so engaged that he entered the Free Normal Seminary in pursuit of his studies. Then followed a period of work as a teacher and work in the Glasgow City Mission, where an experience was gained admirably fitted to qualify him for wider responsibilities abroad. Having gone through the Divinity Hall, Mr. Paton accepted work in the New Hebrides as a colleague to Rev. John Inglis; and from that his real work in the vineyard was begun. How he laboured in this field, his privations, his wonderful escapes and his signal successes, are related in that simple, unaffected style, as eloquent as it is charming.

As to the autobiography, being one of the best known of books on missionary trials and triumphs, little need be said. Dr. A. T. Pierson, who has written the introductory note to the second volume, describes it as the "most fascinating narrative of missionary adventure and heroism and success" that he ever met and when we remember the thrilling experience of pioneer missionaries, which has been portrayed in many books by masters of the literary art, this testimony places the work on a high level. And no one can read the book without feeling the justice of the remark. As a marvellous record it is unsurpassed in the literature of adventure, and it is not without high claims as a literary production, although here an easy narrative style was all that was required in which to set effectively never-failing incidents of an extraordinary character. The work, also, is a powerful contribution to the cause of missions, and is calculated to fire the aspirations of young men burning with zeal, and to touch the hearts of those able to materially advance the cause of Christ with their worldly means. The sale of the book has been enormous, and by its circulation a monument to the missionary's work has been reared which will endure, testifying to the self denial of the man and to the wondrous grace and mercy of God.