

Besides the annual and semi-annual visits, to the tombs, women go alone to wait by the side of the grave of a deceased husband; and thus they do monthly or quarterly, on the day of the month on which his death took place. As they suppose the spirit of the dead is in or about the grave, they believe he hears their cries, witnesses their tears and grief, and can exert some influence for their good in answer to the prayers they address to him. With sobs and bitter lamentations they tell over their griefs, and supplicate for some mitigation of their misery. These scenes, though we frequently witness them, are very painful to behold; for the weeping is not always feigned. They, indeed, howl, wring their hands, and tear their hair. Poor creatures! who does not pity them? Vain are their prayers, and unavailing their grief. Oh that they knew of Him who once mingled his sorrows with the family of Bethany; and who will proclaim "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me, shall never die." "Believeth thou this?" Yes, reader, believest thou this? Then how long shall those widows, in whose behalf I here appeal to you, how long shall they be ignorant of Him who came to bind up the broken heart.

THE ISTHMUS OF PANAMA AS A MISSION FIELD.

We make the following extracts from the Report of a special committee of the Foreign Committee of the Episcopal Board of Missions, in relation to a proposed mission to Central America. It will be found to contain useful information concerning a region with which we are becoming intimately connected, and its views of Christian duty will commend themselves to the friends of the missionary work.

The Isthmus of Panama is the north-western province of New Granada, which is the north-western State of South America. Central America bounds the Isthmus on the north. The principal towns in the Isthmus are Panama, on the Gulf of Panama or the Pacific Ocean, and Aspinwall, on the Caribbean Sea or the Atlantic Ocean.

The population of the Isthmus is a mixed race. The proportion of white Spaniards is, probably, not one-third. There are a few Indians. The bulk of the inhabitants are mulatto, white, and Negro. It is supposed that the Indian race was rapidly exhausted by the mining operations, and their place supplied by an importation of Africans, from whom the present population has in a great measure descended.

As might be supposed, the preponderating traits of character are African. There is great ignorance, superstition, and animism. Nevertheless, the infusion of Spanish blood elevates them above the low type of the African race. They appear to have a desire for improvement, and considerable aptitude for receiving instruction. Many exhibit very fair intelligence. The natives who labour on the railroad are quite as capable as the usual run of laboring men; in many instances they have been raised to positions of responsibility, requiring skill, tact, and ingenuity. Many of them exhibit a desire to learn to read and write; some have acquired both. Many are inquiring for and anxious to receive books.

Similar remarks probably apply to the condition of Central Africa. If there is any difference between the two, the condition of the Isthmus and New Granada is the most favourable.

The whole of these countries are under the influence of the Roman Catholic Church, and to it are owing the grievous ignorance and degradation, and the entire want of all true religion, under which the people exist. The small intelligent portion of the people are becoming infidel. The mass is in the lowest degree superstitious, idolatrous, and given to ceremonials and formalities. The condition of the priesthood is lamentable.

Such a state of religion among the teachers could consist only with the deepest degradation among the people, and the absence of all true knowledge of God. The amount of religion among the natives at work upon the railroad, is observed to be their attention to feast days as days of idleness; even these observances are, in many cases, neglected, since it is found that the company pay for labouring upon festivals. Feast days are not much observed. They are fond of ceremonials and processions. An eye-witness informed your Committee of a circumstance illustrative of this fact. He was sitting with a distinguished native officer on Palm Sunday, when a procession passed, illustrating Christ's entrance into Jerusalem. A negro boy mounted on an ass, bedizened with silver paper stars, and surrounded by an admiring crowd, personated the Saviour of the world. His friend (himself a Romanist) remarked, that he had not seen such religious degradation as exists in that country even in Italy.

As was to be expected, this religious condition has aroused the attention of the more intelligent few. The party now in power in New Granada has arisen upon the ruin of the Jesuits, and is decidedly anti-Roman Catholic, and will afford every reasonable facility for Protestant missionary effort.

A similar spirit of religious improvement is being awakened in other parts of South America. At Valparaiso, on the occasion of a dinner given to the President of Chili, a gentleman from Buenos Ayres offered a sentiment in favour of religious freedom. He said (so it is stated) that since the people were so much indebted to foreigners for improvement in their physical condition, the least return would be, to allow foreigners full liberty of worshipping God according to the dictates of their own consciences. The correspondent of the *Commercial Advertiser*, from which paper we extract the account, proceeds:—

"He was right. This is the heavy and depressing load which rests upon and retards this and all the South American nations. The priests

are for the greater part illiterate and morally disqualified. And if the people are by law shut up to the miserable religious nutriment which such teachers are able to impart, it is but little better than being shut up to a moral starvation. It is a thousand pities that these people cannot come into a closer contact on this subject with the great North American heart, as it throbs with the sentiment of respect for the fullest freedom in matters of religious belief and practice."

The announcement of such a sentiment, and the forbearance with which it was received, especially when the character of the audience is considered, is a very encouraging sign. It seems to indicate that before long the influence of the Protestant commercial enterprise of the Anglo-Saxon race will, under Divine guidance and blessing, open stand-points, for the faith in the darkest places of the South American continent; portions of the great field which have been left by true Christianity for ages, as entirely impracticable.

In the mean while, no obstacle opposes such missionary effort in the Isthmus of Panama. The government, it is supposed, will favour the scheme. At present, the Roman Catholic Church have no ministry labouring there.

But another element is being rapidly infused into the character of the population, not only of the Isthmus, New Granada, and Central America, but of the western coast of South America. The immigration from the United States is great. Most pass through to California, but many remain; and many from various causes are scattered through the neighbouring country. The features of character of this more powerful race must necessarily be impressed upon the weaker, either for good or evil.

The American population of the Isthmus is already several thousand. Two thousand passengers may be said to be at all times on the Isthmus. The way-farers, as well as those who have settled there, especially need the ministrations of the gospel.

The Isthmus must always be the central point of southern and perhaps western oceanic missions. From this point a direct communication, as it is established with America, North and West, will soon be opened with the Sandwich Islands and China, and with the various parts along the western coast of South America. A line of steamers has already commenced to run fortnightly, between Panama and Valparaiso.

Again—From the Isthmus a missionary can have direct communication with the interior of New Granada. The workmen on the railroad are all from the central districts of New Granada, generally numbering from 600 to 700. None of these become settlers, but after making a little money return to their homes. Consequently, a missionary influence upon them will be readily felt in their (at present) not easily accessible country.

OLD CALABAR.

STATE AND PROSPECTS OF THE MISSION.

We have much pleasure in presenting to our readers the following extracts of a letter to the mission board, by the Rev. Mr. Waddell, giving an account of the present condition and the prospects of the Calabar mission. Surely those that read it, will be disposed to bless God, and to take courage.

I beg to assure the Board that it has been sorely against my will that I have at this time revisited Britain. But having fully detailed, in my letters from Calabar, all the circumstances which rendered it necessary, and the plans which I had desired rather to adopt, had I been able to succeed therein, I need not repeat them now. Suffice it to say, that Divine providence so shut up my way as to leave me no choice in the matter, either as to the time or the way of my return home.

The climate and the health of the Missionaries.—To some persons it may seem strange, that within these few years, all the brethren and sisters from Calabar have in succession come to this country, and yet not all on account of their health. It seems that a favouring providence so ordered it; and I doubt not that to all candid observers it will yet appear in the same light. It has contributed to the health and comfort of the missionaries, and thereby to the stability of the mission; and I hope that it has contributed to the satisfaction of the church at home, by bringing before it the consistent testimony of all the brethren there, as to the important and interesting nature of the field we occupy, the progress of the mission work therein, and the prospects of extended usefulness that open before us in Calabar and circumjacent regions.

Though such frequent returns may not for the future be expected, as it is to be hoped they may not be necessary, yet some tenderness on this point, towards your agents engaged in that field of foreign service, may for a while be found advisable, more than has usually been deemed necessary in other countries. The practicability of permanent residence, and of missionary operations there, by natives of northern climes, has been indeed fully proved. Yet it is unquestionably true that the climate of Calabar, in common with the Bights of Biafra and Benin, is wasting and debilitating, more than that of any other part of West Africa; and so long as a few missionaries are the only European residents over a thousand miles off that dreaded coast, and the agents of commerce deem two years on it a hazardous detention, and the term of her Majesty's naval service thereon is limited to two and a half or three years, so long will Christian prudence and kindness dictate that your fellow labourers there should, at no very distant intervals, revisit the land and church of their fathers, to repair their wasted energies, both of body and spirit. It may, however, be reasonably expected, that as Christian missions extend into the more salubrious districts of the inland hill country, and as the coast itself becomes