

Our Contributors.

GREAT MOMENTS IN SERMONS AND SPEECHES.

BY KNOXIAN.

A distinguished literary critic writing in the *British Weekly* says. "Kenilworth" and "Woodstock" are high-class productions mainly because each has its "great moment." For the sake of clergymen who never indulge in first class fiction we may say that "Kenilworth" and "Woodstock" are novels written by a distinguished man named Scott. This Mr. Scott must be carefully distinguished from the Ottawa gentleman of that name who drew up the Scott Act. Esteemed brethren and sisters who boast that they "never read a novel," and who, in the exuberance of their Christian love, consign to the bad place everybody who does indulge in a little high-class fiction, should not be trayed into thinking that the author of the Scott Act ever wrote novels. Quite frequently there is not much virtue in the boast, "I never read a novel." People who never read anything can scarcely claim much credit for never reading fiction. There is something grimly comic in the spectacle of a man cramming himself with election literature and then boasting that he never read Thackeray or Sir Walter Scott. The spectacle is equalled, however, by the dearly beloved sister who says her conscience never would allow her to read novels, while her bookseller knows that she devoured the biography of Birchall and feasted on the trial and hanging of that unfortunate young man.

Mr. Barrie, the writer to whom we allude, thinks a "great moment" makes the fortune of a story. It is equally true that a great moment lifts a speech or sermon from the ordinary level and gives to it a power that never fails to make an impression. Mr. Barrie says that the great moments of an author are also great moments to his readers. Does anybody need to be told that the great moments of a preacher are always great moments to his hearers? One or two great moments can redeem the most commonplace sermon and send every hearer that has a soul as large as the mind of a mosquito out of the church more than satisfied. Probably one of the main points of difference between a respectable preacher who can hardly hold the attention of his audience and another who seldom fails to make a powerful impression, is that the one has great moments in most of his sermons and the other never rises from his respectable plane.

Some years ago we heard John Hall preach to a crowded congregation in one of the American cities. The sermon was about forty-five minutes long, and for twenty-five or thirty minutes there was no striking work done. The exposition was clear, the doctrinal statements concise and clean-cut, here and there came an apt historical allusion or something of that kind. Once or twice there was a fairly good illustration, but for about half an hour there was no outward and visible reason why John Hall should be considered a pulpit prince. The tone and spirit of the work was the best and the literary and oratorical part eminently respectable, but that was about all an intelligent hearer would care to say. At the end of about half an hour the great moment came. To illustrate the effect which the giving of a life for a life should have upon us, the preacher related an occurrence which took place in Dublin during his pastorate in that city. A young officer on one of Her Britannic Majesty's warships leaped into the water to rescue a drowning man. He succeeded in bringing the man to the shore, but just as he brought him to the beach he was swept out by the undertow, and sank to rise no more. All Dublin was moved, said the preacher, but we ventured to think it was not moved more than the congregation that was listening to the story. Every head was bowed and the handkerchiefs came out by the dozen as the great Irishman went on with matchless power and pathos to apply his illustration. The great moment had come, and from that moment the preacher was almost omnipotent.

In the evening we heard him again, and he had half a dozen great moments; not great in the same way, however. No preacher or congregation could stand half-a-dozen great moments like the one we had in the morning. The great moments of the evening sermon were moments spent in knocking the bottom out of excuses that some Americans and Canadians, too, make for not believing the Gospel. Logic, mild sarcasm, a slight suggestion of the most delicious Irish humour, common sense that might be called monumental, and a yearning love for souls, seemed all to meet in each of the great moments and make them great enough never to be forgotten. A somewhat careless-looking citizen coming out of the church remarked to his neighbour: "The old man doesn't give a fellow any chance to dodge, does he?" He didn't. The moments when a careless sinner feels he hasn't any chance to dodge are fairly good moments if not absolutely great.

Those who remember Dr. Bayne's sermons say he had moments of tremendous power. A prominent Presbyterian of one of our Ontario towns told the writer that for many years he could feel the power of a sermon he heard Dr. Bayne preach on the words: "Behold He cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see Him," etc. We needed no evidence to illustrate the truth of that story, for the man's face changed colour as he recalled the sermon. It was said that several other citizens of the same place were similarly affected.

Dr. Willis had great moments in many of his sermons. At some point in the discourse something was pretty sure to come that gave you an inkling of what the Doctor could do when preaching was his special work. Old Knox men say his speech on the Patriotic Fund had some great moments, though he spoiled the effect a little by not stopping in time. We know his speech on the Anderson slave case had some really great moments for we heard it. Perhaps the greatest moment came when he asked if Britons should too accurately measure the blow which a man strikes for life and liberty for himself and his children. The audience rose and cheered until the roof of the old St. Lawrence Hall seemed to crack. A man who wouldn't cheer a point like that has no more life than an oyster and is not half as useful. Britons won nearly all their own liberties by blows, and it would ill-become them to measure very accurately the blow that poor Anderson struck in achieving liberty for himself and his family.

Next week we may have something to say about great moments in speeches and so something, if our column holds out, on the way great moments are made and sometimes spoiled.

MADAGASCAR.

BY REV. R. S. G. ANDERSON, M.A., B.D., ST. HELENS.

(Concluded.)

The time was soon to come now when Christianity should be established among the Hovas. One day, in the early part of the persecution, a native passing down one of the streets of the capital picked up a piece of paper lying on the way. It was a leaf of the Bible, and day after day he read it and re-read it. He was led to secure a New Testament and in a little while he was rejoicing in the truth. His life was now devoted to the service of Christ. He escaped death, though he suffered much, he saw the return of the missionaries, he aided them in their work, he saw the Church grow in numbers from five thousand to twenty thousand; and then one glad day he received a summons from the new queen, Ranavalona II., to go and burn the great idol of the tribe. Soon after he saw the memorable day when in his own tribe the prophecy was fulfilled: "The idols I will utterly abolish." Ere the close of that year, 1869, the Church in Madagascar numbered over one hundred and sixty thousand members and adherents. In 1874, the three hundred thousand among whom the London Missionary Society worked had all renounced their idols. Thus mightily did the Gospel prevail on the island.

But a city that is set on an hill cannot be hid, and the tribes around saw these wonders and were astonished. Only too glad were the native Christians to shed their light abroad. Much had been done by fugitives and exiles among the tribes with whom they had sojourned; but now the native Church began its first organized missionary efforts to the heathen around.

There is a remarkable incident connected with this. In a South Lancashire town, a little boy read the following story in a missionary magazine: "On the Rock of Hurling there were gathered together several officers of the kingdom. The prime minister was there, and a little girl was brought before him. 'Take the child away,' he said, 'she is a fool.' The little girl raised herself and said: 'I am no fool, but I love the Lord Jesus Christ. Throw me over.' A second time the prime minister said: 'Take the child away, she is a fool'; but again she said: 'No, sir, I am no fool, but I love the Lord Jesus Christ. Throw me over.' As the lad read this story, he said: 'O, teacher, if ever I am a man I will go and be a missionary there.' That scholar grew to be a man. He became a missionary to Madagascar. Standing on the very spot where the scene with the little girl took place, he sent forth the first native missionaries of the Church of Madagascar. In the following year he accompanied a second band and nearly became a martyr himself, and on the following year he stood on the same spot again, with a Christian prime minister, the son of the prime minister already mentioned in the incident. The prime minister told this story of his father, and then added: 'If a little girl in those dark times could give her life for the love of the Saviour, shall we hesitate to give of our substance to send forth the missionaries to the heathen.'

Assuredly the Gospel of love was working wonders for Madagascar, nor did the gospel of peace the less prevail. In the reign of a former king, soldiers were sent against a tribe that had rebelled. They killed twenty thousand men, they took captive twenty thousand warriors and children, and despoiled the whole country. In this Christian reign another tribe rebelled, but how different was the sequel! Ere the soldiers left, the prime minister said to them: "Remember, you go now as Christians and not as barbarians. You must go into that country and you must not repeat those cruel practices of former days." And so the soldiers, as they night and morning assembled for prayer, prayed that God would keep them from shedding blood and from pillaging the country. "They arrived at their destination, an army of ten thousand men and thirty thousand camp-followers. They fired not a single shot to hurt a man, they slew not a single ox, they paid for every fowl that they had, they burnt not a single village, they carried not a single child away with them, they subdued the country and went back again without carnage and without capturing a single slave." And this was done by a people who had not heard of the Gospel fifty years before. The Gospel, like the leaven that leavens the whole lump,

was making its influence felt throughout the whole Hova tribe.

The London Missionary Society has at present about 90 congregations, with a membership of 130,000, and adherent to the number of 160,000. In 1889 these congregations contributed upwards of \$18,000 for Church work and missionary effort. The congregations, which are to a great extent self supported, manage their own affairs. The missionary acts as superintendent over an allotted district. The native pastor is not ordained over any particular church; but is for the most part an assistant to aid the missionary in his duties. It is impossible even for both together to overtake all the congregations and the out-stations besides; so that there is an organized and trained class of lay-evangelists who give their assistance. The London Missionary Society has thus twenty-seven missionaries, assisted by 827 native pastors and 1,100 evangelists, or local preachers. Besides the London Missionary Society the Church Missionary Society, the Norwegians, the Quakers and the Roman Catholics have missions in Madagascar.

A large part of the island still remains to be evangelized. There are districts as yet a sealed book to the white traveller. And there are other districts where the rum-seller has got the start of the missionary. It is pathetic to hear the appeals for teachers and missionaries made by some of the tribes. After repeated appeals from one tribe a missionary from another district was deputed to visit them. During the first night of his stay he and his wife were much disturbed by the drunken revelry that was going on in the village and which promised to end in a fight. Unable to sleep, they lay listening when they became aware of voices whispering on the outside of their hut. Fearing violence, the missionary rose and investigated. To his surprise he found the king and queen of the tribe seated on the ground outside in the cold night air. They had come to guard the white man lest he should meet with any harm, and they, in consequence, lose the hope of a missionary coming and remaining with them. All night long they kept their loving guard. It is not the fault of the missionaries nor of the committees that these tribes are not evangelized. Missionaries are but mortal men and committees are dependent for ways and means on the Church of Christ behind them.

The missionaries do what they can. They are wont to make excursions now and then from their own fields of labour to break new ground in other parts. "I remember," says one on such an expedition, "as we pitched our tent somewhat early in a village, we soon had a number of people in to hear what we had come for. We sat down and talked to them of the old, old story, old to us but perfectly new to them. How intently they listened as we told them of God the Father of Christ the Saviour, of the soul and of its salvation and of the heaven beyond. As we finished speaking, 'Tell us again,' said they, 'these things are new to us, but they make us glad to hear. Tell us again.'

And a voice with the same burden comes to us from India and from China and from Africa and from the islands of the South Seas. And when the Church of Christ at last awakens to her duty, there will be nothing sadder to her than the rebuke of the heathen for her delay. "My father," said a Chinese convert to a missionary, "my father sought for four-and-twenty years to find these truths you speak and he died without them. Why did you not come sooner?"

SHOULD CHRISTIANS DANCE?

In a recent number of THE CANADA PRESBYTERIAN this question was put and answered in the affirmative.

The article by itself might not be worth a passing notice, but when it appears in a Church paper I think it should be noticed. Reasons for dancing: 1. "My mother was a devoted dancing Christian." 2. "I am a devoted dancing Christian because my mother taught me to dance. I frequently went to dancing parties given by Christian ladies. Then I infer that this Christian dance never dances except with Christians. I think that is her position. Is it a Christian position? 'This Man receiveth sinners and eateth with them.'" 3. "I admit it may be carried to excess. But anything else may be made a sin." Then there is danger not far off. But this Christian dancer has a measure or rule by which she dances. She never goes beyond the measure. If she did it would be sin. So she says. How large is the measure? Many would like to know. How many nights in the week does it contain? I say nights, because dancing is a night exercise. Some dancers begin at nine or ten p.m., and dance till two or three a.m. Now what is the measure? All those Christian ladies who give dancing parties have a measure. I infer that the measure is the same with all because it is a Christian measure.

This Christian dancer is wrong when she says: "Anything else may be made a sin." Prayer cannot be made a sin. "Pray without ceasing." Praise cannot be made a sin. "I will bless the Lord at all times." I know that some find more enjoyment in those Christian exercises than the dancing Christian finds in her dance.

Reasons for not dancing: 1. Jesus says to me: "Remember Lot's wife." When I keep Lot's wife in my memory I cannot dance. She enjoyed many Christian privileges. She could not live with Abraham without seeing the light that shone from him. But she perished after being almost saved. Jesus thought of her with sorrow. And He says to me: "Remember the solemn lessons which that history teaches." 2. Jesus says to me: "This do in remembrance of Me."