

PROTESTANT MISSIONS BEFORE CAREY.

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Whatever the reason may have been, certain it is that the great Reformers of the sixteenth century, with all their lofty enthusiasm and holy zeal, were possessed of no pervading and consuming desire to carry the Gospel to the ends of the earth. In the multitude of their fervid thoughts we find no reference to the sublime privilege, the bounden duty, or the possibility even of making Christ and His salvation known to every creature. This was in part on account of the tremendous pressure of such external hindrances as were named in a former article. It came about also in part because of the fact that their zeal was so largely not evangelistic, but polemic instead—anti-catholic, theological, ecclesiastical. Thus, as we have seen, the range of their intellectual and spiritual vision extended only to the boundaries of Christendom. The Mohammedans—"Turks," as the dreadful word was—were thought of only to be feared and hated, while, as for the heathen, they had no dealings with them, or knowledge of them. In addition, it appears to be well established that missionary fervor was smothered by certain eschatological misconceptions. As many earnest souls read the Scriptures and the signs of the times, not only was the world "very evil," but "the times were waxing late." The Gospel had already reached its extreme limit in terrestrial space and the end of all things was at hand. The world was not to be converted, but was soon to be destroyed. And it has even been suggested, though perhaps without sufficient evidence, that in the fact that from 1540 onward, the papacy, through the Jesuits and other similar orders, was propagating itself with such tremendous vigor in all the new-found regions, the Reformers and their successors, in their intense anti-papal prejudice, discovered a sufficient reason why they should undertake nothing of the sort.

The story of what was attempted for the salvation of mankind is so brief as to be most painful and humiliating. In 1555, at the request of the great Coligny, Calvin despatched fourteen pious men to Brazil, of whom, however, only two were clergymen; they went out more as settlers than as heralds of good news, and besides the "mission" met with speedy and utter failure. In 1559 Gustavus Vasa (not the Swedish Church or the Swedish Christians) was moved to send the Gospel to the Lapps, and his successors carried on what he had begun. Churches were built, schools were opened, and in later years religious books were translated into the vernacular, but only the slightest spiritual results ensued. And the reason becomes evident when we are told that all services were held in Swedish, which the people did not understand, and that in the winter months the population was gathered by royal edict to pay tribute and to be indoctrinated into the faith. For those were the days of universal State and Church. And these few lines contain in outline the entire narrative of Protestant missions undertaken during the first century after the Reformation. And it is well-nigh as brief as that famous chapter upon "snakes in Iceland."