

the closing chapters of Dr. Ball's book for most accurate facts connected with the disestablished Church.

What have we learned from this brief review? Guided by history, we have seen a reformation thrust forcibly, in obedience to the fashion of the times and to the conscience of England, on an unprepared and unwilling Church. We have seen a degraded and ignorant "reformed" clergy living in poverty, in ruinous houses, ministering fitfully in decayed, and often roofless, churches—no school for the peasantry, and no one competent to teach the principles of the Reformation had they existed. We have seen the Church pillaged in war and decimated by massacre, holding its ground, humanly speaking, only because endowed with a remnant of its ancient tithes—too weak in all the instruments of spiritual power to do more in Ireland for centuries than hold its ground.

We must admit that the problem placed before the Church of Ireland has always been one of vast difficulty. Some of the conditions of the problem we have noticed, many more may be studied in our author's pages; but these enormous difficulties and these innumerable hindrances must be considered by those who find fault with the Church for her failure to win over the majority to her side.

To-day, as we look at her, we see a Church alive and awake. Deserted by the State which once only too sternly established her in Ireland, but containing within herself elements of perpetual life. Governed by her synods, supported in great measure by her laity, aiding in sending the Gospel to all lands, quietly sowing the seeds of the truth among the Romanist population, and setting an example to the people of Ireland of God-fearing, law-abiding, and intelligent citizenship, which not long since won from the lips of a Roman Catholic, who had every means of knowing both sides, the confession that "the Protestants of Ireland are the salt of the earth."

G. R. WYNNE.



ART. V.—ROBERT AITKEN, OF PENDEEN:
A SKETCH.

IT was in the autumn of 1872 that I first saw Robert Aitken, of Pendeen. I was in wretchedly bad health, and had been sent down to the coast—to the little watering-place of Sandgate—with the double object of recruiting strength and of reading for Orders with the Vicar. Sandgate is a long, straggling little town, which stretches its wind and weather-beaten length for a mile or more along the line of the beach.

Like a wall behind rise the cliffs ; at their foot bosky groves, within the recesses of which nestle the villas of the fortunate and the one or two mansions of the great. Above are the downs and the geometrically arranged huts of the camp of Shorncliffe. Sandgate is a little quiet backwater, away from the rush of the tide of life. It is not situated on the main line of railway. Those who are whirled past Shorncliffe station on their way to Folkestone or Dover are not made conscious of its existence by any outward and visible sign. It is hidden away behind and beneath the cliffs which terminate the downs seaward. If you want to visit Sandgate you must either change at the junction above and run down to the shore upon a single loop-line, or else you must make your way along the white and dusty road which leads past the Martello tower, through a depression between the high downs into the main or rather only street of the village. All that is to be seen is then soon seen. On the left are the schools surrounded by their bare, trodden playground ; on the right a flight of steep steps leads up to the church—a shapeless building, whose meaningless architecture is, however, partly redeemed by the masses of ivy which cover its walls and festoon its open belfry ; further on a long vista of smallish shops and not very pretentious lodging-houses ; short side-streets running up to the cliffs on the right and down to the beach on the left, where is hidden away a colony of fisherfolk, labourers, and that nameless unworking population which hangs on somehow to the skirts of society in every English town or village. Such was Sandgate fifteen years ago ; such, for all I know to the contrary, it is to-day.

We were not easily excited in Sandgate. Sometimes we waxed a little warm over local elections, and called each other hard names ; or we (metaphorically sometimes, but not always) shook our fists at each other over an audacious proposal to carry a railway right through our narrow territory, stringing it like a bead, and encroaching upon our beach, in the eyes of quiet people, our best possession ; or bands of young soldiers would now and again parade our street, throwing their caps in the air, and hurraing when some foreign complication threatened an immediate outbreak of hostilities and a prospect of active service. But in the main we took things very quietly ; and the passing years which were effecting such startling changes in the great world beyond the cliffs left us much as we had always been, both socially, politically, and religiously.

When, therefore, the Vicar announced that, for the first time, a Mission was to be held in Sandgate, and that the Missioner was to be that well-known and mighty evangelist,

the Rev. Robert Aitken, of Pendeen, I do not think that very many people troubled themselves much about the matter, or even inquired very diligently who Mr. Aitken might be. The Vicar, however, set to work in a methodical manner, and called together his staff of parish-workers. To each district visitor a certain section of the village was assigned, which was to be systematically visited from house to house, and the aim and objects of a Mission impressed upon the people. The Thursday evening service took the form of a large prayer-meeting, at which a special blessing was asked, during many weeks beforehand, upon the coming Services. By-and-by everybody at least knew that something unusual was going to take place in connection with the church; and by the time that the season of the Mission drew near, most of the spiritually minded people in the parish were thoroughly interested and determined to do their best to make Mr. Aitken's visit a success.

One Saturday afternoon he arrived at the Vicarage. For my part I was, I confess, a little frightened. I had never taken part in a mission before, and my solitary experience of the ways of a Missioner had been rather alarming. About a year previous to this, a certain well-known evangelist had visited a Midland town, near to which was my home. He had been invited to read a paper at a clerical and lay conference. After the proceedings, it fell to my lot to pilot him through the mile and a half of country lanes which lay between the town and the parsonage at which he was to pass the night. Our conversation, which was at first upon general topics, was soon brought round to that of religion, and religion, too, made somewhat uncomfortably personal. It was in vain that I turned the edge of my companion's remarks with my best skill and attempted to parry his semi-questionings, so as to avoid as politely as might be the catastrophe of the interrogative direct which a certain instinct told me was threatening. All in vain. I found myself at last taken by the arm, and required to answer then and there whether I were a Christian in the truest and fullest sense of the word. On that occasion I had chosen to consider myself as insulted. The memory of it rather rankled in my heart. When, therefore, Mr. Aitken was announced at the little Vicarage on the cliff, I looked forward with some apprehension to the prospect of spending nearly a fortnight in the same house with one so noted for "his power in dealing with souls!"

As I entered the drawing-room a deep, bass voice was uttering sounds in slow tones which seemed to vibrate through the room. There stood upon the hearthrug an old man of a striking and majestic figure. He seemed to fill the room with his presence. The rest seemed there to listen and to

obey. One became instantly conscious of a great and compelling personality.

Robert Aitken, of Pendeen, was not a man to see and to forget. His commanding height, which raised him head and shoulders above the average crowd, supported a massive head, square and resolute, venerable as that of an apostle, and, in spite of its thin white hair, bleached by many heats and frosts of hard service, erect as that of a general reviewing his troops in the field. His eyes, which rested upon the new-comer with the quiet benignity of a patriarch, would at times concentrate their gaze into a steady, searching look which seemed to penetrate right through one's frontal bone into his brain, and to read the secrets there as an open letter might be read. Sometimes they would flash a fitting accompaniment to the thunderous tones of his overwhelming voice. The face was neither handsome nor beautiful—that is to say, its features were neither regular, nor were any of them, taken singly, conformable to any recognised model of masculine beauty. But the face was a powerful face. It was the countenance of a man who was accustomed to be loved, followed, and obeyed. His voice, which was then slightly affected by age and much speaking, was still magnificent. Full and resonant, one of the deepest bass voices which I have ever heard, its lower notes seemed, without any effort on his part, to cause a vibration throughout the room, such as is effected by the swell of an organ. Such a voice exercises a singular power over the heart of a listener. It touches a chord which responds as to the subtle influence of music, and brings an audience at once into sympathy with the speaker.

We soon found that we had nothing to fear from any want of tact on the part of the great Missioner. He treated us all as though we must, as a matter of course, feel a deep interest in the work which he had come among us to undertake; and, before many minutes had passed, we found ourselves sitting, as in an enchanted circle, spell-bound by that soul-thrilling voice, and listening to words such as one at least among the company had never before heard fall from lips of mortal man. As that one listened, "his heart burned within him," and it seemed to him as though the days of the Apostolic Church might once more dawn upon men; and that disciples of Jesus might again comfort and encourage one another in very deed, "in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs." We were more than content to let him talk. His conversation was as a revelation to more than one among his listeners. He discussed easily and without constraint many subjects, but all were regarded from the point of view of the other world. In his scheme of life it was evident that Jesus still walked among men. When

we rose to separate for the night, it was with the feeling that we had at last been brought face to face with an actual saint of God.

Next morning, as we went churchward, Aitken accepting and leaning upon my young arm, some people turned to look after the notable figure of the fine old man. And indeed he was not one who could pass down the main street of a village without attracting attention. His tall, square-set form was robed in a long, cassock-like over-garment, which reached almost to the ground, and was fastened down the front by braided frogs. His broad-brimmed hat bore that rosette in front which is now not an uncommon ornament upon the clerical headpieces, but was then sufficiently rare to be remarked. These rather unusual habiliments became him well enough. He bore himself unconsciously, and not as though there were anything about him different from his fellows. But, as I said, people turned and looked after us. They were evidently asking one another what sort of man this Missioner might be. The church, however, was not crowded. It was fuller than usual, but that was all. Sandgate was not easily excited. It was evident that, if this Mission were successful, it would not owe much to the initial force with which it was started on its course.

We had heard something of the strange power which Aitken was able to exercise over his congregations of Cornish miners. How he would emerge from his church, where he had spent hours in prayer, and, standing up before the great assembly in the open air, would bow them before the sweeping onrush of his impassioned eloquence, as a field of corn is swayed by the wind. How tears would respond to his pleadings, and sobs and cries at times would convulse his hearers, as a thousand hearts trembled before his stern delineation of the judgment which follows hard upon a life of unrighteousness. It was, therefore, with a keen interest, not unmixed with curiosity, that we watched the black-gowned figure—the black gown and bands were then used in Sandgate—ascend the lofty wooden pulpit, and listened for the first words which he might utter.

A short collect, and then he commenced the Lord's Prayer. I do not know whether he was in the habit of using the Lord's Prayer in the pulpit. I imagine not; since, if I recollect rightly, he did not again repeat it before his sermons during that week. But then, as though without premeditation, he began the words of the Prayer of prayers. Never had I heard that prayer so prayed before. It was as though I had not understood what the words meant until then. As he prayed, it seemed as though a veil were drawn away from our faces and our Father was before us—a substantive Being. Hands

seemed to be extended above us as though in benediction. A deep stillness fell upon the congregation. Scarce one durst look up. Even the children appeared to feel the spell. Not a sound came from the fidgety corner of the Sunday-school gallery. We were already well disposed to listen to the words of the sermon which was to follow.

The sermon itself, however, was not quite what we had been led to expect. It was not the kind of sermon to which we had been accustomed to listen from the lips of distinguished preachers. There was nothing in the nature of oratory about it. If one might judge by such recognised models as Barrow, or Jeremy Taylor, or by Melville, or Bradley, it was not a sermon at all. There were no apparent "divisions." There was no marked peroration. There was no swift rush of arguments like to those with which, as with charging battalions, Chalmers would bear down and overwhelm all mental opposition on the part of his audience. Nor was there the forcible flow of dramatically told and artistically arranged anecdotes with which Guthrie would enchain the attention of every hearer.

Aitken's style, on this occasion at least, was almost colloquial. He seemed purposely to avoid all conventional methods. Indeed he spoke almost with contempt of those "paper sermons" which were compounded out of dry books in the study-chair. He assured us that anyone among us could preach if only the love of Christ burned with a living flame within his heart, and if only he would be content to tell others what he actually knew of the grace of God, and not what he supposed *ought* to be known and taught. Sometimes his stories seemed to fall almost below the dignity and solemnity of the occasion—as when he narrated how a sportsman with gun and dogs had occupied the same compartment with him on his journey from London, and had asked him whether he, too, was fond of shooting. With a twinkle in his eye he told us that he had replied, 'Yes, sir, but it is my business to shoot *souls*!' Yet, if we smiled, it was with a tear in our eye, for we already felt that the bow was in the hand of no unskilful marksman, and that the arrow which he had aimed at our hearts had found "the gold." We left the church disinclined to criticise, though there was plenty in what we had heard to invite criticism. The preacher had produced the effect upon us which no doubt he had intended to produce. He had made us feel that what he said he *meant*; and that God, Eternity, Judgment, and Salvation were not disputable theories but absolute facts. Somehow, by his very artlessness of speech, he had brought us face to face with God. He had—how, we could not tell—for awhile raised the curtain which

shut us off from the Invisible; he had led some of us trembling into the very presence of the awful Judge; others—happy souls—to meet the reassuring glance of their Father in heaven, in Whom they then knew that “they lived, and moved, and had their being.”

Aitken was, however, not always colloquial; he was capable, we found, of flights of eloquence, at which times his action would be as vehement as his delivery was impassioned. On such occasions he was overwhelming. There was nothing for it but to yield one's self unreservedly, for the time being, to the influence of his surging speech. Now and again even the rushing torrent of his thunderous words seemed but an inadequate vehicle to convey to us the thoughts which strained and pressed with volcanic force within him, seeking an outlet. Then he would lean far forward, reaching over the pulpit, extending his arms as though he would gather us all up together close to him, and so impart himself to us. Or, he would, in attacking some crying evil, or some God-defying sin, wrestle with it, crush it, strangle it, and dash it out of existence, treading it down beneath his feet, to be committed to utter destruction among the impalpable dust of all forgotten things.

He would sometimes laugh at his own impetuosity, and say that it took a strong pulpit to hold him. Nor, after we had heard him a few times, were we incredulous. We did not, after a little experience of those thunder-clap passages of his, find it hard to believe the following story which he told the home-circle at the Vicarage against himself. He was, on a certain occasion, preaching in a West-country church. The pews were old-fashioned and high-walled; the pulpit was lofty, shaped like a wine-glass, of thin panelling, and supported upon a slender and wholly inadequate stem. This pulpit stood in the centre of the building, and was surrounded on two, if not three, sides by the encroaching ranks of pews. As the great preacher ascended the rickety and worm-eaten steps they creaked ominously, nor did the pulpit, when he grasped its narrow edges, seem too strong. All this, however, Aitken soon forgot, and launched himself freely out upon the current of his discourse. Presently he was breasting the rapids and carrying the whole congregation with him as with the mighty strokes of a powerful swimmer, when some lunge of arm or leg, or the sudden impact of his body against the side of the pulpit, was too much for its sorely tried stability. There was a sharp crack, a long, rending crunch, and Aitken felt the whole pulpit was slowly falling forward! Rapidly the question flashed through his mind, What was he to do? As rapidly he resolved to do nothing, but to continue his sermon.

This he did, till the pulpit, gradually settling down, rested against the edge of the high pew nearest to it. Happily the inclination was not so great as to prevent him from preserving his balance, and he was able to stick to his post until the end!

Aitken's real power, however, over his audience did not seem to lie in his vehemence, or in the language which he employed, or even in the earnestness and directness with which he spoke; rather in a certain magnetic force which he appeared to possess, and which placed him at once *en rapport* with his hearers. One may almost say that without this indescribable attribute, without a certain measure of this almost mesmeric power of attraction, no man can be a truly great orator. Aitken had it in a remarkable degree. From the moment when he began to speak to the moment when he closed his address, all eyes were fixed upon him—riveted, one might say. He sometimes seemed to hold absolute dominion, for the while, over the souls whom he admonished. I remember one remarkable instance of the strange power which would accompany his simplest words. We had left the church after the evening service, and were assembled in the schoolroom across the way for an after-meeting. The room was full without being crowded. There was no excitement of any kind. We had not even sung any of the revival hymns from the Mission-book. We sat in our places quietly waiting for the clergy to take the initiative. Presently Aitken arose. His tall form, crowned with its massive white head, towered above us. There was a moment's silence, during which he looked around, and seemed in that glance to comprehend all present. Then he slowly raised his arms, and with hands extended above our heads, began, "Dear, dear souls!"—no more. There was a slight pause. I was myself seated upon a form which likewise held five others, men and women. I distinctly felt the form tremble beneath us. Glancing sideways I could see that my neighbours were visibly agitated, nor was I insensible to an influence which, as it were, bowed the spirit before the compelling will of him at whose feet we, disciple-like, were sitting. During that slight pause following those three words a silence that was almost painful to bear fell upon the room. It was as though every breath were held; and when the deep tones of the preacher's voice were again heard resuming his address, a light sigh, almost a sob, escaped from the congregation, as though they had been under the influence of a spell and were just set free.

"Dear souls" was a favourite expression of Aitken's. It did not sound strange coming from his lips. But, indeed, we did not stay to weigh his expressions, or much to recollect his words; they were but as the chariot of fire—wheeled or

winged, we cared not which—that bore us up into heavenly places and into the presence of the eternal Father. Of the after-meetings, and Aitken's method of dealing with the people who remained for them, I will not say much. His methods were such as might with safety be adopted by himself, but by none other. It was impossible really to resent any words, however personal and persistent, from one whose grave and commanding personality and whose age and apostolic bearing appeared to bestow upon him the father's right to speak. It is said that upon one occasion his attention was directed to a certain lady of title—a well-known leader of fashion—who had come to hear him preach, and, having satisfied her curiosity, was leaving the church. She had passed with a cold stare some one who asked her concerning her soul, and begged her to remain to the after-meeting, when Aitken, rapidly striding down the aisle, overtook her, and, laying his hand upon her arm, said quietly, "My dear, go and sit down." Her hauteur was dissolved in an instant, and she suffered herself to be led without resistance to a seat, where she remained during the rest of the proceedings. I can quite believe it. But some of his assistants who imitated his methods, without possessing at the same time the advantage of his manner, no doubt often gave serious offence.

That was the case at Sandgate upon more than one occasion. Toward the end of the Mission, however, there were few who found a word to say against either it or the Missioner. I do not suppose that Sandgate is perfect even yet; but I do not fear being found far wrong if I say that much of the fruit of the patient labour of the then Vicar was gathered in during that time, and that converts were made who have not since been lost, and that spiritual life was awakened which is still, after the lapse of fifteen years, putting forth strength.

This was, I believe, Aitken's last Mission. Soon after he left for the Continent, and, returning home, fell dead upon the platform of a London station. Judged by results visible and countable, it was not one of his most successful Missions. But there still live certain who thank God that they were then brought into contact with one of His servants, and listened to a voice which they recognised as that of His messenger.

E. C. DAWSON.

EDINBURGH.

