

JOHN MASON NEALE.

Since the last number of the *Shirburnian* appeared, a man has died, of whom no mean authority has declared that "he leaves behind him a reputation for unrivalled scholarship, for lyric grace, for unostentatious devotion, and for gallant daring in the noblest of causes. His memory will not pass away from the Church of England until Anselm and Becket, Herbert and Laud, Hooker and Taylor have been forgotten." To those who were acquainted with him this eulogy will in no way appear to be extravagant, and yet it may well be doubted whether his name is ever mentioned in Sherborne School, and still less likely is it that he is remembered there as an old boy. Yet strange though this may seem, it is not so strange as the consideration that one who has deserved so well of the Church to which he belonged, should for twenty years have received as the emolument due to his services from that Church, the exact sum of twenty-seven pounds per annum. When Keble passed away in the spring of the present year, much comment was excited by the fact that one who had exercised so powerful an influence on the English Church, should have lived and died the possessor of no more substantial dignity than might be implied in the title of Vicar of Hursley. So too with Keble's brother poet, Isaac Williams; and now again, still less requited than they, has gone to his rest the third member of that trio of "sweet singers of the temple," who have restored to England the art of Christian poetry, almost forgotten since the days of George Herbert. But though thus unrewarded in their life times, their names will not soon pass into oblivion; pioneers in a movement which has already made itself felt through the length and breadth of Christendom, they themselves have reaped but the first fruits of the great harvest, which is now being gathered in. Every day the cause which they had at heart seems to gain strength, and this is undoubtedly due in a great measure to themselves; for religious poetry has always been a mighty engine for good, and, indeed for evil as well. Whether we turn to the Apostolic age, or to the nineteenth century, to the Church in the Catacombs, or to the Church in Sherborne Abbey; whether we think of Arius denying the Godhead of the Son, or of Colenso reviving the forgotten heresy; whether we look at Luther or at Wesley awakening the apostate Church from a lethargy of vice and apathy, - in every case we find the power of hymnology acknowledged. It is not a little singular that whereas men were wont to attribute the success of Arian principles to the popular hymns in which the doctrines were inculcated, now a professedly-Christian Bishop complains, that the spread of the opposite belief is effected by precisely the same means. Admitting then, as we must, the great influence of hymnody, there is no doubt that the three men to whom we have alluded, have, during the present generation exerted this influence in a degree unparalled since Wesley's days. Of the three, Keble and Isaac Williams are in England the best known; they were both Oxford men, and intimately connected with the birth of the movement, which, even in its name, must always be associated with that University, while the other, John Mason Neale, with whom we are more immediately concerned, had to work with the same object upon the less congenial soil of Cambridge. Yet we are much mistaken if Neale is destined to exercise upon the Church an influence inferior to that enjoyed by either Keble or Williams. If Keble has given us that Evening Hymn without which no collection even of Sectarian hymns would be deemed complete; it is to Neale that we owe "Jerusalem the Golden", the most generally popular hymn that the English language boasts. This hymn has for a long time been a great favourite in our School Chapel, but we do not think that any of the congregation who worships there ever remember while singing it, that it is the composition of an old Sherbornian. It is a translation of the "Urbs Syon Aurea," which forms a part of the wonderful "Rythm of Bernard, Monk of Cluny". And this leads us to speak of the special services rendered to the English Church by Neale. We mean the restoration to our Services of those beautiful mediaeval hymns which had fallen into disuse since the Reformation. Considering the utter want of Aestheticism which characterized that age, it is not at all wonderful that our Reformers should have been compelled to confess their incapacity for rendering in English the sublime beauties of poetry that belong to a time when to worship GOD "in the beauty of holiness" was not yet considered either a sin or a crime. The first who mastered the difficulties involved in such a task was Neale, and we believe that the great majority of the ancient hymns now sung in our Churches are his translations. One other hymn only less popular than "Jerusalem the Golden" because less suited for ordinary choirs, deserves especial mention. "The Silver Sequence", better known as "The Strain Upraise", is so familiar to our readers that comment upon its merits is superfluous, nor would it be necessary to do more than mention that we owe it also to Neale, were it not that as sung in our Churches generally no real idea of its beauty can be formed. Although like almost all mediaeval hymns,

it has a peculiarly beautiful melody of its own, we are content to gabble through it as fast as possible, without the smallest attention either to rhythm or expression, singing it not to a tune but to a chant evidently composed, for it on the principle that irregular metres are not to be tolerated, as though one of the chief beauties of the hymn did not consist in this very peculiarity. Neale, himself, in republishing the hymn with the original melody, made an unavailing protest against such treatment of his handiwork, and specially mentioned Sherborne Abbey, as a place where they might be expected to know better, yet there too Troyte still holds sway.

We have so far considered Neale's work as a Christian poet, yet he has established still greater claims to our remembrance in other ways. He was the first to introduce to the notice of Englishmen that large branch of the Church which is established in Russia, Greece, and Turkey in Europe; and if by a more picturesque style and greater felicity in word-painting, Stanley's Lectures on the Eastern Church, have somewhat thrown into the back ground Neale's more solid work on the same subject, the more popular historian has not unfrequently to acknowledge his obligations to the deep research of his more laborious predecessor. But if Neale has made himself a name as a Christian poet and historian, there yet remains one monument of his versatile genius, which we venture to assert has connected his memory with a work of practical utility more enduring in its effect than all the writings of all the Churchmen of the present century. It is but ten years since he founded the Sisterhood of East Grinstead. Already their work is known from one end of England to the other. Let any man now spend but half-an-hour in the Cholera Hospital, in the east of London: let him marvel, as assuredly he will, that in these days of refinement and luxury, neither loathsome diseases not deadly contagion can deter women with the birth and education of English ladies, from ministering to the sick and dying those comforts and consolations, which represent a duty of Christianity long ignored by the followers of Him "Who had compassion on our infirmities"; let him learn that these who have made such an office their labour of love are "East Grinstead Sisters," and then let him turn to the Workhouses or the Hospitals, where the "Gamps" and "Harrises" of a past age are still rampant, and it will require no words of ours to convince him that the name of John Mason Neale, must least as long as the English Church.

Perhaps however we owe an apology to our readers for having so far disregarded the usual method of biography. It may perhaps fairly be urged, that we should have first of all at least recounted the leading events of our hero's life, and reserved our reflections for the conclusion. And yet we may well reply that the life of such a man is best seen in his work, and it is his work upon which we have throughout dwelt. Nevertheless it may be useful to survey his career in a more connected and regular view. It may suffice then to state that he was born January 24th 1818. His father, who died when his son was but four years old, had been a Fellow of St. John's College, Cambridge, and Senior Wrangler and Second Chancellor's Medallist in the year 1812. The care of the youthful Neale thus early devolved on his mother, who appears to have acquitted herself of her task in a manner worthy of all praise. She was the daughter of the celebrated author and Physician, John Mason Good, who is said to have been "a man of considerable powers and learning." For several years, she herself assumed the direction of her son's pursuits and studies, until his first appearance at Sherborne School. This must have been somewhere about 1830, or at any rate not later than that date, as we find that he subsequently became a pupil of the Rev. William Russell, Rector of Shepperton, and in 1836, matriculated at Trinity College, Cambridge. There he soon obtained a Scholarship, and was universally regarded as the cleverest man of his year. We have already remarked that his not having occupied a more prominent place in the minds of men during his lifetime, was in some measure owing to the choice of a University which he made, and in truth we need not be accused of partisanship, if we maintain that in those days, at any rate, Oxford would have offered to Neale a far more genial sphere than the Sister University. For he had the greatest possible aversion to the study of mathematics, and at that time there prevailed at Cambridge the inexorable rule, which was finally abolished the year after he took his degree, that no one could offer himself as a candidate for classical honours unless his name had already appeared in the mathematical list. The result of this in Neale's case was, that he did not graduate till 1840, and even then was compelled to relinquish those distinction which were universally acknowledged to be his due. Still he did not leave without some distinctions, for in 1838, he won the members' prize, and was elected to a fellowship at Downing, and after he ceased to reside, he commenced a victorious struggle for the Seatonian prize which he carried off no less than eleven times.

But if Cambridge did so little for Neale, she has at least good reason to remember her illustrious son. To him she owes the society started under the name of "The Camden", but now known wherever ecclesiastical art is appreciated as "The Ecclesiological Society". On leaving the University, he was presented to a small country living, but owing to a threatening decline, was compelled to abandon his charge and repair to Madeira, where he remained some years studying hard in the library of Funchal Cathedral. On returning to England, he was presented by Lord De-La-Warr, to the Wardenship of Sackville College, East Grinstead, a post which he retained until his death on the 6th of August in the present year. It was this little village which he was destined to render illustrious, not more as the retreat of a great scholar, than as the nursery of that Institution which has already done so much to restore to the lower classes in our great cities that affection for the Church of their forefathers, which now for more than a century has been utterly wanting.

And here it were well for some of his survivors, if we might close this record of a great Christian's life; and yet justice demands that we should devote a few lines to the one sorrowful episode in a blameless career.

We do not envy the Right Reverend Bishop of Chichester, his remembrance of a certain transaction in which he bore a conspicuous part. From the course of this biography it may well be conjectured that Neale's character was marked by one peculiarity which was sure to render him a ready butt for sectarian malice and narrow-minded obloquy. Be it confessed then in plain, intelligible English, John Mason Neale was a "Tractarian" and a "Puseyite", of the deepest dye. Be it acknowledged that he renounced as unscriptural, the Shibboleth of "the Protestant religion". Yes, let the truth be told: John Mason Neale believe in the existence of a Catholic Church, and that to it he, as an Englishman, belonged. Nay, let us shirk the appalling fact: the man whom we have ventured to represent as a benefactor to the Church was positively accustomed in the obscure retirement of Sackville College Chapel, to celebrate what he believed to be the highest mysteries of the Christian faith, upon an altar surmounted by two candlesticks! We have not attempted to veil the crime; let us for a moment consider the punishment. For fourteen years was he prohibited by Dr Gilbert, from the exercise of his ministerial functions. Is it asked whether this was all, whether the opportunity of otherwise atoning for his offence was not offered? We reply, that his Lordship neither put question, nor assigned cause, nor requested explanation, but in solemn silence ratified the sentence which for fourteen of the best years of the Christian scholar's life, so far as his judges were concerned, deprived the world of such a mind and such a heart. Yet, if his voice was silence, not so the eloquence of his pen. From Moscow to New York his work was appreciated, and the Czar of Russia and the scholars of the New World alike "delight to do him honour". Truly "a prophet is not without honour, save in his own country." The reunited Christendom, which was ever the object of his fondest hopes, the reward to which his unwearied labours pointed, will hail him one day as the husbandman who sowed the seed of a plenteous harvest, while England, and above all, we in Sherborne, will at length have learned the lesson, that not less in a chasuble than in a surplice, not less in a cassock than in a Geneva gown; not less before a gorgeous altar than before a humble table, may the incense of adoring praise and prayer be offered by the humblest of His creatures to the GOD Who must be worshipped "in spirit and in truth."

EDITOR SHIRBURNIAN: We beg to state we are not responsible for the opinions of our contributors.