

"MY REMINISCENCES"

IX

Sir Robert Anderson K.C.B.

Although for many years regarded as a terror to evil-doers and as the chief criminal expert in Great Britain, Sir Robert Anderson, late of Scotland Yard, is by nature a scholar, singularly modest and affable. His theological writings have won him a high place amongst the thinkers of the day. In his books, especially "Crime and Criminals" and "Sidelights on the Home Rule Movement," he narrates more fully his experiences.



WHENEVER my friends press me to write my Reminiscences, I remind them of my resolve first to embark upon salmon-fishing, and then to set about the compilation of a book of Reminiscences, when my mental faculties begin to fail.

I am not vain enough to believe that the particulars of my birth and upbringing are of any interest. I will only say that in the same year which gave the Empire its present ruler I was born in Ireland, of Scottish stock that for several generations had settled in the sister kingdom. And I always imagined I was Irish until the Home Rule movement exhibited to me my error; for, having no "nationalist" aspirations and no tendency to sedition, I could not be "Irish" in the now accepted sense of the word.

I may add in passing that when I entered Trinity College, Dublin, as a Presbyterian, every member of the governing body and all the fellows and professors belonged to the Established Church, and at that time a spirit of narrowness and bigotry, little known on this side of the Channel, was all too rife outside the walls of Trinity College. It was unknown within them, as my relations both with the "dons" and with my fellow-students abundantly proved. But with neither was the question of my being a Presbyterian

of more account than whether I drank tea or coffee for breakfast.

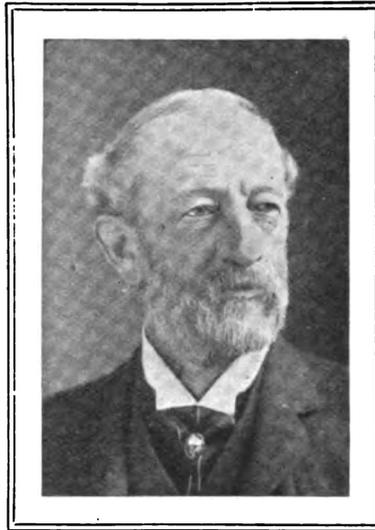
But Maynooth has changed all that. The pupils there were so separated from life around them that even in the playfields they were generally required to talk in Latin. "Do you mean," I remember asking one of them, "that you have Latin for losing your leg-stump at cricket?" "Yes," he replied, with

a laugh; "but I don't think Cicero would understand it."

My special knowledge of the Fenian movement began with the State Trials of 1865. Not that I was professionally engaged in those prosecutions, for my standing at the Bar was too junior for this. But my father, the Crown Solicitor, was permitted by the law officers to depute the duties of his office to my brother, the late Sir Samuel Lee Anderson, and never was there between brothers a closer friendship than ours. And so it came about that not only were the Crown briefs at my disposal, but also the confidential reports and secret information

which had led the Government to bring the leaders of the conspiracy to account.

In those stirring days the Permanent Under Secretary at the Castle was Sir Thomas Larcom. When, after the change of Government in 1866, Lord Mayo (then Lord Naas) was casting about for someone to whom he might entrust a task of an exceptionally confidential kind, the Under Secretary recommended



SIR ROBERT ANDERSON.

From a Photo. by Elliott & Fry.

me for the work. Though dangerous conspiracies had been rife in Ireland for years, there existed no Secret Service organization or Intelligence Department of any kind at Dublin Castle. America being then the hot-bed of Fenianism, our Minister at Washington and some of our Consuls in the United States procured much valuable information about the progress of the movement, and all their despatches were communicated to the Irish Government. But so secret were they regarded that they were put away without being even "registered" in the Chief Secretary's office. Specially confidential reports from the Irish magistracy and police were treated in the same manner. So it came about that when the new Chief Secretary sought information respecting the history of the conspiracy, the task which confronted him was to master the contents of a cupboard in which all these documents lay heaped up in an undigested mass. And the task which Lord Mayo entrusted to me was that of compiling a *précis* of these secret papers and of the other official archives relating to Fenianism.

Then came the "Fenian rising" of March, 1867. I was paying an after-circuit visit in the country when a summons from the Attorney-General recalled me to Dublin. Some hundreds of the "insurgents" had been marched into the city in custody and, after a very summary magisterial hearing, committed for trial for high treason; and I was charged with the duty of sifting all these cases with a view to selecting those which were worth bringing to trial.

Here again my work was appreciated by Lord Mayo, and I found myself still further drawn into Government employment. That a man of my age should be accorded a position of such responsibility and trust as that which I held in Dublin Castle at this time is explicable in only one way. I was my brother's brother, and therefore credited with the qualities which made him the trusted adviser of the Irish Government in all administrative matters. An exceptional capacity for affairs and imperturbable amiability of temper are rarely combined as they were in his case, and, though not many

years my senior, he was regarded as a Nestor in the councils of "The Castle."

In 1865 an American Fenian named Rickard Burke settled in Birmingham as "arms agent" to the conspiracy. He was a man of such mark in the organization that if the career of the notorious Kelley (the chief organizer) had been cut short by a conviction Burke would have succeeded him as "C.O." This man fell into the hands of the police, and was committed to the House of Detention at Clerkenwell.

We received information of the fullest and most explicit kind that a plot was formed for his rescue, and we sent a warning to London in the following terms: "The rescue of Rickard Burke from prison in London is contemplated. The plan is to blow up the exercise walls by means of gunpowder; the hour between 3 and 4 p.m.; and the signal for 'all right,' a white ball thrown up outside when he is at exercise."

It all occurred exactly as thus described. Change the tenses and it would read as a record of what actually took place. Moreover, an amazing part of the story is that there was a "full-dress rehearsal" of the plot the day before the actual explosion. On the afternoon of December 12th (1867) a barrel of gunpowder was brought to the place on a barrow. The preconcerted signal was given—a white ball was thrown over the wall of the prison yard. Burke "fell out" on the pretence of having a stone in his shoe, and retired to a corner of the yard, which, as was proved next day, was a perfectly safe retreat. For some unaccountable reason, however, the fuse when lighted



AN EARLY PORTRAIT OF SIR ROBERT ANDERSON.

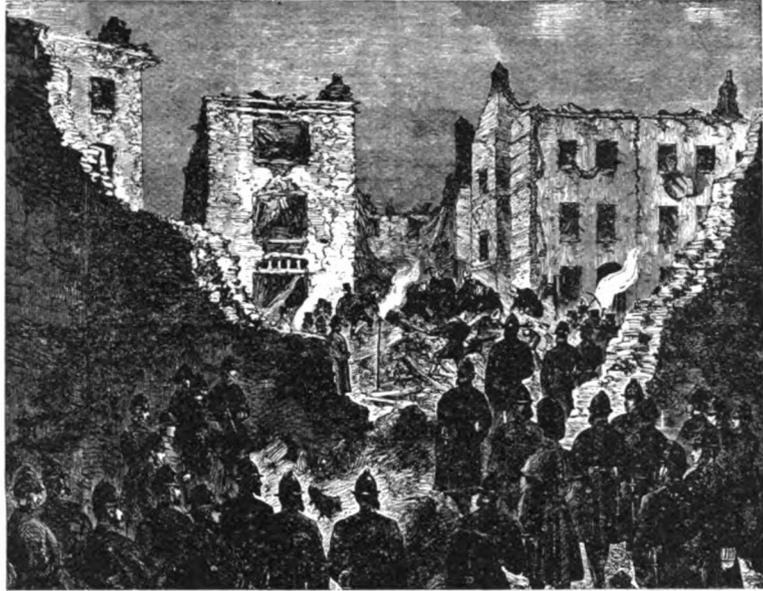
From a Photo. by W. G. Moor

failed to explode the powder. Consequently the execution of the plot was postponed till the morrow.

The warning having been unheeded, the conspirators repeated their performance. Once again the cask of powder was rolled to the place agreed upon; the white ball signal was given as before. This time there was no failure—the explosion followed. The prison authorities, however, had taken the precaution of exercising the prisoners in a different yard; and thereby the whole purpose of the plot was thwarted.

A new generation has arisen since then,

who can hardly realize to what an extent the Metropolis was thrown into a state of panic. "Fenian scares" were springing up all over the kingdom, when, on a telegram from Lord Mayo, I crossed the Channel and arrived in London that very week. We met, and I placed myself at the disposal of the Government. I did not know whether to be more amused than amazed at the state of things I found in the British capital. The teetotallers, it has been remarked, throw off all restraint



EFFECTS OF THE EXPLOSION AT THE HOUSE OF DETENTION, CLERKENWELL, SEEN FROM WITHIN THE PRISON YARD.

when they give way to a debauch; and the same remark seems to apply to Englishmen when they yield to panic. Even the private secretaries at Whitehall carried revolvers. A Fenian was seen in every lamp-post. Staid and sensible men gave up their evening engagements, and their sleep at night, to take their turn at "sentry-go" as special constables. The lives of many of them were seriously imperilled, but more, I fear, by London fogs than by Fenian plots.

It thus came about that almost on the eve of Christmas, 1867, I found myself installed in the Irish Office in London. This was one result of the famous Clerkenwell explosion.

In the following April I moved to the Home Office as adviser to the Secretary of State in matters relating to Fenian and Irish business. It is certain that the scare produced by that crime operated as an encouragement to the conspirators, and further tended to cause a revival of the Fenian activity in London. Next year came the attempt to assassinate the Duke of Edinburgh in Australia. But there is one error which here merits passing correction. In his "Life of Lord Beaconsfield," Mr. Lewis Apjohn narrates that "on March 12th, 1868, the Duke of Edinburgh was shot in the back by an avowed Fenian in Australia, and was hanged for the offence." Having enjoyed the honour of his Royal Highness's acquaintance, I can assert that this is wholly inaccurate.

The Duke of Edinburgh was *not* hanged for the offence!

One hears much from time to time about cases of mistaken identity. I was once nearly in serious trouble from this cause. Being detained in London by official business far into the summer, I took lodgings at Norwood. Arriving late one night at the Crystal Palace Station, I made for my lodgings at a smart pace. I heard steps behind, turned, and soon discovered that I was being pursued by a constable. Two ladies who had travelled in the same train accused me of having grossly insulted them. I returned with my constable to the station, and to my horror my accusers identified me as the delinquent, but absolutely refused to prosecute the charge. Indeed, they were in such an hysterical condition that they could scarcely be induced to look at me at all. As I had travelled in a compartment by myself, there was only my own word against theirs, and if they had pressed the charge I do not see how I could have escaped. In any case, my position was a painful one. Luckily, in the sequel, accident enabled me to put the police upon the track of the real offender, or the stigma of the accusation might have rested upon me to the present day.

While I am on the subject of my early criminal experiences I will narrate how I was once actually locked up. When the Dublin Special Commission to inquire into

the Fenian outbreak was appointed, certain technical evidence was wanting which the law of conspiracy requires; the Government sought my aid in the matter, and I immediately set about obtaining the necessary evidence. Armed with a permit to see all the prisoners without restriction, I repaired one morning to Kilmainham Jail. No one, save the Governor, was in the secret. After visiting a number of men, and taking notes of their complaints or appeals, I left the prison as openly as I had entered it; but I had not yet finished. Returning by the Governor's house, during the officers' dinner-hour, I was smuggled unobserved into a cell. In vain the Governor remonstrated when I begged him not to rejoin me until after locking-up time, as I was resolved that no one, not even the police, should get an inkling of my mission. I refused to listen to the friendly official's warning that I was entering upon an unpleasant ordeal; but I laughed at the idea, and, certainly, as long as I was occupied with the task that had brought me to the cell—and its nature may be guessed—I was quite indifferent to the surroundings. Had my work occupied me up to the time I had fixed for my release, my incarceration would not have troubled me. But for three long hours—and it seemed an age—I had experience of a prisoner's lot.

Only a single feature distinguished that cell from any other barely-furnished closet room. It was that the aperture that passed for a window was, as in every prison cell, placed high up near the ceiling, and a pane of ground glass obscured even the sight of a few square yards of sky. I fancied as I sat there that if only it were night, and I had artificial light, I could forget the miserable window and be at my ease; but in the daylight I could not get away from it. I seemed to be in a pit. There was no want of air, and yet I felt smothered. My nerves would not have long stood the strain of it. I was almost ready to cry out and beat upon my prison door when I was released, and I have since understood what must be the feelings of highly-strung prisoners on first being in close confinement in the wretched cells of our prisons.

Secret Service work seems to have such a strange fascination for many people, but as for me I always felt a decided aversion to it. When in the spring of 1882 an opportunity of escaping from it appeared, I began to look forward to a long holiday. Then came the terrible Phoenix Park murders, and suddenly all my plans were changed. Colonel Bracken-

bury, appointed to office at Dublin Castle, as Under Secretary for Police and Crime, called on me at Whitehall to claim my help. I refused his appeal, and adhered to my refusal when he returned a second time to press it upon me. But I had to give way at last. He convinced Sir William Harcourt, then Home Secretary, that it was essential to have me to represent his department in London; and to the pressure thus brought to bear upon me I was obliged to yield.

With Colonel Brackenbury my official relations were altogether pleasant, unmarred by a hitch of any kind. But his tenure of office was unfortunately brief, and the years that followed brought me a good deal of worry and not a little anxiety. London Fenianism, indeed, though more formidable than in 1867, was a negligible quantity, for I had the organization practically "in my pocket." But the dynamite plots of that era were cause for grave concern.

One bitter winter night in February, 1883, I was just on the point of going to bed, when one of my informants came to report that money to enable certain Irish criminals to escape had reached London. I left my house and drove at once to Grosvenor Square, to place the business in the hands of my friend who then ruled at Scotland Yard. He had already retired, but came down to see me. "You are far more competent to do this business than I," he said. "I'll send orders to the office delegating my powers to you for the occasion. Won't you undertake it?" In a weak moment I consented to do so. Indeed, I was so zealous that I went out with the officers whom I "put on the job." If I had possessed official authority I might have got the money. Unhappily for the success of that night's work, many of the Scotland Yard officers know more law than some of the lawyers. Their desire to help me on this occasion was as great as when I afterwards became their official chief. But I was not their chief, and that made all the difference. So, after all my zeal and my labours, when I got back home at three o'clock in the morning I had taken nothing but the worst cold I ever had in my life—a cold from the effects of which I am still suffering.

The Home Secretary of those days, as I have said, was Sir William Harcourt, and I knew enough of him to keep out of his way the next day. But I had accepted an invitation to a party at Lady Harcourt's. I went late, thinking that the presence of Lady

Harcourt's guests would bar an opportunity for "talking shop." Vain hope! Sir William tackled me in a characteristic manner the moment I appeared in the drawing-room, without even taking me aside. "Why had I not seized that money?" I pleaded that the law was against me. The "Bah!" with which he turned away from me made me feel that I had fallen grievously in his esteem.

I may mention here another nocturnal experience of a different kind. It was while I was living with Charles Reade, the novelist, long ago in his house at Albert Gate, which he afterwards christened "Naboth's Vineyard." It was this house, by the way, in which Mr. Rolfe received his visitors in "A Terrible Temptation." Late one night, on arriving home, I discovered I had forgotten my latch-key. Unable to rouse the inmates, I decided to enter burglariously. My experiences of criminal courts had given me a theoretical knowledge of the business, and it was with a light heart that I dropped into the area and attacked the titchen window. Of course, I had no fear of the police. Neither had I any cause to dread a pistol-shot in entering the house. But the kitchen window refused to yield, and such was the effect of spending twenty minutes in that area that the sound of a constable's tread in the garden made me retreat into the coal-cellar. I felt then that my case was desperate. There being no steps to the area, escape was impossible, and a new bolt on the window baffled me. There was nothing for it—I was driven to break the glass. It is extraordinary what a noise it makes to smash a pane of glass when one does it deliberately. To my horror, it was so great that the passers-by were attracted by the sound. Luckily for me, they had no bull's-eye lantern to flash into the area, and as I had again taken refuge in the cellar they could see nothing to account for the noise. As soon as they were gone it was the work of a moment for me to shoot the bolt, open the window, and scramble into the house.

But my adventure doesn't end here. The next morning the police were sent for, and the detectives investigated the crime. The broken glass and the finger-marks gave proof



SIR WILLIAM HARCOURT AND SIR ROBERT ANDERSON.
 "The 'Bah!' with which he turned away from me made me feel that I had fallen grievously in his esteem."

of a felonious entry; but nothing was disturbed and nothing was stolen. The case was most mysterious, and it passed into the statistics as an undetected burglary. I need hardly add that when I afterwards told Charles Reade the facts the novelist's delight was unbounded.

As for the moral of my story, it is this. I know the popular idea exists that serious crimes against property are like many serious crimes of violence—*i.e.*, the result of accidental circumstances or sudden passion. It is not so; such crimes are deliberately planned and executed by expert criminals.

When it comes to such special feats as safe breaking, for example, the men competent for the task are so few that some police-officers could probably write down the names of them all from memory. When a crime of a certain sort occurs, it is not necessary for the police to hold a "Sherlock Holmes" inquiry. The practical problem is to discover what members of certain definitely



"THERE WAS NOTHING FOR IT—I WAS DRIVEN TO BREAK THE GLASS."

known gangs of thieves had a hand, either active or passive, in the crime.

Experience proves that the men competent to plan and execute crimes of a special character are limited in number, and they are definitely known. When such crimes occur, therefore, the list of men who are in that line of business is examined. Some of them are found to be in seclusion—"doing time"; some of them are known to be out of London in the course of their business; others are proved to have been at their registered addresses on the night of the crime. So by elimination the list becomes reduced to working dimensions, and it is not difficult to go on eliminating one name after another till the delinquent is found. But to find the criminal is often easier than to obtain evidence on which to charge him.

On taking charge of the Criminal Investigation Department in 1887 I was no novice in matters relating to criminals and crime.

Besides my experience at the Bar and on the Prison Commission, Secret Service work had kept me in close touch with Scotland Yard for twenty years, and during all that time I had the confidence not only of the chiefs but of the principal detectives. As a consequence, I embarked on my duties with very exceptional advantages. Notwithstanding all this, to my surprise I found myself credited with a vast amount of ignorance by one of my principal subordinates. When any notable crime occurred and I began to investigate it, *à la* Sherlock Holmes, he used to listen to me in the way many people listen to sermons in church, and at the conclusion he would stolidly announce that the crime was the work of So-and-so, naming one of his stock heroes—"Old Carr," "Wirth," "Sausage," "Shrimps," or "Quiet Joe." And I soon found that my prosaic subordinate was right. Great crimes are the work of great criminals.

There is nothing spontaneous and occasional about the crimes of "professionals."

Take the case of a "ladder larceny," for example. While the family are at dinner the house is entered by means of a ladder placed against a bedroom window, all outer doors and ground-floor windows having been fastened from outside by screws or wire or rope. Wires are stretched across the lawn to baffle pursuit in case the thieves are discovered. A case of the kind occurred some years ago at a country house in Cheshire. The next day brought the chief constable of the county to Scotland Yard. Such a crime, he said, was beyond the capacity of provincial practitioners, and he expected us to find the delinquents among the criminals on our list at Scotland Yard. He gave me a vague description of two strangers who had been seen near the house the day before. An hour or two later I handed him three photographs. Two of these were promptly identified as the men who had come under local observation, and arrest and conviction followed. They were well-known "ladder" thieves.

The sentences of this pair expired about the time of my retirement from office in 1901, and thus my official acquaintance with them came to an end. But in the year after I left office I picked up a newspaper recounting a similar case and I recognized my old friends. Rascals of this type are worth watching, and the police had notice that they were frequenting the Lambeth Free Library, where their special study was provincial directories and books of reference. They were tracked to a bookshop where they bought a map of Bristol, and to other shops where they procured the plant for a "ladder" larceny. Then they booked for Bristol, and there took up observation of the house they had fixed upon. They were seized, however, before the burglary was actually committed, and were sentenced to nine months' imprisonment on a minor issue.

Crime in general, I would here say, is diminishing, but professional crime is on the increase, and it is this kind of crime which is the most serious danger to the community, as well as the severest tax upon the police administration.

The comparatively small band of known criminals who are responsible for almost all the serious crimes against property live well. They can name their favourite wine and they know a good cigar. A trip to Brighton is an ordinary incident in their easy lives, and a winter visit to Monte Carlo is nothing uncommon. They are responsible for the elaborate frauds and great forgeries and jewel larcenies and bank robberies which now and then startle the public.

In fact, the professional is a man who takes good care of himself. He is no out-at-elbows petty thief. He does not work on foggy nights or during prolonged frosts. As a matter of fact, a fog causes no anxiety to the Criminal Investigation Department, and a burglary epidemic, like a fever epidemic, flourishes in mild weather.

I know this upsets a popular notion, but it is true all the same. Professional crime is organized crime, and all organizing involves time. Now, professional men, even burglars, do not care to be abroad at night when the thermometer is approximating a Polar temperature.

As to burglaries, they are usually committed by men who are burglars in the sense in which other men are doctors, lawyers, and architects. The only difference, indeed, is that in the burglar's trade success gives proof of greater proficiency than seems necessary in other lines.

Once Dr. Max Nordau called upon me. I put his "type" theory to the test. I took a couple of photographs and, covering all but the face of each, told him that one was an eminent public man and the other a notorious criminal. I challenged him to say which was the "type," but he evaded the test. One was Raymond, *alias* Wirth—one of the most able criminals of my time; the other was Dr. Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury, and if anything the former's countenance was more replete with strength and benevolence than the latter's. It was Raymond who stole the famous Gainsborough picture, for which Mr. Agnew had recently paid the record price of £10,000. In this matter the dealer acted with great consideration. The picture was offered him more than once on tempting terms, yet he refused to treat with the thieves, until I intimated to him that he might himself take steps for its recovery.

I would here remark in conclusion that my duties at Scotland Yard were not always directed to overtaking crime. The Criminal Investigation Department of the Metropolitan Police is one of the greatest "Prisoners' Aid Societies." No part of my work as head of that department gave me more pleasure than carrying on and developing the system which my predecessors had inaugurated in this sphere. Following their practice, I kept an annually-revised list of employers of labour who were willing to give work to criminals on their release. There was no deception or concealment in the matter. The firms who were willing to help received particulars of a man's antecedents, so that they could stop employing him in circumstances where he might be tempted again to fall. And I had a fund at my disposal which enabled me sometimes to keep a man from want till work was found for him. Very many criminals were thus restored to labour and an honest life. And I entertain no doubt this good work is continued by my successor.