

ART. IX. — CRITICAL NOTICE.

Personal Memoirs and Recollections of Editorial Life. By
JOSEPH T. BUCKINGHAM. Boston: Ticknor, Reed, & Fields.
1852. 2 vols. 16mo.

To the public in general, as well as to the numerous friends of Mr. Buckingham, these volumes will be acceptable and interesting. The author's long and checkered career, as printer, editor, and politician, and his intimate acquaintance with the business to which his life has been devoted, give to these volumes not only a biographical importance, but a broader significance in relation to the history of the country and the times. Mr. Buckingham is a writer of uncommon power. His style is admirably suited to public discussion, being pure, clear, and forcible. No reader ever doubted what he intended to say. Without effort, his writing often rises to a chaste eloquence, and never sinks to feebleness. It is always terse, cogent, and effective. The point and vigor of his sarcasm are very remarkable; and it must be confessed that he has been led sometimes, by the passion of the moment, to indulge more largely in biting speech than the cooler judgment approves when the occasion is past. But this is an almost inevitable incident to the life of a political editor. Mr. Buckingham frankly acknowledges as much in the work before us.

The manly spirit that breathes in these volumes is worthy of all honor. Every thing is told in the plainest style, without suppression or disguise. The literary information preserved in this work is very curious; and the sketches of the numerous characters, with whom the writer has come in contact, are drawn with force and distinctness. But the portion of the book which will most interest the feelings of the reader of sensibility is the opening chapter of the first volume. Here Mr. Buckingham relates the story of his early struggles, through a childhood and youth oppressed by poverty and adversity. The scenes of home, the forms of parents and friends, rise upon his memory, and are delineated with an honest tenderness and pathos rarely surpassed. The sketch of the author's mother, and the simple, unaffected truthfulness of the narrative of her sufferings;—her patient labors to support her fatherless children, her religious trust and the consolations of piety in her darkest hours of trial, form a picture which the most indifferent can scarcely contemplate without tears. This part of Mr. Buckingham's Memoirs will be read with deep sympathy; and the reader will honor him for the affecting

tribute which, so many years after her death, and after the varied fortunes of an active life, he has paused to pay, in a spirit of unforgetting gratitude and filial affection, to the motherly virtues and sleepless love that watched over his struggling youth, to the last moment of her earthly existence. The father died early; of him, Mr. Buckingham gives the following striking reminiscence.

“I have no other recollection of my father *living*, than an indistinct idea of sitting on his knee, and hearing him sing for my diversion; but, of the father *dead*, the picture is fresh and vivid. The sensation that I felt, when carried into the room where the body was laid out in its shroud, I shall never forget. The room was darkened; whether by the closing of window curtains or by a cloudy atmosphere, I cannot tell. The body lay on a smooth board, which was placed on a table. The closed eye and the pale lip, even the plaits on the stock around the neck, (such as were then worn by men and buckled on the back of the neck,) now form as perfect an image in my memory, as the fold in the sheet of paper on which I am writing. Of the funeral, too, my recollection is almost as distinct as the remembrance of the events of the last week. The bier is standing before the door. The coffin is placed on it and covered with a black pall. A procession is formed and goes to the meeting-house. The bell tolls. The funeral prayer is said. The procession is again formed, and proceeds to the burying-ground. The family crowd around the grave. The coffin is laid in its appointed place. Mr. Huntington, my mother's brother, takes me in his arms and holds me over it, so that I may see the coffin. The earth is thrown upon it. I hear the rattling of the gravel upon its lid. I feel now, as I have always felt, when I have called up the remembrance of this scene, the chill which then curdled my blood, and the fluttering of the heart, that then almost suspended the power to breathe.” Vol. i. pp. 5, 6.

To this we add another passage, without a word of comment.

“About this time, (i. e. in 1793,) my brother Alexander completed his apprenticeship, and set up the business of shoemaking in Windham. He hired a part of a house in which he and our mother went to house-keeping. Thanksgiving day came soon after, and presented an opportunity to indulge in its peculiar enjoyments. The two younger sons, of whom I of course was one, who lived at a distance from each other, *went home to keep Thanksgiving.* WENT HOME! what thrilling sensations of rapture does that thought communicate to the heart! The festive preparations were completed; the table was spread; around it stood a mother and three sons, who had not been assembled together before within the remembrance of the youngest of the group. The grateful and pious mother lifted her soul and voice to the widow's God, and uttered a blessing on that kindness, which had not broken the bruised reed, and which had known all her sorrows, and permitted her once more to see so many of her orphan children assembled around her. Her expressions of gratitude were not finished when the sentiment of affection and thanksgiving, which swelled in her heart, overpowered her strength; her bosom heaved, as if in strong convulsion; her utterance

was choked ; the lips could not relieve with words the soul-felt emotion ; she faltered, and would have fallen, had not the elder son caught her in his arms. Tears at length came to her relief, and her agitation was succeeded by those grateful and affectionate sensations, which find no parallel but in a mother's heart. It is now near sixty years since this incident took place. The scene is as bright and life-like in my imagination, as it was at the moment of its occurrence. Eternity cannot obliterate the impression from my memory ; and if it could, I would not willingly accept of eternal life on such condition ; for, I would never forget that that widow was MY MOTHER. She has long since put off her mortal clothing, and has, I trust, joined that innumerable company that are clad in white raiment, and receive palms in their hands from HIM whom they have confessed in the world." Vol. i. pp. 21 - 23.

We might select many passages of biographical and literary interest, relating to names of great distinction now, as well as others, whose fame has dwindled into vague tradition ; but the book is sure to be extensively read, and will always be referred to as an authentic record of an important period in the history of New England journalism.