

ART. V. — IN MEMORIAM.

JOHN C. MILLER.

AMONG the severe losses the Evangelical section of the Church of England has recently sustained, the death of Dr. Miller must on several grounds be estimated as one of the heaviest. The venerable Prebendary Auriol, justly regarded as a Nestor amongst us, had of late, as the weight of advancing years pressed heavily upon him, gradually ceded his place to others, and as a shock of corn fully ripe was gathered into the garner. Prebendary Wright, snatched away in the prime of life and vigour, in the mysterious providence of our Father Who doeth all things well, though he occupied a post the importance of which can hardly be overstated, yet from the absorbing nature of the duties devolving upon him—"standing," as his predecessor Henry Venn said, "between the Church abroad and the Church at home"—was almost precluded from giving attention to those many matters of deepest concern to the Church of Christ, both at home and abroad, which bring the Evangelical School of the Church of England into contact with, or opposition to, Nonconformity on the one hand, or the High Church, or Broad Church Schools of its own Communion, on the other. It was here, we think, that Dr. Miller's special value was proved; it is here that his loss will be most keenly felt.

At the very beginning of his ministry of forty-three years Mr. Miller was able to place his feet firmly upon the two great foundation rocks—justification by faith through the atoning and all-sufficient blood of Jesus, and the full inspiration of the Bible, rendering it a complete and sufficient revelation of God's will to man; and never one inch to the right hand or to the left did he shift his position. In the preface to a volume of sermons, preached by him in his first and only curacy at Bexley Heath, which, with a vigour of illustration and eloquence of language that gave early indication of those powers of preaching he afterwards so fully developed, set forth in uncompromising terms these great truths, in reply to an objection which he supposes some friend might make to so young a man appearing before the public as an author, that "it was rash and imprudent that he should tie himself to particular opinions, and thus oblige himself hereafter to be consistent with views and statements now advanced, even when he may have seen reason for modification or change," he says, "The author believes and trusts that there is not any one view or statement of truth contained in the volume which is of a *novel* or *peculiar* character; he trusts there is no view of an ultra character, and as a minister of the Church of England he would have shrunk from advancing

views and statements in which he did not conceive himself fully warranted by her Scriptural articles and formularies." And not long before his death he was heard to declare in public, that the study and experience of a forty years' ministry had only tightened his hold of the same principles and convictions to which he deliberately set his hand as a curate of two years' standing. This unflinching and uncompromising consistency in the maintenance of the fundamental truths gave him from an early age an important place in the councils of Evangelical Churchmen.

But he was none the less, but rather the more, a consistent Churchman; he believed firmly that the Evangelical interpretation of the formularies and articles of the Church of England was the true one, both in spirit and in grammar; and he was therefore always as ready to uphold and abide by Church order, as Church doctrine; both to him were dear, because both to him appeared to be distinctly proved by "most certain warrants of Holy Scripture." This was well illustrated during his ministry at Birmingham. While his own pulpit at St. Martin's bore abundant testimony to the deep spirituality of his teaching, the town hall of Birmingham was filled again and again by enthusiastic audiences, as, at one time, he proved compulsory confession to an earthly priest to have no warrant in Holy Scripture, and therefore to be intolerable in the Church of England; when, at another time, he demonstrated in one of a series of lectures, others of which were delivered by the Evangelical Dissenters of the town, that the inspiration of the Bible is not contrary to any demands man's reason may reasonably make; or at another time, when, with equal power, he vindicated the honesty of the Evangelical section of the Church of England in remaining within her communion, which, in the excitement of the Bicentenary celebration of the ejection of the Ministers in 1662, had been impugned by an eminent Nonconformist minister of the town.

These convictions were not with him as a precious heirloom, of intrinsic value it may be, and to be jealously preserved for the honour of those who had handed it down to him; nor were they the mere shibboleths of the party to which he belonged, to be uttered therefore with due care and correct pronunciation, but devoid of that inexpressible, but most real, value which attaches to opinions which are the result of honest conscientious research. Dr. Miller's intellect was of that robust and independent character which delighted in mental labour, and forbade him to hold as an opinion any thing upon which he had not brought his mind to a definite conclusion after a thorough examination. When his opinion was asked, it was quite certain that it would be given in a straightforward, though courteous manner, and would be exactly what he thought, and not a weak

attempt to please those who sought his counsel. The Bishop of Rochester, in a sermon preached in the parish church of Greenwich on the Sunday after his funeral, spoke thus of him:—

His character is, in my judgment, sufficiently defined in a single word—*manliness*—his strong face, his broad shoulders, his ample form, his slow and stately tread, were all reproduced in a will that knew no vacillation, in an independence that brooked no interference, in a nature which was sufficiently endowed with the quick self-protection of a rather sharp displeasure; and the dignity of a courage which feared neither friend nor foe. Whenever I was in council with him—and I was often in council with him—I always felt perfectly confident that his sense of justice would carefully weigh and candidly appreciate all the argument brought out in the discussion. I was equally assured that it would never even occur to him to give his opinion upon a statement that he had not minutely examined, or to approve with the entire judgment of his conscience the most earnest wishes of those he loved and respected best if before God he could not approve of them. If he was one of those men of whom it is sometimes said—and it may be no mean praise—that you never know where you will find them, in his case it was not from indefiniteness of principle, but from sturdiness of conscience; and if he frequently made objections and did not quickly recede from them, those who were at first disconcerted often in the end found cause to be supremely grateful.

This characteristic made him a most valuable member of committees and councils; and while it was acknowledged by all who worked with him that he was a first-rate chairman, he was scarcely less appreciated when occupying a more subordinate position, both by those with whom he agreed and those from whom he differed. Many notable instances might be cited, but we will only mention, as illustrating the remarkable versatility of his powers in this respect, that he won equal admiration as chairman of a committee for settling the affairs of Attwood and Spooner's bank in Birmingham, as one of the three arbitrators in the investigation into the state of Dr. Barnardo's Homes, and as a member of the Committee of Convocation for the revision of the rubrics, where, by his sound common sense and sturdy Evangelical churchmanship, he gained the respect of all his coadjutors. His management as chairman of Attwood and Spooner's committee is thus alluded to by a Birmingham newspaper:—

It was by his pen that a masterly and exhaustive report was drawn up and presented to the shareholders, the result being an unlooked-for dividend, which undoubtedly saved many families from ruin.

Of Dr. Barnardo's investigation the Bishop of Rochester said:—

A very eminent living judge observed of the judgment, mainly composed by Dr. Miller himself, that had he written it he should hardly have altered a word.

But while we think that scarcely too much importance can be attached to the position which his powers in this respect enabled him in God's providence to fill, he had other gifts for which the Church has to thank God, and there are other circumstances in his career well worthy of remark.

The early promise given by Mr. Miller, as a curate, of attaining a high place amongst the preachers of the English Church was abundantly fulfilled. He had most of the natural gifts which make a successful orator; his stalwart presence, and the penetrating glance of his eye when in the act of speaking, commanded the attention of his audience, whilst with a voice at once powerful and almost fascinating in its musical tones he gave utterance in an easy flow of words to thoughts which his sometimes vigorous, and always transparently natural gestures made it evident came from his heart. Besides these things, God had given him a powerful intellect, and a clear and logical mind; but he ever, as the last written words he left behind him testify, regarded these things as entrusted to him to be used and improved in the Master's service, and so, though he had the power of preaching without much, or indeed any preparation,¹ his study of his subject was always deep and thorough, and a strict critic would say that as a general rule the introductions to his sermons were almost too elaborate. It was said once by one who valued his teaching very highly, "He is almost too careful in laying the cloth before he puts the food on the table;" but the food when it was put on was the Bread of God; the Lord Jesus Christ in all the fulness of His redeeming love and sanctifying power; food, too, it was which it was evident the preacher had tasted himself. It was this diligent use and improvement of God's good gifts to him, combined with his own personal experience of the power of the grand truths he expounded and enforced, that made him what in ordinary language is called a popular preacher. And in the truest sense he was a "popular preacher;" whatever kind of people he was called upon to address, he compelled their attention for the whole length of his sermon, which not unfrequently extended over an hour. The boys of "King Edward's School," Birming-

¹ The news of the death of the Prince Consort arrived in Birmingham on Sunday morning, and Dr. Miller received it as he was starting for church. He changed his text and entire subject, and preached a most powerful and touching discourse on "Lazarus sleepeth." On another occasion his son, walking with him to church, asked him to preach during his stay at home on the personality of Satan; he was astonished and delighted to hear a most exhaustive sermon that very morning on the subject. As a third instance, when standing ready to preach an open-air sermon, the working men of the parish brought him a portable wooden pulpit, he immediately changed his subject, and preached from Nehemiah viii. 4, "A pulpit of wood."

ham, who regularly attended his church, listened with an unflagging attention, and not a few of them, now themselves ministers in the Church, look back with deep gratitude to his plain and forcible teaching; the rough artizans of Birmingham crowded his church, which he delighted to open for—what were then almost, if not quite, unknown—special services for the working classes; indeed, whether he preached in the Black Country of Staffordshire or in a University pulpit, whether he addressed a country congregation or stood up in St. Paul's or Westminster Abbey, a crowd of eager listeners always gathered to hear him; and many are the proofs proffered by grateful hearers that his heart-searching faithful words have been used by the Holy Spirit for the conviction of sin and the building up of God's people. This latter function of the ministry he always considered most important; and on his coming to Greenwich one most prominent feature in his work was his Friday morning's service, instituted by him for this purpose. The large Church of St. Mary's was well filled on these occasions by a congregation, gathered from all parts, of Christians who came to feed upon the Word of Life; and the cessation of these services will create a great blank in the spiritual life and enjoyment of many advanced servants of God.

As an organizer and personal director of parochial machinery Canon Miller was most successful, and not a few of what have now come to be the ordinary arrangements of a well-ordered parish owe their origin to his sagacity and courage. The first Mission Services ever conducted in an orderly Church of England fashion were held in St. Martin's, Birmingham, and he often lamented that to the sober model there laid down, and abundantly blessed by God, so much was often added that opened the door wide to a flood of unhealthy spiritual excitement and extravagance. Though he was never able to convince himself that wine was not one of God's good gifts, and because many people abuse it he ought not therefore to use it, he yet led the way in the most practical attempt to wean the working man from the snare of drunkenness. The first working men's club, combined with a night school, was started in Inge Street, Birmingham, in St. Martin's parish. Penny readings and concerts for the working classes were almost, if not quite, unknown when Dr. Miller issued his first programme, in which his own name as a reader appeared. Mr. Henry Venn had already at Hull devised the plan of district visiting under the direct superintendence of the clergyman. This was adopted by Dr. Miller in Birmingham, and enlarged by the addition of a body of working men, trained for the purpose in the working men's Bible class, who devoted their Sunday afternoons and some of their leisure time in the week to act as missionaries to their

fellows. This band of parochial missionaries became a most valuable agency in the parish. St. Martin's, Birmingham, was also the first church in England in which a regular system of the division of the services was adopted, with the sanction of the bishop of the diocese.

It is well known that the credit of the practical origination of what is now known almost throughout the British dominions as Hospital Sunday belongs to Dr. Miller. He was always careful to say that the idea itself came from Mr. Wright, the editor of the *Midland Counties' Herald*, but the practical organization of that Annual Festival of Charity, which now unites in so many places all bodies of people in one grand effort to relieve their suffering fellows, was Dr. Miller's work.

After twenty years' arduous labour in Birmingham, both as a parochial clergyman and as the recognized leader in all the great social and religious movements of that energetic and stirring community, he in 1866 accepted, on the nomination of Lord John Russell, the then Prime Minister, the Crown living of Greenwich, and in the enlarged sphere of London work found abundant scope for the exercise of all his varied powers. He was elected one of the members for Greenwich of the first London School Board, but he found its duties incompatible with his ministerial work, and retained his seat but for a short time, long enough, however, to cause his colleagues to lament his resignation. He gave much time to the committees of various Church societies, never being absent from the Church Missionary Committee whenever important questions were under discussion, and always serving most readily and punctually on any sub-committees—and they were many—on which he was nominated, for the settlement of the more delicate questions that from time to time arose.

His nomination by Mr. Gladstone, in 1871, to a residentiary canonry in Worcester Cathedral opened up a new, and to him most interesting, sphere of Church work, and both at Worcester and at Rochester, to which latter cathedral he was transferred in 1873, he devoted himself, and not without success, to make the cathedral church a centre of spiritual light and usefulness to the whole diocese. He was elected by the Chapter of Rochester to represent them as their proctor in Convocation, and his presence in that assembly added greatly to the strength of the small band of Evangelical clergymen who have as yet obtained seats; and also in a most marked manner compelled, by his clear and judicious utterances, increased respect and consideration for the Evangelical view of Church questions at the hands of the large High Church majority.

But his appointment to a canonry must be reckoned amongst those second causes by which the Master sees fit to call his workmen to their rest. The only way in which Canon Miller

could, with satisfaction to his conscience, make the necessary three months' residence in the cathedral city fit in with his parochial duties, was by arranging with his brother canons to keep his residence during the three summer months, when a very large number of his parishioners were from home. This he did from the very first, and thus deprived himself of a real holiday from the summer of 1873. There is no doubt that it was this incessant work that brought on the disease that closed his earthly life; for on consulting a physician early in the year 1879 he was enjoined to take four months' rest. He consented so far as to spend two months at the English lakes; but the other two were spent at Rochester; and though, on his return from the lakes, he seemed somewhat benefited, when he went back to Greenwich in October it was evident the disease had obtained firm hold of him. He did not, however, relinquish his work, though the performance of it entailed upon him much physical discomfort and fatigue. This is alluded to in touching language in an article that appeared in the *Kentish Mercury*¹ :—

But, perhaps, nothing in his whole life more marked the fixed purpose of the late vicar of Greenwich to spend, and be spent literally, in his Master's service, than the efforts he made, for the last few weeks that it was possible for him to appear in public, to preach to his beloved people. He felt the shadows of death gathering around him, and his heart was oppressed with the longing desire to testify to them of the grace of God with his very latest breath. Many of his last few sermons were delivered under circumstances of great physical weakness, apparent to all who heard them, but yet there was a pathos that melted every heart, and a spiritual power which no physical weakness could overcome. It was the privilege of the present writer to hear the last sermon Dr. Miller delivered in the church of St. Alphege, and as he listened to the lucid exposition of the text, the second and third verses of the fourth chapter of Colossians, he felt, as no doubt others did, as if the words spoken were not so much those of a dying man as of one who, in the spirit of the Resurrection, proclaimed in triumphant confidence, as it were from heaven, the truth he had so well proved. Physical weakness indeed there was, painful to witness as he commenced to speak, but as he proceeded the spirit proved mightier than the flesh, and those who heard never will forget the plaintive tenderness, and the powerful appeal of the last words he uttered from the pulpit of St. Alphege. Perhaps even more memorable was the last sermon of his life, preached at St. Mary's Church on the 9th of May. Pressed with exceeding weakness, it was almost impossible for him to ascend the pulpit, and then for a few minutes his tones were tremulous and almost inaudible; but a remarkable renewal of his strength was accorded to him, and the last words the late vicar of Greenwich ever uttered from the pulpit were words

¹ This Article was written by Mr. James Watson, a former Editor of the *Kentish Mercury*, and is published in a tract form.

declaiming with his old force and his old fidelity the Gospel he loved so well.

The last nine weeks of his life were passed in complete physical prostration, borne with a patience and resignation manifestly granted to him in answer to his repeated prayers that he might not by impatience dishonour God. He could only bear the repetition of texts and hymns, but in these he found great comfort, especially in all texts that set forth the power of the blood of Christ to cleanse from sin, and the completeness of His atoning work. The end came suddenly and most peacefully: without any apparent change in his condition, just as the services in his churches were concluded, on Sunday evening, July 11, he quietly passed away from the scene of his earthly work to the place of his spiritual rest. He left behind him a paper strictly enjoining that no "funeral sermons" should be preached or "pulpit eulogies" uttered, ascribing "any usefulness he may have had to God, who giveth the increase;" and this article has been written with the endeavour to carry out this wish: less than what has been written would not have given a true description of the place he was called upon to occupy in the English Church; and without violating the spirit of his dying wishes we may well thank God for giving him to our Church, and enabling him to occupy the post for which He fitted him; and with our thanksgivings we may join the prayer that his mantle may fall on some other shoulders.¹

We cannot better conclude this slight sketch of Canon Miller's character and work than by quoting some words from a letter

¹ It may interest our readers if we put in a footnote the chief dates connected with Canon Miller's life—and a list of some works of which he was the author. Born in 1814, he was educated at Brompton Grammar School, and matriculated at St. John's, Oxford, in 1831. He gained a scholarship at Lincoln, from which college he took his B.A. Degree (First Class in Lit. Hum.) 1835; M.A., 1838; B.D. and D.D. in 1857. He was ordained in 1837, taking his title from Bexley Heath, in the Diocese of Canterbury. After two years he became assistant minister to the Rev. T. Vores at Park Chapel, Chelsea; and afterwards succeeded him as sole minister. He was elected by trustees to the rectory of St. Martin's, Birmingham, in 1846; and was appointed hon. canon of Worcester in 1852. In 1866 he accepted the Crown living of Greenwich, and was nominated by Mr. Gladstone to the canonries of Worcester and Rochester successively in the years 1871, 1873. He was Select Preacher of the University of Oxford in 1859. He has left behind him two volumes of sermons, preached at Bexley Heath, and Park Chapel; a valuable volume of advice to young clergymen, entitled "Letters to a Young Clergyman," which appeared originally in the *Clergyman's Magazine*; two series of Lent lectures on "Solomon" and "Joshua;" "Bible Inspiration Vindicated," a lecture; "Courtship and Marriage," a lecture; a lecture on the life of "John Angell James;" besides numerous single sermons and addresses, and tracts for the Christian Knowledge Society.

written by one who had long worked with him on the committee of one of our religious societies:—

Well may we repeat over his empty seat, how mysterious are the ways of God. Mysterious indeed, for he was one who had proved himself to be fitted for the times he lived in : who was a power we could ill spare, whose place I know of no living man able to fill. How clear he was in all things to himself, how clear he made things to others. Then his powerful common sense swept away by its very presence half the cobwebs of theory and fancy which perplexed other men, even before he spoke ; and his first words always gave one the assurance that we were going to be shown land at last. He was simply invaluable in difficult times as a counsellor, and as a chairman he was the best I ever met.

To this we cannot forbear adding the closing portion of the Bishop of Rochester's sermon, from which we have already quoted. Bishop Thorold says :—

His gifts may be summed up in one word, capacity. He was capable over folios of accounts, even with men whose lives are spent in figures ; capable in the pulpit, where his close dialectics and compact but never heavy reasoning was lightened by illustration, quickened by pathos, and sanctified by the Word of God ; capable on the platform, where for many years he held a front place with some of the most brilliant orators of his own religious school ; capable in Convocation, where, amongst differing but ever kindly and courteous brethren, he asserted his principles and expounded his convictions with a moderation and sagacity that won him as much regard as his courage and ability earned him esteem ; capable above all in committee, where, if there was a weak spot in a proposal, he darted on it like a falcon on a linnnet, where he would defend the right of the absent, and assert the privileges of the feeble, with an emphatic earnestness, that, if sometimes indiscreet, was always generous ; where I, for one, shall miss him, and mourn for him for many years to come, for, if he was one of the kindest of my counsellors, he was also one of the most valuable.

The Bishop adds :—

The main results of his life, as I seem to see them on review of his career, are briefly summed up thus :—first the fearless, consistent, powerful, reasonable exposition of the great truths of the gospel from the standpoint of the Evangelical school in a way that compelled a respectful attention, if not always an entire assent. Second, the promotion, if not the creation, of a precious spirit of toleration among churchmen of all orthodox schools towards each other, not by the compromise of principle, but by the generousness of charity, by listening as well as by contradicting ; by accepting common ground against a united foe, as well as declining to keep back honest differences ; by refusing to magnify trifles into essentials, and by doing his best never to permit the truth he loved, and we love, to be watered down by weak surrender or compromised by a sour narrowness.

B.A. CANTAB.