

COLONIAL PEARL.

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COLONIZATION AND CHRISTIANITY.

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The history of European Colonization is one of the darkest chapters in the annals of human crime. It is written throughout with weeping, lamentation, and blood. It discloses a series of atrocities, perpetrated on a larger scale, and inflicting a greater sum of misery than any other event on record. Hitherto it has been but illegibly written; the truth has been told but in part; a dark mantle has been thrown over the misdeeds of European colonists, and the work of oppression, treachery, and murder, has in consequence proceeded unchecked. Few have troubled themselves to inquire after facts which could be gathered by laborious diligence only. The benevolent have been occupied by more palpable and better understood cases of grievance. Evils occurring beneath their eye and claiming their daily notice, have engaged their sympathy and exertion, while the wrongs of distant tribes, the worse than Machiavelian policy to which they have been subjected; the unblushing invasion of their rights; and the murderous rigor with which the outbreaks of their resentment have been checked, have been palliated and justified under a thousand pretexts. The progress of discovery has in consequence been marked by the misery and waste of human life. Every step which civilized man has taken in advance of his former position has augmented the sum of social misery, and brought new victims to the shrine of mammon. A dark line may be traced between the barbarous and the civilized;—a fit emblem of the sufferings of the one party and the crimes of the other.

Prior to experience it might have been anticipated that the presence of a civilized people on the confines of a barbarous tribe, would have been to the latter a harbinger of unmixed good;—that the contact of the one with the other would have been so much clear gain to the cause of human happiness and virtue;—that the denizens of the forest would have been raised in the scale of intelligent existence, and have gathered from their visitors the arts which embellish social life, and the principles and hopes which give dignity to man. The reverse of all this, however, has been the fact. The white man's presence has been the omen and pledge of coming woe. Dark shadows have been thrown upon the future, and history, has soon told, in brief and disjointed fragments, of numerous tribes that have wasted away, heart-broken, yet unpitied, beneath his sway. So uniform has been the result, that, as is not uncommon—a theory has been devised to account for and justify, the wide-spreading calamity. The ordination of Divine Providence,—a providence, ever just and kind—has been represented as meeting its fulfilment in the erection of an altar to Moloch, at which millions of human victims have bled. Man has impiously appealed to the purposes of his Maker in vindication of his own atrocities. He has pointed to the squalid forms, and sorrow-stricken countenances, and decreasing numbers of Aboriginal tribes, as a practical illustration of the design of that Being who is 'the Father of the spirits of all flesh.' Inhuman and revolting opinions have been uttered on this subject by men standing high amongst us;—opinions that bear a character it is painful to designate, and from which every humane and honorable mind must recoil with horror. It has not often been our lot to meet with a passage of more barefaced and cold-blooded barbarity than the following; which occurs in the account of Sir John Ross's Second Voyage to the Arctic Regions. The man who could pen the language is not likely to have been a benefactor of any uncultivated tribes he visited. 'Our brendy was as odious as our pudding to our Esquimaux visitors, and they have yet therefore to acquire the taste which has, in ruining the morals, hastened the extermination of their American neighbours to the Southward. If, however, these tribes must finally disappear, as seems their fate, it is at least better that they should die gradually by the force of rum, than that they should be exterminated in masses by the fire and sword of the Spanish conquest, since there is some pleasure, such as it is in the mean time, while there is also a voluntary but slow suicide in exchange for murder and robbery? Is it not the fate of the savage and the uncivilized on this earth to give way to the more cunning and the better informed, to knowledge and civilization? It is the order of the world, and the right one; nor will all the lamentations of a mawkish philanthropy, with its more absurd or censurable efforts, avail one jot against an order of things as wise as it is assuredly established.' The spirit which dictated this passage has been extensively prevalent amongst our countrymen, but few have had sufficient hardihood to avow it in an equally unblushing manner.

A new era, however, has recently commenced. It has had its origin in various causes, among the most prominent of which we place, the agitation of the slave question, and the fuller and more accurate information respecting the condition and wrongs of Aboriginal tribes, obtained from the agents of different Missionary bodies. Placed on the outskirts of civilized life the Christian missionary has been a witness of the misdeeds of his countrymen, and has faithfully reported them at home. This has been equally the case in the West Indies, in Africa, and the South Sea. Wherever commerce has pushed her speculations, the untired missionary has trod, and as an earnest of the spiritual blessings he painted to communicate, has raised a protesting voice against the perfidy and oppression practised on the natives. 'In every distant scene of our crimes,' Mr. Howitt truly remarks, 'the missionaries have stepped in between us and the just vengeance of heaven, between us and the political punishment of our own absurd and wicked policy, between us and the miserable natives.' For a long time their reports were disregarded. Interested witnesses appeared against them. Their motives were impugned, their actions were misrepresented. They were spoken of as the enemies of their countrymen, and the disturbers of colonial peace. The audacity with which their statements were denied, shook for a time the confidence even of their friends, while the danger which was threatened to the permanence of their labors, induced many temporizing supporters to express a wish, that they would be more reserved in their communications, and confine themselves more strictly to their spiritual functions. Happily they spurned the unworthy counsel. Their remonstrances became more frequent and more loud. They were repeated through evil report, and through good report, until at length a nation's ear was gained, and even sluggish statesmen were compelled to bestir themselves. Of this improved state of things the volume before us is an earnest. We are somewhat at a loss to know how to treat it. Its multifarious and deeply interesting details, together with the healthful and high-toned spirit which pervades it, entitle it to a far more extended notice than our limited space admits of. In our despair of doing it justice we are half disposed to content ourselves with a brief and most hearty recommendation of it to our readers. But we shrink from this summary procedure as unjust to our own feelings and unsuitable to a Journal which is specially devoted to whatever promises to advance the well-being,—social, political, and religious,—of every section of the human family. We shall therefore endeavour however inadequately, to make our readers acquainted with the work in question. Mr. Howitt's volume is designed to lay open, in a popular and attractive form, the evils with which European colonization has been fraught to the Aboriginal tribes in whose neighbourhood we have settled. He limits himself expressly to this object, and in doing so has acted wisely. The system reprobated 'has been in full operation for more than 300 years, and continues yet in unabating activity of evil.' An exposure of colonial enormities,—a laying open to public inspection, of the dark deeds of our countrymen in various quarters of the globe, is therefore the first thing at which British philanthropists should aim, and this has been nobly accomplished by our Author. Let the extent of the evil be once apprehended, and as Mr. Howitt remarks, 'in this great country there will not want either heads to plan or hands to accomplish all that is due to the rights of others, or the honor and interest of England.'

The wide range contemplated by Mr. Howitt embraces the colonial enterprises of all the European states. His volume, therefore, opens with a historical notice of the discovery of the New World, and its earlier chapters supply a rapid, condensed, and deeply afflicting narrative of the proceedings of the Spaniards and Portuguese in their intercourse with the native tribes to whom they were introduced by the discoveries of Columbus and his successors. The general character of this intercourse is well known. The brute passions of the adventurers, released from the restraints of civilized life, and goaded to madness by a base appetite for gold, were let loose upon the unoffending natives with murderous effect. 'A day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness,' broke violently on the Indians, when European visitors landed on their shore. Like the locusts of the East, their progress was marked by desolation. Before them the land was as the garden of Eden, but behind them a desolate wilderness. But we must not dwell on these facts, having other matters before us, in which, as Englishmen, we are more nearly interested, and to which we wish to direct the special attention of our readers. There is one point, however, in the history of Spanish colonization on which we must detain attention for a moment. We refer to the operations of the Jesuits in Paraguay, which stand out in singular and most honorable contrast, to the

general character of their order, and to the sordid and brutal policy universally adopted by their countrymen towards the natives of the New World. It is the one chapter in the history of this politico-ecclesiastical fraternity which serves to redeem it from unmitigated reprobation, and to shed around it a halo not wholly obscured by its intrigues and crimes in other quarters of the globe. Mr. Howitt acknowledges that in a former work,—The History of Priestcraft we presume,—he had classed the operations of the Jesuits in Paraguay with the worst deeds of an unholy ambition; but that more extended inquiry had convinced him that their conduct was one of the most illustrious examples of Christian devotion—Christian patience—Christian benevolence, and disinterested virtue on record.

'I do not mean to say,' he adds, 'that they exhibited Christianity in all the splendour of its unadulterated truth;—no, they had enough of the empty forms and legends, and false pretences, and false miracles of Rome, about them; but they exhibited one great feature of its spirit—love to the poor and the oppressed, and it was at once acknowledged by them to be divine. I do not mean to say that they adopted the soundest system of policy in their treatment of the Indians; for their besetting sin, the love of power and the pride of intellectual dominance, were but too apparent in it; and this prevented their labors from acquiring that permanence which they otherwise would; but they did this, which was a glorious thing in that age, and in those countries—they showed what Christianity, even in an imperfect form, can accomplish in the civilization of the wildest people. They showed to the outraged Indians, that Christianity was really a blessing, where really embraced; and to the Spaniards, that their favorite dogmas of the incapacity of the Indians for the reception of divine truth, and for the patient endurance of labor and civil restraint, were as baseless as their own profession of the Christian faith. They stood up against universal power and rapacity, in defence of the weak, the innocent and the calumniated; and they had the usual fate of such men—they were the martyrs of their virtue, and deserve the thanks and honorable remembrance of all ages.—pp. 121, 122.

The Jesuits were invited to Paraguay by the Spaniards, in 1586, from that craving after something that bears the semblance and promises the fruits of religion, which is instinctive in the human mind. They were received with unbounded exultation. Triumphant arches were erected, their path was strewn with flowers, and solemn thanksgivings for their arrival were addressed to heaven. Their popularity, however, was short-lived, but its decline is their imperishable honor. It redounds to their glory, and adds a yet deeper tinge to the infamy of their persecutors. The following is our Author's account of their proceedings:

The Jesuits found, wherever the Spaniards had penetrated, the Indians groaning under their oppressions and licentiousness, ready to burst out, and take summary vengeance at the first opportunity; and they were on all sides surrounded by tribes of others in a state of hostile irritation, regarding the Spaniards as the most perfidious as well as powerful enemies, from whom nothing was to be hoped, and against whom every advantage was to be seized. Yet amongst these fierce tribes, the Jesuits boldly advanced, trusting to that principle which ought always to have been acted upon by those calling themselves Christians, that where no evil is intended, evil will seldom be received. It is wonderful how successful this system was in their hands. With his breviary in his hand, and a cross of six feet high, which served him for a staff, the Jesuit missionary set out to penetrate into some new region. He was accompanied by a few converted Indians who might act as guides and interpreters. They took with them a stock of maize as provision in the wilderness, where the bows of the Indians did not supply them with game; for they carefully avoided carrying fire-arms, lest they should excite alarm or suspicion. They thus encountered all the difficulties of a wild country; climbing mountains, and cutting their way through pathless woods with axes; and at night, if they reached no human habitation, they made fires to keep off the wild beasts, and reposed beneath the forest trees. When they arrived amongst the tribes they sought, they explained through their interpreters, that they came thus and they themselves into their power, to prove to them, that they were their friends; to teach them the arts, and to endow them with the advantages of the Europeans. In some cases they had to suffer for the villainies of their countrymen—the natives being too much exasperated by their wrongs to be able to conceive that some fresh experiment of evil towards them was not concealed under this peaceful show. But, in the far greater number of cases, their success was marvellous. They speedily inspired the Indians with confidence in their good intentions.