

In Memoriam.

THE death of the Founder and Editor of this Review is an event which requires more than a passing notice. Walter Purton was born in 1833. He received his university education at Cambridge, graduating from St. Catherine's College in 1859. His first curacy was with the Rev. Charles Holland, at Petworth in Sussex, where he worked with much success for six years, from 1859 to 1865. After a short period of duty at Blackpool, Lancashire, he returned to Sussex in 1866 as Rector of Coombe. Four years later he became Rector of Kingston-by-the-Sea, in the same county; and in 1888 he accepted the Crown parish of Poynings, a beautiful place on the north slope of the South Downs, containing in its boundaries the celebrated hill and ravine known as the Devil's Dyke. He was also at one time chaplain to the illustrious philanthropist, Anthony, seventh Earl of Shaftesbury, and took a prominent part in the Chichester Diocesan Conference. The *Times* adds that although holding a country living he exercised for a large number of years a widespread influence, particularly through the religious press, for he was a man of considerable literary ability. He held successively three editorships, and published several devotional and other works.

¹ More than sixteen years have passed since Mr. Purton, mainly influenced, as he wrote, "by a deep conviction that work especially ministerial was that to which he should devote himself," resigned the editorship of the *Record*, an office which he had filled with credit and success for nearly eight years. It is a long time; long enough to throw into obscurity the events and to blur the details of his *régime*, but not long enough to efface the impression left in the minds of those who worked beside him, of his interesting personality. That impression is one of a frank, manly, genial nature; of a man with a hearty liking for his work, which he despatched with whole-heartedness and a bluff good-humour that commanded the affectionate admiration of his colleagues and assistants. For a short time after he became editor he continued to reside at Coombe, near Lancing, of which place he was Rector. Some indication may be gained of the increased demands made upon editors by modern enterprise when it is seen that it was then possible for Mr. Purton to transact a portion of his duties at Coombe, while the other part was done in London, to which he travelled three or four days a week, mastering the morning's news in the rail-

¹ The notes on the editorship of the *Record* are contributed by an old member of the staff.

way carriage and formulating there the views which, upon reaching his office, he would with briskness and energy throw into the form of a leading article for that day's issue.

Between the duties of all editors there is a strong family likeness. To say nothing of the routine work in which there can be little scope for variety, there comes to all alike a quickened interest in current events and in the men who mould them as well as an intimacy, pleasant at once and enlightening, with the chiefs of the side represented. There comes also to all but the most exceptional some burning question in which the editor discerns the test of his principles and ability, which is said to come once to every man. Mr. Gladstone's Bill for the Dis-establishment of the Irish Church was Mr. Purton's most serious moment. There are many who will remember the strong line taken by the *Record* in support of the Irish Establishment, which in a series of powerful articles it defended by the argument, then less familiar than now, that it was one of the out-works of the citadel, the English Established Church, the demolition of which was aimed at by the enemies of all Establishments whatever. Among other questions upon which Mr. Purton, in consultation with the proprietors, had to formulate the policy of the paper, were Mr. Forster's Education Bill, the Deceased Wife's Sister Bill, the Lectionary Bill and the Burials Bill, all of which he treated with characteristic energy and thoroughness. Not long before the termination of his career with the *Record*, Mr. Purton completed his journalistic course by that least pleasant of editorial experiences—an action for libel. A vexed author of a set of biographies of Church dignitaries, whose book had been reviewed fairly and honestly enough, but at a length and with a completeness that would delight some writers, took the *Record* and its editor into court, where, in person, he set forth his case before Mr. Justice Lindley with copious and persistent eloquence. When the aggrieved author had finished his vigorous speech, and Mr. Webster (now Sir Richard and ex-Attorney-General) rose to open the defence on behalf of the *Record*, Mr. Justice Lindley turned to the jury and put to them the question whether in their opinion the articles showed more than a fair criticism of the book. "If," said the learned judge, "you doubt it we must hear the other side. If you think the fair limits of criticism have been exceeded you can say so." The jury briefly considered, and the foreman said: "I think we are all agreed, my lord. We believe there was nothing beyond fair criticism. We think no good can be gained by going on in the matter." Mr. Serjeant Parry, who with Mr. Webster appeared for the *Record*, said that after hearing that expression the gentlemen who are the proprietors of the *Record* were willing to forego

their claim to any costs from the plaintiff. A verdict for the defendant was then recorded without costs. Subsequently the plaintiff made an application to the Court of Queen's Bench sitting *in banco* for a new trial, on the ground of misdirection by the judge, but failed. So Mr. Purton and his contributor, who had expected to be haled into the witness-box, returned home with peace and honour, and with as much satisfaction as any *dénouement* to a libel action can be expected to afford. Thus good-humouredly ended the most dramatic incident in Mr. Purton's editorship of the *Record*.

Mr. Purton really led two lives.¹ One was that of the hard-worked man of letters, mingling with the stir and activity of the world; the other was that of the quiet country presbyter. These two lives existed side by side, and it would be hard to say in which he delighted most—serving his Church by his influence and pen, or ministering to the handful of Sussex hinds amongst whom he dwelt. In most respects he was the ideal of a country clergyman: full of tact (for he knew that Sussex peasants “wunt be druv”), courteous to the humblest, tolerant to those who differed from him, and kindly to all. His sermons, far more skilful in their simplicity and shortness than many an ornate discourse, went straight to their hearts. “We like his preaching,” they used to say, “because he means it, and we understand what he says.” No one, whether Churchman or Dissenter, ever went to the rectory for advice in vain. He felt that the Church was the National Church, and he himself was the parish minister. So, at Poynings, bit by bit the children who formerly attended the Baptist Sunday-school sought that of the Church. Gradually the Dissenters dropped away too; the Baptist farmer paid the voluntary church-rate, the local preacher came to learn at church. Kindness and sympathy will always tell, and no rural pastor ever exercised them more. And at his funeral in the little churchyard at Kingston from far and wide came the Sussex peasants to do him honour. They tramped over the downs, and toiled along the roads, and stood round his grave in a mute grief that showed they knew they had lost one who understood them, and was a friend. Although Mr. Purton was only four years in his last incumbency, a great deal was done for the parish. The beautiful old church was thoroughly restored, at the cost of several hundred pounds; cricket, clothing, and musical clubs were started; a flourishing night-school was held in the winter months; Sunday and day schools were rendered thoroughly efficient; extra services were held

¹ The passage on his domestic and parochial life is supplied by one who can speak with authority on the subject.

in church; the choir was greatly improved; and, above all, the village learnt to see in their rector not merely their ecclesiastical superior, but their minister in the best sense of the word.

As regards Mr. Purton's family life, without trenching on its private sanctity, all who knew him saw in him the wise and tender parent. Few men were more happy in their home-life than he was. It is no exaggeration to say that he always thought of his children first and himself last. The loss of his wife at a comparatively early age, leaving him seven young children, was a tremendous blow; but with his sister's devoted aid they were brought up with such care and tenderness that perhaps they hardly missed a mother's love. For the last five years he underwent much suffering with complete faith and singular sweetness of disposition.

The surrounding clergy often, in their own troubles, sought his advice and aid. Full of practical sagacity, he was always at the service of his brethren, and they all esteemed and loved him. He was on unflinching terms of cordiality and friendship with the country gentry.

Mr. Purton died at Poynings on the 17th September. As was his life, so was his end, entirely trustful, and full of reliance on the Lord he served. Much could be written, but nothing higher said of him, than that in him passed away a sincere and humble "imitator of God."

A friend wrote of him: "We had always looked upon him as a singularly consistent and encouraging specimen of a true, faithful, and humble Christian man. To me personally he was of the most signal service and comfort at the most trying period of my life. I consider him as one of the means used by God in His mercy to arrest me in a protracted life of careless indifference to what sin really is, and the Saviour. I shall never cease to think of him with the deepest gratitude for his kindly, sympathetic, and able advice. I am quite sure that many others can bear testimony of a similar sort, for his congregation contained many thoughtful and God-fearing people. What his old neighbours thought of him was manifest to anyone who attended his funeral. All present seemed to feel that they had lost a friend; but they also knew that he had gained what had been his desire for many years."

It is hoped that the able staff of well-known writers that he had gathered round him will show their respect for his memory and their gratitude for his ability and courtesy by continuing to characterize this Review by moderation, sound learning, impartiality, and loyalty to the National Church.

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