

objection I anticipate. It will be said that under the present regime great progress has been made. That in a certain sense may be granted. But no one will assert that this progress has arisen from the methods employed. It has taken place in spite of these methods and would have been much greater and much more solid under the labours of ordained men. It says much for our people, not for our rulers, that stations have survived the treatment they have received. But whether this motion be approved or not, or whether the proposal set forth be accepted or not, I trust that this Presbytery which has so large experience of the difficulties of the problem may be able to make a contribution to the solution of it, and I trust that brethren in office will not regard with too little patience and too little attention the views and criticisms of other brethren equally interested with them in the great question of home missions and equally zealous for the prosperity of our Church.

MADAGASCAR.

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Madagascar, an island with an area twice as large as that of Great Britain and Ireland, lies about two hundred miles off the south-east coast of Africa. It has a population of a little over five millions of people. The capital is a large town called Antananarivo, situated on the summit of a hill almost in the centre of the island and about five thousand feet above the level of the sea. This is the seat of Government and the centre of the missionary work. The journey hither from the coast—about two hundred miles from Tamatave—is accomplished on fanzanas, carried by means of poles on the shoulders of the native bearers. There are no roads, and at one time the traveller will be borne above the heads of the bearers as they ford a river; at another, he will be dragged under fallen trees; at another he will be traversing the very brink of a frightful precipice. But nature is found in all her primeval beauty—shady nooks in the forest undisturbed by the axe, long open stretches, thick carpeted with velvety lawn, wildernesses of flowers of every delicacy of hue and richness. Few missionaries pass through these spots without making "the aisles of the dim woods ring to the anthem of the free." Yet their joy is turned to sadness as they see how often man has come like a blight into the midst of all this beauty. "Every prospect pleases and only man is vile."

Madagascar is inhabited by many different tribes. Some of them are supposed to have come from the East and to be descendants of the Malays. These are the strongest and most intelligent of the natives and give hope of the greatest development, but at the same time they are the fewest in number. The other tribes are supposed to be descended from natives of Africa. These have the strength that comes from having great numbers; but also the weakness that comes from being broken up into hostile tribe. At the close of last century the various tribes waged continual war against each other, and it was only when well on into the present that the Hovas, the tribe of Malayan descent, gained the power over the largest part of the island. It is in this tribe that we find our interest principally centred, for here it was that Christianity first planted its foot; it was here that the great and thrilling drama of the persecutions was played, and here it is that the London Missionary Society and other associations have now their stronghold.

Away back in the years, tradition tells us, the religion of the Hovas differed widely from that of the surrounding tribes. They had no idols, but had brought with them from the East memories of an old religion with one God—the Creator of all things. The traces of this belief are to be found in the language to this day in proverbs such as these: "God is everywhere," "Do not think that God is not and therefore jump with your eyes shut," "Though I shall not be able to reward your kindness, it will be rewarded by God." But when the missionaries first knew them they were worshippers of idols, and the natives tell us that it was in this way that it came about.

In one of their battles with the idolatrous tribe of the Sakalava the Hovas were defeated. For the Sakalava, trusting to their idol charms to protect them from death, had no fear and so dashed on their enemy with such impetuosity as to strike terror into their hearts. But the defeated chief tried to gain his end by means of a trick. Having summoned his army around him, he told them that he, too, had received a gun charm to protect him from the enemy's bullets. He then ordered a servant to fire a gun at him. This was done without harm, for the servant had slipped the bullet aside unseen by the people as he pretended to load. Immediately the soldiers cried for charms for themselves, and the king presented each with a piece of wood. Thus all fear having been banished from their minds they returned to the fight with such energy as to strike terror to the hearts of the Sakalava and to drive them in confusion from the field. But by this trick a terrible injury had been wrought to the victors themselves, for the seeds of idolatry had been implanted in their hearts and fearful was the harvest which they were yet to reap. The number of their charms or idols rapidly increased, till at last the Hovas, like the Israelites of old, were wholly given over to idolatry. The downward progress is always easy. And it was now, when the number of their gods was as the number of their cities, when the night of heathenism had fallen with a darkness that could be felt, that the dawn of the Gospel light began to kindle over the land and the day-star appeared on high, and the morning stars sang together.

The eyes of the Lord's servants had been turned to Madagascar, and there were those who heard the Spirit of the Lord saying to them: "Arise, get thee down, doubting nothing." Early in the beginning of this century, two noble men from Britain with their wives and children came bringing the glad tidings. But they had come at the rainy season of the year when the germs of fever are in the air, and soon, after much suffering, all but one of that little company slept their last long sleep on a foreign shore. They had not died in vain. The London Missionary Society that had thus sown in tears was soon to see others of its labourers reap with joy, bringing their sheaves with them. Another band entered upon the work, and long and earnestly they laboured, teaching and preaching. Their experience was the old, old experience of Christianity coming into contact with heathenism. It may be illustrated by a story told about a husband and wife who wished to get a new idol for their house. They went away to the idol-maker who lived at the edge of the forest, and he cut down a tree and made them the idol that they wished. But night had come on, so with the waste wood and the chips left over from the tree they made a fire at which they cooked their food and warmed themselves throughout the night. A few days after their return home with their new idol, a Christian friend called on them and read part of the forty-fourth chapter of Isaiah, describing the folly of idolatry, how a man "heweth him down cedars . . . and will take thereof and warm himself; yea, he kindleth it and baketh bread . . . and the residue thereof he maketh a God, even his graven image; he falleth down unto it, and worshippeth it, and prayeth unto it, and saith, Deliver me; for thou art my God." "Why," they exclaimed, "this book of yours exactly describes what we were doing a few days ago. We did just as the book says. It seems to know all about us." And so they were led to enquire into the religion of the Book, and ere long they were ranked among the most heroic and faithful of the band of native Christians.

Thus the work went on but not without the fiercest opposition from many in high position in the land. Already over two hundred members had joined the Church, when a thundercloud gathered above and burst over the field of their harvest. King Radama who had been favourable to the missionaries died in 1828 and was succeeded by his queen, Ranaivalona, who hated the Christians with a bitter hatred. An earnest of what was to come was given at her coronation, when, taking the idol in her hands, she said: "My predecessors have given you to me. I put my trust in you; therefore, support me." She dared not injure the white men but soon began to vent her wrath upon the natives. Still Christianity grew. Soon all the missionaries were forced to leave the island save two; and these two wrought nobly that they might give to the Malagasy (or Hovas) the whole Bible in their native tongue, ere they also should be compelled to leave. Soon their turn came; but their work was completed. And there must have been joy mingled with the sorrow of that missionary, who, as he took farewell with a small band of the faithful on the road outside the capital, held up a copy of the New Testament and said: "You know, my friends, I have taught you this is the Word of God, but your queen says it is only the word of man, and she will destroy it. If it is really as she says, no doubt she will be able to put it down. But if, as you and I believe, this is really the Book of Him who says, 'Heaven and earth shall pass away but My Word shall not pass away'; then all that the queen can do will not destroy it." And in the fulness of the time this prophecy was abundantly fulfilled.

But meanwhile the persecution raged fiercely. The first martyr for Christ was a young woman named Rasalama. After having borne much cruel torture, she was led out of the city to die. Passing the little church where she had often heard the missionaries preach, she exclaimed: "There I heard the words of the Saviour." Soon, with a song upon her lips, she reached the fatal spot and kneeling down committed her spirit into our Saviour's hands. Then, as the executioner pierced her through the heart with his spear, her soul passed out into the presence of her God.

There was weeping and lamentation throughout the land, but Christianity lived on. In the forest, in the cave, and in the swamp might have been seen small gatherings of the faithful, and borne on the night-wind might have been heard the music of many a native hymn. Nobles of the land were burned alive, men and women of ordinary rank were speared or cast over the Rock of Hurling, one hundred and fifty feet down into the plains below; even children did not escape; but Christianity still lived on. On the island of Maurelius, over five hundred miles away, the exiled missionaries watched and waited the hour of relief. Once or twice they visited Madagascar, but the way was still barred and they had to return. Twenty-five years passed, and the persecution that had rested for a moment had burst forth with redoubled fury, when, one evening, "mysterious fires were seen on the tops of the mountains round about the capital, and there was a sound like music rising from Isotry to Andohalo, and it was a pleasant sound, though making sad." Next morning the queen asked: "What is it thought this fire is?" And one whom she questioned answered: "It is not the fire of men but of God; it is like a foreshadowing of coming death." The answer proved true, for in four months the queen lay with her ancestors in the royal tomb. With the ascent of her successor to the throne there was fulfilled another interpretation of that fire, "This fire is a jubilee," said one, "to gather the dispersed and to redeem the best," for under the new king, Radama II., there was proclaimed "liberty to the captive and the

opening of the prison doors to them that were bound." Out of the dens and caves of the land they gathered back to their homes, many like the ghostly shadows of their former selves from the fever-smitten haunts of their exile, many too feeble to walk from the load of irons with which they had been fettered. In 1862 Mr. Ellis, of the London Missionary Society, returned, and when word came that he was nearing the capital a large band of Christians set out to meet him. As they came in sight of the missionary party their joy could not be contained but burst forth in songs of praise to God. The tide of emotion in the heart of the missionary and his friends swelled full to overflowing at the sound, and answering psalms pealed back to greet those hero-singers who had come through great tribulations. On that last Sabbath day before the dread persecution began, the last sermon preached was from the text: "Lord, save us, we perish"; and surely that cry had not been unheard throughout the weary years, for when at last the voice of the Master was heard calling: "Peace, be still," and the tumult ceased and there was a great calm; it was found that the bread cast upon the waters had returned after many days, that the two hundred converts had been increased thirty-fold. The blood of the martyrs has proved indeed the seed of the Church.

(To be continued.)

A LAYMAN ON PREACHING.

MR. EDITOR,—Your bright and racy contributor, "Knoxonian," gave a discourse in your issue of the 14th inst. on "Some Things that Need Revision." His points are all well taken, especially that one respecting the coldness of the atmosphere of some congregations. We meet at the Sunday services, the prayer meeting and other occasions, and we go away knowing each other little or no better than before. Perhaps this is accounted for by the habit so early instilled into many of us, notably those of Scottish origin, namely, the virtue of silence. In itself it is a habit to be commended and cultivated, for there is far too much talk, loose talk, now-a-days, but it would be a good thing if after devotional exercises this habit were somewhat relaxed, and instead of the people hurrying away as they generally do they would linger a little for social converse and interchange of views.

He was also frank enough to say that some laymen would be justified in saying that some sermons need revision. Now my ideas about sermons may be peculiar and may not meet with the approbation of many of our preachers, but they are concurred in by most of the friends I meet. I grant that the time of our ministers is encroached upon by duties which they cannot help attending to, and perhaps it is our fault that we do not take measures to relieve them of some of those duties; at the same time I conceive that their first duty is to "preach the Word" and to do this with acceptance there must be needful preparation. With some the preparation means the choosing of a text or subject, the "thinking out" its treatment, perhaps writing down a few "heads" or divisions and subdivisions, and trusting to their power of clothing the whole in suitable language. With others the preparation means not only "thinking out" their subject but writing out their thoughts thereon in the form they mean to express them to their people, whether they commit them to memory or make use of their manuscript.

Now which of these methods is most likely to be acceptable to the congregation and to produce the best effect on the hearers? I take for granted that we are far enough removed from the "Auld Light" days when the "reading" of a sermon was sufficient to damage the minister's reputation for life; that there is intelligence enough in our congregations to grasp the lessons of a discourse whether read or delivered extempore, and to extract the profit therefrom. As between the two methods I have mentioned, on the theory that the minister is bound to give us of his best, I prefer the written sermon read as written, and this preference is based on experiences of many years, after listening to the sermon of one of our leading clergymen. There are eminent exceptions of course, among whom, without being invidious, I may name Principal Grant and Principal Caven, who, while not reading from manuscript, always deliver their discourses in concise form and free from breaches of English grammar. We are often told that the modern preacher, if he is furnished for his vocation, must be a scholar, raised like St. Paul in Hebrew and the "obscure Greek." In this opinion I concur, but assuming that he has knowledge of those and even other ancient languages, is he warranted in committing breaches of his own language, as I am safe to say is done dozens of times in one sermon by ninety-nine out of a hundred ministers who think they can trust themselves without a manuscript? When a preacher reduces his thoughts to writing, he will not often use a superfluity of words. The tendency will be rather to crystallize and present his thoughts in a condensed form. His attention will be concentrated on the subject of discourse, and a perusal of his manuscript will satisfy him whether or not he has presented his thoughts in logical form and deduced therefrom the requisite lessons. The result will be a more or less well rounded composition calculated to produce the effect desired.

On the other hand, no matter how carefully he has considered his subject or how earnest he may be, if he has not committed his thoughts to paper and trusts to the inspiration of the moment, he is apt to be loose in thought, diffuse in language and defective in grammatical construction. He consequently wearies his hearers and offends those who look for logical and grammatical propriety.

A preacher who chooses to speak extemporaneously, however deep his acquaintance with dead languages may be, has no excuse for any breach of the rules of grammar of his own language. He must remember that many young people are listening to him who look up to him as a teacher as well as a preacher.

Above all his effort should be to produce the most beneficial effect on the minds and hearts of his hearers, and the question is whether this can be best accomplished by a well prepared written discourse, or by an extemporaneous effort accompanied by its unavoidable diffuseness of thought and language.

LAYMAN.

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