

ARTICLE VII.

THOUGHTS ON FOREIGN MISSIONS.

It is not the design of this article to offer any formal argument in defence or in support of this sublime enterprise, but rather to bring forward some of those more familiar considerations which ought to stimulate the people of God to a heartier and more earnest prosecution of it. The time for argument is gone by. The man who professes to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, but denies his obligation to do what he can to promote this cause, needs to vindicate the sincerity and consistency of his Christian character. If it be true, as is generally acknowledged, that we who dwell in Christian lands are indebted to the presence and influence of Christianity for all the civil, social, and religious blessings with which we are surrounded; if it be true, as is acknowledged by all evangelical denominations, that there is no possibility of salvation for the heathen without some knowledge of the gospel of Jesus Christ; if it be true, that it is the special work of the Church to spread the knowledge of salvation among all mankind; if it be true, that the Bible, and the Bible alone, sheds any light upon the world to come, then it is a matter of momentous importance that the knowledge of the gospel should be communicated as speedily as possible to all the nations of the earth.

Among those considerations which we wish to impress upon the minds of our readers, we would mention,

1st. That if the Lord Jesus Christ has made known his will more clearly in relation to any one matter than another, it is that his gospel should be made known to all the nations of the earth. We touch at once the main-spring of Christian activity. The man who feels no desire to do the will of Christ can have no well-founded hope of interest in his atoning blood. Christ himself has emphatically said, "Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you." Not only has the Saviour made known his will in commanding that his gospel should be preached to every creature on the face of the earth, but the very circumstances under which it was uttered give great emphasis to the command itself.

He had completed the work of redemption, so far as that work was to be completed here upon earth. He had by his sufferings made atonement for sin; by a life of obedience he had wrought out a perfect righteousness in behalf of all his own chosen people; he had come forth from the grave, not only for the justification of his people, but thereby furnished the assurance of their resurrection also; he was just about to ascend to heaven to take his seat on the mediatorial throne; he had just made the grand and sublime announcement that all power in heaven and in earth had been committed to his hands. It was in connexion with these impressive surroundings and this grand announcement, that he gives the command to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He saw distinctly all that was involved in the execution of this command: how much self-denial would have to be practised, how much hardship would have to be endured, how much danger would have to be encountered, how much persecution would have to be borne. In view of all this, he fortifies the minds of his disciples with the precious assurance that he would be with them to the end of the world; and with this assurance, they went everywhere proclaiming the unsearchable riches of Christ; realising at every step his personal presence and protection.

But not only is the will of the Saviour made manifest in appointing this work in the first instance, but it is equally manifest in the favor he is bestowing upon it in these latter days. And without going into any extended details, we would simply ask, Where has the gospel been preached in modern times, even among the most degraded portions of the human race, that there have not been tokens of the Saviour's presence and blessing? How is it that there are scores of immortal beings in almost every kindred and nation on the face of the earth, who are to-day lifting up anthems of praise to him who died to redeem them? Can any one fail to see the hand of the Redeemer in all this? Can any one doubt whether this enterprise lies near to his heart?

And what is the spontaneous feeling of every regenerate heart, especially when that heart feels the freshness of atoning blood applied to it? Is it not, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"

And what is the answer that comes down from heaven, if not in articulate voice, yet in the indications of providence which sometimes speak even louder than the audible voice? Is it not, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature"? If, from some providential hindrance, any one cannot go himself, then, to the extent of his ability, let him help those that can go. How any church, or individual member of the church, can stand aloof from this great work that is so dear to the heart of the Redeemer, and yet profess to be a friend and follower of him, is a problem that we cannot undertake to solve.

2d. The work assigned the Church by her Divine Head is to make known the salvation of Jesus. The field he has given her to cultivate is the world. If this is not the special work of the Church, then the Scriptures may be searched in vain to find out what that work is. The apostles and primitive Christians made no mistake in relation to this matter. They felt that a special work had been given them to do; that the world was truly and literally the field that was to be cultivated. They commenced their labors in Jerusalem, which was not only the most natural course, but was in strict accordance with the command of the Saviour himself; but in a comparatively short time the glad news of salvation were made known, not only in Judea and Samaria, but to the distant ends of the earth. They never thought of using the miserable pretext "that there is work enough at home," lingering indefinitely on the confines of their own native homes. The same unmodified obligation rests upon the Church at the present day.

The Church is not responsible for the conversion of men, either here or in the heathen world, this being preëminently the work of the Holy Ghost. But she is responsible, at least to the extent of her ability, for the universal dissemination of the gospel among all mankind. And this responsibility is greatly heightened by the fact, that, so far as we know, the Holy Ghost never regenerates the heart of an adult man except through the medium or instrumentality of that truth which it is the special business of the Church to disseminate. In the order of God's grace, therefore, the sowing of the gospel seed, which is the work of the Church,

must precede the converting power of the Holy Ghost. It is unreasonable, therefore, for us to expect or to pray for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon any portion of the human race among whom the knowledge of salvation has not been previously diffused. In this view of the matter, the duty of the Church becomes solemn and momentous to the last degree. The position assigned her in carrying the work of redemption into effect is momentous in the extreme, and is especially so in connexion with the urgent duty of carrying the knowledge of salvation to those portions of the race who are destitute of it. Not only is the honor of the Redeemer involved, but the spiritual welfare of the Church and the salvation of millions of perishing men are all dependent upon the faithful performance of this duty by the Church. Indeed, we do not see how any Church can have spiritual life while it neglects this duty. There have been times in the history of the Church when the heathen world was inaccessible to her, and of course it was not expected that she could do much for their salvation. But now the case is different and inactivity is incompatible with the life and spirit of the Church. The spirit of missions, which is the spirit of Christ, is emphatically the life of the Church. Without this, no matter how large her communion, how compact her organisation, how abundant her pecuniary resources, or how sound her religious creed, it will be utterly impossible for her either to maintain her own spirituality or to fulfil the object for which she was instituted. Duty to a perishing world, the maintenance of her own spiritual life, as well as duty to Him who redeemed that life, make it necessary for her to be unreservedly devoted to the business of spreading the knowledge of salvation among all mankind. Her activity in the performance of this duty will always be the true gauge of her spirituality, and without which she cannot long be regarded as a living Church.

3d. Another consideration of great moment, and one that ought to be deeply impressed upon the heart of the Church, is, that so far as we are informed by the word of God, there is no possibility of salvation for the heathen without some knowledge of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Of course no reference is made

here to the millions who die in infancy in heathen lands, and who, never having committed actual transgression, may be saved through the atoning merits of redeeming blood.

In relation to this general matter, there has recently sprung up (and we are sorry to say to some extent in the evangelical Church) a wide-spread scepticism, which is undoubtedly closely allied to that general disbelief in future retribution which has become so rife of late. Now without citing the almost innumerable passages of Scripture, both from the Old and New Testament, which declare that all the nations that forget God shall be destroyed; without stopping to show that the denial of the punishment of the heathen is a virtual abrogation of all God's denunciations of sin; without dwelling upon the solemn declaration of the Saviour himself that those who refused to hear the gospel would be damned; without commenting upon the statement so frequently and so emphatically made in the New Testament Scriptures, that the gospel was just as necessary to the Gentile as to the Jew, we come directly to the well-known creed of all evangelical denominations, that there is no salvation for man (that is, adult man) without faith in the merits of a crucified Redeemer. And here the apostle, as if he were writing with special reference to this modern scepticism, settles the question beyond all reasonable controversy: "How shall they (the Gentiles) call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?"

But the question presents itself and is pressed with no ordinary pertinacity, how shall the heathen be condemned for rejecting the gospel when that gospel has never been presented to them, or for turning away from Jesus Christ when they never heard of that blessed name? The answer is, that they will not be condemned on either of these grounds. The same apostle makes this point just as clear as the other: "The Gentiles which have not the law, are a law unto themselves, which show the work of the law written on their hearts." The law of God, of course not in all its fullness, is indelibly written upon the human heart. This is not more in accord with the teachings of God's word than

it is with the experience and the observations of all those who have had the opportunity to study the matter under favorable circumstances. There exist in every heathen mind, it is confidently believed, some conceptions of a supreme governor of the universe, some perceptions of the distinction between right and wrong, and some ideas, though indistinctly developed, of future accountability. There are those, and among them some for whom we have great respect, who doubt the correctness of this statement. But this doubt, we apprehend, arises from one of two things, or from the two combined. 1st. The heathen (the great majority of them at least) are not in the habit of formulating their religious creed in any very intelligible phraseology. Indeed, they cannot always tell what they do believe, and their creed has to be inferred from their actions rather than their words. 2d. In many cases those who seek this knowledge are sufficiently acquainted either with the language or the character of the people to ascertain precisely what they do believe. All nature reminds the heathen that there is one great first cause of all things. The laws and usages by which all their social intercourse is regulated are based on the conviction that there is an essential difference between right and wrong, good and evil. Then the custom, which is amazingly prevalent in all heathen communities, of burying persons of notoriously bad character apart from those that have been orderly in their deportment, shows not only a belief in a future state of existence, but also in a state of future retribution. Without the existence of such convictions it would be almost impossible for a missionary to bring the gospel to bear upon the hearts of the heathen at all; as the matter stands, it is not necessary for him to attempt to prove the existence of a personal God. This is already admitted. His work will consist in giving right views of God's moral character. So it is unnecessary for him to attempt to show that lying, theft, adultery, murder, and sins of like nature, are all wrong. The heathen not only knows this, but these crimes against society are often severely punished. It looks like an absurdity to the heathen to try to convince him that he has a soul that is to exist hereafter. He carries food almost every day to the grave of his parents. When

reminded of future accountability, he plainly shows that a painful apprehension has been confirmed, rather than a new idea suggested.

But how far operative is this law of God written upon their hearts? Here is just the point where its weakness and insufficiency manifest themselves. Whilst the law itself is universal, and cannot be altogether obliterated, it exercises very little power over the moral character of men. On this point there is no diversity of views among missionaries. The first man in all the heathen world is yet to be found who is living according to this law written upon his heart, or is even trying to do so. There is diversity of moral character among the heathen as there is among ourselves. But the best and purest among them not only fall infinitely below the gospel standard of purity, but far below that standard of moral rectitude that might be inferred from their inherent knowledge of right and wrong, and by which they are to be judged and condemned in the great day of accounts. There is no more possibility of their being saved by this natural law than there is of our being saved by the law as revealed in the word of God. We and they therefore stand substantially on the same platform. Neither can be saved except, through faith in the merits of a crucified Redeemer. If the gospel is necessary for our salvation, it is not less so to theirs.

But we are told that it is a great mystery that the millions of the heathen should have been left for so many centuries in utter ignorance of the gospel, when that gospel was so essential to their salvation. It is readily admitted that there is a mystery in this too profound to be fathomed by the human mind. But is this the only mystery in God's providence or grace that cannot be fathomed? Who can tell why the coming and incarnation of the Son of God was delayed four thousand years after the promise was first made? Who can tell why the Redeemer, when he took his seat upon the mediatorial throne, did not at once take to himself his great power and subdue all the nations of the earth to his dominion? More than all this, is there really any more mystery in the fact that the heathen should be lost, than that hundreds VOL. XXX., No. 2—20.

and thousands of men should he permitted to perish here in the full blaze of gospel light?

4th. The success of the gospel among the benighted nations of the earth during the present century furnishes a powerful motive for the more earnest prosecution of the work. This is not offered as an argument for the undertaking or the prosecution of the work, for obedience to the command of the Saviour makes it the duty of his people to preach the gospel everywhere, whether men hear or forbear. But when God is pleased out of regard to the weakness of his people's faith, or in fulfilment of his designs of mercy, to make the gospel effectual to the salvation of multitudes of ignorant and perishing men, a most powerful motive is superadded for a more vigorous prosecution of the work. The cause, thus made to bear the seal of the Saviour's approval ought to be brought very near to the heart of every believer.

But in what does the success referred to consist? In an article like the present this inquiry can be answered only in the briefest manner. It is not necessary to go back to apostolic times for proofs of the power of the Holy Ghost to reclaim the worst and most degraded of the human race. The times in which we live are furnishing even stronger illustrations of that power. Before adducing the actual facts connected with the success of modern missions, it is necessary to premise that the condition and circumstances of the world at the two periods referred to are essentially different. Most of those communities in which early Christianity had its most vigorous growth had been previously permeated by the teachings of the Old Testament Scriptures, and were in consequence measurably prepared to embrace the gospel as soon as it was proclaimed. Again, the Gentile world, in the days of the apostles, occupied a much higher place in the scale of civilisation than the present inhabitants of the pagan world. Not only did they occupy this higher place, but human ingenuity had exhausted all of its resources in the effort to acquire more certain knowledge about a future world. The minds of men, therefore, were in a favorable attitude for the reception of the truth. The pagan nations of the present day have sunk so deep in the mire of sin and superstition that nothing short of an extraordinary divine

power can reach and save them. More than this. The early propagators of the gospel were endowed with the gift of language and the power of working miracles. What the primitive disciple possessed by intuition or inspiration, the modern missionary can acquire only by laborious study.

In view of this state of things, it must be seen at once that a most important work of preparation had to be perfected in modern times before any great ingathering of souls into the fold of Christ could be realised. The minds of the nations had to be aroused from the slumber of centuries, their systems of superstition and false religion overthrown; and the truth had to be disseminated, which involves not only the preaching of the gospel in languages that have been acquired at the expense of great labor, but also the translation and the circulation of God's word into all such languages. No adequate views of the actual success of modern missions can be formed without taking into the account the nature and magnitude of this work of preparation.

Let us now look at some of the actual facts connected with the progress of modern missions. And first, as to the extent to which the work has already been carried. There are those still living who can remember the time when all the Protestant missionary stations in the heathen world could be numbered on the fingers of the two hands. But what is the state of the case at the present time? What considerable tribe of Indians are there on the North American continent of the present day that have not representatives of the Christian Church among them, endeavoring to guide them in the paths of Christian knowledge? What considerable group of islands are there, either in the Northern or Southern Pacific, upon which the light of the gospel is not already beginning to shine! Note the fact too, as we pass along, that the inhabitants of at least three hundred of these islands have already been brought so much under the influence of Christianity that all traces of idolatry have disappeared from among them. Look at the great continent of Africa, that which a few years ago seemed to be the darkest and most hopeless of all portions of our habitable globe. Travel now along its western coast, over its southern territory, along its eastern shores, penetrate the regions

around the newly discovered lakes, ascend the Niger from its outlet in the Gulf of Benin to its source near the Great Desert, and everywhere you will find representatives of the Christian Church, kindling up lights, feeble and flickering now, but destined in the mercy of God to blaze up and illuminate the whole continent. Go to Eastern Europe, especially to that portion that was known until recently as Turkey in Europe; to Greece and the Grecian Islands; to all parts of Asia Minor, including Armenia and Nestoria; to Palestine, to Syria, to Persia, to the Valley of the Euphrates, to all portions of the great empire of India; to Burmah, to Siam, to China and Japan; and what one of these great sections of the earth has not representatives of the Christian Church laboring among its people at the present day? Not only are missionaries to be found in all these regions, but the most important, and what may be called strategical points, have been seized and will be made tributary to the universal spread of the gospel among these various races. Now connect with this wide-spread work the further fact that there are at the present time as many as twenty-five hundred foreign missionaries and more than twenty thousand native laborers scattered over these vast regions and proclaiming far and wide the glad tidings of salvation, and we shall have some idea of the extent to which the work has already been carried.

But we must look further at what has been achieved, through the blessing of God, by these missionary brethren.

One of the most serious obstacles that lay in the way of the evangelisation of the heathen world was the number of languages and dialects that had to be acquired, and many of them to be reduced to writing for the first time, before the knowledge of the gospel could be communicated to the people. It is a work of great labor to acquire one of these languages, but especially so if it is to be reduced to system for the first time. A still greater and more laborious work is to translate the word of God into one of these newly written languages. But what has been accomplished in this direction? As many as two hundred and thirty languages have not only been made tributary to the public preaching of the gospel, but into most of them the word of God,

in part or in whole, as well as hundreds of other religious books, have been translated, printed, and circulated, and are read to-day by millions of the human race. It is estimated that there are now as many as one hundred and thirty-five million copies of the Scriptures in whole or part, in possession of the human family—about one copy for every ten human beings on the face of the earth—and more in all than was ever possessed by the world from the days of Moses to the present time.

But the achievements of the missionary work are by no means limited to this work of preparation. Far more has been accomplished in connexion with the conversion of men—the great end for which the work was instituted—than could reasonably have been expected under the circumstances of the case. Without the exercise of the power of miracles, the gift of tongues, or any of the extraordinary advantages which attended the labors of Apostles and primitive Christians, the number of conversions that have taken place in the heathen world during the last half century is probably a good deal larger than what took place during the whole of the first century of the Christian era. Rieger, whom Lange endorses as good authority, estimates the number of conversions during the first century at five hundred thousand. This includes the converts in Palestine as well as those in all other parts of the world. The estimated number of converts in all parts of the unevangelised world at the present day—taking no account of those in Christian lands—is probably not less than six hundred thousand, the great majority of whom have actually been gathered into the fold of Christ in the last twenty-five years. It should be borne in mind at the same time, that these converts have not been gathered mainly out of one or two nations, but from all the kindreds and tongues and peoples and nations on the face of the earth—thus showing that the glorious Redeemer is now marshalling in all parts of the earth that mighty host, too great to be numbered, that is to surround his mediatorial throne in heaven. It has become true, too, as has frequently been remarked, that the sun, in performing his daily circuit around the earth, rises now upon no people among whom there are not some to send up ascriptions of praise to Him who sits upon the throne,

and who redeemed them from their sins. What a grand view is this that is now spreading itself out before the Christian Church! What a privilege, what an honor it is, to live in times like these! How strange it is that any portion of the Church should be asleep in such an emergency! How strange it is that the whole Church does not rise up with one mind and one heart and devote all her strength and all her resources to the one great object of saving a lost world!

5th. Another consideration of great moment is, that there are greater facilities and advantages at present for spreading the knowledge of the gospel among mankind than ever existed before. This is equally true whether regard be had to the condition and resources of the Church, or to the altered condition of the great mass of the heathen world. The number of ministers, as well as the means of training men for the ministry, has been multiplied beyond anything that has ever before been known in the history of the Church. At the same time, wealth has been poured into the lap of the Church without stint; so that there are means and agents in the bosom of the Church at the present day, if they were properly consecrated, to carry the gospel, in a comparatively short time, to every portion of the habitable earth. The heathen world, too, in some respects, is in a more favorable condition for the reception of the gospel. They have been aroused to unusual activity by being brought in contact with modern commerce—have felt the throb of a superior civilised life. They realise, as they never did before, the essential difference between a life of barbarism and one of enlightened civilisation.

But not only is the mind of the heathen stirred, but the increased facilities of travel and transportation bring the products of the civilised world to their doors, and, what is far more important, they bring the heralds of salvation also to guide them into the paths of truth. India, Burmah, China, Japan, and the Polynesian Islands, can now be reached in greater comfort and safety, and in fewer weeks than it formerly required months to perform the same voyage. And not only can these far-off countries be reached in a comparatively short period, but they can be traversed with more ease, speed, and safety than could have been

imagined fifty years ago. A missionary can travel and see more of India in one day now than he could formerly have done in a whole month. Similar advantages will soon be enjoyed in China, Japan, and other parts of the world. Recent discoveries show that there are at least twenty thousand miles of navigable inland waters in the heart of Africa, and intended in the goodness of God, no doubt, to furnish facilities of access to the millions of at benighted land.

Now, what is the design of that providence which has brought all these unevangelised nations face to face with the Christian world? The man of commerce sees in this nothing but the results of the commercial activity of the age. The man of science claims it all as the necessary results of the scientific discoveries of the day. But the thoughtful Christian recognises the hand of the Redeemer behind and above all these movements, directing them so as to bring about the complete fulfilment of his own precious promise, that “the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.”

But whilst there is cause to rejoice in this promising state of things, there is also occasion for most serious anxiety. And it is this: if the bringing of these uncultured races in contact with the civilised world does not result in promoting their spiritual welfare, it will certainly result in their ruin, both temporal and spiritual. This has not always been the consequence of the comingling of barbarous and civilised races. But there is something in our modern civilization—even what is called Christian civilisation—or in the deeper degradation of modern heathen nations, or in both combined, which prevents the two from being brought into close contact without serious detriment to the best interests of the weaker and more ignorant party. Nothing but the interpenetrating power of Christianity can counterwork this result. We shall not turn aside to analyse the causes which lead to these disastrous consequences, but look at a few of the facts themselves; and we have not to go far for such facts. Where, for example, are all those numerous tribes of Indians which once overspread New England and occupied all the country lying between the eastern slopes of the Allegheny Mountains and

the Atlantic Ocean? The only answer that can be given is, that, with the exception of a little handful of Choctaws, Chickasaws, Cherokees, and Creeks, now residing in the Indian Territory, and who were brought under the influence of religion before the tide of white population reached them, they have been swept from the face of the earth. Their names, except so far as they have been perpetuated by our geographical nomenclature, are not even known to the present generation. And those smaller tribes to the Northwest, who are now struggling so manfully, but unwisely, perhaps, to perpetuate their own nationality, where will they soon be? Their names will scarcely be known two generations hence.

It is the boast of Great Britain that she put an end to the foreign slave-trade on the western coast of Africa. And when it is remembered how much it cost her to suppress that nefarious trade, she deserves all the honor she claims. Legitimate trade, as it is called, has taken the place of the slave-trade, and it may with propriety be asked, what has been gained by the exchange? Peace has been restored to her borders, it is true, but intemperance, brought about by the use of New England and Old England rum, is likely to do that country more harm than the foreign slave-trade ever did. This is the express testimony of an American missionary who lived on that coast nearly twenty-five years, who had the amplest opportunities for forming a correct judgment on the subject, and whose veracity is heartily endorsed by the writer of this article. Again, it is well known that the British government was the chief agent in forcing open the empire of China to the light and influences of Christian civilization. But at the same time she forced upon that people the opium trade. And what have been the consequences? In the judgment of missionaries and others equally well qualified to form a correct opinion on the subject, there are now at least seven million of Chinese who have become the victims to the use of this poisonous drug, which is virtually acknowledging that that number will be destroyed. In no part of the unevangelised world has the gospel performed greater achievements than among the Polynesian Islands in the Southern Pacific. But now this work is threatened with entire overthrow by the introduction of what is called the

“transportation of labor,” *i.e.*, by carrying laborers from these islands to different parts of Australia to cultivate cotton and sugar plantations. Bishop Paterson, who labored among the people of those islands for many years, affirms that the prosecution of this system is doing as much harm to the Melanesian Islands as the foreign slave-trade ever did on the west coast of Africa. Further, those who are at all acquainted with the progress of British colonisation on the island of New Zealand, are perfectly aware that the native population of that great island is rapidly disappearing before the march of European civilisation. What has become of the aboriginal population of the Cape of Good Hope? And what is to be the fate of those brave Zulus who recently dealt such heavy blows in the face of this onward progress of European colonisation?

Now we raise no question about the natural rights of civilised men to force themselves upon territory that is but partially occupied by weaker and savage races. But we simply look at the facts of the case, and ask what is the duty of the Church of Christ in view of these conflicts which must necessarily take place. The influence of Christianity alone can forestall the direst calamities that must always ensue from contact between races of such diverse condition and circumstances. The weaker races must always go down, unless they are sustained and fortified by the principles of a living Christianity. The Christian Church ought, therefore, to be alive to her great mission, and do what she can to save these untutored races both from temporal and eternal ruin.

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