

## THE MISSIONARY WORLD.

## THE RELIGIONS OF INDIA.

Sir William Hunter read recently a profoundly interesting paper before the Indian Section of the Society of Arts, in London, of which the following is a synopsis :

It has slowly come to be understood, at least by some, that Hinduism, though utterly incapable of being, like Christianity, a missionary religion for the world, or like Islam, for two parts of the world, or like Buddhism, for Asia generally, being absolutely territorial, is yet, within its own sacred land, not only a missionary religion, but the chief missionary religion, having annually, it is said, more accessions by far than either Christianity or Mohammedanism. After 4,000 years of occupancy, it has not yet by any means closed up its assimilation of aboriginal tribes. And according to Sir William Hunter, there are still in India fifty millions of human beings lying outside, or barely inside the pale of orthodox Hinduism and Islam. Here, he holds, is the line of least resistance, along which the Church is called to regard it as her principal immediate duty to advance. He says: "I believe that within fifty years these fifty millions will be absorbed into one or other of the higher faiths, and that it rests in no small measure with Christian England, whether they are chiefly incorporated into the native religions, or into Christianity." This shows, as Sir William remarks, that Christianity in India has a vast area of extension open before it, even if it should not for an indefinite length of time lessen the numbers, or even stay the advance, of Hinduism and Mohammedanism. One-fifth of the people of India is a prize worth trying for, even according to the canons of ordinary probability.

Islam has another fifth of the people of India, and these, both according to Sir William, and to the author of an article, only less important than his, published in the February *Contemporary*, are very far from having been principally won by the sword. Indeed, around the three centres of Mohammedan rule, Delhi, Agra, and Lucknow, the Mohammedans are under fourteen per cent. of the population, while in Lower Bengal they are thirty-one per cent. Islam, Sir William shows, while not forgetting its advantages of conquest, and its obligations to violent conversion of its Hindu subjects, did also what the Church is invited to do, plunged among the teeming millions of the lower races, "fishermen, hunters, pirates, and low-caste tillers of the soil, whom Hinduism had barely admitted within its pale." To these, he says, "Islam came as a revelation from on high. It was the creed of the governing race; its missionaries were men of zeal, who brought the Gospel of the unity of God and the equality of man in His sight to a despised and neglected population." And in this century a great religious revival has purged out the abject pagan superstitions and "fuliginous rites of low-caste Hinduism," amid which "the white light of Semitic monotheism had almost flickered out." But the author shows that it is unwarranted to suppose that Mohammedanism is advancing largely now in India. Of the five provinces outside the famine area of 1877, within which a religious census has been taken, the Moslem increase in one, from 1872 to 1881, has gained a good deal on the population, in two more has gained somewhat, in one has fallen behind, and in one has fallen a good deal behind. In Bengal, where Islam is strongest, the population has gained 10.89 per cent., the religion 10.96 per cent. Intellectually, it has made very rapid progress, of course, however, on lines laid out by Christian culture, within a generation, and Sir William declares, contrary to general impressions, that "Islam in India has shown that it is perfectly able to dwell in peace and comfort in the new Indian world."

Though Christianity in India has been said to be advancing much less rapidly than Hinduism and in several provinces much less rapidly than Mohammedanism, yet regarded as gaining on its own numbers, it seems to be growing much faster than either. Passing over, though not with disparagement, the 1,600,000 Catholic and Syrian Christians, who do not seem to represent at present "the new disruptive force" of Christianity, the author dwells mainly upon the 600,000 Protestant Christians of India. Protestant Christianity was intro-

duced by Danish and German Lutherans, who are still, though now overshadowed by the missionaries of the governing race, going quietly and steadily on. "English missionary work practically began in the last year of the last century. It owed its origin to private effort. But the three devoted men who planted this mighty English growth had to labour under the shelter of a foreign flag, and the Governor of a little Danish settlement had to refuse their surrender to a Governor-General of British India. The record of the work done by the Serampur missionaries reads like an Eastern romance. They created a prose vernacular literature for Bengal; they established the modern method of popular education; they founded the present Protestant Indian Church; they gave the first great impulse to the native press; they set up the first steam engine in India; with its help they introduced the modern manufacture of paper on a large scale; in ten years they translated and printed the Bible, or parts thereof, in thirty-one languages. Although they received help from their Baptist friends in England, yet the main part of their funds they earned by their own heads and hands. They built a college, which still ranks among the most splendid educational edifices in India. As one contemplates its magnificent pillared facade overlooking the broad Hugli River, or mounts its costly staircase of cut brass (the gift of the King of Denmark), one is lost in admiration of the faith of three poor men who dared to build on so noble a scale."



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