

DEATH OF MR. W. C. AITKEN.

A face and figure long familiar at the "Private View" of the Society of Artists was absent yesterday, and will be seen there no more, for in the early morning William Costen Aitken had passed peacefully away into the silent land beyond the grave. For nearly three years past he had lost something of his early vigour, and during the last few months a fatal malady had slowly sapped his strength. His last appearance in public was at the laying of the foundation-stone of Sir Josiah Mason's Scientific College—the first great step towards the realisation of his dreams of which should be done for practical science; and the crowning with public approval of his own unselfish labours of more than thirty years.

During the past quarter of a century especially with all the great work done for the art-union and the science-teaching of Birmingham people. In season and out of season, late and early, with the secure greatest interest and devotion to the industrial, and scientific, and artistic culture of our working people; and although he had departed from among us at a comparatively early age—he was only fifty-eight—when many more years of usefulness might fairly have been hoped for, he lived long enough to see the promise, if not the ripened fruit, of the good seed he had sown, and his culture he had bestowed upon it.

Mr. Aitken was born at Dunfermline on the 2nd of March, 1817; the son and the grandson of men who had won more than common honour from their skill in the handloom-weaving trade. His favourite hobby was the hereditary transmission of special powers was illustrated in his own case, for he seems to have inherited his father's taste and skill. He was a painter, John Craig, the writing-master there, who was a man of no ordinary stamp. One of his fellow-scholars was Robert Thorburn, afterwards well-known as a painter and an Associate of the Royal Academy. At this period Mr. Aitken was also associated with a number of youths of his own age and earlier, in the Royal Free School Institution, and, like himself, many of his associates there have since done credit both to themselves and to the training they received. Dunfermline, however, was too limited a field for Mr. Aitken's peculiar powers. For some time he assisted in his father's works, and then, while still a youth, he came to Birmingham as an "improver," being desirous to enter the handloom-weaving trade in the place where it was most skillfully and largely practised. He then went back to Dunfermline, but in 1844 returned to Birmingham again, to make it his home for the rest of his life. His first engagement was at the works of Messrs. W. W. Winfield and Co., in Cambridge Street, which he held for nearly twenty years, and having his value by numerous inventions and ingenious mechanical appliances—amongst them being the invention of the beautiful process of "Nature printing"—and by a fertility of resource unsurpassed and perhaps unequalled in the records of the trade. On leaving Messrs. Winfield's—some time after the death of Mr. J. Lawrence Winfield, to whom he was tenderly attached—he held a short engagement with Messrs. Threlknap's Art-Manufacturing Company. He was eager, however, to return to Birmingham, and consequently accepted an engagement as manager of Messrs. Harlan's new works in Newhall Hill, a position which he held until about three years ago, since which period he has remained out of active business employment, though still busily occupied with his labours for the promotion of the teaching of science and art.

The public life of Mr. Aitken has long been put—and a most important part—of the industrial history of our town. With little more than a boy he joined, or rather led, his fellow-workers at Dunfermline to form an industrial association, and he succeeded with his characteristic energy in making it a great success. He was not long after his residence in Birmingham actively engaged in similar works, and at the meeting of the British Association here in 1849 he was one of the most interesting of the workers, and was the chief promoter and addresser of the late great Industrial Exhibition at Hingley House. The visit of the late Prince Consort to this collection, as is well known, led to the International Exhibition of 1851, and its successor in Paris, Dublin, London, &c.; and finally to the International Exhibition of 1873, and the Vienna Exhibition of 1874. In each and all of these Mr. Aitken took a deep, intelligent, and earnest interest, exhibited not only by his assistance in securing contributions, but in the valuable and important reports which he wrote from time to time. The visit of the Queen to Aston Hall in 1858 led to the formation of a local exhibition, in which Mr. Aitken took a most active part, not only in securing specimens of art and workmanship, but in compiling the catalogue, in arranging the objects, and in writing descriptive reports for the benefit of all engaged in industrial pursuits. In 1857 he contributed some valuable papers on brass, metals, &c., to "Our Circle of the Industrial Arts," a frequently-quoted valuable paper to the Art-Journal and other periodicals on subjects connected with the arts and manufactures. The Paris and Vienna Exhibitions owed to Mr. Aitken some results which were scarcely anticipated, and the issue of which can hardly be properly appreciated. He had long held, and had succeeded in convincing others, that if such exhibitions were to produce their proper effect, the actual workers must examine them for themselves, and describe them for the benefit of others. He was appointed to conduct parties of workmen to the Paris and the Vienna Exhibitions, and the Reports, which were written under his guidance and suggestions, edited by him, and issued by the local Chamber of Commerce, are among the most valuable in the history of industrial art.

The meeting of the British Association, in 1865, was ever he associated with the memory of the local Chamber of Commerce, for when the "Local Industries Committee" decided to collect the materials and notes for a volume in the history of the industries of the town and the district, Mr. Aitken entered into the work with a degree of zeal and energy, and an amount of private knowledge, which went beyond praise. He contributed almost one-third of the records of Birmingham Trades—not merely the words and acts from previous writers, but original, elaborate work. His history of the brass Trade alone would have made the reputation of any author, for its detail is wonderful, its facts are extraordinary, and the labour expended upon the work was incalculable—extending, indeed, over many months, and involving great research. Many articles in the same volume bear Mr. Aitken's name, and it is a simple justice to his memory to say that when any contribution promised by others failed to appear, a hint to Mr. Aitken was enough, and in a few days the resurrection of many years were gladly offered to enrich the volume in which he felt so deep an interest, and for which he worked with such untiring energy and untrivaled skill. Year after year, as the history of trades and commerce may display the history of men, his name, as one of the earliest and most earnest and most able contributors to industrial literature, will ever live an honorable name.

When the Midland Institute was first opened, Mr. Aitken was one of its warmest advocates, and incessantly devoted himself to its work and progress, almost to the last hours of his life. He was a member of the original Council named in the Act of Parliament; and even when he lived at Coventry his interest in the institute was so great that he never missed a meeting of the Council, while at the annual Conventions in later years he was an indefatigable friend and ardent worker in the promotion of Illustrations of science and art. He entered it one of his highest honours to hold the vice-presidency of the institute; and in this capacity, and as a member of the council, he was entering in his devotion to the institution. In the School of Art, also, he took the deepest interest and a most active part for a long series of years, and succeeded in securing many important changes and valuable results. For many years he has the honour of being recognized and elected by the Town Council as one of the members of the Free Libraries Committee, and in the superintendence and management of the Art Gallery his large knowledge, and administrative taste, and ceaseless perseverance were of inestimable value in the public service. He had the further honour of being appointed one of the trustees of Sir Josiah Mason's Scientific College, and on the occasion of the laying of the foundation stone he was heavily and deservedly gratulated upon the fact that his own life-long labours were now about to be crowned with

success, thanks to the munificence and foresight of a single citizen in providing for the needs of a great industrial community. We have just spoken of his labours in connection with the Corporation Art Gallery. The formation of an Industrial Museum was, indeed, his great desire; his earliest literary efforts were directed towards it; and one of his latest works was a paper on the subject, read before the London Society of Arts. He also interested himself greatly by personal interviews and correspondence, to improve the national collections at South Kensington, and to render these more available for the uses of Art Students, and for public instruction, throughout the country. Reference has been made to some of Mr. Aitken's literary labours. It would be impossible to give an adequate record of them; he had been for many years a contributor to the Birmingham Journals, and especially to our own, in which from time to time he had written most valuable criticisms of Art exhibitions, and on other subjects relating to his favourite pursuits. His last contribution—a significant one—appeared only a few weeks ago; it was a review of the Life of his fellow-countryman and fellow Art worker, Allan Cunningham, a man whose character and tastes he much resembled. At the time of his death he was engaged on an important work, the selection from the Art Journal of the Illustrations of Industrial Art, which, for years past, had appeared in that periodical. These he was arranging into groups, and was to have accompanied them with descriptions, and with introductory and explanatory essays on Industrial Art in its various applications. For such a work, as we have seen, he had special qualifications; and it would doubtless have contained the ripe fruit of his knowledge and experience he had acquired in his long and active working career. One word should be added in this connection. Mr. Aitken was a thoroughly well-read man, not only in his particular subjects, but in general literature, and especially in the poetry and literary history of Scotland. Though so long resident in this country, he remained to the last thorough "kailyo Scott," in speech and manner, in action, and in association with literary and other friends.

In the preceding lines we have noted the public incidents of Mr. Aitken's life, though, unfortunately, for the benefit of his sympathisers, and the numerous objects in which he took an active interest, most notable the catalogue incomplete. While suffering acutely from loss by his death it is at once difficult and painful to speak of his character. Yet in justice to the memory of one who was both a good man and a good citizen, we must make the attempt. To many of our readers it is needless to say anything. Mr. Aitken was well known to every man of mark or position in Birmingham, and by every one of them he was thoroughly appreciated for the sterling qualities of his heart and mind. His language was, and sometimes coarseness of speech he was unobscured by those who knew him little; but those who knew him well understood the greatness which lay beneath the mere trick of habit. Though seemingly rough on occasion, no man ever had a kinder or more respectful regard for his disposition more simple, affectionate, and wholly unselfish. From youth upwards, indeed, his was a life of perfect self-control, and a very noble life, as the world would say, if it were proper to write all that could be written on this matter; without breaking into the sacrosanct domain of privacy, we could fairly portray his relations as a friend, a husband, a brother, and a son. His quickness and vivacity, indeed, were often but the excess of a kindly nature, which longed not only to display but to receive the tokens of affection. There was nothing great. The least hint of a distant secret self he seldom to remember it; not, in fact, delighted him more than to penetrate desire and to satisfy it by anticipation. With this genuine kindness he united the most perfect frankness and plain-spokenness when he thought his friends were in the wrong; no man, indeed, could be more utterly fearless or honest in the expression of opinion. In this, as in thought, and in personal conduct, he was a bright example of modern civility—a veritable *honest* without fear, and without reproach. He was a later of shrewdness and never failed to denounce them; yet with such touches of humor that he rained no bitterness against himself; while, amongst those who knew him thoroughly, his vehemence of his occasional communications only served to endear him the more; for there was never any taint of malice in them; and if, by chance, he quarrelled with a man, it was but to say which of the two was more conscientious to be good friends again. The best testimony to his many good qualities—his high principle, kindness, honesty, and plainness—was afforded by the great confidence in a very wide circle yesterday, when his death was made known. This feeling will be lasting as it is deep and sincere; in the ranks of his friends, especially those who were most intimate with him, a gap has been broken that never can be filled up.

A few days hence the mortal remains of this worthy citizen and much-loved friend will be buried in peace in Handsworth Churchyard, in the Campo Sancto or *Industrial Heroes*, whose memories he cherished, whose lives he had illustrated, whose examples he had followed, whose work he had continued—near the graves where Matthew Boulton, art manufacturer, Francis Repton, artist, and his own illustrious countryman, James Watt and William Murdoch, all the great Worthens of Soho, rest from their labours, after life's fatal fever, in the last long sleep.

NEW MINTING PROVIDENT

The thirty-ninth annual meeting of this society was held in the School Room, St. Peter's Place, Broad Street, last night; Councillor Brooke-Smith presiding. There were 413 members present, and the meeting was a most successful one. The Treasurer, J. S. Stiles, read the report of the year, which stated that the past year, considered financially, was probably the most successful one recorded. The capital showed an increase of £107, £25, 25s. The amount was standing at the credit of the society were as follows:—Savings fund, £207, £11, 11s.; Reserve fund, £1,182, £12, 12s.; £100, £1, 10s.; contingents, £14, 7s. 6d.; total, £1,304, £12, 12s. There had been twelve deaths, and the amount withdrawn from this cause was £75, 7s. 6d. The amount of £22, 10s. on the previous year. Although 25 new members had been admitted, the number of deaths and those who had left the list by the number of the books on January 1, 1875, was—male, 67; 12 years of age, 27; female, 31; total, 98. The number of the society at the time of the meeting was 1,402. The number of members at the present time they had plenty of funds in hand to meet any liability; but, if the falling off in numbers continued in the next period, they would be in a very serious state. It was decided that the next year they should be in a very serious state. It was decided that the next year they should be in a very serious state. It was decided that the next year they should be in a very serious state. It was decided that the next year they should be in a very serious state.

RAILWAY TRAFFIC RECEIPTS.

WEEK ENDING MARCH 26.

TOWNS.	
Midland	£8,701
Great Northern	5,122
London and North-Western	4,135
Great Eastern	2,125
London and South-Western	2,044
London, Chatham, and Dover	1,717
Metropolitan District	1,346
London, Brighton, and South Coast	1,215
North British	2,011
Caledonian	2,739
Great Northern of Scotland	7,049
DUBLIN.	
Great Western	3,509
Frisland and Eire	438
Dunstable and Waterford	254

MORE QUARTERS OF COUCH, ARMCHAIR, AND CHAIRS. BY GIBBS, OF 10, ADAM'S PLACE, WATERLOO PLACE, LONDON. THE FOLLOWING LIST OF THE QUARTERS OF COUCH, ARMCHAIR, AND CHAIRS, WHICH HE HAS BEEN EMPLOYING FOR THE LAST YEAR, IS HEREBY PUBLISHED.