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and authorship. But when it comes to denying the substantial truth of the Scripture record—then, for Christians at all events, the time has come for exclaiming: “Hitherto shalt thou go, but no farther; and here shall thy proud words be stayed.”



Revival Memories: The Early Days of Church Missions.

BY THE REV. CANON W. HAY M. H. AITKEN, M.A.

THE Mission Movement in the Church of England was no doubt greatly stimulated by the visit of the American Evangelists in 1873, but it is well to bear in mind that it had been inaugurated some four years earlier by the great “Twelve Days’ Mission” in London. Indeed, though that was the first united effort to which the name “mission” was given, it was far from being the first thing of the kind ever attempted in connection with our Church. The student of the history of the Evangelical school in the Church of England can hardly fail to be surprised at the fact that, while the teaching of Wesley and Whitfield was reproduced during the nineteenth century in many churches throughout the land, the evangelizing methods which Wesley had used with such effect, and which had done so much for Wesleyan Methodism, do not seem to have been adopted. The “penitent meeting,” which always followed the sermon of the Methodist revivalist, does not seem to have been made use of by the Evangelical leaders who did such good work in the first fifty years of last century.

These good men seem to have trusted mainly to their preaching of the Gospel on the Sundays, and probably to house-to-house visitation, with which they, no doubt, followed up the impressions made in the pulpit, for the results which so abundantly accompanied their ministry. Perhaps it was their Calvinistic bias that inclined them to imitate the methods of Whitfield rather than those of Wesley. No doubt many of the

most earnest amongst them were jealous of anything that might seem like an attempt to supersede the direct personal action of the Holy Ghost upon the awakened heart. In the early days of the mission movement I have myself, at our clerical gatherings during a general mission, every now and then heard words of warning uttered that were based on this apprehension.

But this habit of leaving results to God (to employ a phrase that used to be very common in those days) had, before the first half of the century had run its course, produced a very unsatisfactory state of things in the great majority of Evangelical churches. Justification by faith was indeed preached, and sometimes with a reiteration of its doctrinal aspects that to-day would be regarded as tedious; yet it was not preached in a way that led people to seek to become justified. A flat and lifeless Evangelicism is, perhaps, the least satisfactory of any form of religious teaching. There is just enough truth in it to harden, but not enough power to save. My early memories of the condition of our Church lead me to believe that ministries of this sort were the rule rather than the exception in the middle of the nineteenth century, and it is my firm conviction that it was the absence of aggressive conversion work in Evangelical churches that paved the way for the progress of the Tractarian Movement.

The man whom God raised up to bring about a great and salutary change in this respect was, I believe, Robert Aitken, of Pendeen. The very definite experience in his own early days of a great spiritual change, when he had already been five years in Holy Orders, led to his giving up the best years of his life to continuous evangelizing efforts. And because he could at that time find no countenance or sympathy in the Church, he felt constrained to break with Church order, and for many years worked as a "revivalist" amongst the Wesleyans, and subsequently in large buildings which he himself purchased or erected in various towns in England. About the time that I was born he submitted himself once more to Episcopal control, and ultimately, by a strange combination of circumstances, found

himself the incumbent of a mining district in the remotest part of Cornwall. Here it might have been supposed that his influence would be confined within narrow local limits, but it was not to be so. From this lonely Patmos of the far west call after call reached him from various parts of England from clergymen of different schools of thought who were longing for more spiritual life amongst their people; and the wonderful results that followed these early efforts excited much notice, and sometimes not a little opposition. William Haslam in Cornwall, John Knott in Leeds, Richard Twigg at Wednesbury, George Herbert of St. Peter's, Vauxhall, and many other clergymen whose names are less known, but whose influence extended widely, all owed their spiritual enlightenment to his teaching, and others who never came into direct contact with him were indirectly influenced by him, through those whom he had led into a clearer light.

These revival services, as they were usually called in those days, the name of missions not having been as yet suggested, were something so utterly new within the Church that they produced a great sensation. The churches in which they were held were crowded, one might almost say, to suffocation. In a certain town in the Potteries an indignant parson exclaimed: "I hear this man Aitken preaches for fifty minutes; I am going to hear him, and if he goes beyond thirty-five minutes, or at most forty, I shall get up and walk out of church as an act of protest." With this laudable intention he entered the church, and found himself seated well in front, while already the huge building was fast filling with an "eager, anxious throng." It continued to fill until all the seats were taken, and then until all standing room was occupied, all the aisles blocked, and every possibility of egress removed; and thus, wedged into his seat, the unfortunate man had to endure a sermon that lasted for nearly two hours; for the preacher's heart was very full, and the eagerness of his audience led him on, forgetful of the flight of time. So the indignant protester had perforce to forego his protest.

The after-meetings, as we should now call them, in those early days were always held in the schoolrooms ; it would have been thought almost a profanation to have them in church. They were generally spoken of as prayer-meetings, and no doubt there was usually a great deal of noise and excitement. My father had learnt his methods of evangelizing work amongst the Methodists, and, having found them useful in his earlier labours in connection with that body, it is hardly to be wondered at that he continued to adhere to them in these pioneer efforts within the Church. Quieter and more church-like forms of procedure came in with missions properly so-called.

Amongst those who were indirectly influenced by my father's evangelizing efforts was one who was destined to contribute, perhaps, more than anyone else, to the bringing of mission-work into general acceptance in the Church—George Howard Wilkinson, late Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church. He was, I suppose, the first man to hold what was definitely called a mission in his parish, and he did it under the very eyes of Bishop Baring, of Durham, who was not a man to sympathize with such innovations, whether they seemed to savour of Romanism on the one side, or of Methodism on the other. The good Bishop, failing altogether to grasp the true character of the movement, made things very difficult for the Vicar ; but Wilkinson was not a man to be daunted, and God's blessing vindicated the wisdom of this new agency. The Auckland Mission stands first, so far as I know, in that long list of Church missions, which has never been made out in this world, but is no doubt preserved in that world where "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."

I am careful to say "so far as I know," for it was about that time that missions of a somewhat different type began to be held by the "Cowley Fathers," and it is possible that some of these may have occurred at an earlier date. There is no doubt that Wilkinson and his close friend, the present Archbishop of York, were influenced by Cowley as well as by Pendeen in their proposal of the first great united effort in London, the

“Twelve Days’ Mission” of 1869. I suppose it was from Cowley that the suggestion of the term “mission” came, and no doubt the Cowley Fathers borrowed it from the Roman Catholics, with whom missions have long been a recognized institution.

“What is there in a name?” people sometimes ask. But my own observation of men and manners would lead me to reply, “A very great deal.” There can be no doubt that the name in this case was a most important factor in the great results that followed. True, it had its drawbacks. It excited no small amount of suspicion amongst the Evangelicals of the time, and I well remember how, when my dear Vicar, William Pennefather, had cordially consented to my taking part in the effort, he was subsequently inundated with expostulations from his friends. This was supposed to be the last move of the Romanizing party, and the most astute that they had as yet made. And to think that the name of the curate of St. Jude’s, Mildmay Park, should be the very first on the list of mission preachers!

No doubt there was some cause for this strong feeling. It had been carefully insisted upon that this was not to be a party movement in any sense of the word, and on that understanding I asked my Vicar’s leave to join in it. Yet the posters that subsequently appeared all over London, and which contained a list of the preachers joining, in alphabetical order, were headed by a huge black cross, and were dated from All Saints’, Margaret Street, while the fact that one of the Cowley Fathers was the secretary gave additional ground for suspicion.

On the other hand, the use of the word proved almost talismanic in other quarters. If, a few years later, I had risen in the Ruridecanal Chapter at Liverpool to propose that we should all join in holding revival meetings in our parishes, I doubt whether I should have found half a dozen supporters. But when I proposed that we should hold a general mission throughout the town, the thing was carried enthusiastically *nem. con.*; so that, after all, I conclude there was a good deal

in that name. Possibly its efficacy may now be somewhat impaired; and the Welsh Revival seemed at one time likely to bring the old word "revival" back again into favour; but during the last quarter of the nineteenth century the word "mission" has certainly done good service to the cause of the Gospel in our Church.

Was the Twelve Days' Mission a great success? Measured by its direct results, so far as I was able to judge, I should be inclined to say No. I do not remember hearing of any church being inconveniently crowded, nor can I recall any report of large spiritual results of a definite character reaching me. Certainly, in the churches in which I myself worked, the apparent results seemed comparatively small, and it fell to my lot to work both for Wilkinson and Archbishop Maclagan (who was then at Kennington)—two men who were the recognized leaders of the movement. I do not say for a moment that there were no apparent conversions, but that the number of those who professed to be thus blessed was small as compared with the magnitude of the effort and the great notoriety that it gained.

But its indirect results were amazing. Everyone seemed interested in this new departure in the Church of England. The secular press, from the *Times* downwards, had leaders on the subject, and during the mission fairly extensive notices of the services appeared. But it was perhaps the clergy, more than any other class, that were stirred by the tidings of this great crusade. Numbers of them felt that it was just some such spiritual impulse as this that their parishes needed, and possibly they themselves not less than their people. Hence the London Mission did more than set a fashion (though certainly it did that); it met a need that numbers of earnest men were conscious of, and many even who were not earnest felt that here was a possibility of becoming so.

Hence the great effort had hardly concluded before invitations from all quarters began to pour in upon the little handful of clergymen who possessed any capacity for, or acquaintance

with, this kind of work. The venerable "Patriarch of Pendeen," as his friends used to love to call him, who was now in his seventieth year, found himself in great request, and the last years of his life were brightened by participation in the spiritual harvest that ensued. Perhaps the most remarkable of the missions in which he himself took part was that at St. Paul's, Newport, where for weeks together a marvellous ingathering of souls took place. His first visit resulted in a great blessing to the soul of the Vicar, the late Mr. Wrenford, and this led to so great a stir in the place that my father was persuaded to return for a second visit, in which the results were even larger than in the first. Night after night that big church, which at that time would hold, when crowded, some 1,800 people, was thronged to the doors; and when the sermon was ended the missionary and the Vicar would retire within the Communion-rails, inviting those who were seeking for pardon and peace to come up and kneel at the rails, where they would offer them personal assistance and direction. Often the rails would be filled four or five times over in the course of a single night, and probably hundreds, if not thousands, were won for Christ during that eventful season. The memory of that wonderful time of blessing is fresh in Newport to-day, and there still remain, after the lapse of nearly forty years, not a few who look back upon it as the turning-point in their lives.

It was in the following year that the General Mission in St. Pancras took place, and my father was invited by the late Bishop Thorold, who was then Vicar of that large parish, to preach the closing sermon of the mission at the parish church at a united morning gathering. I was not present, but I have heard that sermon, on the words "Jesus Christ our Lord," again and again referred to as one of the most striking that he ever preached. At its close he retired for a moment into the vestry along with the late Bishop Magee, who was to celebrate at the Communion Service that followed. After thanking him very cordially for his sermon, the Bishop asked: "Now, do tell me, Mr. Aitken, are the spiritual results of these evangelizing

efforts really permanent so far as you have been able to form an opinion ; or, when the heated emotional excitement passes away, does not all collapse ?” Just at this moment there was a loud knocking at the vestry-door, and, on its being opened, a small crowd of people pressed eagerly forward to grasp the hand of the preacher. Returning to the Bishop after a most affectionate leave-taking, he replied : “ You have your answer there, my lord. It is more than thirty years since I closed my evangelizing career in London, and here are these dear people crowding round me to-day, full of gratitude to God and man for the blessing that they received all those long years ago.”

I was present at a meeting of the clergy held in St. Pancras Schoolroom on the last Saturday of that mission, and I always look back upon my father's speech on that occasion as the utterance of a sort of *Nunc Dimittis*. “ You can better imagine,” he remarked, “ than I can describe what my feelings are in addressing you to-day. For many a long year I have been endeavouring to bear my witness to the importance—nay, the necessity—of this kind of work, but I have stood almost alone ; and now I have lived to see it taken up by the leaders of the Church, and, I may almost say, by the Church at large. My heart is very full, and I can hardly trust myself to speak, but I do thank God that I have been spared to see this day.”

Only another year, and the sudden call came, and God's servant did indeed depart in peace, for his eyes had seen a wondrous manifestation of God's salvation.

In a concluding paper next month I hope to give some reminiscences of missions in which I have myself taken part.

