

THE UNIVERSITIES' MISSION TO CENTRAL AFRICA.

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IN thinking or speaking of any subject connected with mission work, we are met at once by a vast army of objectors, who must be answered before we can go on to the positive question. Their arguments and the answers to them are as old as mission work, so old that there would be no reason to mention either in a paper of this kind except for the fact that, in relation to Africa, they have an apparent force and plausibility greater than in other cases. Therefore, to speak briefly of the three commonest arguments against foreign missions.

The first objection is the ancient and venerable plea, "Charity begins at home." This is an unexceptionable statement, and one which ought not to have been handed over to the enemy so completely as it has been; in other words, it is equivalent to this: Until our own country, its moral and spiritual conditions, are as they should be, other countries must be left to themselves. Why not carry the argument further and say: Until our own town, or street, even our own household, are in an approximately perfect condition, the country must be left to itself? It may be enough to remind you of the evil auspices under which this argument came into the world; it was that used by Judas when a loving woman brought her precious ointment to the feet of Christ, and as we are told that the complaint of Judas was urged for his own advantage, and not because he cared for the poor, we may assume that the "want of sympathy for foreign missions, because we have so many heathen at home," means, generally speaking, the desire to spare ourselves from work or subscriptions.

The second objection is: Failure is a foregone conclusion; you can't convert the heathen. To this it seems enough to say, the darkest hour that ever dawned on earth, the hour of what looked like the most utter failure, was also the hour of the greatest triumph of the Cross. Even without this assurance we should be in no more uncertain position than the Light Brigade at Balaclava. Even if we say of our Leader, "What though the soldiers knew some one had blundered," we are as much bound to obey orders as the men of the Light Brigade were when the command meant fruitless destruction. If, on the other hand, we are, as we profess ourselves, sure that our Leader cannot blunder, what do we need more than to ride at the guns of the enemy? The only responsibility upon us is to obey orders; the result belongs to God.

The third objection is dangerous because it is one of those half-truths which are worse than

utter falsehood, viz., that "the heathen are better without us." The force of this arises from the confusion it makes between Christianity and civilization. Mere civilization has not of necessity any moral force, any elevating power, and one illustration will prove the truth of this apparent paradox. Rome, under the Empire, at the beginning of the Christian era, had attained a very high degree of material civilization. Her patricians enjoyed luxuries which only the last half-century has given Englishmen; her people understood arts, the knowledge of which we have almost lost. Yet the culture of Rome had no power to touch the heart or elevate the character; it did not restrain its citizens from savage cruelties; it did not prevent its high-born women from enjoying the death-struggles of martyrs and gladiators; and it has taught us that the utmost external refinement may be only a cloak for the utmost savagery in nature. The truth is, like the blades of Toledo, which in the hands of a skilled soldier were the best of weapons, civilization is an effective instrument of Christianity, but it is nothing but an instrument, and Christianity is the only guarantee against its becoming an instrument of degradation instead of elevation. It is this civilization, apart from Christianity, which harms the untaught races by giving them new vices. But all true efforts of the Church in East Africa are directed, not towards Europeanizing the people, but towards planting a native branch of the Christian Church in the Dark Continent. So far the general question. Then as regards Africa especially, we have a twofold responsibility; Africa, a twofold claim.

The first claim of Africa is as the parent of western Christianity. In the early days of Christianity, Africa had a vigorous organized Church of her own, which lasted until she was overrun by the barbarians who colonized the west of Europe. Simon of Cyrene, the Cross-bearer, was of African blood; so was the Ethiopian eunuch, whom we may regard as the first-fruits of missionary effort there. St. Augustine, the chief of theologians, ruled over an African bishopric. The great Christian school of philosophy had its headquarters at the African city of Alexandria, and, if not certain, it is at least highly probable that to Africa the Church of the West owes the beginning of her life.

The other claim is different, but equally strong. To ourselves we owe it to wipe out the past, to atone for the African lives that have been sacrificed to English commerce, by giving our best treasure to the native Africans in their own country. Surely it is enough to state this claim, without enlarging upon its force and definiteness.

And then answering to the twofold claim of Africa there is our own twofold responsibility towards her. First, of course, the responsibility of Christians and Churches. God has laid it