

Selections.

(From the *Literary Churchman*.)

DR. KITTO.

MEMOIRS OF JOHN KITTO, D. D., F. S. A., Editor of the "Pictorial Bible," and the "Cyclopædia of General Literature," &c. Compiled chiefly from his Letters and Journals, by J. E. RYLAND, M. A., Editor of Foster's Life and Correspondence; with a Critical Estimate of Dr. Kitto's Life and Writings, by Professor EADIE, D. D., LL.D., Glasgow.—(Edinburgh: Oliphant and Sons. London, Hamilton, Adams and Co. Large 8vo, 713 pp.)

It has been remarked that,—"The fortunate subjects of biography are those, where some powerful and permanent interest is maintained; where great minds are advancing to some lofty and determinate object; and where, amid the toils or the difficulties they have to encounter, the mind of the reader feels somewhat of the same anxious and unbroken interest with which we follow the progress of the drama, or the narrative of the epic poet. Even the history of inferior men can, at times, be made interesting, when one object of admiration is seen to be steadily pursued, and one corresponding sympathy is awakened." This condition of interest has been singularly fulfilled in the biography before us. A more striking instance of 'one object of admiration,' steadily and successfully pursued, we never remember to have met with. Moreover, the person commemorated bore a name with which every one has become familiar.

John Kitto was born at Plymouth in 1804,—the son of a journeyman mason, who—

"Instead of returning home on Saturday night, would frequently send the poor lad home alone, while he spent his earnings at an alehouse, and left his wife to provide as she best could for herself and her family. Having scarcely any method of obtaining a scanty livelihood, except by charging Mrs. Kitto, when so employed, left John in charge of the younger children. In the evening, when they were gone to bed, he would try to write and read by the light of sticks which he had collected during the day."

Several amusing instances of the child's precocity are related, from which we select one. Let it be remembered that there was as yet no books for the million, and that Kitto was a forlorn, uneducated, and all but uncared-for child;—

"Not only before he was twelve years old, had he become an extensive reader, but an author, and one, too, who had earned money by his writings. The authorship, indeed, was on a scale that may excite a smile, and the remuneration in proportion; yet it was certainly a sign of mental vigor far beyond what is usual at so early an age. A cousin somewhat younger than himself, came to him one day with a penny in his hand, declaring his intention to 'buy a book with it.'—John was just then sadly in want of a penny to purchase the 'History of King Pippin,' (not Pepin), so he asked his cousin whether he bought a book for the pictures of the story.—"Oh! the story, do be sure!"—John immediately offered to write him, for a penny, a larger and better story than he could get in print for the same money, and to clench the bargain, said he would paint him a picture, at the beginning; and he knew very well that there were no painted pictures in penny books. His cousin jumped at the liberal offer of an author and artist in one; and sat down quickly on the stool to watch John's operations. When the double task was finished, John thought he had well earned the penny, and, as on reading the tale, and viewing the 'pictorial embellishment,' his cousin was of the same opinion, no one else had any right to give a different verdict."

Such was the boyhood of one, who at the end of less than forty years could boast of "a library 3,500 strong!"

But the great crisis of his life, the event that more than any other outward cause determined the peculiar mode of employing his talent occurred in 1817, when he was little more than thirteen years old. A fearful accident then befel him which, at the time, threatened to become fatal; but from the effects of which he recovered, with the exception of the total loss of the sense of hearing. He was engaged with his father, in repairing a house in Batter street, Plymouth. He had just reached the highest round of a ladder with a load of slate, and was in the act of stepping on the roof, when his foot slipped, and he was precipitated from a height of thirty-five feet on a stone pavement in the yard beneath. No limb was fractured, but he was picked up in a state of unconsciousness, from which he recovered to learn the terrible truth that he was deaf. To help his father any further was now impossible, and the

puny boy was left to follow his own devices. Literature was his ruling passion; but what were "the poor student's ways and means, and his expenditure?" Such was the title prefixed by Dr. Kitto himself to an autobiographical sketch which he contributed in 1836 to the "Penny Magazine," and from which his biographer derives the materials for his second chapter. Our readers will not be displeased to be presented with an extract from it:—

"When the books of his neighborhood had been exhausted, when halfpennies had become scarce, and could only be obtained by his own exertions, he was obliged, in order to raise funds for the purchase of books, to adopt measures, of which we shall proceed to give some account. At the port of Plymouth, most of the trading vessels, particularly those of the class called 'fishing trawlers,' discharged their cargoes in a harbor or basin called Sutton-Pool. At low water a great part of this was converted into a sort of swamp of soft black mire, rendered more intensely fetid by the influx of the town drainage, in which boys were accustomed to prope and wade, sometimes above their knees in the deepest parts, in search of bits of rope or yarn and old iron.—A pound of either of the former articles used to fetch one halfpenny, and three pounds of the latter one penny. Some clever hands, unchecked in those days by a watchful police, would gain as much as threepence a day; but Kitto's weekly profits never but once came to fourpence. By the time he had acquired some dexterity in the employment, an accident forced him to cast about for some other way of earning a penny. One day he trode on a broken bottle, and so injured his foot as to be kept home for several weeks. While thus laid aside, it struck him that he might turn to account the remains of the box of water-colors which he had employed in decorating the prints that were contained in the little books he then possessed. He determined on drawing some fine pictures, and selling them for one halfpenny or a penny each. This brilliant thought quite dazzled him, and he wondered that an occupation so much more respectable and artistic than that of wading in Sutton Pool, had never before occurred to him. Taking one week with another, his average weekly income from this source was about twopence-halfpenny."

But the receipts of the "Art-exhibition" with which he speedily contrived to fill the window of a house in the court where he lived, were inadequate for the gratification of his desires. He accordingly betought himself of the expedient of producing decorated labels:—

"Seeing a very bad 'milk and cream' notice at a window, he went boldly in, somewhat encouraged by the gentle features of an ancient spectacled dame, who was employed in darning stockings. To explain his errand was the first difficulty, for he was not only deaf, but had almost lost the power of speech. The sentence he had prepared to utter died on his lips. He placed the book in which he carried the labels, on the counter, and after leisurely turning over the leaves, in order to regain his composure, presented the paper, pointing to that in the window, and saying, 'This for a penny.' After glancing at the paper, the good woman spoke, and Kitto, apprehending that his charge was thought excessive, said, 'A halfpenny, then.'"

What wonder that a youth exposed to such adverse influences should have found no refuge, at the age of fifteen, but the workhouse? He emerged from the workhouse when he was seventeen, to be apprenticed to a shoemaker,—one of those brutal natures of which one reads in "Uncle Tom's Cabin" but hardly expects to find at home. For a wry stitch, he hung a shoe in Kitto's face; narrowly missed his eye by throwing a broken tobacco pipe at him; and when "he held the thread too short, instead of telling me to hold it longer, he struck me on the head with the hammer."—"O misery!" (writes the unfortunate boy, in his journal, under date, Jan. 19, 1822.) "Art thou to be my daily portion? Father of Mercies, forgive me if I wish I had never been born. O that I were dead!" And yet the wretched youth was cultivating his mind all the while! Many years after he declared that twelve hours cobbling he could have borne. "I have tried it, and I know that the leisure which twelve hours would have given me, would have satisfied me. But sixteen hours and often eighteen out of the twenty-four, was more than I could bear. To come home weary and sleepy, and then to have only for mental sustenance the memories which by self-imposed tortures could be torn from my mind, was a sore trial. And now that I look back upon this time, the amount of study which I did, under these circumstances, contrive to get through, amazes and confounds me." How it is possible to read such a passage without a pang, we see not. One reads on, expecting that the *Deus ex machina* is about to de-

scend every moment; but no such thing! The allegations of his master's ill usage at last became so grave, that application was made for John Kitto's—re-admission into the workhouse!

At the workhouse the future author of so many valuable works remained for four years. A strong feeling in his favor, it is true, had been excited by the statement of his hardships which he had drawn up at the time of his transfer from the shoemaker to his former home; but nothing was done in his behalf. The particular circumstance to which he owed the immediate change in his prospects and amelioration of his fortune, is thus related:

"Mr. George Harvey, an eminent mathematician, being accidentally in a bookseller's shop, had his attention attracted by seeing a lad of mean appearance enter the shop, and immediately commenced a communication with its master by writing on a slip of paper; and that no oral communication took place. So novel a circumstance induced him to enquire what it meant, and he was then told that this was a workhouse boy, who was totally deaf, and could only communicate with others by means of writing, that he had a great thirst for knowledge, and that he came to borrow a book that the bookseller had promised to lend him."

"This information was quite sufficient to excite the interest of Mr. Harvey on his behalf, and induce him to make further inquiries. Having satisfied himself that the lad possessed superior abilities, which it would be highly desirable to cultivate and foster, he made his case known to various gentlemen of the town, and succeeded in interesting many of them in his future welfare and support, and in inducing a great many others to contribute pecuniary assistance, or to give books, paper, and pens, to enable him to pursue his literary occupations."

This must suffice for our object is not so much to give an abstract of this biography, as to call attention to it; and especially to advert to the very discouraging circumstances under which the future author and editor commenced his literary career. Dr. Kitto's subsequent history,—his removal to the Missionary College at Yarmington, where he was placed under the direction of the Society's printer,—his voyage to Malta; and his subsequent travels to St. Petersburg and Bagdad, should be read of in detail, not in abstract. He returned to his native land, and produced several works, which have procured for him an immense and a deserved reputation. A royal pension of £100 a year gilded his latter days; but he died before he had attained his 50th year, at Cannstatt, in Germany, Nov. 25, 1854, the victim of excessive mental exertion.

"What a contrast" (remarks Professor Eadie) "between the deaf and pauper boy of 1819, wheedled into a workhouse, to keep him from 'hunger and fasting, cold and nakedness,' and the John Kitto of 1854, Doctor of Theology, though a layman, Member of the Society of Antiquaries, editor of the 'Pictorial Bible' and the 'Cyclopædia of Biblical Literature,' and author of the 'Daily Bible Illustrations.' The interval between the two extremes was long, and sometimes very gloomy, yet he bore bravely up, with earnest resolution and a strong faith in God." His history is indeed one of the most remarkable which we ever remember to have met with; one which must command sympathy wherever it is read.

Dr. Kitto died, as might be expected, a very poor man; but he left an unblemished reputation, and is spoken of in the most honorable terms by all who were commercially connected with him. Her Majesty has bestowed upon his widow a pension of £50 per annum, and we learn with interest that his eldest son is about to proceed to the University, with a view to taking holy orders,—being dependent entirely on the benevolence of a few munificent individuals. Should any of our readers feel disposed to befriend this youth, we will undertake that any sums contributed for this object, and sent to the Editor of the *Literary Churchman*, shall be forwarded to those who are raising funds for defraying the expense of his University education.

MR. SPURGEON, THE POPULAR PREACHER.

We are accustomed to look grave when the old mysteries and miracle-plays are mentioned. We pity the ignorance of those ancestors of ours who could find food for amusement or help to devotion in the representation of doggerel drama, where God, the Father, our Saviour, the Holy Spirit, the Devil, Adam and Eve, and in short, all the principal personages, human or supernatural, mentioned in the Scriptures, were brought on the stage. We are liable to entertain shrewd doubts as to the piety of the writers of these horrible travesties of the sacred narratives, and to lament over the crassness of the intellect of those who could find entertainment in them. We can see nothing