

For the February Simultaneous Meetings.]

Church Missionary Society.

LETTER FROM THE BISHOP OF EXETER.

“THE LORD WORKING WITH THEM.”

(St. Mark xvi. 20.)

BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST,—With the new year our beloved Church Missionary Society is calling us to renewed prayers and efforts. Is there not a cause? Were there ever wider, nobler prospects? From the first century of the Church's warfare until now has the charge, “Go forward,” ever been louder or more distinct?

Let us remember those early days, and be of good courage, and strengthen ourselves in the Lord our God.

Stand in thought by the lonely herald of Messiah, beside the banks of Jordan. He came proclaiming, Repent ye: the kingdom of heaven is at hand. His was the voice crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord. His was the grand prescience of faith which affirmed, All flesh shall see the salvation of God. And yet then darkness covered the earth, and the struggling rays of light were almost confined to the few watchers for the morning who waited for the consolation of Israel. But John Baptist staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief. He was fully persuaded that what Jehovah had promised He was able also to perform. His faith overcame the world. The valleys were filled, the mountains brought low, the crooked made straight, and the rough places plain. A people was prepared for the advent of the Christ.

Take another standpoint, three or four years later. The Apostles were returning from Olivet. Joy was in every eye. Strength was in every footstep. Their risen Lord indeed had been taken from them, and a cloud had received Him out of their sight. But ere He left them He had entrusted them with a mission, that vibrated through every heart, and raised their souls to the loftiest enthusiasm which perhaps ever filled the human breast. He, the Truth, had said to them, All power is given unto Me in heaven and earth: go ye therefore and disciple all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and, lo, I am with you all the

days even unto the end of the world: Amen. This commission had just been sealed to them anew, Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. How this should come to pass they knew not. When, they knew not. But they knew their Master and Lord. It was enough. They returned to praise in the Temple, and to pray, like the wrestling Jacob, in the Upper Room. The Day of Pentecost came. They were clothed with the Spirit, and went forth to live and labour and die and conquer.

Take another standpoint, some thirty years after the Ascension. There was a prisoner at Rome, chained to the soldier who kept him. He bore in his body countless marks of suffering. Travel and shipwreck, hunger and thirst, stripes and stonings and prisons had left their ineffaceable scars upon him. But none of these things dimmed the fire of holy love and courage which burned within him. He was writing to a Church which he had planted far away in Macedonia, and moved by the Holy Ghost he says of that crucified Redeemer who was to the Jews a stumblingblock and to the Greeks foolishness, "God hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name; that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Haply to the Apostle's eye the victory seemed nearer than it has proved in the event. He could not fathom all the enmity of the world, all the infirmities of human faith, all the longsuffering of God; but not a shadow of doubt crossed his mind that Christ must reign till He had put all enemies under His feet.

Take one standpoint more. Again thirty years had passed by. The Twelve, all save one, had been gathered to their rest. He, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was an exile in Patmos when the scroll of inspired prophecy was for the last time unrolled to mortal eyes. There was indeed enough of trial and persecution, of failure and defeat, of lamentation and mourning and woe. But we are never for a moment suffered to think of the issue as uncertain. Wherein the enemies of God dealt proudly, He was above them working all things after the counsel of His own will. An angel is seen flying in mid-heaven, having the everlasting Gospel to preach to every nation and kindred and tongue and people. When the seventh trumpet sounded, there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever. And the final victory of Divine goodness rests on the assurance, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. The end of all things is the unclouded communion of man with God.

Such were some of the triumphs of faith in the first century. Where

are ours? It is true we cannot attain to the lofty courage of the isolated Baptist; for the darkness which wrapped him round is passing away, and the true light is now shining. Nor can we share the embassy of the Apostles; for they were leaders in a path which none had trodden before them. Nor can we touch the heroism of St. Paul; for the standard of the cross, which he planted on the walls of Pagan Rome, now waves over Christendom. Nor can we breathe the celestial serenity of St. John, for he was in the Spirit called to enter the opened door of heaven and to look within the unveiled sanctuary of God. But we may light our lamps where they lit theirs. Thank God, there is yet room for masculine faith! How can it be otherwise, when two-thirds of the human race still lie in heathen or Mohammedan darkness, and the Saviour's words still echo in our hearts, Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature?

Perhaps there is now just that measure of light and darkness over the horizon, which if it does not lead us to expect quite the same heroic torch-bearers as those of the apostolic age, is yet most favourable for the growth of trust and toil in every rank of the Church militant. In earthly warfare many victories have been won by the daring chivalry of officers; but some, like Inkermann, have been justly called the soldiers' battle and the soldiers' victory. It may be that in the conflicts of these last days every one, who is true to the cross stamped upon his or her brow in baptism, shall feel and confess himself or herself a missionary with a deeper meaning than the Church of Christ has hitherto known.

Not that the missionary annals of the last hundred years have lacked God's heroes and God's heroines among labourers for the sacred cause at home and abroad. It was on April 12th, 1799, the Church Missionary Society was formed, and as Bishop Wilberforce said in the Jubilee Meeting of the Society in Exeter Hall, alluding to the first Committee held, he knew not, since the Apostles met in the Upper Room, when mightier issues were struggling in fewer minds. Then the world of heathendom was lying in almost unbroken gloom. Africa was groaning under the slave-trade. India was well-nigh sealed against the Gospel by the guilty timidity of Government. China and Japan were lying in the outer darkness. New Zealand was shunned as the haunt of cannibalism. The North-West American Indians were dying out before the white man, with none to tell them of a better fatherland. But the men, into whose hearts God infused this inextinguishable desire to preach among the heathen the unsearchable riches of Christ, knew that it was God's work. He had given the command. He would open doors. He would raise up messengers. His must be the power, and His should be all the glory. And as Thomas Scott said at that time, "What will be the final issue, what the success of these Missions, we know not now. I shall know hereafter. It is glorious and shall prevail. God hath said it, and cannot lie." And all along this nineteenth century there have been men of like faith and courage, whose record is on high; and there are those now in our mission-fields who, burning with love to Christ and to the

souls for whom Christ died, count not their lives dear unto them that they may finish their course with joy. The muster-roll of the noble army of martyrs is not yet filled up.

But the Master seems now calling in louder tones than ever to men and women, aye and children too, of every rank, "Go, work to-day in My missionary vineyard." And they are listening to His voice. And many are themselves going forth, forsaking kindred and country for Christ's sake and the Gospel's. Only where hundreds go, thousands are wanted. And many who cannot go are denying themselves, so that some as princes cast into the treasury of God; and of others it may be truly said, their deep poverty abounds unto the riches of their liberality. Only may this holy fire spread from heart to heart, from home to home, from parish to parish, from diocese to diocese, from nation to nation throughout Christendom; and surely, within the lifetime of some who are now pressing into the field, the Gospel will be preached for a witness among all nations.

We want a new standard of self-sacrifice. A friend told me last week that after the siege of Paris she visited those who had moved among the wealthiest circles, and found them dressed in mean and coarse attire. But they said to her, "We do not feel it any disgrace. We are all alike. And we must do it for our country's sake, until the war indemnity is paid, and France is free." Shall patriotism surpass the self-sacrifice and self-surrender of Christian love? God forbid! We must love more, pray more, give more, do more, endure more. His grace will be sufficient for us. His strength will be made perfect in our weakness.

For this we are about to make the special effort of next month. Surely God will give us an answer of peace.

Yours in our One Lord,
E. H. EXON.

The Palace, Exeter, January 1, 1886.