

HAVE MISSIONS PROVED FAILURES ?

Even at the present day there are some who, from ignorance or hostility to the truth will assert that all the missionary efforts of the Church have been without any adequate measure of success. The Rev. Dr. Duff in the course of of an address before the Commission of the Free Church, deals with the question, and makes the following remarks with reference to the past success, and the future prospects of Christian missions.

"I have heard such expressions as 'Have there not been failures?' My answer is, 'Yes, so far as individuals are concerned, and so far as particular localities and projects are concerned. There have been failures in these, but there have been no failures with regard to the grand work of God at large; on the contrary, there has been progress and advancement.' Then it has been said, 'Has there not in certain departments of the field been retrogression?' I answer, 'What if there has? It is incident to advancement in every great enterprise, civil or sacred, that there should be occasional and temporary retrogression.' In respect to our missions, it is like the progress of the tide, which goes up to a certain mark, but retires again, only to flow up to a greater distance. I believe this is the truth with regard to missions, if a candid view were taken of them over the whole world. I find in certain quarters very gloomy anticipations and views of the state of religion both at home and abroad. I feel no way staggered by these apprehensions. Quite the contrary, and I have reasons for it. I am not one who ever encouraged sanguine expectations of any great or immediate results for our enterprises in any part of the mission field. On the contrary, some of you may remember that thirty years ago I protested against these being entertained. That is not the way in which God works. He works slowly and surely from age to age, from generation to generation. We are apt to forget that with Him 'one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.' He was pleased to work on slowly for four thousand years, unfolding the mysterious scheme of redemption, till the fulness of the time was come. If God, then, be patient in working, ought not we, who are bound to imitate Him in all His imitable perfections, to imitate Him in His patience, and to wait till His appointed time come? Surely this is like Scripture and like common sense.

I feel that the aspect of things is to the eye of sense and to the world at large, a very dark one; but to the eye of faith I say emphatically it is otherwise. It has been my own lot within the last ten years to note from personal observation in different regions many of the strange workings and counter-workings of Popery, Jesuitism, materialistic infidelity, the neology, rationalism, and the strangely varied pantheism of Germany, and such like; and it has also been my lot to make acquaintance with the Brahminisms, and Hinduisms, of India, the Confucianisms, Buddhisms, and rationalisms of China and of the Indian Archipelago; and on returning to the western world I find the great ecclesiastical machine of the Church of England torn to pieces, or going to pieces, by strange decisions of the most adverse kind; and I find creeping in, at least there is said to be creeping in, to all religious bodies more or less a feeling of doubtfulness and distrust, all tending to weaken one's faith and confidence in Jehovah's holy oracles, and to fill our minds with doubts and alarms in regard to the future. Now, I feel that instead of being disheartened or discouraged, there is something underneath all this that is full of encouragement.

It has been so in all ages; God has permitted these things on purpose to prove and test and try His people's faith and in order that out of darkness may spring forth a brighter light. I feel encouraged, not only by these considerations, but that in the heathen field there are processes at work, and that elements have been introduced which will ferment and go on increasingly fermenting till the whole mass be leavened. All this may be imperceptible to the outward eye and to the superficial view; but there are elements of change