

WHY MISSIONS ARE SO MODERN.

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How happened it that the work of evangelizing the world, after centuries of such vigorous prosecution, attended with such marvellous success, was afterward well nigh suspended, and for well nigh fifteen hundred years? This most serious question we answer correctly by alleging that Europe became semi-barbarized and half-heathen, that the Church became secularized and religion formal, that Gospel faith, and love, and zeal went into long and almost total eclipse.

But this only leads to another question equally pertinent, and coming much nearer home: Why, when through the Reformation ensued an astonishing spiritual quickening, a widespread revival of New Testament fervor and force, was not the sublime task at once resumed and pushed as at the beginning? Or, how happened it that for nearly three hundred years longer next to nothing was even attempted, so that the nineteenth century of grace was well on its way before the ears of the Christian Church began to be opened to hear the agonizing wail of a dying world? To this latter question let us seek a reply more at length; and also together with it, to the further and pleasanter query, How came it about at length that His disciples began to re-peruse their Lord's Great Commission, and, though slowly, began to obey his last command? It is my purpose to set briefly forth some of the principal and more patent causes which hindered the beginning of modern missions and postponed them to a day so painfully and so culpably late, and also other conspiring forces which in the fulness of time made a beginning easily possible, and communicated the heavenly impulse, and then carried the majestic movement onward from strength to strength, from grace to glory.

And, first of all, be it remembered that in God's strange providence Protestantism was compelled at once to engage in a most terrible life-and-death struggle with Rome, one whose fury did not in the least abate for five or six generations, and which has continued to the present time. The new doctrine must establish a right to existence, must conquer standing ground for itself, define and then enlarge to the utmost its bounds in Christian countries. So that as yet there was neither much time nor energy left to expend upon the vast and even far more benighted regions beyond. In Babylon, out of which they in horror had lately fled, the reformers found a foe ever present, wily, unscrupulous, and most determined to crush them, and commonly with the ruthless civil power in close league and co-operation. The horrid enginery of the Inquisition was steadily at work, and the Jesuits were plotting destruction night and day. All Germany was in perpetual chaos, social, political, and religious. Recall the unspeakable desolations attending the almost constant "religious" wars of those dark days; the hapless and most tragic lot of the Waldenses and