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I.—LITERARY.

THE TESTING SYSTEM FOR MINISTERIAL STUDENTS IN THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF IRELAND.

The testing system for ministerial students in the Southern Presbyterian Church is far from giving universal satisfaction. No proposed changes have met with a favorable reception at the hands of the majority of our rulers. But all parties are ready to admit that practically the examining of our candidates is very often most imperfect and unsatisfactory. Laxity is the common characteristic of most of the examinations conducted by the Presbyteries, while incompetence on the part of the examiners is not unheard of.

We are not concerned here to inquire whether the trouble springs from the requirements of the Book, or from the nature of the personnel of the Presbyteries—whether the standard set up in our Constitution is too high, or the material of our Presbyteries too low. We merely affirm as an acknowledged fact that there is dissatisfaction with the system by which we test the students' qualifications for the work of the ministry.

This being so, it may be fairly assumed that an account of the testing system in application in a sister church of noble repute will be received with interest. We do not think of advocating the adoption of the Irish scheme by our own church. We hope simply to stir up the minds of our brethren, by giving them a new plan to think on, to the bettering, in a way which shall seem good to them, our testing system.

FOREIGN MISSIONS IN THE FIRST AND NINETEENTH CENTURIES.

The history of the early Christian Church is the history of missions. "The dispensation of the fulness of times" had just been inaugurated; the Messiah had come, and his glorious works, teachings, death and resurrection were filling many with wonder, gratitude and love; converts full of new born ardor were eagerly asking, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" the catholic spirit of the Master was infusing itself into his disciples, and they were learning that henceforth there was to be "neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free; but Christ all, and in all." And just as the Lord Redeemer was about to ascend his mediatorial throne, this last command and promise rang out to the little band, "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature; and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." Fired with zeal by all the wondrous things they had witnessed and experienced, nerved with power from on high after that the Holy Ghost had come upon them, the disciples "went forth and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word with signs following." Throughout Palestine, Syria, Asia Minor, Macedonia, Greece, Italy, and remoter parts of the then continents, they bore the banner of the Cross, amid tribulation and distress and persecution, famine, nakedness, peril and sword; in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in watchings, in fastings—they ran with patience the race that was set before them.

We can find no parallel to this spirit of missionary enterprise until after the lapse of seventeen centuries, nearly three hundred years after the Reformation, the Protestant church awoke to a realization of the truth that Christ's kingdom is world-wide in its scope, and that the prime function of the church is the proclamation of the Gospel in all lands. The rapid growth of this work of modern missions, its marvellous successes and its revolutionary effects upon so great a portion of the heathen world are well known facts. The mantle of the Apostolic church has fallen upon our shoulders. In the number of missionaries in the various fields, in the variety of agencies employed in the work of evangelization, in the amount of contributions to the cause, in the extent of territory covered by missionary aspira-

tions, in the number of converts, in the rapid growth of the enterprise, and in its stupendous results in Christianizing and civilizing the nations, the present century bears the palm as the age of missions.

It would be most interesting and instructive to compare the evangelistic work of our age with that of the Apostolic church, as to the chief obstacles encountered then and now, the favorable circumstances, the respective resources of the two churches, and the results accomplished by each. We can in this article merely touch on a few points.

I.—OBSTACLES ENCOUNTERED. 1. *Pride of race.* The stupid barbarism of the Hottentot does not more effectually close his mind against the reception of spiritual truth than does the blind vanity and bigotry of the Chinese and the Hindoo. Proud of their national antiquity, wrapt up in fond conceit of their social, intellectual and moral culture, these people look with contempt upon the foreign upstarts with their fantastic dress and manners and doctrines.

This was a tremendous difficulty in the way of the early Christians also. There was the Roman Empire, the haughty mistress of the world. The proudest boast of a man of that period was, "I am a Roman citizen." On the other hand, Judea was an insignificant province, whose people too were objects of intensest aversion. The Christians moreover were at first merely an obscure sect of the Jews, whose adherents came mostly from the humbler classes of society, and whom even their own countrymen despised; never was there a stronger contrast than between the Roman citizen and the Christian Jew. Then there were the Greeks, so proud of their attainments in art, philosophy, and letters. To him all other nations were "barbarians." What contumely then must the cultured Greek have heaped on the plain, blunt preachers, who came to teach them and yet treated with undisguised contempt all the so-called accomplishments of the rhetoricians.

Now while this same obstacle of race-pride confronts us to-day there is this great difference, that whereas those early preachers represented a despised people, and a religion that could boast of no prestige and of but few adherents, our missionaries represent nations that are honored and feared everywhere, and preach a religion that has transformed the civilized world.

2. *Odium attaching in many places to the Christian religion.* The very name "Christian" is to-day a stench in the nostrils of many heathen, because of outrages perpetrated by Christian nations or by

certain classes from Christian communities. England forced her opium traffic upon China by brute force. The same ship that carried missionaries to Africa would return laden with Negro captives to be sold into slavery in Christian lands. Whiskey and Bibles to-day form parts of the same cargo. While the missionary "preaches of righteousness and temperance and judgment," the sailor and the trader "walk in lasciviousness, lusts, and excess of wine." Then there are prejudices excited by the political machinations of the Romanists. Moreover, the heathen priests, image-makers, and others concoct the vilest slanders against the missionaries.

Various causes conspired to make the early Christians objects of odium to the Pagans. Their religion had its origin among a people despised and hated, and its adherents were a sect contemned even by their own people. Again, in the Roman Empire, the established religion was so intimately related to their political and social institutions, that a change of religion meant, to some extent, a revolution in government and in society. Any sect, therefore, that should threaten to overturn the established faith would bring down upon itself the odium and vengeance of the whole commonwealth. Now this was precisely the avowed mission of the Christians, and their rapid progress demonstrated their determination and zeal. There were also many minor causes which tended to fix upon them suspicion and hatred; their secret meetings, their retirement from public service to avoid heathen ceremonies, and their refusal to offer incense to the statues of the Emperors. Monstrous stories too were circulated about them; and every wile that could be devised by cunning priests and image-makers, was used to excite popular ill-feeling. Tacitus refers to Christians as "an object of odium to the human race;" and Pliny, the Elder, calls their religion "a depraved and immodest superstition." No wonder then that the devoted church passed through three centuries of fire and blood.

II.—FAVORABLE CONDITIONS. I shall mention only two; and it is a significant fact that in no other period have these conditions existed to such a remarkable extent as in those that we are now considering.

1. *Constant and rapid intercommunication and ease of access to heathen lands.* The Roman Empire stretched its vast network of fine roads and lines of traffic like an immense spider's web over much of Europe, Asia, and Africa. Through various centers of government, as Rome; of learning, as Athens; of trade, as Alexandria; and of religion, as Jerusalem—passed an endless stream of travellers.

"Alexandria, Antioch, Ephesus, Corinth," says Neander, "were centers of commercial, political, and literary correspondence; and hence became also the principal seats chosen for the proclamation of the Gospel. Commercial intercourse, which had served not merely for the exchange of worldly goods, but also for transmitting the nobler treasures of the mind, could now be used as means for diffusing the highest spiritual blessings." One circumstance in particular was of the greatest importance in disseminating Christian truth. The Jews were scattered through all parts of the Empire, and were also accustomed to resort periodically to Jerusalem. On the great day of Pentecost, "there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven." Peter preached that one day to "Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judea, and in Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in Lydia, and strangers of Rome, Jews and Proselytes, Cretes and Arabians." That sermon was repeated from one end of the Empire to another; seeds sown that day were carried about by the four winds of heaven, and bore fruit in almost every quarter of the globe.

The Christian student of history cannot fail to see in these propitious circumstances God's special preparation for "the dispensation of the fulness of times" "when he was to "gather together in one all things in Christ," both Jews and Gentiles. And now, after eighteen centuries, history is repeating itself. What a time of travel and commerce and international intercourse! This is the age of the steamboat and railroad and telegraph; when a trip from San Francisco to Honolulu or Yokohama is child's play compared with one in the olden time from Tyre to Spain; when one rides up and down the Ganges and the Congo on the railroad; and when European events of the morning are published in all the American evening papers. Then there is the printing-press strewing broadcast over the whole world Bibles, books, pamphlets, newspapers, and tracts in about 270 languages and dialects. "Many shall run to and fro; and knowledge shall be increased;" "the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."

2. *Decadence of hostile religions.* True, the early church had to contend in Egypt, Judea, Greece, and Rome, with prejudices that were the growth of centuries and with priestly classes that fought to the bitter end. "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" was their wrathful protest against Paul's preaching. These struggles of the old faiths, however, were but their death throes. The more en-

lightened thinkers were becoming thoroughly disgusted with the ancient superstitions, and the more devout were yearning after the living and true God. As we read of the gropings of those philosophers for some ray of light shed upon that mysterious Being, "seeking the Lord, if haply, they might feel after him, and find him," and of the cold despair with which they gave up the search, our sympathies are profoundly moved. There is a world of sadness in the phrase, "The unknown God." Many of those advanced thinkers became hardened agnostics, while others eagerly hailed the star of Bethlehem which shined on a better way.

So to-day, Moslem intolerance, Romish bigotry and persecuting malice, and the inordinate spiritual pride and caste jealousy of Buddhist and Brahmin, resist stubbornly the principles and practices of evangelical Christianity. Yet we hear of Brazilians and Mexicans recoiling with disgust from Romish fables and old wives' tales, of Hindoos deserting their Buddhist priests, and of Japanese eagerly asking for that religion that has so enlightened and exalted the Christian world. "Oahn's idols are no more!" is a cry echoed through many lands.

III. RESOURCES OF THE TWO CHURCHES COMPARED. As to numbers, the early Christians were but a feeble folk; and as to their social and material condition, we know that "not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, were called: but God chose the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God chose the weak things to confound the things that were mighty; and the base things of the world, and things that were despised, did God choose, yea, and things which were not to bring to nought things that were." As to their ministry, doubtless most of the preachers, from the necessities of the case, belonged to that class of whom Celsus jeeringly spoke, when he said that "wool-workers, cobblers, leather-dressers, the most illiterate and vulgar (common) of mankind, were zealous preachers of the Gospel." Such were the people that set out to bring a powerful and cultured Empire into worshipful subjection to a crucified Jew!

Now look at the Protestant church of the nineteenth century. Our membership number many millions, the richest, most intelligent and most influential of people. Our ministry compares favourably in scholarship with any other professions; and in the respect they command, the power they wield, the influence they exert, they surpass all others. Let such a church but once fully realize her tremendous responsibility and glorious privilege, seize her golden

opportunity, and utilize her abundant means and facilities, and the prayer, "Thy kingdom come," would soon be fully answered.

IV.—SUCCESES ACHIEVED. The great churches of Antioch, Ephesus, Thessalonica, Corinth, and Rome, soon bore witness to the faithfulness and zeal of the Apostolic church. At the close of the first century the Christians numbered perhaps 200,000; at the close of the third century about six millions, or one-twentieth of the population of the Roman Empire. Justin Martyr (A. D. 106) says: "There is not a nation, Greek or Barbarian, among whom prayers and thanksgiving are not offered to the Father in the name of the crucified Jesus." Tertullian (about A. D. 150) says: "Though of yesterday, we have filled every sphere of life—the exchange, the camp, the populace, the forum." In A. D. 324, Christianity was made the established religion of the Empire.

Thus the most despised and persecuted sect of a people whose very name was an object of detestation to Rome, had in three centuries succeeded, to a great extent, in demolishing the religions and revolutionizing the society and government of the proud Empire. The disciples of that Jesus upon whom the Roman power had inflicted contumely and cruel death, had brought the haughty Emperor himself to bow at their master's feet. A few uncultured fanatics (so-called), whose preaching had been characterized as "foolishness" had taught the conceited Greeks that higher wisdom of which their own boasted philosophy had never dreamed. A religion preached by men who were regarded as "ignorant and unlearned," "the most illiterate and common of mankind," and propagated at first chiefly among the lower classes of society—had gained for its adherents the wealthy and noble and cultured.

Of the marvellous successes of foreign missions in our own times, I need scarcely speak—the story is so familiar: the "Walled Kingdom" opening her gates to the preachers of the "Jesus' religion;" the "Sunrise Kingdom" hailing the morning glory of a new spiritual day, even "the sun of righteousness rising with healing in his wings;" India forsaking "the Light of Asia" for "the Light of the World;" the "Dark Continent" welcoming the Star of Bethlehem as it gleams athwart her gloomy horizon; and the isles of the South seas "now spreading the Lord's table for the feast of life and love where once their ovens roasted human victims for the feast of death."

We have now shown that the obstacles that obstruct our progress in mission work confronted more formidably the early church; that

we have to a higher degree the same favorable conditions that encouraged them; that our material and intellectual resources are immeasurably superior to theirs; and that God has as clearly authenticated our mission "with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost." These considerations should humble, stimulate, and encourage us.

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