

Mission and Missionaries

III

So far we have not even touched upon one particular branch of mission labour. We called it a branch; it is really a root; it forms the foundation of all true work. It is the *raison d'être* of the apostolate, whether in olden times or in our days. Clerical, educational and medical agents must enter upon this work as soon as they are fluent in the native language. We mean preaching in churches, schools, hospitals, and in the open bazaars. This now includes sermons, with exordium and peroration, and a logical division in three parts, such as the learned *moulvi*, delivers in the Amritsar city church—as well as simple words spoken to the country folks, who taking their shoes from off their feet and baring their heads, clad in long white garments, sit on the mud floor of a village room—and conversations carried on under the shade of a banyan tree, or at a roadside well.

Numerous as are the societies and different as are the methods on which they act, the messengers whom they have sent are still more varied in character. "The double first Oxford and fellow of his college," the trained scientific theologian and philologist, Ph.D. of a German university, the Edinburgh M.D., as well as the farmer, mechanic, and labourer, have worked side by side on this mission-field, and each one in accordance with the training he had received. The university professor who lectured to the students of a college—the "man of the world," the "*Amir* missionary," who entertained largely, and kept open house for Europeans and natives—the mendicant friar, "the *faqir* missionary," who, dressed in a rough cassock, a girdle round his waist and sandals on his feet, went preaching from village to village—all these different types of ancient and modern apostles have their representatives in the Punjab.

History indeed repeats itself. It would be difficult to go through the records of missions from their commencement in modern times, about 1600 A.D. to the present day, and to discover any kind of institution or any type of person, whose counterpart could not be found in the province of which we are speaking. Christianity has come nigh unto the races and religions of the Punjab, with all the powers of which it is possessed, with its powers of teaching, healing, civilising, of holding together human society, of building up communities, of founding churches. Not its doctrine merely, but its manners and morals, its science and civilisation have been offered to a people whose manners have been rigidly fixed by caste, whose civilisation is far older than ours, and who are possessed of intellectual and spiritual treasures of great value. The two combatants are well matched. For the non-Christian society has on its side the forces of the most perfect living polytheism, with the most subtle philosophy at one end and degraded demon worship at the other end of the scale—as well as the forces of the two great monotheistic religions, Islam and Buddhism.

And what has been the result of a struggle which has now lasted for longer than one generation? We have hitherto avoided statistics. We cannot now spare our readers a few figures. There were in the Punjab in 1851, ten foreign missionaries, in 1861 forty, in 1871 thirty-eight. During this second decade the number of the European clergy remained stationary, if anything it decreased. The native clergy on the other hand rose from three to fourteen. The number of native Christians in 1861, after ten years of mission-work, amounted to 1136; in 1871, after twenty years, to about 1900. These figures do not however include Roman Catholics.

Thirty years of labour show the number of converts and of their descendants, of all denominations, at the figure of 3823. If we take into account the births and baptisms since 1881, when the census was taken, the number of native Christians in the Punjab may be put down roughly as 4000. The population increased seven per cent. during the third decade; the Hindu and Mohammedan religions remained practically stationary; the Sikh religion declined; but the Christian religion increased 38½ per cent.—more than five times as fast as the population.¹ There were in 1881 thirty central mission-stations, exclusive of out-stations; one society alone maintaining fifteen central, and thirteen branch-stations. In 1871, there were 10-11,000 pupils, boys and girls, in the various mission schools; and about 28,000 numbers of publications had been printed by the various tract societies. In addition a large fraction of the 193,000 Hindustani and 97,000 English publications, which had been issued in India, found their way into the Punjab.

The mission stations can perhaps give us the truest picture of the actual work which has been done. In 1881 there were thirty such stations; they are scattered over an area of 140,000 square miles, and a population of 23,000,000 souls. Every station, we take it, has on the average two European missionaries, one European lady, a native clergyman, one or two native catechists, readers, schoolmasters and hospital assistants. There are only two cases where we can fix the actual proportion of missionaries to population. The proportion was as 1:333,333 amongst Afghans. As 1:280,000 amongst Punjabis. The number of converts from the latter had been almost trebled during one decade, and thirty converts were counted to each missionary.

We have purposely avoided statistics as much as possible. For the world is getting suspicious of figures. And perhaps the world is right: figures do not prove everything. Fortunately

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men cannot be counted like heads of cattle, they might rather be compared to diamonds. Statistical tables add them up, as if they were all alike; but the value of one may be ten thousand times that of another.

We let our eyes pass from the Punjab to the great mission field of the world. We find that the work and the results are in both similar. The scale on which operations have been carried on is, of course, entirely different in the different spheres. The proportion of missionaries to population could not be fixed for China or Africa; and it would be vain to expect to find in a newly-occupied country or continent the elaborate machinery which has in the course of a hundred years been furnished for India. But the essential character of Christianity on one hand, of the non-Christian religions on the other, is identical throughout the world; and the results of the influences of one brought to bear on the other, must also be the same.

When we read of the low-caste population in the neighbourhood of Amritsar, the sacred city of the Sikhs, turning Christian in large numbers—when we hear of whole families and villages being baptised into that Name which always has been amongst heathens a term of abuse—then we are reminded of the early successes of German missionaries in Lohardagga, or amongst the Santhals and Karens.

¹ Sir C. Aitchison's speech. Simla, June 12.

More than that, we see a likeness to those greater movements which have taken place in the South Sea islands, and in Madagascar. We meet with the same features everywhere. The change that came over the native population was sudden and unexpected, even to those who had laboured long to bring it about, and the difficulty the ministers experienced was to keep the movement within bounds, to give those that applied for baptism the needful instruction, and those that had been baptised the necessary surveillance.

It would be easy to declaim against the poverty, the ignorance, the traces of superstition and vice that are still discernible amongst the Christian sweepers of the Amritsar district. And the same charges could, no doubt, be brought against Santhals or South Sea islanders. But the careful observer could not fail to discover that the adoption of the new creed has been also the commencement of a new life for them. "Those that were not a people have now become a people." Those that in the economy of the world filled the place of sweepers and scavengers, whose value was fixed according to the low offices which they performed, have now been taught to regard themselves as human beings. Schools and books, and the elementary means of civilisation, are beginning to do their work amongst them. Undoubtedly they have been—or are being—given their place in the family of human nations.

Those that stand highest in the scale of the Hindu polytheistic creed have also felt the influence of Christianity. It would not be difficult to point out Brahmins in the Punjab, men of note and of standing amongst their countrymen, who have employed their profound knowledge of the Vedas to bring home to Hindus, in their own language and imagery the truths of the Trinity and Incarnation. They have—like the Alexandrine Jews of Philo's time—endeavoured to reconcile their own philosophy to Christian theology. The doctrines of the religion which they have embraced have received shape and colouring from the faith they formerly held. It is difficult for those who once believed in Brahma; in a threefold revelation, and in many consecutive incarnations of the divine principle, to look upon the corresponding articles of the Christian faith with the same eyes as we do. It is natural for them to embody these articles in definitions which have been taken from the Vedas. These definitions take hold upon the Hindu mind.

The men capable of harmonising, even in crudest fashion, the partial truth, which may be found in other religions, with the perfect truth, "the word" revealed in Christ, are of necessity very few. But their influence is widely felt. Their kin are to be found in Benares and Muttra, and may we not add, in China and Japan? For though polytheistic religions are different in appearance, though the bottles are of different shape, yet the wine that is poured into them is one and the same. The work which was attempted at Alexandria in the second and third century of our era, is being done over again in the Punjab, in India, in Japan. That men should be found of sufficient mental calibre to conceive the idea of casting their new faith in the mould of their former belief, is a sign of the unimpaired strength of that religion which once laid under contribution both the Greek philosophy and the Roman polity. In all this there may be peril of grave error, but the fact is one that must be noted.

Let it be clearly understood that we distinguish between the matter and form, between the metal and the mould in which it may be cast. The fine gold of revealed religion is one and the same in the far East and the distant West; but the forms in which it finds expression may present differences of clime and race and nationality. We speak even now in Europe of Western and of Eastern Christianity. But modern missionaries have taught us to remember that what has been conventionally called the "East," is not the end either of the physical or of the spiritual. To the

east of Palestine and Mesopotamia there live on the highlands of Asia those mighty Mongol tribes which twice in the fourth century, and again in the fourteenth, well-nigh overran Europe, and which might attempt a third attack could they but find a leader. There dwell in the valleys of the Indus and the Ganges those peoples who are blood of our blood, and whose language is like unto our own. There exist in Eastern Asia hundreds of millions who are only now waking up to the fact that they are members of the great human family of nations.

Is it too much to say, that if ever "the gold and fine gold" of Christ's religion obtains currency in these different countries, it will not bear everywhere the same cast and stamp? We speak of Eastern and Western, of Greek and

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Latin Christianity; is it—or rather will it be—incongruous to speak of Mongol, of Chinese, of Hindu Christianity? "God is greater than our heart." The very greatness of our religion will perhaps show itself in the manner in which it adapts itself, becomes assimilated to the minds of various races. Its essential verities belong to regions which know no change; but may there not be realms of Christian thought and feeling which the great races of the East may conquer for themselves?

We are hardly able to even touch on the vexed question of missions to the Mohammedans. The Trans-Indus stations give a fair idea of the work that has been done amongst the followers of the prophet. That work has been carried on within very limited confines. Only in a few places on the Afghan frontier, in Aden, in Northern Egypt, and in some portions of Eastern Africa, has Christianity come in contact with undiluted Islam. And everywhere, we believe, the results have been the same. The great body of the "believers" have stood aloof, have been hostile to Christian preaching. But insensibly the words against which they protest have stolen into their minds. Believers in Mohammed and in Jesus have learned to lay stress on those parts of the Koran which are least repugnant to the teaching of the New Testament. Mohammedans in India when they seriously discuss the questions whether the "holy war," or the enforced conversion of unbelievers, is enjoined in the Koran, show how much they have learned from the Sermon on the Mount. There have not been wanting men in - India and in Africa who have clearly seen the historical and logical impossibility of the position assumed in the Koran, and who have, so to speak, transferred their allegiance from Mohammed to Jesus, embracing their new faith with a zeal, a vigour, and a fervour which has almost compensated for the smallness of their numbers.

The smaller mission field is a picture of the larger. The question whether Christianity is really spreading has been answered by a careful survey of the results. But to return to the Punjab. Whatever the numerical success of missionary labour may have been, it cannot be denied that Christianity is still foreign to the people. It has been brought from the Far West, it has been planted with painful labour in the rocky ground of the frontier province. It does not seem to be like the tree whose roots once struck so deep in Asiatic soil. When families of low-caste sweepers, when young, men who have passed through mission schools forsake their kith and kin and throw in their lot with the Christians, when they resolve to dress and eat and live and worship like the padre whom they respect, then their conversion is registered in missionary reports. It strengthens the cause of morality, of true civilisation in the country. But it does not help to rouse a national movement tending towards Christianity. Such conversions, if regarded as numerical results, may not appear proportionate to the trouble and labour that has been expended

upon them. But when we find Mohammedan *moultvies* devoting their learning and fiery ardour to the cause of Christianity; high-caste Brahmins accepting the ritual and the theology of the Christian Church; Hindu penitents substituting the asceticism of the West for the sufferings they have imposed upon themselves; large numbers finding in the religion they have adopted a stronger binding force than in the caste they have forsaken—then we come upon signs which show unmistakably that the religion of the West is returning to the East.

It may be that the visible results of mission work have not been hitherto in proportion to the means employed. It is equally certain that numbers as such do not really represent the sphere of Christian influences. They reach far and wide, the day will declare them. The tribe, the race, the caste, which first embraces Christianity, will, we sincerely believe, rise to the leadership of that most complex body, Indian Society. It is not impossible that a change of religion will create a change of the social system, and place first those who are now last. It is not likely that such a revolution will be accomplished silently. Indeed the analogies of Christianity in the fourth century, and of Protestantism in the sixteenth, lead us to expect the contrary. "The religion of slaves and freed men" ascended only after violent struggles the throne of Caesar. Agrarian disturbances in England and Germany during the time of the Reformation followed the proclamation of the great doctrine that priests and laymen are alike before God. Looking beyond to-day, to the vast complexities of interests at work, it is not improbable that we shall see political convulsions ere "the religion of sweepers and outcasts" obtains the dominion of our Indian Empire. These convulsions may be the birth-throes of a new era.

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