

Some Criticisms on Foreign Missionaries, and the Answers to Them.

BY REV. J. FRASER SMITH, M.D.

Having had the pleasure of meeting the majority of your missionaries in China and Japan, many of whom I count among my warmest friends, I feel jealous for their "reputation before the Church," and therefore am constrained to write this letter.

We assume that the "sharp criticisms" spoken of must have been general throughout the Church, and not merely the usual murmurings of a few grumblers here and there. For as it was in the time of Christ so it is now, there are those even among his followers who "have indignation within themselves," and cry out "waste! waste! waste!" when money is expended in a way they do not approve of.

The first criticism is in regard to "the frequent return of missionaries from their fields on account of health and other causes," and it is said that in 1893 no less than *one-eighth* of the force was at home for all or part of the year. *One eighth is surely not a very large proportion*, when you consider the climate, the severe strain of mind and body, the constant worry and continual anxiety from various causes, not to speak of the difficulty of acquiring a new language and the study of a strange people, who have no love for the missionary and scarcely any sympathy with his work, but who always, as far as the Chinese especially are concerned, are filled with intense pride, extreme prejudice and absolute indifference. Besides, it should be remembered that missionaries are but men after all, and they do not possess charmed lives. Like the ordinary run of mortals, they often get sick, and, strange to say, when the "Angel of Death" knocks at their door, no matter how pressing their work may be, they have no power to turn him away. Those who find fault along this line must not forget and leave God out of their reckoning.

"A large percentage of the Church's contributions is consumed in paying travelling expenses, and the work must suffer in the absence of the workers." We would like to know the exact proportions of the contributions used in paying the travelling expenses of those who are invalidated home before their regular furlough; for the travelling expenses to the field the first time does not count, neither should the travelling expenses of those on regular furlough be considered. It is not well to make such an assertion until we know the actual figures. Moreover, it is well understood by the Church that the missionary goes to the field under certain conditions. He is willing to labor in the field for, say, seven, eight or ten years (different societies have different rules) before coming home on furlough, providing his health remains good and his strength is such that he can carry on his work satisfactorily. If these conditions are fulfilled, no person has any ground to find fault. As regards the work "suffering," no person, I am sure, can lament this as the missionary does; but if the Church, notwithstanding the numerous appeals, will continue to ignore its plain duty, and will not send out men enough to fully occupy the stations already opened, so that, in the event of one or even two having to return home, there would still be enough to carry on the work, then the Church, and not the missionary, who is forced to leave much against his will, should receive all the blame. In many cases, the missionary has to be urged over and over again to leave in order to save his life for future usefulness. If your horse takes ill, you do not drive him until he drops dead. Even suppose it costs considerable to cure him, you are better pleased to see him strong and able to work again.

"The charge is made against the Committee that they are not careful to send out really healthy persons, and that they are too ready to grant them leave of absence from the field." All our Committees follow general principles in the choice of candidates and if they exercise ordinary care, there is no room for blame. Often the strongest and most robust candidates are the first to succumb to those trying climates. God alone can tell who will stand the climate and have good general health, but no body of men dare undertake to promise such a thing. And will those who say that the Committee is "too ready to grant them leave of absence," venture to assert that any body of men has the right to say to any particular missionary, "You must remain at your post, whether you are weak or strong, whether you are sick or well, whether you live or die?" I am sure no Committee wishes to assume such a grave responsibility; the missionary is not a slave of the Church, nor is he the property of the Committee, but he is the servant of God and the representative of the Church in a heathen land.

The next charge is that "missionaries are too ready to quit work on slight pretexts." When such an assertion as this is made we call at once for proof; and if reliable proof is not produced, then this statement is nothing more or less than a shameless libel. No such sweeping assertion should be tolerated for one moment,

unless it can be proven that more than one-half of the missionaries have done so in the past. I know too much of the feelings of a missionary when he is forced to leave his work; and, moreover, I know too well how very hard it is to persuade men and women to leave the work which is so dear to their heart, to listen for one moment to such hap-hazard assertions; therefore I have no hesitation in challenging those critics to bring forth *reliable* proof (the five per cent. of the missionaries who have left the field have done so on "slight pretexts.")

Another charge is that missionaries show "a lack of the spirit of self-sacrifice." What do you mean by self-sacrifice? Have you ever left your own native land, your home and your friends, congenial work and bright prospects, because you thought it was your duty to do so? Do you know what it is to be far away from your home friends, in the midst of a people who have no sympathy with you, and there to toil on not only for a few weeks and months, but for years against fearful odds, with sickness and death ever staring you in the face? Have you been forced to see your children, because of their unhealthy surroundings, take ill, pine away and die, and know, as you laid them in that lonely little tomb, that you had offered them upon the altar of Foreign Missions? Have you ever seen the companion of your bosom stricken down with a deadly disease, contracted while trying to help the poor benighted people around you? But why multiply scenes that are almost of daily occurrence in every heathen land? Are you sad because more of those whom the Church has sent out have not found graves in these far off lands? Are you willing to go out and show the Church what self-sacrifice is, and to practice it to the utmost extent? If you are not, what right have you to demand from others what you are not prepared to practice yourself? Why do you require more self-sacrifice from the foreign missionaries than you do from your ministers and other Christian men and women at home? Begin at home with "self-sacrifice," and I am satisfied your missionaries in the foreign field will not lag far behind. The mission fields of to-day do not want more dead men and graves, but there is an urgent cry from many lands for consecrated, able-bodied men and women, with a large share of common sense, who are willing to do and, if need be, to suffer for the love of Christ and for the sake of those who are perishing. Thank God there are many such, who have courage not only to sit down and talk about self-sacrifice in their own cozy home with friends and dear ones around them, but also show their true courage by leaving all these behind and going themselves to carry out their convictions, rather than ask others to carry out their fine theories while they continue to practice something entirely different. As some one has said, "the fact that a man gives a few nickles every year to Foreign Missions, or even a dollar or two a year, or goes to a missionary meeting when it doesn't rain, or when he has no other engagement, does not entitle him to demand his 'pound of flesh' in the sufferings and cruel experiences of missionaries."

Regarding the "invidious comparisons" that are made "between the advantages of the foreign missionary and the home missionary," the critic should remember that the foreign missionary only receives that to which he is entitled. There is a clear contract between him and his supporters, and the salary he receives is that which the people have promised as their part of the contract. If some receive more than they would at home, many more receive infinitely less than they would command at home, and very few think of that side of the question. Is it not strange, however, if the foreign missionary's position is so very desirable, that many more of those who have remained at home have not been more eager to secure such an advantageous position? How is it, that notwithstanding the glowing picture here presented, "sure salary, salary even when off duty, and travelling expenses for himself and family when in need of change," that our Committee find such difficulty in getting new candidates for the Foreign fields?

In conclusion, let me ask how many of those who criticize missionaries, think to remember them daily at the Throne of Grace? If we are in earnest, we will find time to pray for those millions who are in heathen darkness, not only a passing thought and an occasional prayer, but we will agonize in prayer on their behalf. If we had a number in our churches who would thus pray, soon all unjust criticism would cease, and more of our Church members would realize their individual responsibility for *their own* share of the Master's work, and then there would be no lack of men or means in any department of the Lord's work.

Jesus is not ashamed of any man because he is weak, or poor, or humble, or despised, or black, or ignorant. Jesus was not ashamed of a certain poor widow, who had only two mites to cast into the treasury. He was not and is not ashamed of cripples and even outcasts. He is ashamed only of the man who is ashamed of Him.