

Our Contributors.

THE RELIGIONS OF THE WORLD.*

BY FIDELIS

It is only within recent years, and to a great extent through the influence of Prof. Max Muller, that the study of Comparative Religion has received anything like the attention it deserves. The beliefs which have nourished the religious life of so many millions of our fellow men should have a profound interest for every lover of humanity, especially to believers in that Holy Gospel which came to earth heralded by the proclamation of "good-will to men." As Max Muller lately observed in an article in the *Arena*, the Parliament of Religion held at Chicago, in 1893, was an "epoch-making" event, unparalleled in the history of the world, and tending greatly to promote among the nations an intelligent interest in religions other than their own. We are apt to appreciate the gain in this respect to the votaries of other religions much more than to ourselves. Yet, in our own day, it is of special importance that Christians should have some intelligent knowledge of the other great historical faiths, lest they fall into either of two extremes—on the one hand that of contemptuously ignoring other religions and the truths which they contain, or, on the other, zealously put before us by popular and plausible writers—thus pointed out by Principal Grant in the introduction to the admirable little book before us:

"When all religions are considered legitimate products of that faith in an unseen which is recognized as an essential part of man's constitution, the tendency on the part of hasty generalizers is to assume that Christianity can have no special claim, and that the differences between it and other religions are merely accidental. The true way to meet criticism of this kind is not by taking up a pharisaic attitude towards other religions, but by instituting a thorough and impartial examination and comparison of all." And the general reader who would be sorely perplexed to choose among the mass of literature recently published on this great subject, could not do better than take Principal Grant's very comprehensive and suggestive book as an introduction and guide to the general knowledge which he seeks. The book is intended, primarily, as an aid to "guilds" and other classes of intelligent young students towards some definite knowledge of the subject. The author, after some valuable general remarks on the universality of the religious instinct in man, and the proof it affords of man's high dignity and "chief end"—the basis of moral truth which is common to all forms of organized religion, and the general relation between Judaism and Christianity—proceeds to give a general outline of the history and teaching of each of the great historic religions—Mohammedanism, Confucianism, Hinduism, and Buddhism—with a most interesting analysis of the strength and weakness of each, especially as contrasted with the fuller light of our own holy religion.

The chapters on Mohammed and Mohammedanism are specially interesting to those who have often been puzzled by "the strange spectacle of a religion coming into being in the clear light of day." The founder of no religion has been so persistently misunderstood as the founder of Islam. Carlyle said, even in his day, that, in the general opinion, Mohammed "was simply a scheming impostor, and his religion a miserable piece of spiritual legerdemain." And there are probably many who think so still. To such we would commend what we believe to be the true picture, given by Dr. Grant, of the earnest contemplative young enthusiast—of his years in the solemn solitudes of the desert—like another Elijah or John the Baptist, absorbed in meditation on great unseen realities, of his disgust with

the idolatries and crude religious conceptions of the surrounding tribes, with their debased Judaism or perverted Christianity, of his self-consecration to the worship of the true God, as he was enabled to conceive Him, of his faithfulness to his convictions and self-imposed mission in the face of danger and persecution, and of the departure or Hegira to Medina, where he was to find refuge and promulgate the tenets of the new religion, declining, however, from the original purity of his life under the insidious influences of power and prosperity. As regards the wonderful rapidity with which the new religion spread itself through Asia Minor, Southern Europe and Northern Africa, and the vitality it has since maintained, Dr. Grant's explanation meets the conditions of the problem and will satisfy most thoughtful readers. We can only quote a sentence or two, but this will suggest its lines:

"The Jew refused the guidance of his own prophets who would have led him to the Christ; and the Christian severed the truth of Jesus from life, forgetting that the eternal meaning of His name is that He is the Lord of this world, that His rule extends over it, and that His kingdom is to be in deed as well as in creed, in power and not in barren profession. Mohammed was quite sure that this world is God's world, that God is its sovereign, that man's place in it is to be a servant of God, and that he had this message from God to deliver to his countrymen, and to all men. Christendom will fail in attracting Mohammedans until it re-asserts this message with apostolic power, and is also true to the special principles of the religion of Jesus, as Mohammedans have been to the truth of the sovereignty of God." As the advocates of Islam have, of late, come to the front in many directions, it is well that Christians should have some definite conceptions as to both the strength and weakness of this wide-spread and aggressive religion.

In the chapters on Confucianism, Dr. Grant takes us over the history of Confucius, and of the wonderful way in which he moulded the beliefs and life of the Chinese, as it would almost seem for all time. He shows, in a striking way, the contrast between the matter-of-fact, prosaic Confucius, with his Benjamin Franklin philosophy, and the more spiritually-minded Lao-Tse, whose deeper knowledge of human nature taught him the futility of seeking to change it by mere external rules of conduct, and gave him a glimpse of the necessity for a spiritual regeneration. The *doctrinaires* of our own day, who imagine that, by a more complete education—and a secular one at that—all the evils of society are going to be weeded out, might gain a needed lesson from this brief record of the signal failure of the great experiment of Confucius and its result in the present moral condition of the Chinese. As our author says: "The fact of the failure of Confucianism is patent. The causes of its failure are that Confucius based religion on man, and ignored God. Consequently, he had only an inadequate conception of man's real dignity, but also a poor ideal for man, while his religion was destitute of spiritual dynamic. In personal union with God is our true dignity and the pledge that the individual and society shall go on to perfection."

Of the complex beliefs of Hinduism, it is possible, in so small compass, to give only a bare outline, but a connected and coherent outline will be welcome to many to whom Hinduism seems a hopeless chaos of conflicting ideas, of transcendental philosophy and grossest superstition. The sketches of both Hinduism and Buddhism will have a special interest for many, as giving them some idea of the ground in which many of our missionaries have to work. Buddhism, as associated with a personality so intensely interesting and morally attractive as that of Gautama, will have a greater interest in itself, and also because of the propagandist movement going on with much zeal among a school of modern Buddhists who are endeavoring to restore the Buddhist faith to

its original purity as taught by Buddha himself. In the chapter on its strength and weakness, Dr. Grant briefly, but suggestively, reviews its many-sided and sometimes apparently contradictory developments, and points out how Christianity meets the needs of Buddhism, as of every other defective form of religion. He points out a needed moral when he says:

"Speaking broadly, it may be said that the Brahmins offered men religion, and observances without morality. Gautama offered them morality without religion, and his system was accepted for a time as the more reasonable of the two. Yet, while both have failed, Buddhism has been the greatest failure; and its failure proves that morality cannot be permanent, when dissociated from its root in God."

We have said enough to give some slight idea of the interest and value of the contents of this useful little book which, tersely and concisely written, is packed full of information and thought, and will well stand two or three readings. It is, however, small enough to be read by even the busiest, and cheap enough to be accessible to the great mass of readers. Guilds and Missionary Societies will be greatly benefitted by its perusal; and while it is admirably fitted to widen general knowledge on a most interesting and important subject, it must also, tend to stimulate in Christian Missions that intelligent and sympathetic interest which is fully developed only when we gain some correct appreciation of the modes in which, in all ages and amid many difficulties, the human mind has been dimly groping after God, if happily it might find Him.

REMIT ANENT THE MISSION FIELD SUPPLY.

BY REV. D. CAMPBELL.

In your issue of January 23rd, page 56, is a paragraph on the proposed regulation that students and ministers from other churches be required to take one year in the mission field. It is said that opposition will come mainly from students and vacant congregations. There are statements and insinuations made regarding these which do not appear charitable. The writer of the paragraph says that "at bottom the question is whether students and vacant congregation rule the Church." Is such a statement concerning those who up to the present time appear to have shown no opposition to the proposal, and who have comparatively no voice in the ruling of the Church at all, not premature and unwarranted? Does the fact that these have little or no voice in the ruling of the Church not claim for them the most honest and liberal consideration of those who do rule? The paragraph referred to would also throw suspicion on the character or standing of any student who may in this matter differ from its author. It claims that "the best students always carry out loyally . . . the reasonable regulations of the Church;" and, again, "the best students will always be willing to do what the Church needs to have done." The insinuations here do not seem just. If we examine history we might find some, not poor men, nor poor students, who caused no little commotion by rejecting the regulations of the Church. The reference to "ministers now occupying influential positions in the Church" voluntarily giving more than a year to home mission work has no bearing on the question. There is a difference between voluntary and compulsory service. The mission fields, of the West at least, are worthy of the voluntary service not only of a year, but of a life time; and no man deserves to be called a hero, or lauded for self-sacrifice who would not give it. It is the compulsory part that is objectionable. One could easily render a service in love for his Church and its work, which it would unman him to give with the feeling that it was compulsory. Besides we do not believe that a compulsory work is a blessing either to the giver or the cause.

The insinuation that a minister from another Church who would not come in and quietly walk off to a year's work in the mission field is not a good man seems unfair. We know some who have come from other Churches who have proved themselves good men on the home mission field. Whether they would have done so under the proposed regulation is another question. If there is any objection to receiving a man from another Church why not manfully reject him and not shut him out by unpleasant regulations.

We take objection also to the reference to vacant congregations who "may have evicted their pastors." There are congregations bearing patiently with pastors to their own injury. It ought to be understood by this time that when a pastor in a Presbyterian congregation is evicted the fault is not with the congregation. The loyalty of Presbyterian people to their pastors deserves no unkind insinuations.

The whole argument seems to be: make the regulations and crush all opposition by force of authority. If students are not satisfied "let them apply any remedy they deem proper," which evidently means let them get out. If ministers from other churches do not like it "they can remain away." "The opposition from vacancies should not be considered formidable." Crush it. This feels more like popery than like Presbyterianism, Christianity or common sense.

We acknowledge the need of supply for the mission fields, but the proposed regulation seems like the resurrection into spiritual life of the dead custom of hazing. When a man is licensed he is acknowledged by the Church to be qualified for the ministry. Is it right then for the Church to make it compulsory for him, willing or unwilling, to labor in a particular sphere without placing all ministers equally under the authority of the Church courts? Why discriminate against licentiates. In what capacity is he to work during the year, as a catechist or ordained missionary. There are those who could not accept ordination as an ordained missionary. They must then work as a catechist during the year. Is this just? This regulation ignores a man's own conviction as to what field he should work in. According to present regulations in one of our colleges a student is almost under the necessity to spend a year out before entering theology. This should be taken into consideration.

Nelson, B. C., February 7th, 1895.

A REMONSTRANCE.

MR. EDITOR,—In a recent issue of your paper appeared a letter from the Superintendent of Missions in which were a few things not altogether too complimentary to our students. In the beginning of the letter we were led to believe that the graduating classes of our colleges are more busily engaged in seeking pulpits than in attending to their more immediate duties. This every fair-minded person will observe is anything but a true representation of what is the real state of the case. A few, whose position in their classes has always been that of a hobbling march in the rear, are, for obvious reason, thus busying themselves, but the great body of the students have to preach their first sermon for a call after their final examinations. Some never preach for such calls, but the reason is, not that congregations prefer youth to old age, but because they prefer competency to incompetency. Incompetent students have as little opportunity of obtaining these calls as so-called "old" ministers.

That the students as a body are not opposed to being driven for a year on the mission fields, before licensure, leads us to believe that the writer has been misinformed. When the question of a Summer Session was first mooted it was represented that the students of Manitoba College had unanimously endorsed it and that long before the matter had ever been brought before them for consideration. Much was made of this

*"The Religions of the World." By G. M. Grant, D.D., Principal Queen's University, Kingston, London: A. & C. Black. Edinburgh: T. & F. Clark. Toronto: W. Briggs.