

**THE EARLY YEARS OF
ALEXANDER SMITH, POET AND
ESSAYIST; A STUDY FOR YOUNG
MEN. CHIEFLY REMINISCENCES
OF TEN YEARS' COMPANIONSHIP**

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The early years of Alexander Smith, poet and essayist; a study for young men. Chiefly reminiscences of ten years' companionship by T. Brisbane

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T. BRISBANE

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BY THE
REV. T. ^{Thomson} BRISBANE.



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"We can remember when we knew only the outer childish rim,
and from the crescent guessed the sphere."—*Dreamthorp.*

P R E F A C E.

VARIOUS sketches of Alexander Smith have already been published since his death. These, however, have been only the brief reminiscences of loving friends of his later years. They may be said to commence with his career of authorship. Their writers seem to have known little of his earlier years of education, aspiration, struggle, and preparatory toil. The information they give of this, the most interesting, instructive, and exemplary period of his life, consists of little more than the date and place of his birth, and the trade to which he served apprenticeship. What has thus been published was indeed worthy of being so; but what has been left untold is none the less worthy of being recorded. His youth was as pure and noble as his manhood. No part of it now

demands concealment by the hand of charity. There is consequently a very general regret among his earliest acquaintances and friends that a fuller account of those days has not been written: and several of them, because I was then for several years most closely associated with him in friendship, and so had ample means of knowing "his stream of life from fount to sea," having frequently urged upon me to write such an account, I, at length, so far complied as to give, in the columns of a weekly local journal, a short narrative to its limited number of readers. This, however, so far from satisfying seemed to increase the desire it was designed to gratify; and, consequently, further pressed both by old and several new friends who happened to read that partial account, and whose judgment I cannot but respect, I have ventured to lay this fuller volume before the general public. If I have done so too hastily, it may, perhaps, be deemed pardonable in his earliest friend to have been easily induced to place, though last, some tangible tribute of affectionate remembrance on a

grave where so many have already, in one form or other, laid theirs.

The only requisite I possess for the task I have undertaken, is a fuller knowledge of Mr. Smith's early years than others may have. This advantage, however, is counterbalanced by a fear lest my unpractised pen may, after all, fail justly to present the well-known features of so fair a life before the reader's view. Still I cling to the hope that, with a hand moved by affection and steadied and restrained by truth, the work may be so done that the limner and his art may be forgotten, and the face growing before him on these pages, alone command the attention of the reader,—or at least so command it, that he and the critic shall find it easy to exercise charity sufficient to cover any multitude of literary sins which a tyro in book-making may commit.

I aim not at praising the dead; and should I seem to praise, it is because praise I must, where true portraiture itself is praise,

As to method, I follow the example of those

who have preceded me ; by giving chiefly reminiscences of that period of the poet's life best known to me. Doing so will indeed necessitate, however, the employment of the *ego* to an extent which—while I trust neither fulsome nor offensive to the generous reader—I would certainly have preferred to avoid, could I otherwise have told the story as well. After all, it may be better thus ; it is only now that reminiscences can well be given ; and by this method, which others have initiated, materials may best be furnished for a competent biographer in the future. So, poor and faulty as the work may be—

“ I go to plant it on his tomb
That, if it can, it there may bloom ;
Or dying, there at least may die.”