

# THE LIFE WORK OF A SCIENTIST

Familiar Pictures of an Important  
Career Set Forth in Entertain-  
ing Memoirs of Prof. N.  
S. Shaler.

**T**HE interest in Dean Shaler's personality, extending far beyond the circles reached by the 7,000 students of Harvard who in forty years passed before the head of the scientific department of the university, an interest stimulated by the influence of his books on many topics of human as well as distinctively scientific importance, is enormously heightened by the reading of this book.\* That the autobiographical part stops short at the end of the story of his youth, when death came to take his activities into other spheres, does not at all detract from the value and importance of the book. Mrs. Shaler has written a memoir which tells admirably what the great teacher of geology and practitioner of the humanities accomplished and planned to accomplish, with grace and discrimination. In a deep sense her story of the events of their mutual life, although she leaves herself out, makes the book more important than if her husband had told of all these activities in his own words. Indeed, it is difficult to see how this story of a great naturalist's life might have been improved, for here we are given an extraordinarily minute and thorough study of his early years and the influences of heredity and environment and occupation forming him from infancy to coming of age. It is genuinely a scientific study of the boy who was father of the man, by the man who knew him best. The autobiography is, in this view, an important contribution to what used to be called natural history.

The author of "The Individual," "The Citizen," and "The Neighbor," books which meet a lively hunger of our time with nourishment for the body social, Dean Shaler could not fail to write a philosophical study of himself in the process of development. But his story of his youth is none the less a most entertaining tale. His forbears on both sides, the Shalers of New England and the Southgates of Kentucky and Virginia with their collaterals, were picturesque and lively folk, all leaning to that best development of life and station which out of our greatest cities still constitutes the "aristocracy" of our democracy. Nathaniel Shaler's father was a physician who married a Kentucky heiress at Newport, across from Cincinnati, where the future student of Agassiz was born and lived, except for two memorable journeys, until he went to college at Cambridge. He had just completed his scientific studies under Agassiz when the breaking out of the civil war sent him back to Kentucky. He was a Unionist, one of the first to proclaim that State rights could only be guarded by Federal Union; but of historical opinion, as shown in his first book other than scientific books to be widely read, his "Kentucky" in the American Commonwealth Series.

That from his maternal grandfather, Richard Southgate, Mrs. Stowe drew her character of St. Clare, the gentle slaveholder, and that of Legree, a neighbor whose history fitted well with that of the villainous slave trader, and the incident of Eliza's flight across the river on floating ice from a tradition of years before, was, Mr. Shaler affirms, a cause for high dudgeon among his own people at the time "Uncle Tom's Cabin" appeared. He tells a capital Lincoln story, too, somewhat unclimatically, of the only time he saw the orator, then in contest with Douglas, on the occasion of Lincoln's visit to his grandfather's home on a matter of dispute over a mule. But the significant thing in that visit was that the young Shaler's mother came back to her home from supper at her father's table with Lincoln, saying:

"If Mr. Lincoln is an abolitionist, I am an abolitionist." "If my mother had said she was Satan it could not have been worse"—the horror with which her remark inspired her household.

The maiming of the brilliant Kentuckian of the earlier day by the civil war, not only in war's sweeping away the young men before they came to their best years, cutting off the Commonwealth's expectancy of children from such families, but also breaking off the eager reaching out for better things in history, literature, and the fine arts, which was beginning to raise the ideals of culture from what Prof. Shaler calls their still low and rather carnal state in Kentucky, are dwelt upon with clarity and conciseness in his pages on the degrading nature of war. This is a subject whereon his words come with consuming convincingness, the more that he was by birth and nature, albeit never as strong of body as of

will, a fighter. In his latest years it was in Faculty meetings or in such affairs as the proposed "merger" of the Lawrence Scientific School (developed through the bequest of Gordon McKay, Dean Shaler's friend,) that his powers of successful belligerence found sway. That they were never as great as the bounty of his heart and affections, his immense capacity for friendship, might well be believed by a visitor from another planet reading for the first time of Nathaniel Shaler. And large circles in every State and in foreign lands still echo with stories of his huge and hearty beneficence.

The "Uncle Nat" of undergraduate affection in his later years—who saved students who timely applied to him from a visit to the "uncle" with three balls as a sign of willingness to accommodate—was but removed in years, not in sympathies, from the warmhearted, imaginative youth who nearly half a century before came up to Cambridge from his Kentucky home.

Prof. Shaler was not only a great teacher, a big educator, but a painstaking instructor. He was endlessly willing to do his best to "beat learning" into a student's head, but his vast living influence came from his abounding humanity, and students who have gone far afield with him on the geological excursions which he made wonderful sources of practical teaching remember better than what they learned of the way this earth is made, the communicated warmth and valor of a brave, generous, "great and powerful" fellow-creature.

Of the tasks and travels of all their years together from the time when (as we are shown the way to infer) Nathaniel Shaler married his first and only love in his early youth until she was left bereaved of high companionship with one who "marched along under the sign of the universe," Mrs. Shaler tells the story. Her pervading delight in her subject is perhaps best put into words for her in Prof. G. H. Palmer's words, wherewith she closes her task, "Happy woman to have been so blest."

Of his comrades in the work at Harvard, Profs. Palmer, Royce, and James were those who held Mr. Shaler's strongest affection, and this not merely from long association, but because he was a philosopher with the best of them. Much more than any of them he was a poet. There is little doubt from what he gave to his time of stately verse, with the resurgence of the poetic impulse which came after middle life had passed, that, had it been his choice to set himself to the life task of poetry, we should not now be in such a twilight of poetry in this country. But as it was to science he was called and devoted himself, there is only to be affirmed anew the mastership of science for our day. The list of his writings on scientific subjects is of itself a small volume, from the 1855 "Report on the Brachiopods of the Island of Anticosti" down to the latest mining reports for the United States Geological Survey. His excursions into belles lettres were many. He preferred his "Elizabeth of England" by declaring, to prove that "the work of the naturalist in interrogating his world of facts differs in no essential way from that of the poet in elaborating his fancies, both alike using the constructive imagination."

The success in this field was more than the success of esteem of which it was in advance assured. The effort of verse-making was to him a pleasure, comparable only to that of calm reflection alternating with killing thistles on the broad acres of his country estate "Seven Gates," on Martha's Vineyard. It is well to quote in this connection a paragraph from "The Individual," which, on the word of Mrs. Shaler, may be construed as personal to its author:

To the oldish person who is a bit weary with the repetitions of his days, to whom the best of his profits have already a tiresome sameness, the effect of a new accomplishment is magical. It brings again the joy of youth, for the most of the pleasure of that time lies in just such excursions into the great unknown of self.

The simplicity and directness of the style of composition admits the reader of this "Life" into a hospitable mental house of wide views, fronting with serenity the known and that unknown of which Dean Shaler testified in the hour of his death: "All things do prophesy the life to come."

## STORIES OF NORSE HEROES.

E. M. Wilmot-Buxton's "Stories of Norse Heroes" (Thomas Y. Crowell & Co., \$1.50) is a book of the young, in which are retold, in simple fashion, twenty-five of the wonderful tales which have come down to us from the old Northmen. Among these retold tales is the one in which the Northmen gave their account of the beginning of things; another relates how Thor was humbled; another contains the story of Sigmund's killing of the dragon; another sets forth how the curse of gold was fulfilled; another thrillingly recounts the tragedies of Sigmund's last battle, and another makes known to us the marvelous qualities of Sigmund's Magic Sword. The tales are illustrated in most cases with photographic reproductions of well-known paintings.

\*THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF NATHANIEL SOUTHGATE SHALER. With a Supplementary Memoir of His Wife. Sixteen illustrations. Octavo. \$4 net. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company.