IN MEMORIAM.

JOSIAH GILBERT.

ANOTHER of the veterans of the Club will be missing from our next winter picture exhibition; another familiar name will no longer be found in the annual list. Many will learn with sincere regret that Mr. Josiah Gilbert passed away at his house at Ongar on August 15, in his 78th year.

Mr. Gilbert probably never climbed what is called a difficult mountain in his life. Nevertheless, he was an Alpine pioneer in the best sense of the word, and his name and presence among us have been for many years valuable in helping to keep and prove the Alpine Club true to its original broad aim and purpose as a body with brains as well as limbs—a body representative in the fullest sense of our countrymen's love of mountains and the various activities, mental and physical, inspired by it.

Josiah Gilbert, born October 7, 1814, was the eldest son of the Rev. Joseph Gilbert, author of a standard book of theology of that day. His mother, before her marriage Ann Taylor, was joint author with her sister Jane of several small volumes of well-known poems for children, as well as of a charming 'Autobiography,' * recently published and edited by her son.

The story of Mr. Gilbert's ancestry is interesting, and has a very distinct bearing on his own career and character. His great-grandfather on his mother's side, Isaac Taylor, was the son of a brassfounder in Worcester. While learning his father's business he showed a talent for engraving. Still a youth, he set out for London, giving half a crown for leave to walk by the side of the stage-waggon, and entered the cutlery works of Josiah Jefferys, afterwards removed to Shenfield, in Essex, where in due course young Taylor married his master's daughter. Isaac Taylor had engraved crests and devices when in Worcester; he now adopted art engraving as a profession, and soon became a well-known artist and art publisher. His house was the resort of many personages of note. Bartolozzi, Fuseli, Smirke, Goldsmith, were often there, and many of the illustrations to Goldsmith's works are signed 'Isaac Taylor.' He was one of the original founders of the 'Royal Incorporated Society of Artists of Great Britain,' from which sprang the Royal Academy, and he succeeded Woollett, its first secretary. Bewick was his pupil. His second son, Josiah Gilbert's grandfather, became likewise a well-known engraver. There was at that time a considerable foreign sale for English prints, and Mr. Gilbert more than once found engravings by his grandfather, signed 'Isaac Taylor, jun.,' in some of the most remote spots of the Continent.

Engravers suffered, in common with most other artists, from the depression caused by the French Revolution and subsequent war.

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* *Autobiography and other Memorials of Mrs. Gilbert, formerly Ann Taylor.* Kegan Paul, 1878.

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The second Isaac Taylor, however, stuck to his craft through evil times, in which he used to declare he had been 'glad to engrave a dog-collar.' He brought up his daughters to assist him, and they thus paid their share of the family expenses by their work.

Isaac Taylor subsequently became minister of an Independent congregation at Colchester. He educated his own children and published several children's books, doubtless first written for their instruction. No less than four of his family—Isaac Taylor, the third, well known as a theological author; Jefferys Taylor, Jane, and Ann (Mr. Gilbert's mother) were more or less distinguished in literature. Thus Josiah Gilbert may be said to have inherited art and letters, and during his early life at Ongar, with his grandfather, he was surrounded by the family influences and trained in their pursuits.

In due time he was sent to London in order that his technical education might be carried on at Sass's Art School (described in Frith's 'Autobiography'), where many known names both preceded and followed him. Among his chief companions were Waller, the writer on monumental brasses, and Samuel Lawrence, the portrait painter and lifelong friend of many of the first literary men of his day. Thence young Gilbert went to the Royal Academy Schools, where he was one of the prize students of his year. The piece of work by which he won is still at Marden Ash.

Mr. Gilbert married at twenty-three and set up as a portrait painter. After a short stay in London, where he had a house and studio in Berners Street, he took up his abode in the country, at Marden Ash, in the house he subsequently lived in for over fifty years. His first wife, who died in 1871, was the companion of his Dolomite travels. To his second wife, who survives him, the writer is indebted for the following brief notes on her husband's professional career:—

'About this time, 1838, he adopted the vehicle of slightly coloured crayon, from which he never departed.

'His professional engagements soon became very heavy and took him much away from home. His drawings, which include many at the time well-known names, are scattered over the country. The quality of his work varied, as is always found when the whole work of any man whose career extended over so long a period is got together. One characteristic is notable in his work—he got into no grooves, and his art grew till the end. The drawings of the last seven or eight years differed greatly in many chief points from the previous ones. He had lost the microscopic precision of touch which his remarkable eyesight gave him, but some larger qualities had come in its place. Many of his drawings we knew to be in the neighbourhood of Leeds, and when we found ourselves there, some five years ago, he feared much what we might see. His fears were, I think, needless. A good deal of his best work is there. A fine drawing of his uncle, Isaac Taylor, has recently been acquired by the National Portrait Gallery.'

A man of very various interests and accomplishments—artist (always and above all), art-critic, traveller—Mr. Gilbert was chiefly known to the world by his Alpine qualification as one of the discoverers of the

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Dolomites. From time to time the eyes of some passing traveller had been caught by one or other of the weird peaks that rise between the Pusterthal, the Eisackthal, and the Venetian lagoons. Sir Humphry Davy had touched on them; early editions of Murray's 'Handbook to Tyrol' had had a view of the Langkofel from the Grödnerthal. But the physical characteristics and the peculiar beauties of a region which 'reveals Nature in one of her loveliest and most fascinating aspects' (Ball *) were all unknown until, in 1864, the public's attention was taken by surprise by Gilbert and Churchill's portly volume. The narrative of travel was Gilbert's; Churchill, his lifelong friend and companion in all the more important journeys, supplied the science. For the moment the book was a society sensation—something to be talked about. Mr. Gilbert had a story on this point. He overheard his hostess one evening whisper to the lady he was about to take in to dinner, 'The author of the Dolomites.' His partner promptly took advantage of the hint by remarking on the stairs, 'I am so longing to read your book. You must tell me all about the Dolomites. They are a very interesting people, are they not—a sect of the Eastern Church?'

This book, the fruit of several journeys, fully deserved its success. The field covered by it was a large one, extending from the Valley of the Adige to the mountains of Styria and Carniola. Fortunate in the freshness of his subject, Mr. Gilbert was happy also in the trained appreciation of natural beauty of form and colour he brought to it. By education a painter, by habit an indefatigable sketcher,† he was also a reader of wide sympathies and the master of a cultivated and attractive style; and when an artist can use his pen as well as his pencil, his trained perceptions give him singular advantages as a traveller.

The new mountains thus introduced to Alpine society were speedily adopted into mountaineers' favour. Mr. Ball proved one of their most enthusiastic devotees, Mr. Leslie Stephen was a respectful, Mr. Tuckett an assiduous, Mr. Holzman a laborious worshipper. The Pelmo and the Cimon della Pala became household words, and it was generally admitted, even among those who care for mountains only for climbing's sake, that Dolomite climbs had a fine flavour of their own.

Mr. Gilbert had the philosophic mind as well as the artist's perceptions. He recognised the close relationship between the beauty of Nature, which has been described as the expression of a superior mind in matter, or more epigrammatically as the Art of God, and painting, in which the human artist, though forced to omit much by the limitations of his craft, yet adds more or less his own individuality to the product. His own artistic talent was appreciative rather than creative, his executive powers were in landscape limited—at any rate he did not press beyond certain limits—hence he had the advantage of not being absorbed in his own productions. With such training and such tastes

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* Mr. Ball's *Central Alps*, containing a description of the isolated Dolomites of Val Rendena, west of the Adige Valley, was also published in 1864, his *Eastern Alps* not till 1868.

† A sketch of Monte Civetta and the Lago d'Alleghe, presented by Mr. Gilbert to the Club, hangs in the Clubroom.

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and sympathies Mr. Gilbert was naturally drawn on to investigate the connection between the Venetian Alps and Venetian art in general, and Titian and his birthplace Cadore in particular. A beautiful volume, 'Cadore, or Titian's Country,' was the result. In this the author practically exhausted his subject, and showed conclusively that the so-called 'fantastic and fanciful' backgrounds of the great painter were one and all faithful reminiscences of his childhood, or of his frequent holidays among his native hills, no less true to local nature than the broad lake and gentle slopes of the school of Perugia are to the scenery of Umbria. From his studies in the Venetian school Mr. Gilbert was led to a wider investigation of the place of landscape in Italian art, and he published on the subject a careful and very attractive volume which was reviewed at the time in these pages. Mountains of course received their full share of attention, and Mr. Gilbert showed that they have been from very early times objects of human worship and admiration—if of a distant admiration. The book suffered from its merits. The author broke ground new to many of the writers who sometimes on very slender qualifications play the part of professional art-critics in London, and it was consequently imperfectly noticed and appreciated in the press. But it has taken, and will undoubtedly hold, a place on the shelves of all true art-lovers. A particular charm is added to it by the engravings of mountains found in the landscape backgrounds of the Old Masters, executed from careful copies made by Mr. Gilbert in the course of his frequent Italian journeys.

We have written so far of Mr. Gilbert as an author. As a friend he will be sadly missed by all who were fortunate enough to enjoy his intimacy. Full of insight and information on many different subjects, he wore his knowledge lightly. His character was marked by a perfect absence of self-seeking or popularity-hunting. He lived a retired life, caring more for the sympathy of a few than for the applause of many. Yet he took a full share in the everyday clatter of country affairs and politics, and brought to them a strong vein of humour and a shrewd common sense, inherited, it is said, from both his parents, together with a sweetness of mind and manners which made friends even of his natural opponents. An ardent, active Liberal, he was the only man in his parish who could keep on terms with one of the wildest of Tory squires; a septuagenarian, he was intellectually the contemporary of a younger generation. In all things his aims were generous, impersonal, intellectual. His friends found in him, both in intercourse and in correspondence—he was one of the few surviving letter-writers — warm sympathy alike in joy or sorrow, and a delicate old-world virtue united with the most open of minds and the keenest enthusiasm for progress. Such a combination is rare, does not grow more common, and can ill be spared. D. W. F.

FREDERIC ELLIOT BLACKSTONE.

The well-known face of Frederic Elliot Blackstone will, unhappily, be seen no more at the meetings of the Alpine Club. Although not an original member, his election dates so far back as the year 1859, and

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his interest in mountaineering remained unabated till his death in October last, at the age of sixty-three. He was the son of the Reverend F. Blackstone, vicar of Heckfield, near Reading, and came of an old Wykehamist family. His father and his grandfather were Winchester boys, and, under the old system, he received in his turn a foundation scholarship, and entered the school in 1843. He gradually worked his way up and became 'Prefect of Hall,' passing on in due course to New College, Oxford, where he was elected a Fellow in 1849. It was at Pen-y-gwryd, at the Easter of 1853, that he first took to climbing, and there he became acquainted with some of the men who subsequently became conspicuous as the 'makers of mountaineering.' He did some good work at Zermatt in 1858, in the company of his life-long friend, the Reverend Ambrose Short, and in 1859 was climbing in the Oberland with Mr. Horace Walker, in which season both gentlemen qualified for admission to the Club. Since that date he spent most of his holidays in the Alps, but occasionally went further afield. He made a tour with Mr. Tuckett through Carinthia and the Dolomites in 1867, and visited Greece with the same gentlemen in 1878, crossing nineteen passes and ascending, among other mountains, Parnassus.

He was appointed an assistant-librarian in the British Museum in June 1856, and was promoted to the first class in 1874. He was a man of wide culture, and had a rare knowledge of books. When the celebrated Grenville Library was bequeathed to the nation in 1847, the task of cataloguing this splendid series was entrusted entirely to Blackstone, and he prepared valuable bibliographical notes and historical and literary information in relation to this particular collection. He also compiled a short analysis of the complicated and perplexing rules of the Museum catalogue, a work of great service to students, which has been twice translated into French for the benefit of foreign librarians. His work was remarkable for its neatness and its accuracy. His professional labours and his high character were alike appreciated by his colleagues, and had he lived he might have occupied the highest position in this department.

He was not a great climber according to the modern standard, but he was a most cheerful and excellent companion, had great geographical knowledge, and an extraordinary capacity for amassing details. Mr. Morshead records of him that on one occasion, when they were travelling together in a country altogether unknown to them, the local guide lost his way, and was altogether unable to proceed. Blackstone said at once, 'But I know,' and gave the guide the necessary directions, having carefully got up the route before leaving England.

His influence and his personality are especially valuable in connection with well-known social gatherings of the older members of the Club. He had an infinite capacity for taking trouble, particularly on behalf of friends who desired to profit by his experience or his knowledge.

He bore the inroads of a depressing disease with a rare patience and cheerfulness; he had an affectionate, generous, and unselfish nature, and his loss has made a gap in our ranks which will not easily be filled.

C. E. M.

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