

MISSION FIELD.

SPEECH BY BISHOP OF WINCHESTER AT THE BOURNE-MOUTH MEETING OF THE S.P.G. SOCIETY.

About three hundred and fifty years ago, the Church of England threw of the power of the Bishop of Rome, and established what was thought to be a freedom of faith and religion. The reformers of that day said they had returned as near as they possibly could to the state of religion which prevailed in the earliest ages of the Christian Church. In most respects I think they said what was true; but there was one point in which the Reformation, or at least the restoration to the primitive faith and practices, was defective, and that was this: the primitive Church was essentially a missionary Church. Almost all its life and actions were missionary in spirit. For the first part of the three hundred and fifty years since the Reformation, for nearly the first half, there was no missionary life in the Church of England. England was active enough in her conquests, in making slaves where she conquered, but she made no conquests for Christ, and was not found freeing the nations from the slavery of error. That was a very heavy indictment to bring against the history of our National Church and religion. It was not until 1701 that their National Church sent out missionaries to the heathen, and then it was that the S.P.G. was established. If nothing more could be said for the Society than that fact, I think it is sufficient to commend it to the support of all Christians. The original idea was to send out missionaries to those of our countrymen who were emigrating to distant colonies, and for some years the income of the Society did not exceed £1,500, and it was only in late years that it reached anything like a deserving sum. The intention of the founders of the Society was that not only should it provide for the spiritual wants of our own countrymen abroad, but that its operations should be extended to the heathen world. It has done a marvellous work on the Continent. The great American Church with its large number of Bishops and dioceses, and the work it is doing in civilisation and Christianity, owes its very existence to the work of the S.P.G. To whatever place our countrymen went, this Society extended its work, built Churches and Schools, and sent missionaries, so that our brethren should not be without the means of grace. And then again as regards the heathen world. It is sometimes said in reproach to this Society that it is not so much a missionary society to the heathen as some of the other societies. God forbid that I should say anything in derogation of any other society; I am speaking this afternoon about the one society, and I maintain that it is a great missionary society to the heathen. Our own Queen, as Empress of India, has the largest Mohammedan empire in the world, and can be

said to rule over the greatest heathen population on the face of the earth. All these facts show the vastness of the field which is open to the S.P.G.

(To be Continued.)



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