

however large, which the cause may demand. The counterpart of an unripe scepticism, which denies before it has even doubted, is a precocious faith which demands the settlement in full of God's promises before the first instalment of the taxes on the same has been paid in patience and prayer and self-denial. A laborious and highly qualified missionary was recently justifying his conduct to the writer in having withdrawn from his board and gone back to his field in sole dependence on the Lord for support. "God can wait; boards cannot," he said in substance. "Because my field has proved unproductive after many years of hard labor, they have abandoned one of its most important stations. I am not on the field for fruit alone, greatly as I long to see it, but in obedience to my Master's commission; therefore I cannot withdraw." Is there not substance for serious reflection in this remark? Is it not the barren field that needs a missionary quite as much as the fruitful field? It should be ever borne in mind, moreover, that the final award reads, "*Well done, good and faithful servant,*" not "*good and successful servant.*" An ambitious zeal has given out the watchword, "All the world for Christ," and many would insist on indications and guarantees that all the world is coming as a ground for unstinted outlay. No doubt God in His own time will give the heathen to His Son for an inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for a possession; but meanwhile our business is to carry Christ to all the world, to carry Him into the barren fields as well as into the fertile fields. How slowly the seed of life germinates and brings forth! The kingdom of God is not a mushroom, springing up in a night; we may rejoice if it is even a century plant, blooming at the end of a hundred years. But the promises of God cannot fail; all that He has spoken concerning the triumphs of the Gospel must come to pass; and it is for us to labor on in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ.

It is only in this thought—faithfulness, not fruitfulness, the criterion of reward—that we seem to get any light on the sorrowful mystery of premature missionary graves. The young and gifted and consecrated servant, who has sacrificed everything to obey the great commission, falling almost as soon as he has reached his field! How can we justify the ways of God in permitting it? Does the Lord really choose His workmen, assign them to the work that is dearest to His heart, and then have no care that they fall ere the work is hardly begun? What if we answer that the obscurest missionary tomb is just as precious in the sight of God as the most illustrious missionary triumph? There it stands, before the eye of the Master, as a certificate of obedience to His great commission—a testimony of faithfulness unto death for Christ's sake. "Thou shalt rest and stand in thy lot at the end of the days." It is everything that the fallen missionary shall be able to stand up in the heathen country where he laid down his life, and at the sound of the resurrection trumpet to say to his Lord: "Here I am, just where Thou didst send me, ready for any further service or reward which may be assigned me."