

THE LATE MR. J. MACGREGOR, M.A. "ROB ROY," THE RAGGED SCHOOL AND OPEN-AIR PIONEER.

As in the North men mark with deepening interest the calling home one by one of the few remaining "pre-Disruption worthies," so in recent years have we in the South sorrowfully noted how the pioneers of home missions, the noble spirits who rallied round the great Earl of Shaftesbury in his labors on behalf of the poor and perishing, the survivors of the memorable Revivals of 1859-60, are one after another passing to rest in the presence of the King. To this goodly company this distinguished traveller, author, and Christian worker belonged.

John MacGregor, whose family came of a famous Scottish clan, was born at Gravesend, on January 24th, 1825. His father, General Sir Duncan MacGregor, was at that time Major in the 31st Regiment, and was then under orders for India. Within a few weeks of his birth his parents, taking the infant with them, embarked in the "Kent" for the East. How that ship caught fire in the Bay of Biscay, and how 577 were saved out of the 642 persons on board, has often been told. Before the "Cambria," the rescuing vessel, hove in sight, the following last message had been written by the father and placed in a bottle, ready to drift ashore:

The ship the "Kent" Indiaman, is on fire. Elizabeth, Joanna, and myself commit our spirits into the hands of our blessed Redeemer. His grace enables us to be quite composed in the awful prospect of entering eternity.

Instead of being thrown into the sea the bottle in which the paper was placed was left in the cabin, and more than a year and a half later it was picked up off the Barbados, between three and four thousand miles away. The infant John MacGregor was the first to be taken on board the "Cambria," which, as a little craft of 200 tons, had some difficulty in finding room for an accession to its company of 577 terrified people. One by one, as the fire reached them, the loaded guns went off, and soon after the captain, the last man to quit the deck of the "Kent," had left, the powder magazine blew up with a deafening report.

Within two months of this escape the baby boy came under the notice of the venerable Hannah More, who presented a pair of shoes of her own knitting, with the verse:

Sweet babe! twice rescued from the yawning grave,
The flames tremendous and the furious wave;
May a third life thy spirit meet,
Even life eternal at thy Saviour's feet.

The bottle with the paper, the shawl in which his mother wrapped him on that eventful day, and the pair of shoes knitted for him by Hannah More, were among the collection of relics treasured to the last by Mr. MacGregor.

In the following year, in command of the 93rd Highlanders, Colonel MacGregor was stationed in Nova Scotia; and the influence which the Christian soldier was able to exercise over his men was as gratifying as it was striking. All attended divine worship, each possessed a Bible and a copy of the Scotch version of the Psalms; and as many as 700 of the company might have been seen at one time partaking of the Lord's Supper. In the year 1838, the Colonel became Inspector-General of the Irish Constabulary, and his son, who had been at school at Canterbury, spent some time at Trinity College, Dublin, whence he removed to Trinity College, Cambridge. At the English University he won two first classes and was a wrangler. He took his degree of M.A. and became a member of the Inner Temple, being called to the Bar in 1851. Even while at Cambridge he developed the same combination of high Christian character with energetic participation in every manly pursuit, for which he was all through life distinguished. A diligent teacher in the Jesus Lane Sunday-school, never ashamed to be known as a decidedly Christian man, and ever seeking to influence others for good, he yet entered keenly into athletics, and, taking up boating with a wonderful zest, won his reputation as oarsman and rower in the First Trinity Eight. He visited Paris during the Revolution of 1848, and in the following year made a long tour in Europe, the Levant, and the Holy Land. A little book under the title of "Three Days in the East" was the outcome of this, and was

intended to illustrate Scripture customs and allusions.

In 1847 MacGregor threw himself heartily into the Ragged School enterprise, then but three years old, and became one of Lord Ashley's right-hand men. Engaging in the work of teaching, the new recruit caught the full spirit of the movement, and soon learned to use his pen effectively and well on its behalf. He remained on the council of the Ragged School Union to the last, although in recent and feeble years unable to take active part, and rendered for forty years most valuable and self-denying service to this great cause.

Besides, as one who knew him well records, there was one branch which he made peculiarly his own. The history of the origin and progress of the Ragged School Shoeblack Society is detailed by MacGregor's vigorous and humorous pen in the Ragged School Union Quarterly Record of October, 1878, and those whose privilege it was to be associated with him in its formation recall with interest those evening gatherings of the few young lawyers who, in the early part of 1851, used to meet in a small alley at the back of Coutts' Bank to assist in carrying out his scheme. The idea had suggested itself to MacGregor by his having noticed in foreign

been widely circulated by tens of thousands, and has done much to encourage Gospel testimony under the open canopy of heaven. It is noted by a writer in the *Record* that:—

In the course of his open-air discussions he came to be in friendly relations with one notorious infidel lecturer, and afterwards visited him in his own home when laid aside by an apparently fatal malady. Who shall say what may have resulted from such Christ-like sympathy? He always made a conscience of preparing very carefully for his addresses in the open air, and especially with reference to infidel arguments, feeling extremely the importance of doing so, and of conducting all such discussions and controversy in a spirit of candor, fairness, and accuracy.

Further, Mr. MacGregor was practically the founder of the Pure Literature Society, which has done good service in diffusing sound, wholesome literature, and in forming working men's libraries. While health permitted, he was also an active member on the committee of the British and Foreign Bible Society; he showed similar interest in the work of the Reformatory and Refuge Union, while he was also honorary secretary of the Protestant Alliance. In short, he was just the kind of colleague whom Lord Shaftesbury most highly prized, utterly unselfish, hard working, and open-handed in giving to a degree which made him an example to all.

So far we have confined ourselves to Mr.



MR. J. MACGREGOR, M.A.

towns that persons were in the habit of getting their shoes blacked in the streets; he thought that foreigners coming over to the Great Exhibition of 1851 would require this want supplied, and that this might furnish an opening for boys frequenting ragged schools. As the result, in that year, above thirty of these boys, each of whose histories had been carefully gone into, marched through the Great Exhibition in those red jackets with which we are now so familiar at various stations in the metropolis. The movement grew and prospered, and has been one of increasing success. The boys themselves were and are trained in habits of religion and thrift, and very many of them, after saving sufficient from their earnings, have from year to year emigrated to America or our own Colonies, and afterwards risen to occupy responsible and useful positions.

The story of Mr. MacGregor's early labors in the open air, of his share in founding the Open-air Mission, and of his subsequent association with the devoted Gawin Kirkham, form also a deeply-interesting chapter in his life. His famous plea for open-air preaching, "Go out quickly," has

MacGregor's Christian service, but his familiar cognomen, "Rob Roy," was earned in another fashion. He was, as many are aware, an adventurous canoeist, loving to traverse alone the rivers of our own and other lands. The experiences thus gained he published in a series of "Rob Roy" volumes, which attracted considerable attention, while he afterwards gave "Rob Roy" lectures, the profits of which were set apart for Christian work. In all his voyages he was never satisfied unless even his recreation was made to redound to the glory of God. When enjoying an excursion on lake, river, or sea, he always embraced the opportunity to circulate evangelical publications from which the people might learn the Gospel. Apart from this it is almost impossible to over-estimate the enjoyment he derived from excursions which were often attended with perils such as would have cowed the hearts of less hardy adventurers. In a letter to Mr. G. Kirkham in January, 1869, he wrote:—

Just think, for instance, of my first day on this lovely Lake of Genneareth. I sat in my "Rob Roy" in the centre of the northern part of the lake. The hills on shore were about three miles off on either hand. The air was balmy, like the finest June day in England. The sun shone, but

veiled by a delicate contour of fleecy clouds. The water was blue, and without a ripple. The sounds of sheep bleating and streamlets gurgling were the only music; and there I read in my Testament John vi., following every incident by actually looking at the places mentioned. Finally, I went to the spot where the Apostles started in their boat, and I rowed the "twenty-five or thirty furlongs," which they had toiled through in the direction of Capernaum.

He had visited Greece and the empire of the Sultan when he was twenty-six years of age; he ascended Mont Blanc, and travelled through Canada and the United States. He appears to have also written interesting accounts of all his adventures, and while in America he gave a number of addresses. He worked well both with pen and pencil, and the proceeds of his work were given to philanthropic objects. Thousands of pounds were also realized for various Christian institutions by the "Rob Roy" lectures. The profits of one of his books relating to a voyage along the coasts of France and England were given to a fund which provides prizes for boys leaving various training-ships.

"Rob Roy" in one of his works boldly defends his practice of distributing evangelical literature and tracts. So far from foreigners resenting such gifts, they accepted them as kindly gifts which won their good opinion. Apart from his Christian character and zeal, he made his mark in literary and scientific pursuits of a more general kind. Occasionally, he read papers before the British Association and the Society of Arts; and he made some extensive researches in reference to the history of the steam engine. It is, however, as a friend of poor children, and of the poor generally, that "Rob Roy" will be remembered. When he became a member of the first School Board for London he gave up his law practice in order the more thoroughly to do what was needed. Who will supply his place at the Council Board of the Ragged School Union, Open Air Mission, and other institutions with which he was associated?

Some years ago Mr. MacGregor married a daughter of Vice-Admiral Sir J. Crawford Cuffin, who survives her husband.

Rev. W. T. McCormick, of Brighton, writes as follows, summing up his career:—

His life was a remarkable one, in some respects perfectly unique. He was a distinguished traveller, a self-denying philanthropist, a hard worker, and a devoted Christian. As a man of iron will, firmness, and intrepidity, he was able to accomplish much that other men would not even face. He was a fascinating companion, and an attractive public speaker and lecturer. His able discussions with infidels and others were well known some thirty years ago. I have heard him discuss in the open air with the secretary and also with the treasurer of the "Secularists' Society" Sunday after Sunday, until both infidels were driven from the field. I have also listened to his able and successful debate, which lasted nine months, with a learned Roman Catholic of great power and distinguished parts. I well remember his taking me to visit an infidel—a writer, of no mean pretensions—who, in a serious illness, had been forsaken by his atheist companions, but whom "Rob Roy" had supplied with necessities during his long affliction. This man afterwards became a true disciple of Christ. The amount of good that Mr. MacGregor was permitted to accomplish in public and in private during his life eternity alone can reveal.

We have before us, as we write, Miss MacGregor's letter to Mr. Kirk, penned within a few hours of her father's death. Although not written for publication, the following touching words may be quoted:—"Our precious father went home to glory yesterday evening." After three days' delirium followed by unconsciousness, "a gleam of consciousness returned, and he smiled so sweetly to us, and when mother spoke to him of going to be with the Lord, he said, 'I'll go to see him.' . . . What a blessed exchange it is for him. Though the blank is so terrible to us, we would not wish him back for a moment."—*The Christian*.

THE PRIVILEGE OF TEACHING.

Not long ago we heard the efficient superintendent of a large Sabbath-school, while addressing the teachers, refer incidentally to the privilege they enjoyed every Sabbath afternoon when teaching. Undoubtedly that is one of the best ways of putting the matter. Teaching in the Sabbath-school may be a duty, but it is a privilege as well. So is doing of the Lord's work in any department. An elder who does his work well receives as much good as he gives. So does a deacon, a manager or office-bearer of any kind. Preaching may be a duty, but it is also one of the highest privileges a human being can enjoy. A minister who talks about the "drudgery of preaching," as we once heard one talk, should be asked to change his character or his vocation.—*Canada Presbyterian*.