

DEATH OF A PRESTON CELEBRITY.

We record this week, with feelings of extreme regret, the removal from among us of a man of mark in our time—one of the self-made men of whom Preston has reason, justly, to be proud—a gentleman no less distinguished for his unassuming geniality in social life, his retiring demeanour and happy domesticity, than for the character of his genius and ardent devotion to the arts which he professed. We refer to Mr. Thomas Duckett, of Avenham-road, the well known sculptor and monumental architect, who died on Wednesday last, in the 75th year of his age, after an illness of considerable duration, brought to a sudden close, it is believed, by recent serious afflictions and family bereavements.

Mr. Duckett was a native of Preston or of one of its suburban districts, where his progenitors occupied the position of respectable farmers; but the subject of this notice, being intended for other than a bucolic life, was, at a suitable age, bound 'prentice to the business of a plasterer, and served the father of the present Mr. Smith, of Cannon-street, until the situation became irksome, in consequence of the expansion of the youth's ideas and the feeling that possessed him for the pursuit of a higher vocation than that of modelling mediocre ornaments from inane designs for interior architectural embellishment (then at a very low ebb in the tide of taste). Arrangements were therefore amicably made for the cancelling of his indenture, and he became free—"the world before him where to choose." He at once struck out upon a new enterprise, exposing himself to difficulties which he was enabled nobly to overcome—this was the presenting himself as a carver in wood and obtaining employment in that capacity in the cabinet-making establishment of the eminent firm of Gilchrist and Company, at Lancaster. After a brief sojourn in the royal burgh and county town he passed southwards in the Liverpool, had the self-reliant courage to "see his way, and, at handicraft again new to him, narrow work" in a practical operations of Messrs. Francis and Spence, in the marble workers and sculptors, with Messrs. Francis and Spence, son, afterwards R.A., was the more John Gibwell were the works accomplished and employed. So assigned to our youngsters, that up to the department assistant made to Messrs. Francis and Spence by Messrs. G. and F. Webster, of Kendal, whose marble works at that time were among if not the most reputable in the kingdom, Mr. Duckett was commended for his efficiency, and subsequently undertook the management of the sculptural arduous duties of Mr. Webster's extensive business, the great satisfaction of which he continued to conduct with much beloved for several years. In that town he was and some of the friends with whom he made acquaintance, abiding in Mr. Webster's friendships there commenced are yet parture of memory among survivors who now mourn the death of a late esteemed associate.

The first trial of his strength in the art of sculpture—a group—that is to say in design and execution—was upon a group of heroic size and full relief, "the round," as it termed in these days, of "St. George and the Dragon," for a niche in the pediment of the Roman Catholic Chapel on the New-road, Kendal. The difficulties he had to contend with, in subduing the material upon which he operated, namely, the hard brittle limestone of Kendal fell, can scarcely be conceived by persons unacquainted with the nature of his self-imposed task, which was completed to the wonderment of those unused to believe that life-like forms lurk in the stone quarried on their neighbouring fell, and that such chip-pings as were seen about the work were alone necessary to reveal the "shapes unseen." Not long after the completion of this herculean production—for he it known that the mechanical appliances, which have since rendered the manual exertions of the sculptor comparatively easy, were then totally unknown, and, like Michael Angelo of old, Mr. Duckett found the subject he laboured to dislodge by bardful toil with mallet and chisels. It was about to be observed that not long after the completion of "St. George and the Dragon," he removed to his native town, taking a dwelling-house and premises in Cannon-street, whence he subsequently took up his abode and established his studio in Avenham-road, where he continued until the period of his death.

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As a sculptor, Mr. Duckett will probably be best known to the world by his statue of Sir Robert Peel in Wiackley-square in this town—yet his name is known throughout the land as a portrait sculptor of most respectable rank. The numerous busts executed by him, from the life and posthumously, will be regarded as imperishable mementoes of loved and honoured friends until new races rise up and the value of such work becomes asserted for Art's sake. A work of simple pretension, but an appositely designed and well executed decorative group of two children, fittingly placed over the entrance to a infant school (endowed by Mr. Newsham of this town) at Lancaster, may be also noticed as creditable to his ability. Some years ago he designed and executed in plaster a colossal seated statue of Sir Richard Arkwright, the multiple millionaire of Derbyshire, who commenced life, as a barber, in Preston. Unfortunately funds were not forthcoming for its perpetuation in marble or bronze, and after remaining some time in its incipency for the admiration of the artist's friends, the work was eventually demolished, no longer to upbraid the spirit of a community so immensely indebted to the mechanical genius and commercial enterprise of the successful cotton spinner. Mr. Duckett was a competitor, receiving honourable mention, in a prize competition for a statue of Sir Robert Peel at Bolton, and for a statue to the Duke of Wellington at Leeds, for both of which he submitted models in small. To mention the numerous important mural and detached monuments designed and erected by him over a large provincial area would be supererogation here; enough may have been said to illustrate his devotion to art in this branch of its manifestation, yet attention may be directed to the beautiful marble altar in St. Augustine's Church, at Frenchwood, as one of the last public works executed by him.

Mr. Duckett was a painter also. The feeling for colour evinced in his works from the easel, and his general appreciation of breadth, tint, and tone in their combined richness, were of a very high order. His weakness was, unfortunately, in the article of drawing. Draughtsmanship he never could master, and notwithstanding that the defect was rarely noticeable in his finished modelling, it was his plastic power that counterbalanced in sculpture what he lacked in painting.

For the greater portion of his life Mr. Duckett was a zealous member of the council of the Institution for the Diffusion of Knowledge, of which he fulfilled the duties of vice-president in the years 1863 to 1865, and in 1873 to 1875, and to his practical counsel may be attributed the admirable lighting of the galleries at Avenham. This was the only public institution—except the church, of which he was a faithful adherent, whose doctrines and discipline he loved and conscientiously observed—with which he allied himself. Bitterly did he lament, in later years, the want of opportunities for advancement in his youthful days, such as are offered to self-seeking aspirants to the honours of art and science at the present time.

Mr. Duckett was twice married. By his first wife he had one son, the present most esteemed Reverend Dr. Duckett, who has spent a great portion of his life in Portugal, where he was lately vice-president of the English College, and is now pastor of St. John's, Norwich. By his second wife he had two sons and two daughters. The older son—a man of the highest promise in his profession (that of his father)—in whose death his family and the world sustained a loss not easily to be replaced. The youngest son is master of the Art Schools at Barrow, while his younger daughter occupies a similar position over classes in Preston and elsewhere. His elder daughter is married, and also resides in Preston.