

COMPARATIVE RELIGION AND THE MISSIONARY STUDENT.

IT is an impression current in many quarters that the study of Comparative Religion is of little practical benefit, if not productive of real injury, to divinity students. We are persuaded that this impression is largely begotten of misunderstanding. Doubtless it has arisen from the fact that many of the leaders in this field of investigation have been men whose interests were not in the line of evangelical Christianity, and the results of whose studies have been thought to be inimical to the unique character of the Gospel. However that may be, any reasonable consideration of the field, the method and the results of this science will show, we believe, the falsity of such a view.

We purpose to present some evidences of its usefulness to a particular class of persons, —to those who are going to preach the Gospel in foreign lands. In discussing this matter, three pre-suppositions are natural : First, the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit. All missionary work presupposes this. Men are not going into the dark places of the earth, relying upon their own intellectual powers, with a message which they have worked out for themselves as a result of scientific investigation—an eclectic compound of self-begotten notions. They deliver a message, and possess a power, not their own. Second, the missionary goes forth with the fundamental purpose to convert men to the love and service of Jesus Christ. He does not propose to give them instruction on all topics, to inculcate the latest notions of philosophy or science, to enlighten them on politics, or art, or even theology. His is a purely practical aim, the highest and noblest aim,—to win men for the Gospel, to change their lives, to bring them into fellowship with the Son of God. Third, it is pre-supposed that the missionary student, recognizing the indispensable necessity of the guidance of the Holy Spirit as fundamental, and holding firmly to the supreme purpose of winning the world for Christ, regards it as simply a plain duty to prepare himself to the fullest possible extent for this great work, that thus he may be able most worthily to co-operate with the Holy Spirit, and to obtain the largest success in the work of evangelization.

If these things are so, the question proposed is this, What is the place of the Comparative Study of Religion in the preparation for foreign mission work ? To answer this question properly one must understand something of the nature of the science of Comparative Religion. We may say very briefly —for this topic could be enlarged into an article by itself—that Com-