

TIME AS A FACTOR IN CHRISTIAN MISSIONS.

BY REV. ARTHUR H. SMITH, SHANTUNG, CHINA.

I.

The main assumptions on which Christian missions proceed are to be found in a single text from the Gospel of Luke: "The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost." This involves a theory of the condition of humanity. It involves the most important fact in the history of the race. It involves a benevolent purpose, which we are abundantly assured will be accomplished. Upon this point there must be no doubt or wavering, for to the believer in the inspiration of the Scripture the future is as certain as the past.

We live in an age in which there has been great expansion in all directions, and among others in the prosecution of Christian missions. Probably more persons are to-day interested in the conversion of the world to Christ than at any previous time. While the work of missions has not been undertaken upon any adequate scale, there is a steady progress both in the amount and in the quality of effort put forth. It is therefore more and more important that those who are brought face to face with this mighty problem should have clear and correct ideas of its nature. Owing to the greatness of the subject and the complexity of the consideration involved in it, it is by no means so easy to come to correct conclusions as many persons seem to suppose. No one has a right to assume that the convictions at which he has arrived are the final truth, but every one who has had experience may be able to contribute something, however slight, for the edification of his brethren. The following observations upon the "time element in Christian missions" may be taken, as in some sense, the outcome of more than twenty years' practical acquaintance with one of the great mission fields of the world.

I. It is a principle of wide application that *great changes take place slowly*. The story of the physical universe has not yet been fully told, but enough is known to make it sure that the vast distances of most of the heavenly bodies are matched by the inconceivably great periods of time in which they have been slowly assuming their present condition. Physical geographers have to some extent been able to decipher the "story of the planet," which is always and everywhere one of gradual and progressive change. Catastrophes in great numbers have occurred, but their effects have been distributed and perpetuated only by the lapse of time. The lava thrown out from the bowels of the earth cools, disintegrates, and becomes at length a fertile soil. Mountains are washed down by torrents from the clouds, and little by little the vast alluvial plains come into being.

The law of gradual development is illustrated in all those races of man-