

THE PRINCIPLE OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONS.*

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[This condensed and vigorous argument on the Philosophy of Missions we reproduce from the *Homiletic Review* (June, 1884), with the consent of its esteemed author, who in a note to the editors kindly says: "Your new venture in missionary literature pleases me very much. We need just such an ecumenical missionary magazine."—Eds.]

We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification. For even Christ pleased not himself.—Rom. xv: 1-3.

THESE words outline the philosophy of Christian missions. There is an "ought" here, before whose imperative even Christ bowed, an obligation transcending all positive statutes, essentially divine. There is reasonableness here, for the obligation has regard to the neighbor's good. The energy thus exerted is, by implication, effective, inasmuch as Christ Himself leads the way in its exercise. Yet is it efficient without overriding personal responsibility, for the end is edification, up-building personal character.

1. Here, then, is the obligation of the Church to evangelize the world: the specific commission, so often quoted and expounded, is only the application of a universal principle antedating and underlying it—the strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak. The obligation meets us only when moral life appears; but there it is of primary and absolute authority. Great prominence is given, in some departments of modern science, to what is called the "struggle for existence" and the consequent "survival of the fittest." Nature is regarded as a great battle-field, where the warfare is fierce, merciless and incessant; where strength is invested with the right and the certainty of sovereignty. And it has been claimed by not a few that this law of nature is no less supreme in human life and history. The strong are entitled to rule, and before their behests the weak are to be dumb. We cannot, however, quite make up our minds that personal force is entitled to rule. It seems to us that the world needs wise men and good men, even more than strong men. We do not despise greatness, but we feel that it ought to be the handmaid of reason and of righteousness. Our native intuitions therefore teach us that, whatever may be true in the realm of nature, where moral law is not operative, in human life strength is secondary and subordinate. It has no title to sovereignty, except in so far as sovereignty is secured in obedience to what is reasonable and right—and that is simply reaffirming the apostle's thought that strength is under the obligation of service. Our pre-eminence makes us debtors to the race. Our superior advantages are a disgrace, and will prove a

* Preached at the ordination of Rev. Mr. Dwight as missionary to Western Turkey.