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DEATH OF CANON ATKINSON.

The Rev. Canon Atkinson. D.C.L., the venerable and genial vicar of Danby in-Cleveland, died on Saturday at the age of 85. Infirmities incidental to his great age had afflicted him for two years past, but it was not until a week ago that his condition became serious. In the early part of last week it was apparent that the end was near, and the members of his family summoned to the bedside. Dr. Hedley, of Middlesbrough, and Dr Alexander, of Castleton, were assiduous in their attention, but the patient was past medical aid, and he passed peacefully away in the afternoon of Saturday.

By the death of Canon Atkinson, the Church of England loses one of its most faithful labourers, and the County of York one its brightest ornament. He was not a Yorkshireman by birth, but did a long and useful life's work in the county, and in his old age told the story of his career with such simplicity and artlessness that Yorkshire folk were both surprised and charmed. He was born the year before Waterloo at Goldhanger, in Essex, where his father was curate. Receiving his early education at a private school in Kelveden, entered at John's, Cambridge, when he was 20 years of age, and four years later took his degree, coming out last Wrangler. Tutorial and clerical work at Pakenham, Rockhampton, Scarborough, and in Berwickshire, led up his appointment to Danby. That was in 1847 – more than half a century ago.

When Canon Atkinson first went to his moorland parish, the living was only a poor one, and the work that confronted him was such as would have daunted a less resolute man. A very primitive state of things existed. Away from the busy haunts of men, and scattered far and wide over the moors, the parishioners were far from being in touch with modern ideas. Some of their ways suggested mediaeval times. There was even said to be a lingering belief witchcraft among some of them, and not a few were in the habit of resorting to "the wise man of Stokesley," when anything mysterious occurred or when there was any suspicion of witchcraft. That was before the days of Board Schools and Sanitary Inspectors, and the young vicar found himself among a people many whom were ignorant of the rudiments of learning, and lived in hovels which would disgrace Whitechapel. The thoroughness which characterised Canon Alkinson's whole life is illustrated by the manner in which he set to work on his arrival in his new sphere of labour. To begin with, he visited every house in the stragglng parish, and by no means a light task, seeing that seven miles long, and has average breadth of about six miles. Finding a large number of his people living in insanitary houses some of them dating from the 16th century – he waged a vigorous crusade against these miserable dwellings, preaching the gospel of decency and cleanliness in season and out of season. How necessary it was to combine with his spiritual functions the duty of sanitary inspector is best described in his own words, written nine years ago :-

There are two of the old-fashioned, as well old cottages, once the rule in the district, still remaining in one part of the parish. In one of these, when I first came, a dog-whipper, his brother, and their sister lived together. The hut contained one room (with a floor sunk beneath the level of the ground) of perhaps four yards square, and no pretence at a separate room or the woman, there being no

loft even. In the other, much the same in point of area and arrangement, lived a married couple with their family, and when the dog-whipper family died out their cottage was occupied by another married couple and their offspring. The united population of these two one-roomed, loftless dens at one time reached the trifling total of twenty three souls!

Canon Atkinson was rewarded by bringing about thorough reform in this direction. Among other aids to civilisation, he introduced penny readings, brought the people together for harmless recreation, and founded an agricultural society, which he had the management as secretary for over thirty years. Until the end of his life he continued some of the arrangements which had their beginning at this time, his "harvest home" teas especially growing to large dimensions, and being marked in the Dales calendar with a great red cross.

A many-sided man, Canon Atkinson's energies were by no means exhausted by the painstaking thoroughness with which he carried out his ecclesiastical duties; he found time for literary, antiquarian, and scientific pursuits. He was a man of great research and original powers of observation, and as naturalist, ornithologist, antiquary, and student of Cleveland folk-lore he acquired no mean reputation. His first book - principally on natural history and ornithology - were very popular with boys especially, and among the more widely read books were his "History of Cleveland," and "Glossary of the Cleveland Dialect." But the work by which he is best known is, of course, his "Forty Years in a Moorland Parish," in which he took the world into his confidence as to the duties and "recreations of a country parson."

In this work, Dr. Atkinson gives the following graphic description of his first introduction to Whitby, which he reached by high-road from Scarborough:-

"Three hours' riding brought me to Whitby, and the quaint, picturesque old town - there were lodging-houses there then; the Royal Hotel itself was not so much as projected - with the setting autumn sun gilding and glorifying its red roofs and quaint gables, impressed an image on my retina which has never faded away, and which has stirred the eye and the heart of many one besides the artist with a longing for some lasting memento of its beauty. The following morning saw me still farther on my journey of exploration. I was told I should find but few on the road to make inquiry of to the route I was bound to pursue. After the first three or four miles, a rough moorland road would have to be traversed, and I might not see a passenger for miles and miles together. Nor did I. The heights Swart House once attained, with the bare moor on either side of me, I passed on to Barton Howl without seeing a soul. Thence to Stonegate, according to the directions obtained at the little roadside inn just passed, and there the solitude of my way was singularly broken. I was no longer the sole traveller on this rugged lonely roadway; for there was a cavalcade such as I had never before imagined, much less realised. What I met was a stone-waggon with a team - a "draught" we call it in our North Yorkshire vernacular - of no less than twenty horses and oxen attached to it, half of either kind. They were drawing a huge block of fine freestone up the terribly steep "bank" or hill-side road, which rises like a house-roof on the eastern side of Stonegate Gill. At the foot of the bank, on the limited level space available, there were standing four other waggons similarly loaded. The full complement of animals dragging each of these "carries" was a pair of horses and a yoke of oxen; and when they reached the foot of one of these stupendous hills, the full force of animal power was attached to each of the carriages in succession, and so the ponderous loads - five tons' weight on the average - were hauled to the top; and then, when all were up, the cavalcade proceeded on its slow march again. I had seen oxen used in the plough in Suffolk, but never before had I seen such a spectacle as this on the highroads of England. At last I reached the Beacon, the highest point, houe-crowned, of all that part the North Yorkshire moors, and the site of a beacon in Armada times, and on many subsequent occasions when it was thought or feared that invasion might ensue."

Canon Atkinson's services as a lecturer on archaeology, folk-lore, and kindred subjects were in later years in much demand. All through life Canon Atkinson was a man of great activity, and he calculated that when was 76 years old he had walked 70,000 miles in the prosecution of his parish work, and much more than as many

again for exercise and recreation. A single visit to a parishioner would sometimes mean walk of five miles, for his church stood isolated among the fields, and not more than 40 people lived within mile of it. Every Sunday he took two services and had to walk at least seven miles, while sometimes he did ten. To quote an admirer of Canon Atkinson who contributed to the *Sunday at Home* early in 1894, the result of interview -

Canon Atkinson was a desperit fresh man ov 'is age. He will be 80 in May, but looks, talks, and works like a man ten or fifteen years younger. "You see that hill," he said, pointing to the brown ridge that shuts in the valley on the east. "I go over that hill every Sunday afternoon to Fryup, and it's two-and-a-half miles the straightest way I can go - across fields and over walls and hedges." There is a mission chapel at Fryup and another at Castleton, a large village to the west. These, with the parish church, make three pulpits the vicar and his curate have to fill every Sunday. The parish church, in which the vicar takes the service on alternate Sunday mornings, is a mile from the parsonage. I asked if the pony and trap would not bring Fryup a little nearer. The Canon said no. The roads were roundabout, and too much up-hill and down-dale. He could do the journey in less time across country. I understood how this was later in the day, when I saw my host getting over a five-bar gate. In spite of the burden of four score years, he is still tolerably erect, and walks with good firm step that soon disposes of a mile.

What leisure the Canon could spare from his parochial, literary, and farm duties - for he had seven acres of glebe and ten or twelve acres besides to look after - was often devoted to the charms of rod and gun, and it was one of the regrets of his declining years that his failing sight prevented the continuance of the field sports he had loved so well. In his later years seldom wrote his sermons, and even for his discourses in York Minster he made no notes. He was thrice married, and brought up 15 children. Two years ago the Queen, on the recommendation of Mr. Balfour, granted the venerable clergyman a pension of £100 a year from the Civil List "in recognition of his services to philology and scholarshp."

In a leaderette the *Yorkshire Post*, of Tuesday, says:- "It is not possible, in the brief obituary notice a newspaper can give, to do justice to the late Canon Atkinson's work as an antiquary and nature-lover. Dr. Whitaker, of Craven, has left a name, but Dr. Whitaker was no such diligent, versatile, and careful worker. With a little more imagination than Canon Atkinson, he turned his folk-lore knowledge and his quest of local character to account in writing stories. But did not possess the scholarship that enabled the Vicar of Danby-in-Cleveland to refer both folk-lore, and place-names, and old manners and customs, to their distant origin; while he was ignorant by companion of prehistoric matters, so familiar to the fine old clergyman that, from his own researches among the and dykes and pits of Cleveland, he could almost form a mind-picture of the ancient dwellers who made them. Dr. Atkinson's labours had much to do in showing that the "Danes dykes" are military walls built not by the Danes at all, but by earlier invaders; and to him alone, working on a hint from Canon Greenwell, are due to the proofs that the "British villages" of Ord and the ordnance maps are old ironstone pits. From the numberless howes, or barrows, in the same district he with his own hands, or with the help of plain men who were inspired by his enthusiasm, dug out intact nearly fifty cinerary vases and other remains for the collection the British Museum; and his systematic methods in excavation established the fact that such barrows were not formed in one operation, but slowly shaped by successive burial, and shaped very often of stones, or sand, or pebbles brought from considerable distances. He was no sciolist, but a scientific worker. To his labours in local history, he brought with the happiest results a knowledge of Norse as well as of English early records; and, dealing with later centuries, he gave eight years of what, to a mind so various, must have seemed prosaic labour to an examination the Quarter Sessions records of the North Riding. The secret of much zeal and success in recalling the past of his countryside was a fine human interest in the present. What had vanished, leaving a few traces, was part what lived in his neighbours. How otherwise explain his fine eye for character and native humour, and his ear for the dialect, remarkable in a South countryman? No Dry-as-dust, or mere hobby-rider of the type of Scott's Antiquary, could have written, again, the perfectly charming chapters of "Forty Years, in a Moorland Parish" on bird-life and the

aspects of nature. What he knew of birds, however, corroborated by a study of books, was founded on the closest of personal observation. He conned their habits like his parishioners' habits, he could imitate their calls with the cunningest poacher (and set snares, too, if had wished); and his garden was a sanctuary for them. What he knew of Nature's moods has not been written; but it is clear, at all events, that he could have written the coming of the great snow in "Lorna Doone." It is almost amazing to think of so much seen and learned, and done by the busy vicar of a very large parish. His forty years of Danby were years, in fact, of life crowded with interest in a degree hardly possible to town-dwellers; and they leave results tangible enough to excite envy."

THE INTERNMENT

took place on Wednesday afternoon, the remains the deceased venerable gentleman being interred in the Parish Churchyard of Danby, amid every manifestation of sympathy. The funeral cortege left the Vicarage shortly before four o'clock, and by this time those intending to take part in the mournful procession had assembled in the immediate vicinity. The hearse containing the coffin was followed by three mourning coaches, five or six private vehicles, containing the relatives and several of the deceased's most intimate acquaintances, whilst there was an exceedingly large following of private friends on foot to pay a last tribute of respect to the memory of the deceased and to show their sympathy with the family in their bereavement. The coffin, which was of polished oak, with brass mountings, bore on the breast-plate the inscription

J. C. ATKINSON,
Died March 31st, 1900.
Aged 85 years.

The long procession, which included almost every one of note in the parish, moved slowly towards the church, about three-quarters of mile distant. Arrived at the church, the bearers carried the coffin, which was covered with lovely wreaths, to resting place in the chancel. The first portion of the impressive service was conducted by the Rev. Canon Wright, of Stokesley, and the Rev. Mr. Bird, curate of Danby. *De profundis*, and the hymn, "Hark, my soul! it is the Lord," were effectively sung by the choir, being accompanied on the organ by Mr. J. C. Dobson, the organist. Besides the officiating clergymen, there were also present:- Rev. A. H. Cumming, rector of Loftus; Rev. Mr. Wilcox (Danby), Rev. E. C. Mackie (Glaisdale), Rev. R. G. Glennie (Egton), and the Rev. A. M. Bolland (Aislaby). As the coffin was carried out of the church the organist played the "Dead March." The service at the grave side was performed by the Rev. Cumming; and the hymn, "Now the labourer's task is o'er," rendered. Deep emotion was manifested while the last solemn rites were being conducted, and a feeling of sorrow which could not wholly be suppressed. The principal mourners were :- Mrs. Atkinson, Mr. William Brown (brother-in-law), Dr. Miles Atkinson, Miss Atkinson, Mrs. Greenhow, Miss S. Atkinson, Miss Dorothy Atkinson. Dr. Guy Atkinson, Mr. G. Macmillan, Mr. W. C. Trevor, Dr. Hedley (Middlesborough), and Mr. George Buchannan. The weather during the afternoon was very unfavourable, rain falling heavily intermittently, much to the discomfiture of the large congregation. A large number of floral wreaths and crosses were sent by relatives and friends, and placed on the coffin. The funeral arrangements were carried out by Mr. Joseph Underwood, undertaker, of Ainthorpe. and Mr. W. Foster, of Whitby, supplied the funeral equipages.

JOHN CHRISTOPHER ATKINSON, D.C.L., Died March 31st, 1900.

The Vicar's venerable form has passed away.
Thus ends at last man's briefest, longest day;
This is the goal, the vestibule of things unseen
Which all must touch and pass between.
As the shepherd seeks, in dark and cloudy day.
The erring sheep which wandering go astray.
The minister also loves and watches o'er his flock.
And knows and answers every heart's sad knock.
But now 'tis given all the flock to weep.
For God has given His beloved sleep.

R. B.