

REV. DR. S. I. PRIME.*

REV. DR. S. I. PRIME and his New York *Observer* have long been a familiar force in the American literary and religious world. He died in 1885, but it lives, and many a year will pass before it loses its associations with his name. His "Irenæus Letters," so called from the signature over which they were written, probably had as wide, attentive, and popular a reading as any newspaper letters of the kind ever published in this country. Dr. Prime was a man of facts; he was genial, witty, and fond of society; he had been almost everywhere and knew almost everybody; he never forgot a good story and knew how to re-tell it without sacrificing its point; he had tender feelings, strong piety of the Presbyterian sort, and a retentive memory; positive views, warm sympathies, and a handsome presence made him a personal force; and all these qualities were well imparted to his letters, which gave peculiar pleasure to thousands upon thousands of people, and a circulation to the paper in which they were printed.

But Dr. Prime was more than a letter-writer. The list of his published works overruns two pages in the appendix to the volume before us, and embraces between thirty and forty titles. It includes several slight memoirs of religious characters, such as "Elizabeth Thornton" and "George Somerville," works on missions like "The Nestorians" and "The Gospel Among the Bechuanas," books of travel, such as "Travels in Europe and the East," "Letters from Switzerland," and "The Alhambra and the Kremlin," and devotional works like "Walking with God" and "Thoughts on the Death of Little Children." Some of Dr. Prime's best known and most useful publications were in illustration of the power of prayer, of one of which, after 20,000 copies had been disposed of in this country, 100,000 copies were sold by a single publishing house in England, while two translations of the same appeared in France, one in Dutch at the Cape of Good Hope, and one in Tamil in India.

It was characteristic of Dr. Prime, whose peculiarities all his friends recognized, that he left in a good degree of completeness the materials out of which his son has edited this autobiographic volume. A certain measure of self-consciousness must be requisite to the preparation of an autobiography, and to that extent is pardonable. Mr. Wendell Prime found among his father's literary remains a series of "recollections of other years" directed to "lie unpublished"

until the writer's connection with the *Observer* should be closed. Out of these and other stores it was easy to construct this narrative.

Dr. Prime was born at Ballston, N. Y., in 1812. He graduated at Williams College in 1829. He preached in pulpits of the Presbyterian Church from 1833 to 1840. From that year till 1885, the year of his death, he was the editor, and in fact the proprietor, of the *Observer*, which was the preferred family religious paper of his time. The *Christian Union* and *Independent* have supplanted it to some extent of late, but it still remains the Presbyterian organ and favorite *par excellence*.

The reader may well believe that this many-sided man's own story of his long, busy, and productive life is full of interest. It is told with charming frankness, and a thorough enjoyment of all that was picturesque, amusing, and peculiar to its time. He introduces his parents and ancestors, takes us into his father's smoky study, shares with us the pains and trials of his school days, and admits us to intimate companionship during his college course and early ministry. The chapters on his boyhood are crowded with pictures of life and society as seen from the home of a Presbyterian minister fifty and sixty years ago. The early efforts at temperance reform, the choir in its lofty gallery, the singing-school, the dancing-school, the beginnings of revival, the spinning-bee, the pleasures of the country and the ceremonies of the town, such are among the slides in this magic lantern, which reproduce with singular clearness and fidelity the customs of New England and New York half a century and more ago. Williamstown, Mass., Princeton, N. J., and Cambridge, Ballston, Newburgh, and Matteawan, N. Y., are points around which the story revolves.

It was bronchitis which drove Dr. Prime out of the ministry of the voice into the ministry of the pen. His first article for the *Observer* appeared over his since familiar and welcome signature in 1838. In 1840 he joined the editorial staff. He was, he says, "cook, cabin boy, and all hands in one." And he asked no better epitaph, he said later, than this: "He helped to make the New York *Observer*."

There is a great fund of anecdote in these 380 pages, an immense store of reminiscence. Any number of eminent men appear in them; such men as Drs. William Adams, Bethune, Cox, Cummings, Griffin, Jacobus, Kirk, McClintock, Muhlenberg, and Nicholas Murray. It was a world of Presbyterians in which Dr. Prime lived, moved, and had his being, though he reached out on the right hand and on the left and was "good fellow" to all good men. Occasional public services, in connection with important religious occasions, brought him into prominence upon the platform, and he was always

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a ready man. His face, well engraved by Ritchie for a frontispiece, is himself.

We commend this book as one of the more affluent and entertaining of recent American biographies.

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