

Obituary Notice of the Late Rev. Dr. Giles.

BY R. C. A. PRIOR, M.D.

A MEMBER of our Somerset Archæological and Natural History Society, and native of this county, a man of great and highly cultivated talent, the Rev. John Allen Giles, D.C.L., died on the 24th of September, 1884. He was born at Mark, near Bridgwater, in 1808, and educated chiefly by the Rev. W. M. H. Williams, at the Frome Grammar School, but was subsequently for a short time at Charterhouse, whence he was removed to Oxford, upon obtaining a fellowship at Corpus. This may be considered the beginning of his literary career. He gained a double-first at the early age of twenty, and thenceforward led the life of a man of letters, and will be known to future generations as the author of many admirable works, but he never rose to a leading position in society, or strove for it.

It had been his wish to make the law his profession, and his talent was of a kind that would have ensured him a brilliant career at the bar; for his memory was tenacious, accurate, and ready, and his fertility of resource in argument, and his perspicuity in stating it, could scarcely be surpassed. But he was one of a very large and not wealthy family, and in order to retain his fellowship at Corpus and the income attached to it, he was persuaded by his parents to take orders; a calling for which he had no inclination, and for which he was little suited.

It was especially in recalling to mind passages of poetry that his power of memory was truly extraordinary. Whatever he had read with attention he could repeat a long time afterwards, and even in advanced age this faculty did not seem to fail him. If reference were made to a line of almost any

English, Greek, Latin, or Italian poet of high class, he would instantly recognise it, and usually repeat what followed; often all the rest of the book or canto, if asked to do so. The range of his studies was extensive, and his publications very numerous: some on historical, some on theological, some on antiquarian subjects, many written for educational purposes; together with several translations of classic and medieval Latin authors, and of the Saxon chronicle, amounting altogether to about 160 volumes. That which will most surely carry down his name to posterity is his *Records*, which he fortunately lived to complete. In these it was his main object to elicit the strict truth in respect to the Gospel history, and in doing so he found himself in conflict with certain dignitaries of the church, more orthodox than profound in their studies. In treating of the Pentateuch, in a work that was commenced in 1851, in conjunction with the Rev. Thomas Wilson, but never completed, he anticipated the conclusion to which Bishop Colenso has arrived. But his daring to think for himself and print his thoughts was, unfortunately for him, detrimental to his chance of preferment.

His *Life and Letters of Thomas à Becket* is, perhaps, of all his works the one most interesting to the general reader. In compiling the materials for it he visited France, and spared no pains in unearthing all that might throw light upon that period of our history. But a great part of his life was occupied with the humble labour of training pupils for competitive examinations, and for this he was well qualified by having in a remarkable degree the power of imparting knowledge and calling out the reasoning faculties. His two sons, inheriting his linguistic ability, have distinguished themselves by their acquisition of Oriental languages,—the one in India, and the other in China, where they hold important appointments.

With all his learning and unquestionable ability, Dr. Giles was not a successful man in life, and failed to win a higher position than that of a country clergyman. The reason is not

far to seek. There was wanting in him the tact to turn his opportunities to the best advantage. There was also wanting in him, it must be confessed, that dignity of manner that commands and ensures an instinctive respect, and seems to entitle the possessor of it to make a bold and open avowal of his convictions, without compromising his character, or damaging his prospects.

During the latter years of his life he was rector of Sutton in Surrey. In his domestic circle he was uniformly kind and considerate, and possessed such equanimity of temper that he never was heard by his most intimate friends to repine at the promotion of much less able men to those high stations which are the usual reward of literary merit, but which did not fall to his own lot.
