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A table of contents for *The Expository Times* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expository-times_01.php

pdfs are named: [Volume]_[Issue]_[1st page of article].pdf

Some Principles of Missionary Work.

A STUDY OF I PETER ii. 11-17.

BY THE REV. WILLIAM A. SHEDD, M.A., URUMIA, PERSIA.

THE attitude of the New Testament to the whole question of missionary methods and means is that which obtains in the whole sphere of practical life. There is no attempt to furnish a manual of methods. There are both principles and history. Exhortations are few, perhaps because they were not needed. Even definite statements of the missionary obligation are not numerous. Far more emphasis is placed on the end than the means. Nowhere is the evangelistic purpose of the Christian life more clearly emphasized than in the First Epistle of St. Peter. In all the passages that might be quoted, the order of thought is the same: exhortation to pure and holy living 'that ye may shew forth the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light'; or that wives may gain their unbelieving husbands; or in the passage we are studying, 'that by well-doing ye should put to silence the ignorance of foolish men'; and 'that they (the Gentiles) may by your good works, which they behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.' A passage so dominated by the missionary aim may be expected to yield missionary principles, and we shall find that this is the case, finding furthermore that the principles contained in it are remarkably comprehensive and complementary.

There is in the first place what may be called the principle of *separateness*. 'I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims' (or in R.V., 'as sojourners and pilgrims'). Thayer defines the Greek words used, 'one who lives in a country without the right of citizenship,' and 'one who comes from a foreign country into a city or land to reside there by the side of the natives.' 'I beseech you as aliens and foreign residents' are words that are startlingly appropriate in reference to the foreign mission enterprise. The thought underlying is that expressed by Paul in the words, 'Our citizenship is in heaven.' Harnack expresses it, 'Not like the Gentiles, nor like the Jews, but as the people of God—that is the watchword.' In his wonderful way Paul glorifies the thought when he says, 'We are ambassadors on behalf of Christ,' referring not

to the exemptions and privileges of the office, but to its responsibilities. The temptation that arises from the sense of freedom is the basis of the warning in our passage, 'as free, and not using your freedom as a cloak.'

The truest application of the principle is not that which lies upon the surface. It is to be found in the very nature of the foreign mission enterprise, rather than in its accidents. The work of the missionary is temporary. He hopes to be superseded, and the highest success imaginable is to become unnecessary. All that he does is with a view to revision and change. He organizes a church, hoping that it may be merged in some new and great movement of God's Spirit, and any lordship on his part is usurpation. All he holds he holds in trust for those for whom he works. So again the missionary does not seek to represent another civilization different from that of the country he lives in as a sojourner. His services to civilization may be great, but they are not primary. Both the forms of church order and the institutions of civilization are at best only blundering attempts to express the evangel he seeks to make known.

Shall we call the complementary principle that of *assimilation*? It is hinted at in the words, 'using not your freedom as a cloak,' and is more clearly expressed in the phrase 'having your behaviour seemly among the Gentiles.' 'Seemly,' or 'beautiful,' implies not merely intrinsic beauty, but such an adaptation to the accepted canons or ideals of beauty as to be recognized as beautiful. Another and more uncompromising expression is the command, 'Be subject to every ordinance of man,' or in the language of to-day, 'Be subject to every human institution.' Stronger still is the final expression, 'As bondservants of God,' 'As free . . . but as bondservants.' There is no timid trimming here in order to avoid apparent inconsistency.

The underlying principle is that expressed by Paul, 'All things to all men, that I may by all means save some.' The following is an expression

of the problem and principle found in a prominent missionary magazine: 'For a Christian to influence a Hindu it is necessary that he should enter into his feelings and understand, if not share, his aspirations. Now this is the very point where we become conscious of difficulty: we may long for a mutual trust and sympathy; but how painfully conscious do we soon become that our feelings and ideals are not theirs. Many of us in India, lay and clerical, missionary and non-missionary, have felt that it would be useless to try to so modify our lives according to Hindu prejudices and convictions as to commend them to Hindus; and have judged that it is best to be what we are, Englishmen, and to try to live the Life as we ourselves have apprehended it.'¹ Probably the last sentence of the quotation expresses the conclusion reached by most, even of those who are earnest and devoted. It would be folly to argue that the success of missions depends entirely on the adaptation of missionaries to native ideas and customs; but to deny this element to be a very large factor in the problem would be to run counter to the more thoughtful literature of missions. Any one who has had personal experience of the difficulties of the problem may well judge with some lenience the vacillation of Peter at Antioch which aroused the indignation of Paul. The problem at Antioch was complicated by other elements, and yet what Peter did was to follow the evangelistic impulse and fellowship with heathen and then to draw back under the pressure of religious and race prejudice. In one guise or another the problem presents itself in every age and land. In no age has it been more urgent than now, when the ancient East is rousing to new aspirations and hopes, which need and long for sympathetic and intelligent interpretation and guidance.

A third principle is *the evangelistic power of right living*. Good works are means that shall lead men to glorify God, and well-doing is the power able to silence the ignorance of foolish men. (What a true phrase that is, the ignorance of foolish men!) Elsewhere the apostle urges his readers to keep a good conscience, that cavilling critics may be put to shame. The meaning hardly needs explanation, but the practical applications are numerous. Scripture, reason, and comparative

¹ Rev. A. A. Blair, *The East and the West*, July 1908, p. 248.

religion may all be invoked with good reason to justify the cause of missions; but practically missions are justified in the eyes of men by their good works. There is no missionary apologetic like the practical beneficence resulting from the work.

'The principle that good deeds have a direct evangelistic power justifies the expansion of the scope of missionary work to include humanitarian enterprises. Jowett in commenting on the passage remarks, 'The Christian will not stand aloof from his fellows. . . . He will fit himself into the social order, into the body corporate, and he will willingly share his blood in the common life. If this be the evangelistic character, the character that tells upon the "Gentiles," then Christian life is not perfected and beautified when the hallowing of the social order is ignored.'² 'To fit itself into the social order' of the community and to become part of the corporate life, is precisely what is done by every well-established mission. Not simply in the lives of the individual missionaries, but as a corporate body, the mission is far more than a 'voice crying in the wilderness.' In its manliness and human interests it is a 'great rock in a weary land.' It represents integrity, honesty, faithfulness, and helpfulness. The multiplicity of operations in missionary work is sometimes the despair of the missionary himself, and it is assuredly not without peril; but it is no modern invention. One of the most important missionary books for many a year is Harnack's *Expansion of Christianity*, and one of the lessons to be learned from it is the complex character of the process by which the Roman world was evangelized. He gives a list of ten different forms taken by the charitable work of the early Church, and says of the healing mission of the Church, 'In its early days the Church, we may say, formed a permanent establishment for the relief of sickness and poverty.'³ It would be difficult to point out an agency of modern missions that did not have its prototype in the first three Christian centuries.

The principle we are considering emphasizes what may be called the ethical mission of the work of missions. If Christian doctrine is the product of long process not yet complete, morality is so in a far greater degree. The moral problems

² Practical Commentary on N.T., *Epp. of St. Peter*.

³ *Expansion of Christianity*, Eng. tr., i, 190, 148.

that meet the missionary, both as respects his own conduct and as respects the people he works among, are often novel and intricate. The newly formed church must form its code of morals adapted to its peculiar circumstances, and the community must be aroused to the evil of practices which have been long accepted and, it may be, hallowed by religious sanctions. The missionary's own moral conduct must not only be controlled by the highest principles, but must also be so conformed to the ideals of the people as to be recognized as true to the highest morality. In other words, the culture of conscience becomes a part of the missionary vocation.

Here again there is a complementary principle, which is intensive and restrictive in its operation. It is the *evangelistic purpose*, that must give point and direction to the moral life and beneficent activity. 'That they may glorify God,' 'that ye should put to silence.' It is this aim, the aim to save souls, that alone can organize and unify and vivify a complex and manifold work; it alone can make the text-book, the surgeon's knife, the social call, the casual meeting, the distribution of alms, sympathy for the oppressed and with new aspirations for freedom and progress and the ordinances of Christian worship, it alone can make each and all means to lead men to Christ. It alone can open the dumb lips, awaken the dormant sympathies, keep clear the eye of conscience, give nerve to the lagging spirit, arouse to prayer, and feed the living flame of spiritual life. It was this that sent forth both Master and

disciple, 'As thou didst send me into the world, even so sent I them into the world.'

Two remarks may perhaps with force be made as to the results of the study of this passage. One is that light may be found in the New Testament upon the problems of present-day missionary work. Two such problems have emerged in this study, both of which might very copiously be illustrated from the literature of missions. One is the relation of the missionary to the institutions and customs of the land in which he lives. The other is the proper scope of foreign missionary activity. The principles found in the passage before us are directly applicable to both of these problems. It is believed that the study of the principles underlying the New Testament conception of the work of evangelization will not only give inspiration and direction to the work, but will also confirm faith in the form which the enterprise has taken in modern times. The other remark is that the problems of missionary work as we have seen them are at bottom questions of Christian character and life. Given the gospel to be preached, the great question is to secure that the work done, and the workers doing it, shall be faithful in commending, both in manner and in matter of work, the gospel which is preached. In other words, in the foreign field as well as in Christian lands, the lasting success of Christianity depends upon the elevation of the moral ideals which it presents, and upon the degree of spiritual power it furnishes, to realize those ideals.

Literature.

GEORGE SYLVESTER MORRIS.

GEORGE SYLVESTER MORRIS was Head of the Department of Philosophy in the University of Michigan from 1887 to 1889. In the latter year he died. It is a quarter of a century ago. And now Professor R. M. Wenley, who occupies the position once occupied by Professor Morris, has written his biography—*The Life and Work of George Sylvester Morris* (Macmillan).

Morris came of the two strains which have done so much for America—the Puritan and the Pilgrim

—the stern Puritan being represented in his father, the gracious Pilgrim in his mother. And he was brought up in accordance with the theology of New England Puritanism, the presence of the Pilgrim idealism being latent until well into manhood. The great matters of social conduct were Slavery and Intemperance. His father was an uncompromising enemy to both—and suffered for it. The atmosphere (softened by the presence of sisters and the love of music) was one to foster manhood.

After college, Morris took charge of a school for