

THE LATE REV. A. N. SOMERVILLE, D.D.

No man of recent times, be he minister or layman, missionary or traveller, has, we should think, preached the Gospel in so many lands, and to people of so many tongues, as did Rev. Dr. A. N. Somerville during his fruitful career.

He was long spared, says the *Christian*, from which this sketch is taken, to fulfil the trust committed to him, having reached his seventy-seventh year; but it might almost be said of him, as of Moses of old, that "his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated."

In character Dr. Somerville was pre-eminently a man of strong convictions, and never was courage lacking to make them known. The share he took in the Disruption, in 1843, is a matter of history. His mind once made up, nothing could shake it. This characteristic was equally prominent in his foreign work. No contrary counsel from well-meaning friends could change his purpose, and very seldom did his judgment prove at fault. He possessed boundless enthusiasm; whatever he did was done heartily, as to the Lord. Being endowed with remarkable strength of body, he did not spare himself; even his holidays were times of service. Such activity marked his movements that even in his seventieth year he was compared to a youthful assistant (who at that time accompanied him on one of his missions) as "the younger man of the two," notwithstanding that he was nearly fifty years the senior. In 1848, when a bad throat compelled cessation from his regular work, he was found visiting Palestine, Egypt, and Constantinople, storing his mind for future ministry; and thirty years later he could not forbear ascending the Great Pyramid for the second time. But though generally strong, he suffered severely at times, and had dangerous illnesses, both on his Australian and South African campaigns. Throughout all his travels he strictly eschewed alcohol and tobacco in every form, and to this was, no doubt, largely due the strength of his constitution.

The following fact in connection with his early years is of interest. He, in company with his student-friends, McCheyne and the brothers Bonar, would repair to Arthur's Seat, whence each in turn would preach to his companions, afterwards submitting to the most rigorous criticism from them as to his subject-matter, style, and mode of delivery.

Dr. Somerville gladly joined in special revival effort. In 1839, during the Kilsyth awakening, Rev. Wm. C. Burns, afterwards of China, deputed him on one occasion to commence a meeting to which he himself would follow when he had first preached in another chapel. Nine, ten, and even eleven o'clock came before Mr. Burns arrived. Meantime, Mr. Somerville had given three addresses upon Rev. i. 5, 6. He would not leave his post until his friend arrived, and the audience, well content to listen to the enthusiastic young preacher, were loth to disperse. During this revival his church was open every night, but Saturday, for three months; and again for eleven months during the great revival of 1859-60. He also entered warmly into the work of Messrs. Moody and Sankey in Glasgow.

His interest in Christian work was three-fold: in that within the area of his own church; in home mission work beyond its pale; and in the foreign field; and he rested not until he had participated in each. In 1860 he founded an agency for female rescue. He was Secretary of the old Glasgow Bible Society, and was one of those who drew up the first sketch of the constitution of the present National Bible Society of Scotland, which was an amalgamation of various societies then existing. He also originated a scheme for sending twenty thousand entire Bibles out to China. His interest in Bible work led him to adopt the plan of distributing portions at many of his meetings, on the Continent and elsewhere.

Next, his aid was lent to a mission at Leghorn; then he warmly espoused the cause of Christ in Spain, and made several visits to that country, becoming a staunch friend of Matamoros. In 1870 he drew up a confession of faith for the use of Spanish Protestants.

That he was honored by his own denomination is shown by the fact that almost immediately after the Disruption he was se-

lected as a deputy of the Free Church to plead its cause in London and various English cities; two years later he was sent by the General Assembly of that Church to Canada; the following year to Shetland; and, finally, in 1886, he was called to the Moderatorship of the Free Church General Assembly. He twice visited Canada; first at the Disruption, and then at the union of all the Presbyterian churches in the Dominion.

Then, too, he was honored by other sections of the Church of God, and this was due to his own large-heartedness and love for all those who love the Lord Jesus in sincerity. In fact, it was this that led to the giving up of his church, of which he had been pastor nearly forty years; for when, in 1877, the Glasgow United Evangelistic Association (which drew its members from various communities) invited him to undertake systematic evangelistic tours abroad, such was the confidence reposed in him that he was left free to choose his own fields, times, and methods. Another memorable occasion was in May last, when he appeared at the General Assembly of the Established Church of Scotland to speak on behalf of the mission to the Jews which that Church sustains. The hall was

particularly attractive; his language was choice, his delivery animated—at times even dramatic—and his subject-matter especially good. Often was he met by persons who had heard him years before, who remembered text, subject, and even outline of his discourse. In Canada he met one person who could do so after an interval of thirty-one years. His addresses abounded with illustration, and this, together with his descriptive faculty, riveted the attention of his audience to a degree which even the process of interpretation failed to diminish. Short sentences or phrases, translated quickly and with equal brevity, were the distinguishing features of these addresses, and the audience had no time to be weary, so rapidly did words in their own tongue follow those of the foreigner. In France alone Dr. Somerville had twenty interpreters, and during his travels his addresses were interpreted into no less than twenty-five different languages. Indeed, in South Africa three languages were used at one meeting. On this tour he was the means of a revival among the Dutch churches of Natal which spread to the Kaffirs.

A good choir, and plenty of singing, were also strong points, and it was no uncommon thing for a great portion of the audience to

at Saragossa he was stoned; and at the Pillars of Jupiter (Athens) a turbulent mob created a disturbance, at the instigation of a priest, who harangued the crowd from an adjacent elevation. Stones were thrown amid cries of "Down with him!" with the result that the interpreter received a severe wound on the head. This was the only occasion on which Dr. Somerville found it necessary to abandon a meeting, which he did under an escort of soldiers with fixed bayonets. At Rome he had a curious experience. Posters denouncing the meetings were to be seen on every hoarding in the city; the press denounced the work; and among other caricatures was one especially elaborate cartoon. In *soma*, the Italian for an ass, was noted a resemblance to Dr. Somerville's name, and the artist represented him as that animal, in a swallow-tailed coat, discoursing with his interpreter at his side similarly dressed, to a company of his fellows, and surrounded by a choir of the same. Here his success in securing the theatre, after it had been refused, was due to the sudden illness of the prima donna, the manager gladly availing himself of a better excuse for postponing the advertised play. In another town an advertisement of a meeting was refused by the editor of a journal (who was a Roman Catholic priest), but he attended the meeting, and was so pleased that he offered to insert the advertisement free of charge daily as long as the Doctor remained in the town. But being obliged to pass on to another the following morning, the kind offer could not be accepted. The priest, however, begged a copy of the tune-book from which the hymns had been sung, which request was readily granted.

In the midst of his abundant labors Dr. Somerville did not forget the children. Seldom were meetings in any foreign town concluded without at least one especial gathering for the little ones, whose attention, by his bright face and happy method of teaching, he never failed to secure and hold.

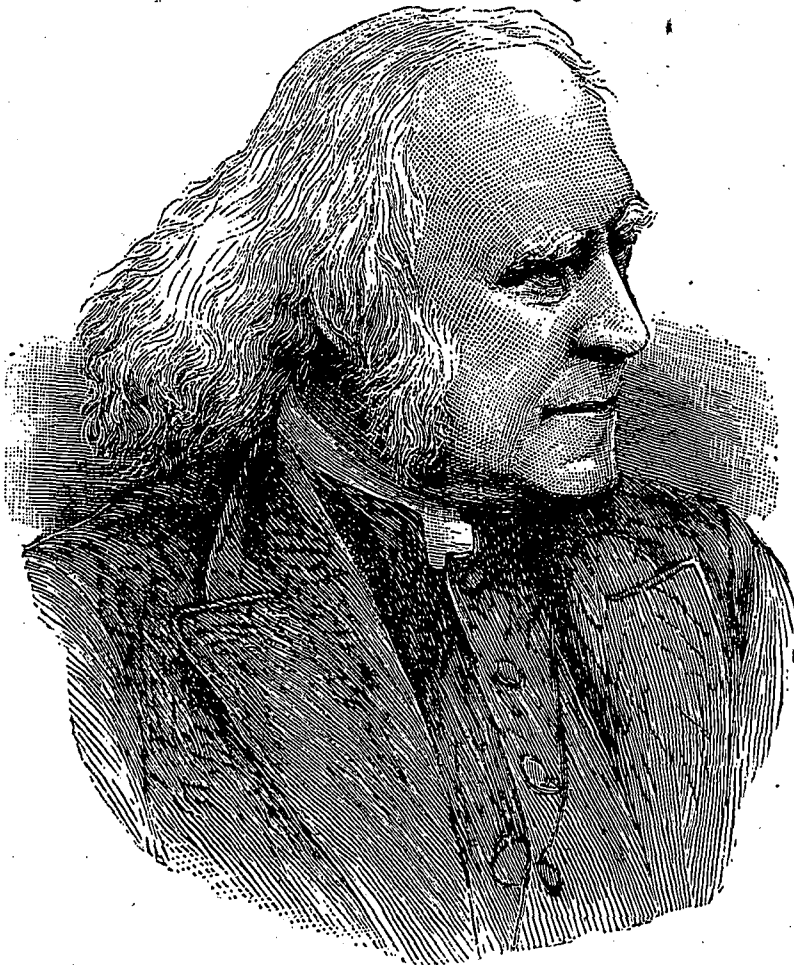
Dr. Somerville thoroughly realized the importance of Young Men's Christian Associations, and was the means of establishing not a few. One of the most important of these was that at Bombay, which is still in a flourishing condition. Ladies' Associations for the care of young women were also set up in several cities. He was also a wonderfully successful money raiser; while visiting Australia, at Christ church £890 was raised at one meeting for the local Y. M. C. A., and at Dunedin £1,133 for a similar object.

In India the Doctor was favorably impressed with the educational work of the missionaries, but felt that more provision should be made to meet the directly spiritual needs of the people. Hence, he advocated that two additional missionaries should be placed at each station to undertake the exclusive work of Gospel preaching. There is no doubt that the adoption of such a plan would obviate much of the weakness which at present seems to exist in this respect.

As Moderator of Assembly he paid a visit to all the Free Church communities in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. This occupied him from July, 1886, till May of the following year, with occasional brief intervals of rest. Even now intelligence is from time to time received of the lasting fruit accruing from that arduous but successful campaign. In 1887 and 1888 he also visited Austria, Bohemia, and Hungary with much attendant blessing.

At his funeral there were present representatives from China, India, Constantinople, Asia Minor, Russia, New York, Canada, and North Africa, besides seven of the gentlemen who had been his companions on one or other of his evangelistic tours.

And now his work is done. And yet not done, for "he, being dead, yet speaketh," and large numbers are now leading others to Christ who were themselves led by him. But what is to be the practical outcome of such a life? Is it merely to excite admiration? Nay, rather, will not some one take up his mantle, and, in the power of God, follow his lead? Here was one, at advanced age, often suffering, unable to speak any language but his own, who, at the bidding of his Master, went forth in the assurance that "all things are possible to him that believeth." The harvest is plenteous; who will enter the field?



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crowded, and as Dr. Somerville entered the audience rose *en masse*. There is, we believe, only one other occasion recorded of a Free Church minister speaking in the Established Assembly since the Disruption, and the movement was a spontaneous and generous impulse of respect.

This same large-hearted charity characterized all his missions abroad. Wherever he went he endeavored to work with ministers of all evangelical churches, and to get them to work with each other. In Melbourne it was in response to a requisition signed by fifty ministers of different denominations, and at Constantinople at the request of thirty-four, that he conducted a special communion service in each of those places. At the former no less than four thousand persons sat down to commemorate the Lord's death.

Dr. Somerville was especially a friend of Israel. In various Continental cities, including Berlin, St. Petersburg, Rome, Vienna, Buda-Pesth, Grosswardein (Hungary), Bucharest, and at Kimberly in South Africa, he addressed large audiences of Jews. At Smyrna, Constantinople, and Thessalonica he also had especially interesting gatherings for them, his addresses being interpreted into Judeo-Spanish. As a preacher Dr. Somerville was par-

ticularly long after the meeting had been dismissed, to hear the hymns (translations of Songs and Solos), which were quite new to them. The Doctor carefully eschewed controversy, and, by a judicious avoidance of any terms which might provoke it, declared the truth of the Gospel without stirring up strife. His general experience was that everywhere the people—Jew or Gentile, Greek or Turk, Kafir or Hindoo—were attracted to the proclamation of the good news of God's love to men.

The meetings were attended by all classes. It must not be inferred, however, that opposition was never encountered. The clergy often objected strongly to the use of secular halls, and especially theatres, for religious purposes. But these were often the only buildings capable of accommodating the people; hence the necessity of utilizing them. It is gratifying to learn that in some places where the pastors were particularly adverse to this, they are now actually adopting the same methods themselves with most satisfactory results.

But the opposition occasionally assumed a more serious character. At Palermo a man provided himself with potatoes and onions with which to discomfit the preacher; at Elberfeld the Doctor received a letter which contained a threat to shoot him;