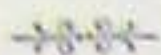


Obituary.



John Spencer, of Leicester.

"Describe him who can?"

An abridgment of all that was pleasant in man."

"I knew him, Horatio; a fellow of infinite jest,
of most excellent fancy."



HE fraternity of British bookmakers has just become the poorer by the loss of one of its most characteristic and remarkable members—a loss which will be felt far beyond the limits of the town and county of Leicester, where, indeed, a gap has been created which it will be hard to fill.

John Spencer, who was born at Sapcote in 1828, came of an old Leicestershire family, but was left fatherless at an early age. His love for literature was hereditary, both his father and grandfather having been, in the early part of the century, frequent contributors to the *Gentleman's Magazine*, the *Lady's and Gentleman's Diary*, and the local press; and they were, with the godfather of the deceased, Mr. Isaac Fowke, of Elmsthorpe, associated with John Nichols in the production of portions of the Spokenhoe Hundred in his monumental "History of Leicestershire." Owing to the Chartist agitation and other causes, the time was one of political excitement, and it is related that an uncle of the deceased, Mr. Thos. Spencer, of Knossington, set up a miniature printing press, with wood-engraving tools, for the purpose of printing small illustrated political satires and lampoons, especially in the form of envelopes, some rude political allusion thus accompanying every letter enclosed in these wrappers. That a love of literature and printing should have resulted from such early surroundings was but natural. During a pupilage at the village school, and at a good private seminary at Narborough, Mr. Spencer was at times a holiday companion of the late Bishop Bickersteth, of Ripon, whose father was then rector of Sapcote.

Mr. Spencer's apprenticeship was served with the late Mr. Samuel Sharpe, of Stamford, a gentleman of some renown as a prominent member of various antiquarian, archæological, geological, and numismatic societies, under whose care his literary tastes were largely stimulated and developed, and a close connection existed between the two friends until Mr. Sharpe's death. On leaving Stamford, Mr. Spencer acquired further training during the next few years with Messrs. Simpkin, Marshall & Co., London; Taylor, of Brighton; and Simms & Dinham, of Manchester, successively; and in 1853 came to Leicester to establish with his younger brother, Mr. T. Spencer (who had been for some years with Mr. T. Chapman Browne, of the Bible and Crown, in that borough), the now well-known bookselling business and library in the Market-place, which has been from the first so successfully carried on. One of their earliest ventures was the production of *Spencers' Almanack*. This, the first annual issued in Leicester, has gradually

developed to its present large proportions, and many copies are annually written for by residents in all parts of the globe. Numerous other publications by various authors followed, especially works of a local character, amongst which were handbooks to Leicester and Charnwood Forest, "What to See in Leicester," and a translation of the Leicestershire section of the Domesday Book. Amongst their more important recent publications are *Leicestershire and Rutland Notes and Queries*, a high-class quarterly magazine edited by the two brothers jointly, in the production of which Mr. Spencer's antiquarian lore has been of invaluable service; and "Glimpses of Ancient Leicester," by Mrs. T. Fielding Johnson, a beautifully-illustrated and very ably-written volume, which has already become a popular standard work on Leicester



JOHN SPENCER.

Died May 4th, 1892, aged 63 years.

and its history. The circulating library established over thirty years ago by Messrs. J. & T. Spencer has attained very large proportions, and has long been one of the most successful features of their business.

In the department of topographical and historical book-collecting, John Spencer had more than a local fame, there being few scarce books connected with the town or county of which the minutest details were not at his finger ends, whilst more than ten complete and perfect copies of Nichols' "History and Antiquities of the Town and County of Leicester," eight vols., folio, the rarest and most priceless of all county histories (the value of a perfect large-paper copy of which is reckoned in hundreds of pounds), have, at various times, passed through his hands. In this great work he revelled with especial affection.

Politically a Conservative, he never took any prominent part in local matters, although several times solicited for municipal work, with the exception of serving a few years on the Board of Guardians in the early days of his career. Personally, he had but to be known to be appreciated. Under somewhat, at times and to strangers, a brusque manner, there was as warm a heart as ever beat. He was a man of abundant humour, quick at repartee, endowed with an extraordinary fund of literary lore and historic fact, and a wonderfully retentive memory. His knowledge and recollection of the pedigrees of historic families in all their ramifications was nothing short of marvellous. Never did he seem so happy as when acting as *cicerone* to strangers, or even fellow-citizens, exhibiting and explaining, as few men could explain, the antiquities—ecclesiastical, baronial, or domestic—of the town in which he lived, and which he loved so well. To no man could Goldsmith's words be more fitly applied:—"I love everything that's old. Old friends, old times, old manners, old books, old wine." Had Mr. Spencer definitely taken up literature as a profession, he would almost certainly have made a successful author. Not only did he occasionally write verse of considerable merit, but his gifted pen could at any moment be relied upon to give for the press a graphic description of any incident, historic, antiquarian, or descriptive. Cheery in face; ever genial and generally jocular in speech; bluntly good-humoured; inexhaustible in his fund of anecdote; possessed of a business capacity such as few can boast for shrewdness; like Temple, "a man of the world amongst men of letters, a man of letters amongst men of the world"; warmly hospitable in private life; and in every way a man of strongly-marked individuality—in a word, a thoroughly good fellow and a friend to be prized—Leicester loses in John Spencer the familiar figure of one of her best-known and most favourite citizens.

Many are the stories told characteristic of the man and his keen, racy mother-wit; nor would even this slight sketch be complete without some illustration of this kind. Having unsuccessfully sued a person in the Leicester county court, where he invariably conducted his own cases in his own humorous way, and where, on this occasion, he was kept waiting from early morn till late at night for the case to be called, he, at the close, quietly remarked to the judge, amid the loud laughter of his Honour and the assembled court:—"I have been waiting here from ten till six o'clock. Truly, your Honour, can I now exclaim with the Psalmist—'One day in thy courts is better than a thousand.'" On another occasion, Mr. Spencer being present at a sale by auction, was pressed by the "man in the pulpit" for another bid. This he promised to give, and was duly thanked by the auctioneer. The promised bid, when forthcoming, was not, however, exactly of the kind desired, being made in these words:—"I said, sir, I would give you one more bid, and I do so with pleasure. I now bid you—Good night!" suiting the action to the word and leaving the mart. But the incident best calculated to appeal to the readers of this journal took place about 1874, at the time when the twopence in the shilling discount

for cash system was just coming into vogue in the retail trade. Of this system Mr. Spencer was no more enamoured than his fellow-traders, but the discount had, of course, to be given when specially asked for. One of the earliest customers to insist on the reduction had been a certain cleric, who, being one day in Mr. Spencer's shop, was turning over the leaves of a copy of Dante's "Inferno," which chanced to be lying on view. Seeing him in the act of examining one of those wonderful and terrible conceptions of Dorè's genius—a representation of the torments of a lost soul, peculiarly horrifying in its graphic realism—John Spencer solemnly addressed the rev. gentleman as follows:—"Do you know, Mr. ———, how that man came to be in the awful position in which you see him here depicted? I will tell you what he had done. *He was the first man who ever asked for twopence in the shilling off his books!*" Tableau.

The two or three last years of Mr. Spencer's life were, unhappily, clouded by a constitution enfeebled by a severe and painful illness, by a great domestic sorrow caused by the loss of a dearly-loved daughter, and by heavy losses owing mainly to the depreciation of county property consequent on many years' agricultural depression. The immediate cause of death was an attack of bronchitis, followed by pneumonia. He leaves several children, mostly sons, and his partner and younger brother, Mr. Thomas Spencer, still survives. Amid a large gathering of his brother Freemasons and sorrowful friends, John Spencer was laid to rest in Leicester Cemetery with the rites of the Roman Church, into which communion he was received when *in extremis*, on May 9th, 1892. *Sit tibi terra levis, amice!*
J. E. H.

SOME remarkable acquisitions have been recently made by the British Museum of celebrated Bibles, including the Egenolff German Bible, Frankfort, 1534, of great rarity, and especially interesting from being adorned with the woodcuts from which the illustrations of the Coverdale Bible of 1535 were imitated; and the Acts and the Canonical Epistles, and the Psalter, translated into White Russian and printed at Wilna in 1525. With the exception of some portions of the Old Testament previously published by Skorina at Prague, and perhaps a version of St. Luke, these are the first translations of the Scriptures into Russian; they are also the first Russian books printed within the present limits of the Empire. To these are to be added a unique copy of an edition of Calvin's New Testament, printed at Geneva in 1551; a vellum copy, unique in this state, of Luther's translation of the Psalms, Leipsic, 1540; the New Testament in the Ober Engadine dialect of Romansch, 1560; the Malagasy Bible, Antananarivo, 1830-35, perfect copies of which are exceedingly scarce, the greater part of the impression having been destroyed in the persecution, and the few copies which escaped having been divided into small portions for more effectual concealment.

THE biggest Bible in the world, in point of bulk, belongs to John Bell, Esq., of Manchester, he having added pictures and photographs to it until it now has 10,000 illustrations and consists of ninety volumes.