



John Henry Shorthouse.

William Blakemore.

I KNOW no better example of a man who emerged from obscurity and became famous in a day by writing one book. It is certain that if John Henry Shorthouse had not written "John Inglesant" he would never have been heard of, because his subsequent work did not in any degree sustain the promise of his "magnum opus."

I first met this extraordinary man in a little eating house just off New Street, Birmingham, in the early seventies. It is an old-fashioned place with a number of small rooms wainscoted in oak and containing an antique fireplace with hobs. In the room where I met Shorthouse there was one small table, which would accommodate six people at a pinch. The table furnishings were unique, consisting of a rough holland tablecloth, an old fashioned plated cruet stand, half a dozen tumblers, and as many sets of black handled knives and forks. The menu consisted of broth, joint and pudding for which we were taxed the munificent sum of 6d each. There were a number of similar eating houses in Bir-

mingham in those days, but I had not previously found out this particular one. A literary friend offered to take me there in order that I might, to use his own words, "meet a little man whom nobody knew but who would some day be heard of." I went, and the little man turned out to be John Henry Shorthouse.

I see him still as I saw him that first time, and in the dimness of the little back room the first glimpse caused almost a shock, so striking was his resemblance to Charles Lamb. In fact the resemblance was in many respects remarkable. He was slight, below medium height, thin, with dark hair, a sallow skin and a typical Lamb nose. He was clean shaven, except for very small side whiskers. His figure was spare and bent, suggesting fragility, his expression somewhat inscrutable and abstracted, benign and diffident. He was a man who created an atmosphere and diffused a sensible influence. It was impossible to be in his presence without realizing something of his greatness. During the meal he did not exchange more than a dozen