

EDWARD WILLIAM LANE.

1801—1825.

THE life of a great scholar should not be suffered to pass away into forgetfulness. The Arabs have indeed a proverb, 'He who has left works behind him dies not': but although so long as there are students of the life and the literature of the East, the memory of Lane cannot die, the personality of the great Orientalist is rigidly excluded from his writings; they reveal almost nothing of himself. If to stimulate the endeavours of others by the example of a chief of their kind, to encourage fainter hearts by telling them of the strength and devotion of a master, be one of the ends of biography, this brief and inadequate memoir of perhaps the truest and most earnest student this century has seen will not be deemed superfluous. As the record of half a hundred years of ceaseless labour, crowned with a perfection of scholarship to which even Germany avowedly yields the palm of undisputed supremacy, the life of Lane must needs be written.

Edward William Lane was born at Hereford on September 17th, 1801. He was the third son of the Rev. Theophilus Lane, LL.D., a Prebendary of Hereford; and his mother was Sophia Gardiner, a niece of Gainsborough the Painter. At first his education was conducted by his father, after whose sudden death in 1814 he was placed successively at the grammar-schools of Bath and Hereford, where he distinguished himself by his unusual power of application and by an almost equal mastery of classics and mathematics. The latter formed his principal study, for his mind was bent upon taking a degree at Cambridge, and then entering the Church. This desire to devote himself to a religious profession may have had its origin in the training of his mother, under whose influence his education was completed. Mrs. Lane was a woman of no ordinary mould. Gifted with high intellectual powers, which she had spared no pains to cultivate, she possessed a strength and beauty of character that won not only admiration but affection from all who were privileged to know her. It is easy to understand how great and how good must have been the influence of such a mother upon Edward Lane. He was wont to say that he owed his success in life to her teaching, and the saying, characteristic in its modesty, was doubtless partly true. His success was the result as much of character as of intellect.

The Cambridge project was never carried out. Lane indeed visited the university, but did not enter his name on the books of any college. A few days' experience of university life as it was in the first quarter of this century was sufficient to show him that in living in such society as he was then introduced to, and in conforming to its ways, he would be sacrificing what was to him dearer than all academic distinctions. That his mathematical training had been thorough is shown by the fact that immediately after giving up the idea of Cambridge, Lane procured a copy of the honour papers of the year and discovered that he could without difficulty solve every problem save one; and, as he has often told me, going to bed weary with puzzling out this single stumbling-block, he successfully overcame it in his sleep and, suddenly waking up, lit his candle in the middle of the night and wrote out the answer without hesitation.