

AITKEN, JAMES (1752-1777), an incendiary, commonly known as **JOHN THE PAINTER**, was born at Edinburgh 28 Sept. 1752. He was the son of David Aitken, a whitesmith of that city, and was brought up as a protestant dissenter. At the age of nine he was placed in Heriot's Hospital, where he continued six years. He was then apprenticed to a house-painter, and at the expiration of his indentures he came to London. Finding no employment in his trade, he took to highway robbery on Finchley Common, petty thefts, and shoplifting. Dreading detection he went to America, where he took a leading part in the riots at Boston, particularly in sinking the tea. On his return to this country (May 1775) he resumed his dishonest courses, and for about a twelvemonth committed many daring felonies with impunity. It appears that in early youth, being a great reader, he had adopted Voltairean and anti-monarchical principles, in which he was confirmed during his stay in America. A conversation which he overheard at Oxford impressed him with the idea that an immense benefit would be conferred on America, then struggling for her independence, if the dockyards and shipping of this country could be destroyed. 'I spent two days,' he says, 'in the contemplation of this malicious design, and promised myself immortal honour in the accomplishment of it. I beheld it in the light of a truly heroic enterprise, such as never would have been equalled to the end of time. I was persuaded it would entitle me to the first rank in America, and flattered myself with the ambition of becoming the admiration of the world!' Having by personal inspection obtained particulars of the dockyards at Portsmouth, Plymouth, Chatham, Woolwich, and Deptford, he crossed over to Paris and propounded his scheme of destruction to Silas Deane, a member of congress, who, according to Aitken's confession, encouraged him to carry it into effect. He had designed certain machines so contrived as not to emit any rays of light. These he proposed to place in storehouses or ships, and as, by the help of a peculiar composition, he could keep them burning any number of hours, he reckoned on being able to make his escape sixty or seventy miles from the spot before the fire broke out. Fortunately the machines did not fulfil the expectations of the inventor. One of them, which went out of its own accord, was found several weeks after it had been deposited in the great hemp house in the dockyard at Portsmouth. Aitken succeeded, however, in setting fire to the rope house in that yard (7 Dec. 1778) and in effecting his escape. In January 1777 he attempted to

burn, first the shipping at Bristol, and afterwards the city itself; but he succeeded only in destroying six or seven warehouses near the quay. He was arrested soon afterwards, and brought to trial at Winchester, 6 March 1777, indicted under the name of 'James Hill, otherwise James Hind, otherwise James Actzen,' and convicted, chiefly on the evidence of another painter, named Baldwin, who had been in America, and who, by pretending to sympathise with Aitken's misfortunes, obtained from him an admission of his guilt. He was executed at Portsmouth on 10 March, and afterwards hung in chains on Block House Point, at the mouth of the harbour. After conviction he made to the keeper of Winchester gaol a confession which was published under the title of 'The Life of James Aitken, commonly called John the Painter' (2nd edition, Winchester, 1777). From it most of the foregoing narrative has been derived. The facts were generally believed at the time, though some persons entertained doubts concerning the truth of the statement in many particulars. In the same year (1777) there was published at London a pamphlet purporting to contain 'A Short Account of the Motives which determined the Man, called John the Painter, and a Justification of his Conduct; written by himself, and sent to his friend, Mr. A. Tomkins, with a request to publish it after his execution.' This work is evidently spurious. The author makes John declare himself an American born, and fired with the most enthusiastic love of his country; in consequence of which he thought it was his duty, as a sincere and active patriot, to exert his utmost abilities in order to distress the enemies of America by every possible means within the power of an individual to perform. The event also occasioned the appearance of an attack, in doggerel verse, on Lord Temple, under the title of 'John the Painter's Ghost: how he appeared on the night of his execution to Lord Temple, and how his lordship did communicate the same at full court, to the astonishment of all present, now partially and circumstantially related,' London, 1777, 4to.

[The works cited above; Trial of James Hill, otherwise James Hind, otherwise James Actzen, taken in shorthand by Joseph Gurney, London, 1777, fol.; Annual Register, 1777, pp. 23-31, 166; History of Great Britain from the Death of George II to the Coronation of George IV (1825), 113; Sabin's Dict. of Books relating to America, viii. 285-7; Sabin's Cat. of Books, Manuscripts, and Engravings, belonging to William Menzies, 5; Monthly Review, lvi. 391, 395, 478; William Gordon's Hist. of the Establishment of the Independence of the United States, ii. 445-7.] T. C.

AITKEN, JOHN (1793-1833), editor of 'Constable's Miscellany,' was born at the village of Camelon, Stirlingshire, 25 March 1793. After a good elementary school education, he became clerk in the East Lothian Bank, whence he was transferred to the bank of Mr. Park (brother of Mungo Park, the traveller) at Selkirk. Subsequently he became teller in the East Lothian Bank, but on its failure he, in 1822, removed to Edinburgh, where he commenced business as a bookseller, and published the 'Cabinet,' a selection of miscellaneous pieces in prose and verse, which extended to three volumes, and met with considerable success. Shortly after this he was appointed editor of 'Constable's Miscellany.' On the death of Constable he, in conjunction with Messrs. Hurst, Chance, & Co., of London, and Mr. Henry Constable, purchased the work, but his connection with it ceased after the failure of the London firm in 1831. He had established a printing-office, with the view of starting a publication similar to the 'Miscellany,' when he died somewhat suddenly, 15 Feb. 1833. Aitken took an active part in founding the 'Edinburgh Literary Journal.' He was an occasional contributor to periodicals, and wrote verse with elegance and taste.

[The Cabinet of Friendship, a Tribute to the Memory of the late John Aitken, edited by W. C. Taylor, London, 1834.] T. F. H.

AITKEN, ROBERT (1800-1873), popular preacher, was born at Crailing, near Jedburgh, 22 Jan. 1800. Almost before he had attained to manhood he became a schoolmaster in Sunderland, and, whilst living in the village of Whitburn near that town, was ordained as deacon in 1823 by Bishop Van Mildert. He was for some time resident in the Isle of Man, and was married there; but in consequence of some irregularities in preaching, he fell under the displeasure of the Bishop of Chester, and withdrew from the church of England. Although he was never properly received into the Wesleyan ministry, he was permitted to occupy the pulpits of that body, and remained in sympathy with them until the Warren controversy arose. Subsequently he preached at Liverpool and elsewhere in chapels of his own, but finally, on 20 Dec. 1840, took leave of his congregation at Zion Chapel, Waterloo Road, Liverpool, and returned to the church of England. Mr. Aitken officiated from 1842 to 1844 as curate of the little parish of Perranuthnoe, near Marazion, in Cornwall, and then became the first incumbent of the new parish of Pendeen in the same county. In this remote district, on the borders of the Atlantic, there was

erected, from his own designs and under his own personal supervision, a fine cruciform church on the model of the ancient cathedral of Iona, the labour being supplied entirely by the people of the neighbourhood, and chiefly in their own leisure hours. He never held any other preferment, but his services were often sought by the incumbents of other churches in large towns, and he was well known throughout England as a preacher of almost unrivalled fervour. A fine presence and a commanding voice, combined with untiring zeal and sympathy for others, concealed his rashness of judgment. His religious creed was taken partly from the teachings of the methodist church, and partly from the views of the tractarians: he wished the one class to undergo the process of 'conversion,' the other to be imbued with sacramental beliefs. Whether his opinions were in accord with the principles of the established church or not, was fiercely disputed both before and after his death. His sermons and pamphlets, as well as the replies which they provoked, are described at considerable length in the first and third volumes of the 'Bibliotheca Cornubiensis.' Worn out with labour Mr. Aitken died suddenly on the Great Western Railway platform at Paddington 11 July 1873.

[Church Times, 6 Aug. to 24 Sept. 1875; Guardian, 23 July 1873; Parochial Hist. of Cornwall (1868), ii. 294.] W. P. C.

AITKIN, JOHN, M.D. (fl. 1770-1790), surgeon, the date of whose birth is not recorded, must have studied medicine at Edinburgh, where he became M.R.C.S. in 1770. In 1779 he is described as surgeon and lecturer on surgery in Edinburgh. Either at that time or later, his lectures included besides the practice of physic, anatomy, midwifery, and chemistry. He appears to have been a successful teacher, and wrote several books, chiefly as text-books for his lectures. They are said, and truly, to 'contain much valuable information and to be well written;' but to a reader of the present day they are of little value, having shared the unfortunate fate of most text-books written for purposes of instruction, and having become rapidly superannuated.

John Aitkin made certain practical improvements in surgery. He introduced an alteration in the mode of locking the midwifery forceps. He also invented a flexible blade to the lever. He likewise invented and described in his 'Essays and Cases in Surgery' a pair of forceps for dividing and diminishing the stone in the bladder, when too large to remove entire by lithotomy.

His portrait forms the frontispiece to 'Elements of Physic and Surgery,' London 1783.

He wrote: 1. 'Essays on several important subjects in surgery, chiefly with regard to the nature and cure of fractures,' London, 1771, 8vo. 2. 'Essays and Cases in Surgery,' London, 1775, 8vo. 3. 'Conspectus Rei Chirurgicæ,' Edin. 1777, 8vo. 4. 'Medical Improvement; an Address to the Medical Society of Edinburgh,' Edin. 1777, 12mo. 5. 'Elements of the Theory and Practice of Surgery,' Edin. 1779, 8vo, republished with the 'Elements of the Theory and Practice of Physic,' thus forming 2 vols. entitled 'Elements of the Theory and Practice of Physic and Surgery,' London, 1783, 8vo (with portrait). 6. 'Outlines of the Theory and Cure of Fever,' London, 1781, 12mo. 7. 'Principles of Midwifery or Puerperal Medicine,' 1784, 8vo. 8. 'Osteology; or a Treatise on the Bones of the Human Skeleton,' London, 1785, 8vo. 9. 'Principles of Anatomy and Physiology,' Edin. 1786, 2 vols. 8vo. 10. 'Essays on Fractures and Luxations,' London 1790, 8vo.

[Medical Register, 1779; Life by Mr. G. M. Humphry, in Biog. Dict. of Useful Knowledge Society.] J. F. P.

AITON, JOHN, D.D. (1797-1863), religious writer, was the youngest son of William Aiton, a sheriff-substitute of Lanarkshire [see AITON, WILLIAM, 1760-1848], and was born at Strathaven, June 1797. He published, in 1824, 'A Refutation of Mr. Robert Owen's Objections to Christianity.' For this pamphlet he was presented by the then Lord Douglas to the benefice of Dolphinton, South Lanarkshire. His other works are: 1. 'The Life and Times of Alexander Henderson,' Edin. 1836. 2. 'Clerical Economics,' Edin. 1842. 3. 'Eight Weeks in Germany,' Edin. 1842. 4. 'The Lands of the Messiah, Mahomet, and the Pope,' Edin. 1852. 5. 'The Drying-up of the Euphrates,' London, 1853. 6. 'St. Paul and his localities in their past and present condition,' London, 1856. He held his living till his death in 1863.

[Clerical Economics, 2nd edition, 1856; Catalogue of Library of Faculty of Advocates.]

T. J.

AITON, WILLIAM (1731-1793), botanist, was born at a small village near Hamilton, Lanarkshire, and brought up as a gardener. In 1754 he came to London in search of employment, and was engaged as an assistant by Mr. Philip Miller, then gardener to the Botanic Garden at Chelsea. In 1759 he was appointed to the management of the Botanic Garden at Kew, which was then in the possession of the Princess Dowager of Wales. He soon raised the position of the garden to

one of importance, and indeed may be said to have founded the reputation which Kew has ever since enjoyed. He took every opportunity of increasing the collections, and was mainly instrumental in sending out Francis Masson in 1772, one of the earliest botanical collectors at the Cape. In 1783 he was promoted to the management of the royal forcing and pleasure gardens at Kew and Richmond, at the same time retaining his former post, a house being built for him at Kew by George III. In 1789 he published the 'Hortus Kewensis, being a Catalogue of the Plants cultivated in the Royal Garden at Kew,' in 3 vols. 8vo, with 13 plates. To this important work, which contains an enumeration of 5,600 species, he devoted 'a large proportion of the leisure allowed by the daily duties of his station during more than sixteen years.' It met with a cordial reception, the whole impression being sold off in two years. A second edition appeared in 1810-13, in five volumes, edited by Aiton's eldest son [see AITON, WILLIAM TOWNSEND]. He received the assistance of Dr. Solander, then curator of Sir Joseph Banks's herbarium, to whom the plants from Kew, as well as from other important gardens, were sent to be named. Although no indication is given in the book, the descriptions of the new species contained in it were contributed by Solander, and are so recognised by botanists: the types of these novelties were placed in the Banksian herbarium, now incorporated in the British Museum collections. Dryander, another assistant of Banks, also helped Aiton. The 'Hortus Kewensis' is of historical value on account of the care with which the dates of the introduction of the plants enumerated were ascertained by Aiton, not only from books but from personal inquiry among his contemporaries. His eldest son succeeded him; another son, John Townsend Aiton, was placed in charge of the Royal Garden at Windsor. Aiton was extremely active; his private character is described as 'highly estimable for mildness, benevolence, piety, and every domestic and social virtue.' Among his friends was Sir Joseph Banks. He died of a disease of the liver, 2 Feb. 1793, and is buried in Kew churchyard. A portrait, in oil, exists in the museum of the Royal Gardens, Kew, from which an engraving was published.

[Preface and Introduction to Hortus Kewensis; Gent. Mag. 1793, lxiii. pt. i. 389; Rees's Cyclopædia.] J. B.

AITON, WILLIAM (1760-1848), sheriff-substitute of the county of Lanark, and, in his day, a widely known authority on all matters bearing on Scottish husbandry, was