

MISSION FIELD.

PROMOTION OF RELIGION AT HOME BY FOREIGN MISSIONS.

A Paper read at the Bishop of Ely's Visitation by the Rev. Francis Pott, Rector of Northill.

The first and indispensable step to the promotion of religion in ourselves is, no doubt, to realise what Religion means; what it is to us to have God for our God, and to hold the truth of God as it is revealed to us in Jesus Christ, by Whom Grace and Truth came; to realise how that Truth has made us free; how by that Grace we are what we are in Him. And so we are now to inquire why it is that a closer contact in thought and interest with Missions to the heathen is a means of thus realising our own undeserved position as Christians.

I am to assume that we all acknowledge the call to support Missions as a duty. What I have to suggest is that this duty should be, and why it can be, and will be, a help to other duties and a higher religious life.

It was well said by Cardinal Newman (in one of those thoughtful sermons preached long ago to a country congregation when he was still ministering loyally in the Church of England) that 'Every act of obedience has a tendency to strengthen our conviction of duty and its blessedness. Our duties to God and man are not only duties, but they are means of enlightening our eyes and making our faith apprehensive. Every sacrifice makes us more zealous; every self-denial makes us more devoted.' This of course is spoken of all duties, generally; and it is only as a great general truth that I ask you to accept and remember it, while I take up the particular aspect of it which the Bishop has put before us, viz., that there is no duty which so directly begets duty and the love of duty as the support of Missions; and this because, if there is no better way to promote our religious life than the realization of our religious position and privileges, there can be no better way to do this than to begin by trying to realise, if indeed we call, the state of those who are without it,—without Christ, strangers from the covenant of promise, having no hope,—in this world of pain and mystery, of sin and death, 'without God' to bless and enlighten either it or them.

I have sometimes thought that it must have strengthened the faith of the early Christian converts, when once set at liberty by the truth, to have before their eyes the degraded condition of their still heathen neighbors, however it may have tried the steadiness of others not yet fully built up in the faith. God forbid that we should wish to run the risk of such a trial for ourselves or others, or cease to thank God that we are not exposed to it; but this thankfulness for ourselves will be increased by the realization of the horrible condition of those now still in heathenism, which the

reports of Missionaries and others will in some measure bring home to the mind of those among us who read and think seriously over them and pledge their interest to them by their active support.

I said just now 'realise it if we can'—for I am sure we cannot realize it in all its depth. We must remember that, just as in the Bible the 'abominations' of idolatry are not openly and definitely described, so the general and reserved statements in Missionary reports of the deplorably degraded state of the heathen, even when most suggestive, do not and cannot enable us to realise, even with the help of much imagination, all the depth of the misery, moral and mental, and I believe I may say physical, in which they live out their dark lives, and from which by the truth and grace we have been preserved.

And this is true not only of the savage races, but of civilised unbelievers like the followers of the False Prophet, and civilised heathen like the Hindoos.

But take only the savages, as we call them, the wholly untaught—not perhaps morally the worst as regards responsibility,—and let us try to imagine for ourselves the intolerable state of dread, for instance, in which they are kept by their conception (if they have any at all) of the Supreme Being as an evil Spirit, cruel implacable, jealous, spiteful,—or by their belief in the secret but ever active power for vengeance or caprice, of the departed spirits of their fathers, and by their abject credulity and subjection to the machinations of witchcraft. It is hard to imagine. I have sometimes wished that we could obtain some really true notion of the mind, the thoughts, the conceptions of an unenlightened savage. The lack of a common language and a common standard of comparison must always make it impossible even to Missionaries living among them to quite enter their minds and understand what the savage really feels about himself, about life and death, and such things, especially those of them whose enjoyment of natural life is limited by weakness, or captivity, or drudgery,—the women, the children, the aged and worn out and cast off—the weakly, the despised for their weakness,—what their inner life of thought is. It would help us to know what the light of life in Christ means to us.

[To be continued.]

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