

The Bloom of the Christian Church

A Missionary Address, by REV. HAMILTON WIGLE, B.A., Winnipeg, at the International Epworth League Convention, Denver.

OUR mission work is the bloom of the Christian Church. This plant has taken many years to bloom. It is not like the century plant, but more like a millennial plant. It has been nearly two thousand years producing its roots and stock, but now the flower has opened and the four winds of heaven are gathering up her aromas, spreading her fragrance on the desert air, and drifting her fertilizing pollen to the isles of the sea.

Christianity is a thousand years late in doing her appointed work. If she had not "left her first love" she would have had the far East, and never suffered the pall of Mohammedanism to fall upon Asia. The loss of the sepulchre was a shock to Christianity from which she has not fully recovered.

The hallucination of material power no doubt led the over-ambitious spirit of the early Church to court the patronage of Rome, and led on by hope of political power she floated westward until the East was abandoned, and the last state of that people "is worse than the first."

The widest interpretation of the mission fields comprises Asia and Africa. In fact we are turning our attention particularly to China and Japan. While Linévitch is being encompassed by that irresistible cordon, so the Church is endeavoring to draw around Japan an irresistible cordon which will bring her to peaceful terms with the kingdom of Christ.

We are not without signs that the old prophecies of the surrender of kingdoms and empires to Christ are beginning to be realized. About one year ago the Jerusalem crusaders entered the Mediterranean like a royal commission reconnoitering the old battle grounds. As the ship parted the waters of the shores where the race was born, and where the sacred sepulchre lies, traces of the new invasion could be seen. All around the Mediterranean could be seen the faithful outposts standing by the guns and pointing their observation glasses towards the Himalayas, the Euphrates and the land of Ethiopia. All about those shores the fires are burning and the night-watch is being kept until the vanguard of the army arrives. That loyal missionary contingent is kith and kin of us, and they are holding their posts under the protection guaranteed by the Union Jack floating beside the Stars and Stripes.

The far East also has her rays of hope, for we see the Chinese wall of prejudice is crumbling down, the gates of Russian bigotry have been torn off their hinges, while the harbors of Japan are open to the advent of the Christian mariner. We can almost stand on tip-toe and look over the horizon and see the reddening dawn of the day of which Jeremiah and Isaiah wrote, for with the sign of the cross now rising in the East the Crescent will be overthrown and the uttermost parts of the earth be given to the Son for His possession.

Notwithstanding these encouraging symptoms of the triumph of Christianity a great deal of hard work remains for the Church before the harvest of the great plant is gathered. First, we need to have Christ's vision; second, we need to have Christ's spirit.

First, Christ's Vision.—He saw human suffering. When on the mount of transfiguration the disciples saw only the celestial glory, and desired to erect three tabernacles and remain there. Our Saviour saw a poor lunatic, with broken-hearted parents, at the foot of the mountain. He dismissed the celestial guests and went down to suffering humanity, and devoted himself to helping them. He saw the possibilities of mankind. He made appeals to what was in men; there still was a remnant of good to be appealed to. Some look upon man as void even of a moral tissue sufficient to respond to higher ideals. We are like the paper from the mill. It may at first look as if everything had been taken out of it until it is a mere dead blank, but on holding it up to the light we see, wrought in the very fibre of it, the name of the manufacturer. So with us, we may imagine the nature to be a moral blank, but when held up to

the light of truth we discern an outline of the Divine in the soul, for of every one we find that—

"Touched by a loving heart, awakened by kindness,
Chords that were broken will vibrate once more."

Surely our Saviour showed His faith and knowledge in those possibilities when He picked up a bunch of uncultured and commonplace men and made them the heralds of His kingdom.

When artists can see a Moses in a block of marble, and when some can see sermons in stones and books in the brooks, why are we so dull that we cannot see Elijahs and Pauls in the throbbing souls that pass our doors from day to day?

We are accustomed to pay homage to our poets, painters and sculptors because they are makers of ideals, but what about the men who lift up their fellow men? Men-makers are the greatest artists of the age—men who can see men in the "submerged tenth"; men who have the vision of Christ, and go after their fellows to erect the sloping brow of the man with the hoe and lift the drooping chin, and pull the Divine image out into his whole face again! These are the great men and this is the Divine vision.

What do we see in humanity? A manufacturer sees in a mass of people only power to work. A mechanical engineer sees in the ocean wave only wasted energy. He does not see the crystal drops carried over all the earth, cooling fevers, quenching thirst, and smiling in the flowers on every hillside, all reflecting the glory of God. So we should not look on humanity as a mass of commercial power or physical energy, but a host of highly-sensitized souls, every one of which can be made another human home for God to live in.

We must possess, in the second place, the Spirit of Christ. He was unselfish. Rev. J. W. Dawson says the Church today is dying of *ennui*. It is so selfish and self-indulgent that its power and usefulness are being destroyed. We are trimming too much and emulating the world. We may be building too fine churches and embellishing them, while on the next corner some poor widow is in need of food to nourish her children.* We may be living in too fine houses while shivering and barefooted boys drop the morning papers at our doors.

I tell you all these conditions have to be reckoned with. Christianity was pre-eminently a religion of the street, the wayside wanderer, the poor and the needy. The reason it so commends itself, above all others, to the world is because it is calculated to meet the woes of humanity. Indeed the great credential of Christianity is the fact of its wonderful adaptation to the need and sufferings of humanity.

When our Saviour was looking at the gorgeous temple His disciples referred to its greatness, but He said that the day would come when there would not be left one stone upon another. There was no glory, inherent virtue, or historic value that would save it; but He told them once that whoever gave a cup of cold water in His name would never lose his reward. When will we learn what are the valuable things in life, and when will we possess the Christ-spirit?

A man on a street corner in Paris saw a poor flower-woman with a delicate child in her arms. She was selling flowers to keep soul and body together in herself and her child. Near by stood a barefooted market girl, looking so covetously at the flowers, but too poor to buy them. The man saw the situation, and possessing both the Christ-vision and the Christ-spirit, he purchased a bouquet from the poor woman and gave it to the poor girl, and he thus did the Christian act.

"He who gives his alms blesses three,
Himself, his neighbor and Me."

We need a Tolstoy to cry out against our national pride and military expenditure. We need a Peter the Hermit to cry out against our religious apathy. We need a John the Baptist to lead us to the Jordan for a fresh spiritual baptism.

*The strange coincidence happened that the next morning's paper, after this address was delivered, came out with the shocking statement that around the corner from the Convention (Trinity) Church a man and wife were in a state of starvation and had been fed by a Chinaman for two days.