

SIR ISAAC PITMAN.

A Life of the Patron Saint of Stenographers.

THE LIFE OF SIR ISAAC PITMAN (Inventor of Phonography). By Alfred Baker. Illustrated. 8vo. Pp. xi, 392. Isaac Pitman & Son.

In 1894, three years before his death, Sir Isaac Pitman ceased to supervise personally the issue of his various writings. Barely half a century had elapsed since the publication of his first quaint little 16mo pamphlet bearing, under the title, "Stenographic Sound-Hand," the imprint of Samuel Bagster, the London Bible publisher, and the added lines: "Also sold by the Author, Wotton-under-Edge. Price Four-pence." Yet this half century had seen the "Manual of Phonography" reach its 900th thousand, and the "Phonographic Teacher" its second million. Not only was phonography in daily use in every part of the English speaking world and throughout Spanish South America, but it had practically superseded all earlier shorthand systems as well.

The mind that could originate and perfect a method of speech transcription destined to such world-wide utility must have possessed, one infers, some uncommon and strongly marked traits, and the inference finds full justification in the pages of Mr. Baker's "Life." They show Sir Isaac (he received the accolade from Queen Victoria in 1894) to have been a man of infinite application, of passionate—sometimes eccentric—convictions, of unbounded self-confidence, and fine altruism. With him the propagation of phonography was more akin to a religious campaign than to any ambitious pursuit of fame or wealth. For years—until the very voluminousness of his correspondence forbade it—he offered gratuitous correction and criticism of any exercises submitted to him by students of the new science. He never willingly gave countenance to costly "testimonials," even when his own circumstances were painfully straitened, but always requested that any sums of money raised in his honor should be applied to the work of propagation. His last illness found him still in harness. Even so late as 1885 he had inaugurated the publication of a new monthly journal, "The Speller," dedicated to six special objects, of which the first three related to Swedenborgianism, his adopted creed; the fourth to spelling reform, the fifth to phonography and the sixth to the peace movement. Vegetarianism and "Tea-totalism" had both received his lifelong support. But it is as the inventor of phonography that his name will be remembered.

Of his boyhood in the English manufacturing town of Trowbridge Joseph Pitman, an older brother, once wrote: "Isaac never had any of that rollicking nonsense about him peculiar to most of us boys, nor do I remember his ever stopping on his way from school to play, but home directly he went, either to his books or to his work." Punctuality and tireless industry seem to have been inbred virtues with him. While still a mere lad he formed the habit of rising at 4 in the morning in order to secure two hours of study before the time when he must be at his desk in the weaving mill office. At the age of seventeen he read through Walker's Dictionary from cover to cover, copying out all the words whose pronunciation had given him trouble, and making himself an absolute master of diacritical science. At about the same period, too, he was acquiring his first knowledge of shorthand.

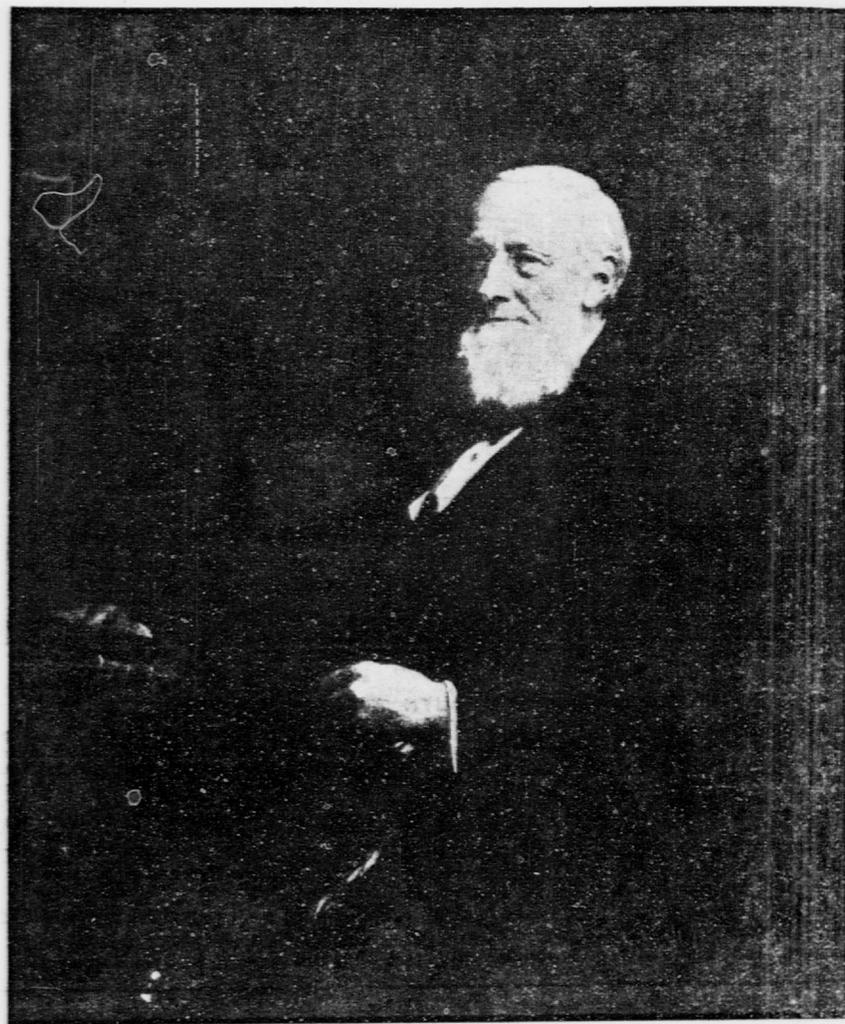
Long before Pitman's day shorthand had been a favorite pastime of ingenious minds; but as a time saving device it had only rarely been turned to serious account. So far back as 1602 some Thomas Willis had brought out a stenographic system; and between that date and 1837, the birth year of phonography, no fewer than two hundred other varieties of shorthand had been promulgated. The majority of these were wholly unscientific, devised solely for purposes of cipher writing. That riciest of diarists, Samuel Peyps, learned his cipher out of a "Tachygraphy" of 1641 by Thomas Shelton. The "Taylor" system acquired by young Pitman adhered to the traditional method of representing each letter of a word by its appropriate symbol. To our ambitious student, still drenched in the diacritical lore of Walker, the wastefulness of such alphabetical procedure must soon have become apparent; yet for want of anything better he accepted it; and when, a few years later, he set up a private school for boys at Wotton-under-Edge, in the Cotswolds, he undertook to give instruction in shorthand according to the Taylor system.

One more step, and the trail that leads up to the "great" year, 1837, will be complete. Visiting one day in the house of a Methodist friend, Pitman happened upon a copy of Bagster's Comprehensive Reference Bible. True to his instincts of exactitude, he tested certain of the references and found errors. The idea came to him of writing to the publisher and offering, in case Mr. Bagster cared to lend him a copy of his Bible, to verify all the 500,000 references without charge. The offer was accepted, and to this self-imposed labor Pitman dedicated his whole leisure for the ensuing three years. Nor did his zeal go unrewarded, for out of this association with Bagster developed a friendship which was later to prove of the greatest advantage to the obscure schoolmaster.

Pitman needed a cheap textbook of shorthand for use in his school. He wrote out an abridgment of "Taylor" and submitted the MS. to the London publisher. The advice came back that

if he would work up a system of his own, the novelty of it might take the public eye and prove remunerative. Thus in the summer of 1837 he set his mind at work to devise an original shorthand system. First he established a novel series, one that accorded with the real sounds, not with the accepted spelling of words. Once started on this path he could not stop. The consonants, too, must be given a rôle that allowed each its actual spoken value. Countless experiments were made. Day and night the inventor kept at it, and on the 15th of November, under Bagster's useful sponsorship, "Stenographic Sound-Hand" was given to the world.

The edition numbered three thousand. There were twelve small pages of print and two lithographic plates. The sewing had been done during leisure hours by the boys of Mr. Pitman's school. Three years later, on the first day of the penny postage system, he brought out a second edition, the so-called "Penny Plate," adapted for sending through the mails. On this plate, which measured eight by six and one-half inches, was engraved not only a full key to the



SIR ISAAC PITMAN.
(From the painting by A. S. Cope.)

new system, but several illustrative passages from Scripture. A marginal suggestion was also added that the student should write out, for practice, a number of Bible texts and submit them to the inventor "in a paid letter" for correction. The new shorthand system soon began to attract attention. In 1841 Pitman, now living in Bath, made his first lecture tour, presenting the claims of phonography to fascinated audiences in several of the larger cities; and by 1843 a number of lecturers, including two of his brothers, were in the field. Societies began to spring up. Poets began to sing. Bagster wrote:

Artists and scribes no more delight,
Their arts imperfect found,
Daguerre now draws by rays of Light,
And Pitman writes by Sound.

He was not alone in singing the praises of the new art. Also there were poets in the opposition. With the establishment of an official organ, "The Phonographic Journal," the movement may be said to have come into its own.

Of further developments it is needless to speak here. Once launched on its career, phonology was sure of universal success, for it was based on true scientific principles and could stand every test of criticism. Spelling reform now began to hold an increasingly large share of Isaac Pitman's attention. In 1849 "The Phonetic Nuz" was established. Tirelessly as ever the great propagandist labored in the new cause. A sentence or two from a phonetic letter to "The Times" (January 27, 1879) may serve as a characteristic summary of his lifelong activity:

These forti yearz hav been spent in kontinuous labor in konekshon with the invenshon and propogashon ov mei sistem of fonetik shorthand and fonetich spelling, korespondens, and the editorial diutiz ov mei weekli Jurnal. . . . Til I woz fifti yearz ov aje I never tuk a holiday, or felt that I woznt wan; and for about twenty yearz in the first part ov this period I woz at mei desk fourteen ourz a day. . . . I attribut mei heith and power ov endurans to abstensens from flesh meat and alkoholik drinks. . . . EIZAK PITMAN.

Miss Marjorie Bowen—otherwise Miss Gabrielle M. V. Campbell—has written a new novel, which she calls "Black Magic." It is described as "medieval and picaresque." The scene opens in Flanders, and later episodes occur in Rome.

ROBERT BROWNING.

Stories of His Visit to Edinburgh.

Robert Browning went to Edinburgh in the spring of 1884 to receive the university's honorary degree, and while there the late Professor Masson was his host. For a pleasant account of his visit and of his joyous and kindly behavior the readers of the current "Cornhill" are indebted to Miss Rosaline Masson. She describes, for example, the quaint little scene of the "dress rehearsal" when Count Saffi, another guest, donned his Bologna academic robes which he was to wear at the conferring of degrees next day. Gorgeous robes they were, in richest glowing colors, in velvet and satin, and fur and lace ruffles and jewels. "And while every one crowded about the splendid figure with exclamations of admiration, Mr. Browning slipped quietly out of the room, and presently reappeared in his Oxford D. C. L. robe, severe and plain scarlet. He looked around deprecatingly, and came forward. 'I have a robe, too!' he

waited forty years for it, and now—I like it!" A characteristic action is recalled—that he always gave both hands to one in whose face he read enthusiasm when an introduction was made to him.

He is quoted as telling with an air of amused worry the story of the deep offence he had once given Mrs. Carlyle:

It was just after his return from a long time spent in Italy, and he had gone to pay his respects to Mr. and Mrs. Carlyle. Mrs. Carlyle was making tea. "The kettle, Browning," she said. "I brought her the kettle from the fire." Mr. Browning related, "and then—it was very stupid of me, but I looked round, and I did not know exactly what to do with it, and I—well, I put it down on the table." And Mrs. Carlyle rose in her wrath. "That he should pretend he had forgotten the habits of his native land! 'You!' she exclaimed. 'You! to return with your Italian ways, and to put a kettle down on the table!'"

But there were those—and it is possible that Mr. Browning, for all his human kindness, was one of them—to whom the thought occurred that, though the proper place for a kettle was not the table cloth, neither was it the hand of Robert Browning.

LITERARY NOTES.

Hitherto unpublished material has been used in the preparation of a forthcoming study of that interesting personage, Mr. Samuel Peyps. The author, Mr. E. H. Moorhouse, has taken the famous diarist with seriousness and has dwelt upon the work he accomplished for the Admiralty. He has entitled his book "Samuel Peyps; Administrator, Observer and Gossip."

Dr. Witkowski's book, "The German Drama in the Nineteenth Century," has been turned into English, and the translation will soon be brought out. It furnishes a careful record of the distinct periods marking German dramatic literature. Even minor dramatists receive attention.

There are to be 176 epistles in the volume which is soon to be issued under the title of "The Love Letters of Thomas Carlyle and Jane Welsh." Carlyle's nephew, Mr. Alexander Carlyle, contributes an introduction wherein he declares that the correspondence "should convince even the most prejudiced and unfriendly that Thomas Carlyle and Jane Welsh were essentially generous, self-sacrificing and noble." The poems of the pair—which are not of great importance—will be published in an appendix.

An abridged version, by the way, of Carlyle's "Life of Frederick the Great" has just appeared in England. It has an introduction, portraits and a map.

An interesting old book which is in the possession of the Scribners is Jean Paul Marat's own copy of his work, entitled "Recherches Physiques sur le Feu." It is full of annotations in the author's handwriting and is in the original paper wrapper.

The return of "Raffles" has much delighted Mr. Andrew Lang, who calls that crafty hero a "Robin Hood and googly bowler." Sherlock Holmes having also appeared again, Mr. Lang suggests that Mr. Hornung and Sir Arthur Doyle collaborate and give us a single wicket match between Raffles and Sherlock. "They are bound to meet in their careers of crime and detection," he says; "so are Watson and Bunny."

Elizabeth, the daughter of that other Elizabeth, Queen of Bohemia, and a woman of intellect, is the subject of a book which is to be called "A Sister of Prince Rupert—Elizabeth, Princess Palatine, Abbess of Hereford." The book is "a study of a temperament and of an epoch." The author is Miss Elizabeth Godfrey.

Dr. Sven Hedin intends to write his promised book during the coming summer, isolating himself for the purpose at some seaside place which has no connection by rail or boat with the outer world. He will refuse to see any callers, and he thinks he will have the work ready for publication in the autumn. It is to be issued in many languages, Chinese, Japanese and Hindustani among them. This edition is for the general public; later will come the scientific edition, when, as the explorer says, his "great chests of geographical and botanical material will be brought fully into use."

A new volume of essays from the pen of Mr. James Huneker will command attention this spring. Huysmann and Anatole France are among the writers dealt with in these papers—papers which are to appear under the title of "Egoists."

Of Robert Buchanan, an author whose books seem nowadays in a fair way to be forgotten, there are some interesting glimpses in "Chambers's Journal." A friend says of him that he was a man who was constantly in difficulties in regard to money matters. He would have a pocketful of money one day and none at all the next. He "gave money away right and left to those who appealed to his sympathy," and he was absurd in generosity as regarded his friends. This particular friend says of this trait:

I found it extremely difficult to get him to accept any money due to him for transactions undertaken for me. If I asked him, "How much do I owe you, Bard?" he invariably answered in the same strain, "Eight thousand five hundred and nineteen pounds four shillings and sevenpence." Or "Give me half a million, and we will cry quits." If we dined together casually, one, two, six of us, he invariably managed to get hold of the bill and pay it. The trick of his, of course, became familiar, and he seldom asked him to dinner unless we had arranged the matter beforehand with the powers that be. When he discovered that fact he would say: "Oh, this is a duke's affair! All right, I expect to be treated as in a dual mansion." It was the same with cabs and trams. He was a large, stout man, but he had a curious faculty of reaching the cabman's hand or the ticket office before the slimmest of us.

He was a confirmed turf speculator—a strange pursuit for a singer of songs and dreamer of dreams; and it need hardly be said he was successful more than he gained; but when he was successful—and occasionally his winnings were large—he always managed to find a means of sharing his good fortune with those less privileged than himself. One of his many methods of telling white lies was this: "How are you, X? I owe you twenty pounds." "This is the first I have heard of it," would likely be the reply. "Oh, I took the liberty of putting a sovereign on King Charles for you, and he started at 20 to 1"; and forthwith he handed over the money.

M. R. de Cesare's work, "The Last Days of Papal Rome," has been translated by Miss Helen Zimmern, and the book will be brought out this spring. The original work was very bulky, and the author himself abridged it for the benefit of the translator. It presents a picture of Rome from 1870 to 1879, when it was still a half medieval state.

urged, with humorous pretence of envy." Was not the poet tired after a long afternoon reception amid a crush of admirers—wouldn't he rest before the dinner party of the evening? asked his hostess. "'Tired!' he exclaimed merrily. "'Tired! Not a bit! Not a bit!' He took the skirts of his coat daintily in his hands, and pointing his toes in true dancing master fashion waltzed elegantly round the entire circumference of the room. 'There!' he cried, smiling triumphantly at us, 'now don't tell me I am tired!'"

In talking of the number of Browning societies then in existence—are there as many now, we wonder—he told how he had gone as a guest to a meeting of one of these enthusiastic organizations and "had sat, unrecognized and unnoticed, in the background and listened humbly. A heated discussion had taken place on the meaning of some passage; and at last, as no one seemed satisfied, he had diffidently suggested a possible reading. But he had been unmercifully snubbed, and promptly given to understand he knew nothing about it." Miss Masson remembers that one morning at breakfast he told his hosts of having been challenged on the occasion of Lord Rosebery's marriage to write four lines which should rhyme the names of both bride and bridegroom:

Browning was evidently—as is plain to any reader—very proud of his out-of-the-way rhymes, of his unique power of rhyming. He accepted the challenge; and he repeated the lines to us with good-natured glee in his success:

Venus, Sea-froth's child,
Playing old rosebery,
Married Lord Rosebery
To Hannah de Rothschild.

In an after-breakfast discussion of Romeo's assertion, "What's in a name?" the poet contended that a person's name influenced his whole life and character and profession. And he added in an aside, "I never should have written a line of poetry if I had been called Stubbs!" All through that Edinburgh week he was lionized in the most unrelenting way, and once his hostess "asked him apologetically, 'Do you object to all this adulation?' And he answered readily and heartily, and perhaps with a kindly desire to relieve her mind: 'Object to it! No; I have