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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

OF

JAMES EDWARD ROOT.

PREPARED BY

REV. EDWARD EVERETT HALE,

FOR THE

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH.

James Edward Root was born in Milton, Ulster county, N. Y., on the 18th of August, 1817. He was the son of Samuel Root of Meriden, Conn., and Philotheta Ives Root of Bristol, Conn.

The Root family is one of the oldest Connecticut families. The Iveses settled at New Haven as early as 1639, but appear to have landed in Boston some years before.

Mr. Root's school education was carried on and ended at the Utica Academy, an institution largely patronized by young men designing to pursue mercantile life. He went to Troy in his nineteenth year where he became a clerk in the Post Office and in this service

he remained for fifteen years and more, passing through successive stages of promotion.

In 1852 he left Troy and went to Europe for a somewhat protracted tour for which his studies and tastes had particularly prepared him.

He was a curious and intelligent collector of prints, books, and pictures, and in this journey he established the connections with Europe which in more than one matter of literature and art have since been so valuable to his associates in this society and in the community.

Returning from Europe he took an interest in the Wheeler and Wilson sewing machine company, and assumed the direction of the Boston agency of that company.

The immense extent of their business has made the name of this company a household

word in every part of the civilized, and in many parts of the uncivilized world.

Perhaps the younger reader of the present day does not appreciate the rapid development of the change in the customs of the world produced by their agency chiefly, and by that of other companies in a lesser proportion.

In the year of the organization of the Wheeler and Wilson company, when Mr. Root became a member of it they made 799 machines. Six years after they made 21,306 machines. In the last year they made 92,732. These figures alone, when thoughtfully interpreted, denote a revolution in the domestic life of the world. As early as 1859, the writer of these lines heard from a missionary in Asia Minor, whose home was on the line of the retreat of the ten thousand, her account of the wonder excited among barbarous Turks

of all ranks by her Wheeler and Wilson's machine.

To see the work of this miracle of Christian civilization the pasha in charge of the whole district would bring in the wondering friends who came to visit him and would ask this lady to set her machine at work, as the emperor of China might have asked Aladdin to show off the wonderful lamp to him.

Mr. Root continued in active business in his connection with the Wheeler and Wilson company for ten years. After that period he retired from active business but kept himself constantly occupied in the pursuits of literature and art which always had for him a special interest. Singularly quiet and unobtrusive, his opinions were the more valued in the circle of his literary and artist friends and the delicacy and accuracy of his taste gave peculiar value to his criticisms.

Sometimes, but not so often as we could wish, he put these criticisms on paper for the press and we should enhance the value of this little memoir by republishing some of them ; but he disliked publicity perhaps with an over sensitiveness and we have met with more than one person, quite closely connected with him in business affairs, who did not so much as know that this quiet gentleman was a student of delicate taste and wide knowledge whose decisions were highly valued by those who consulted him.

Mr. Root's library, his cabinet, and his collection of pictures were not what would be called large by the drag-net collectors. He formed his own opinions and as we have intimated acted upon them.

He therefore bought what he wanted quite regardless of its cost, and probably never

bought what other people wanted him to buy simply because they thought it curious.

His collection of books is remarkably strong in the department of Biography.

He had been earnestly engaged for three years in illustrating the *Life of W. H. Prescott* by George Ticknor, a work in which he took great pride and for which he was eminently fitted.

In his collection of prints there are rare portraits which could hardly be found elsewhere in America.

The same interest was exhibited by him in Numismatics, he having been for many years an active member of the Numismatic society of this city.

He joined the Historic Genealogical Society in the year 1866, and had a thorough knowledge of all its workings.

These lines merely supply a few data

and other external memoranda of the life of a man very dear to his family, to a circle of close friends and to his associates.

He was always reticent so far as any criticism or expression went which might seem to bring him before the public; but in domestic or social life, no man lent himself more eagerly to the wishes or purposes of his friends. His books, his pictures, and his curiously accurate information were all at their disposal.

He was very happy in his home and it was interesting to see how, in looking forward to another journey in Europe, he struggled with his unwillingness to break off from those he loved so dearly, from the quiet charities, the constant courtesies, the easy hospitalities, and the unfailing occupations of his home life.

From that journey in Europe we should all of us have derived advantage though perhaps we should not have known it.

He knew precisely what he was going for, what to see, what to study and what to do, and he would have so seen, studied and done that all of us would have been the gainers.

But this was not to be. He died suddenly, while staying temporarily at Bristol, Conn., on the 20th of September, 1875, in the 59th year of his age.

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