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THREE MISSIONARY EPOCHS.

All history is marked by eras or epochs. Certain memorable periods have determined the fate of nations, and formed the world's career. Long intervals there have been, now of reaction, now of stagnation, and now of slow amendment and progress; but the decisive impulses have been at those times which one may call the high tides of human life.

The history of the propagation of Christianity has obeyed this general law. It has advanced, not by a uniform and unbroken course, but by mighty movements, swelling tides of missionary zeal. Not that at any period the spirit of propagation has been quite extinct—for that were to say that Christianity itself had died—but between those movements which have formed Church epochs, there have certainly intervened times of reaction, of worldliness, and of a relaxed and lukewarm religion.

The three great movements of Christian missionary zeal we find in the missions of the primitive times, the missions of the middle ages, and the missions of the nineteenth century.

I. *The missions of the primitive times* date from the Lord Jesus Christ and his Apostles. The Master, for reasons which we need not here point out, confined his personal ministry within narrow geographical limits; but he founded a mission which his followers are to carry out, even till they have gone into all the world, and preached the gospel to every creature. Beginning at Jerusalem, the Apostles, endowed with power from on high, went out over the surrounding lands, proclaiming good tidings of great joy. An inspired narrative of some of those primitive missionary labors we have in the "Book of the Acts of the Apostles," which however is to be regarded, not as a comprehensive record of the first missions, but rather as furnishing a specimen of these, chiefly in connection with the services of two Apostles, Peter and Paul, and one Evangelist, Philip.

It is not our present purpose to trace the progress of the primitive Church in any detail. Suffice it to say, that the impulse of propagation ceased not, till the Paganism of the Roman Empire was overthrown, and the missionaries of