

AN INCIDENT IN THE RECENT TEN DAYS' MISSION AT NORTH SHIELDS AND THE SURROUNDING DISTRICT.

The following narrative of one portion of the work may not prove without considerable interest to some of our readers. The service attracted great attention, even in a land where pits and pitmen are matters of no special attraction, save as they fill the mine owners' pockets. Whitley is on the very outside of the Northumberland coal-field, and possesses one solitary mine. Its chief attraction is the glorious sea and its unsurpassable sands.

It was the Wednesday afternoon of the Mission week. That something unusual was going on at the colliery was evident from the strange faces which might be seen gathered around the pit shaft. There were some three or four clergymen and a few other gentlemen—able workers in the Mission—to be seen on the top of the screens. As we stood talking about the scene around us, and watching the tubs of coal being rapidly brought to the bank top, our eyes fell on a large group of women—wives of the pitmen—who were wending their way homewards from the colliery cottage in which Miss Bazett, from London, had been speaking to them words of hope and comfort, and had been trying to lead them to thoughts of holiness and peace—peace through the alone merits of Jesus their loving Saviour. Just then Mr. Rutherford, the resident viewer of the mine, was seen hastening up, and on his arrival the needful arrangements for the descent of the party were soon made. In less than half a minute after the start we found ourselves 240ft. down in the earth.

Stepping out from the cage, headed by Mr. Rutherford, every other one of the party carrying a candle stuck in a bit of soft clay, we began to grope our way along the workings. The cabin in which the barometer is placed was quickly reached, and there we halted for a few minutes, while our friend the viewer went on to see that all was clear and ready. Following our leader and receiving information as we went as to the mode of working the coal, sending it to the surface, and other like matters—very interesting to those of the party who had never been down a mine before—after groping along the gallery of the mine for some minutes in dirt and darkness we found ourselves in a tolerably large cavern. A rough table had been prepared. Temporary seats were formed by cutting away parts of the shale and rock, and placing a board on the ledges so formed. It was a strange, weird place. Whitley Pit is free from explosive gas, and so, illumined by the dim light of a few paraffin lamps and our candles, we could make out that the workings extended far away from where we sat.

The party of Missioners and the kind helpers who accompanied them were alone. On the table a pitman had chalked in letters of large size, opposite where the Missioner, the Rev. E. B. Trotter, vicar of Alnwick, was to stand to address his very unusual congregation, the words, "Pray in Faith." On the other side, in letters equally large, so that the people could read, were the words, "Prepare to meet thy God." We had been seated some three or four minutes, and our eyes had become accustomed to the darkness made visible, when, creeping out from the very bowels of the earth, grim forms began to appear, their black faces being just made visible by the light falling on their clear bright eyes. Now they came creeping up by twos and threes, now by sixes and sevens. Some of the miners' wives, and some young lasses, who hoped to be wives in their turn, had obtained permission to be present. It is needless to say that their appearance and presence added not a little to the strangeness of the scene.

At length all were assembled. We numbered about 150. The candles were stuck here and there against the rocky sides of our cavern chapel: we needed but little light, and there was ample for our purpose.

The vicar of the parish, the Rev. R. F. Wheeler, gave out the first hymn, "Jesus, lover of my soul." A hearty tune was struck up by some of the pitmen, and loudly and strangely did those galleries resound with notes such as most probably had never there been heard before, and never may again.

Prayer was offered up by the Rev. G. Howell of

Everton, Liverpool, one of the Missioners, and then Mr. Trotter began his address. After reading from Romans v. 6-10, he took for his text, "A lump of coal," illustrating his subject from the matter around. Coal, once a living tree, bright with its leaves waving in the warm winds of summer—a very beautiful object in its fern-like form. Then a dead tree, buried out of sight, no use for any purpose till the time came, but meant in God's good, far-seeing providence for a definite and most valuable purpose in after times. Once more raised to earth's surface it became a living power, the fruitful source of energy to nearly every human industry.

Its powers dormant and hidden while in the earth, now when above, mighty for good. Still the coal had no power of itself alone. The spark of fire must be brought to it ere the mighty force could be developed. Surely this was a good and true type of man by nature. Dead in trespasses and sin, no power for real good till the life-giving Spirit came and the spark of the Divine life was quickened within the soul.

Then the pitman himself was no unapt type of the same idea. He puts on his working clothes, already soiled by previous labor. He descends into the earth, far from the light of heaven. Everything he comes in contact with only tends to bodily defilement. He is in constant danger. The frequent explosions and loss of life from the many accidents to which a miner is always exposed, like the terrible accident a few years ago at the Hartley pit, only a short distance from where we were; then the accident in South Wales last year, when eight men were entombed for days shows this. Still the miner goes on, determined to win the coal and bring it up to the light of day. So Jesus left the glories of heaven, came down to earth, where there was "gross darkness." He was not only willing to die, but gave Himself, and did in very deed lay down His life for us. He humbled Himself, and took upon Him the form of a servant. How thankful were those entombed miners in that Welsh pit when they heard the sounds of the pick growing louder and louder, as those bent on rescuing them worked with all their strength for their liberation, and when the last barrier was broken down, and they were able to come forth, how grateful were they! Shall we be less so? Have we been brought from the horrible pit, out of the mire and clay, our feet securely placed on the Rock of Ages? Surely this calls for a new song. We love Him because He first loved us. He loved me and gave Himself for me:—

"Thy love unknown
Has broken every barrier down;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my life, my soul, my all."

The Pitman wins the coal from the dark bowels of the earth to the light of day. Jesus wins the sinner from the darkness of sin to the light of God's truth.

When brought to the surface, to how many purposes can the coal be put! It is used to work the steam engine, to bring warmth and comfort to our homes, to make bright colours for our clothes, to produce the gas which lights our streets and our houses. Warmed, it drinks in the oxygen of the air almost as a living thing; it sheds a blessing on all around. So the sinner rescued by the blood of Jesus, becomes a source of good everywhere, spends and is spent for its Master's service. He gave Himself for me. I leave myself to Him. He died for all that they which live should not live unto themselves, but unto Him that died for them and rose again. This afternoon's service can never be forgotten. In your daily work, as you win the coal, think of the love of Jesus. Ask yourselves, "Have I been born and found in Him?" If not, at once decide. No life till brought to the light. If you have been brought, remember the coal is lifted to the bank for a special purpose. It is not brought up to remain there a useless heap. So God has saved you to do His work, to glorify Him, to be a blessing to all around you, to your fellow-workmen, your homes, your neighbours. What a matter of rejoicing would it be if every pitman and pitlad was found, and henceforth in his daily life witnessed of the love of Jesus!

The preacher's voice dies away. A moment of silence, then a brief prayer by the Rev. R. F.

Wheeler. The hymn, "Rock of Ages, cleft for me," was given out. The stone walls by their echoing sounds seemed to join in the spirit-stirring strains which with heart and voice, the pitladdies joined in singing. A few words of brief address by the Rev. R. F. Wheeler, and the presentation of copies of the Special Mission Hymn-book to the hearers as a memento of the service, to be treasured by them and to serve as a means of bringing back the loving words they had just heard, perhaps long years hence, concluded the service. Copies of the Gospel of St. John were subsequently given to all present. A vote of thanks to Mr. Rutherford, the viewer, for his help and the interest he had taken, was responded to by every voice and heart in the congregation.

Then we sought once more the cheering light of day. Some took away a lump of coal, to be treasured up as a remembrance of this never-to-be-forgotten service. Then careful we were carried aloft, singing, as one of the pitmen has described it in verse:—

"Singing tunes in lively strain,
Trusting that the meeting there
Will never be forgot,
Until we are safely landed
Where sin can harm us not."

Truly were the Missioners rejoiced and strengthened for the work which yet was before them, in evening services at Whitley Church and Cullercoats, and happy did we all feel that the grace of God which bringeth salvation has been so freely proclaimed, so lovingly received.

Correspondence.

NOTICE.—We must remind our correspondents that all letters containing personal allusions, and especially those containing attacks on Diocesan Committees, must be accompanied with the names of the writers, expressly for the purpose of publication. We are not responsible for opinions expressed by correspondents.

THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH WHICH IS IT?

DEAR SIR.—In your issue of the 16th inst., I find two communications in reply to mine of the week previous, as to "many," of the English clergy being paid by state. "D. C. M." (I hope this is not "Doctor of common law") presumes I am aware "that 20 years gives possession," and states that "of Withred &c., gave tithes to the church—these tithes &c., since then have belonged to the church." I presume that D. C. M. is aware that Withred and other kings of England not only gave tithes but make laws or dooms commanding all their people to do the same, and this not as private individuals, but as supreme in the state as being in fact the state in person. The argument of D. C. M. will hardly stand the test of examination. "If 20 years gives possession, why does not every Bishop or Rector who has held any temporal emolument in the church for '20 years' or over claim them as their own as being in their possession. Again, why has every bishop to do homage to the state in the person of the Sovereign if the temporalities of his See belonged to the Church not to the state. If D. C. M. would study the matter of homage, and "Ecclesiastical investiture," he would see that "20 years does not give possession."

In reply to "CHURCHMAN," I would state that the acts and dooms from which I quoted were too long to include in an article for a weekly paper, and would occupy more space than you could afford, therefore I did little more than refer to them. Had I given the portions left out of my last, "CHURCHMAN," would have seen that instead of being gifts from the "private purse" of the king, they were grants of the tenths of all living and growing things in the state—under certain restrictions and for certain purposes—and to show that the king was unreserved and honest in the grant, he commands that "first of all" the tithes should be paid out of his own personal property, and then that the Reeves &c., should see that the rest of the nation did the same. For proof of this, I would refer to "Thorne's Ancient Laws and Institutions of England," or to the appendix to "Brogdin's Catholic Safeguards Vol. III. I find also that these tithes were originally paid to the Bishop before the present system of parochial divisions came into use and when what are now