

ART. V.—CITY MISSIONS AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS.

It is a noteworthy characteristic of current discussion that even secular minds are seeing, amid the forces which have made our century one of progress, the figure of the foreign missionary. To find the record of his service it is no longer necessary to take down from our shelves the quaint and frequently ill-written volumes of pious biography. We go as often to the treatises on ethnic and linguistic science, to the works of travel and exploration, to the commercial reports, to the scientific journals, and even to the columns of the daily press. Men who are careful to minimize his motives cannot afford to depreciate his influence. Weary as the world is of the rage for centennializing, it is constrained at this reflective epoch to admit that William Carey and his successors have had not only an intense zeal to save human souls, but a profound influence toward the betterment of human life.

It is not equally clear that the world has discovered the city missionary. The Christian worker in foreign fields has made notable contributions to government, language, commerce, art; to the circle of sciences—geography, ethnology, geology, botany, zoology, comparative religion; to the higher pursuits of philosophy and of philanthropy. But the missionary in the cities is at present quite generally supposed to be but slightly concerned with what the world of literature and science and statesmanship regards as important and dignifies for its own thought as the problems of the age. His special function is to visit the poor, to distribute tracts, to hold small prayer meetings, to preach to the sodden and the sad from the vantage point of a street corner or in an obscure hall, and once a year at some anniversary in the wealthy districts to tell the benevolent "better class" what they are doing by proxy "to reach the masses." He is in popular thought characterized, physically, by a capacity for living by faith on starvation wages, with the meal always at the bottom of the barrel; mentally, by an intense but narrow conception of the value of the human soul, especially if concealed in a diseased and degraded body under a scant garb of rags; spiritually, by a Christlike but ineffective renunciation of self and trust in God, a self-devotion which barely misses

being fanaticism. But that he has a relation to human progress in its broader sweep, at all similar to that of the missionary to foreign lands, has only just begun to dawn upon the world's consciousness.

Beneath the thought of this decade are two postulates. The first declares the supreme importance of the questions of society. The problems of government, of social and economic relations as bearing upon the welfare of the race, are given the right of way in every avenue of thought. The chief concern of humanity is not discovery or science or art, but—humanity. The second postulate asserts that the city is the playground, or, better, the battlefield, of these tremendous social forces. Here they center and combine and contend. It is like history, not repeating itself, but transferring itself into another realm and reproducing Troy and Alexandria, Rome and Paris, in the fierce and far-reaching conflicts of the social world. Where are the problems of society and, specifically, of the city not held to be paramount? In England the semi-socialistic reforms of the London County Council are watched as closely as are Mr. Gladstone's home rule proposals for Ireland. Germany busies herself with plans for workmen's insurance, and state socialism receives the careful attention of her entertaining and versatile emperor. The most striking feature of our own last census is the transfer of population from the rural to the civic life. Congress appoints a commission to investigate the slums of great cities. The best minds are studying, in New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Boston, the difficult problem of municipal government. In thousands of halls each week workmen are discussing the gravest social questions. The late political campaign was a conflict between economic theories. The most popular lecture rooms in our colleges and universities are those of political economy, history, and sociology. The lengthened calendars of the courts tell constantly the story of new theories and interpretations of the fundamental principles of the laws of property and of personal rights. The press, secular and religious, double-leads its sociological dissertations, and its news columns are a catalogue of the deeds of great cities. A few men—and the world honors them—are mapping the heavens, seeking the frozen secret of the pole, measuring the crust of the earth, and hunting in laboratories the elusive laws

of matter ; but the age as such has turned its search-light upon the people, and its revealing rays are focused upon the centers where they live and toil and sin and play and weep and die.

Into the **city** comes the man whom God has sent to preach his Gospel to the people. He finds himself at once in actual contact with the **problems** which other folk are discussing. With them facts melt into theories, with him theories congeal into facts. Observe the discoveries of his practical life, the realities which confront him in a single day's experience.

1. Here is the rum traffic. It thwarts him at every turn. He is familiar with the drunkard's home. The children whom he gathers into his Sunday school are the heirs of vice. In New York, a block or two from one of our **mission** churches, is a public school. Within four hundred feet of that school are *seventy-seven* legalized saloons. Next door to that church is a saloon, in the back yard of which the empty beer kegs on Monday morning are heaped in great piles, and in summer the preaching is accentuated by the stroke of the mallet which taps the barrels. A converted drunkard recently said, that on his way to the **mission**, which was his spiritual birthplace and to which he nightly goes, he must pass one hundred and sixty dramshops. When the **city** missionary reads in the laconic phrase of the Bishops' Address concerning the liquor traffic, "It can never be legalized without sin," he knows as few others can the terrible truth of that statement. He is obliged to ponder the physical and moral effects of alcohol, to note the relation of its manufacture and sale to the peace of communities, to the enforcement of law, to the propagation of vice, to the sources of government. The serpent whose sting is in the wine draws its slimy length across the thresholds of the homes this man seeks to brighten, and poisons with its venom the very cup of cold water he would give to the thirsty. Who better than he can study the problem of rum?

2. He confronts poverty everywhere. The hiss of the serpent is no more familiar to him than the growl of the wolf. There is a poverty which is a spur to ambition and impels to better deeds. There is a poverty which means privation, hunger, filth, moral inertia, vice, death. Notwithstanding the constant discussions of the problems of poverty, few understand their horrible import. Professor Böhmert, the Director of the

Bureau of Statistics in Saxony, states that over seventy-six per cent of the inhabitants of that kingdom are living on incomes of less than two hundred dollars per annum. A recent authority estimates that in Great Britain thirty thirty-eighths of the population possess in actual property on the average thirty dollars per head, and have an average annual income of eighty-five dollars. Mr. Frederick Harrison said in 1886 :

Ninety per cent of the actual producers of wealth have no home that they can call their own beyond the end of a week ; have no bit of soil, or so much as a room that belongs to them ; have nothing of value of any kind except as much as will go in a cart ; have the precarious chance of weekly wages which barely suffice to keep them in health ; are housed for the most part in places that no man thinks fit for his horse ; are separated by so narrow a margin from destitution that a month of bad trade, sickness, or unexpected loss brings them face to face with hunger and pauperism.

In London, in 1888, out of 79,099 deaths 17,663 occurred in public institutions. "In the richest city in the world one out of every five persons, or probably one out of every four adults, dies a pauper's death!" The remarkable conclusions of Mr. Charles Booth, based as they are on the most systematic and scientific investigation, show that at the present time in London one person in three is in the thralldom of poverty. "But," it will be said, "there is no such poverty in America." This is true of the country at large. In some cities, however, and in some parts of all large cities on these shores, the poverty varies little from that beyond the sea. In New York, for years, of all who have died one out of every ten has been buried in Potter's Field. Mr. Jacob A. Riis, an expert authority, estimates that "twenty to thirty per cent of our population are always struggling to keep the wolf from the door," and shows "that we have an army of four hundred thousand persons receiving alms in the past ten years, of whom eighty-five per cent may be safely estimated to be still in the slough, or where they may be swamped in it by the first misfortune, idleness, death, or loss of work. The other fifteen per cent worked out of it, died, or moved away." Practical mission workers know that here is no exaggeration. Spread your table with sandwiches and coffee anywhere below Fourteenth Street or on the extreme east or west side, and your room will be filled with guests

so gaunt and scarred and famished that your wonder will outrun your pity. It is said that one hundred deaths from starvation were recorded last year. But no record is made of the thousands to whose death hunger was a contributory cause, nor of the scores of thousands who are physically dwarfed and morally debased by the horrible experience of continual semi-starvation.

But hunger is not the only incident of poverty with which the city missionary must deal. The homes he enters are ever emphasizing the crime of overcrowding the poor. In many a parish not only has no family a single house, but very few have a single floor, and the majority live in two or three rooms, of which one at least is never touched by either air or sunlight. It is said that there is one square mile on the lower east side which contains two hundred and twenty-six blocks, where the population exceeds three hundred and fifty thousand, or fifteen hundred and fifty to the average block. One block at least contains nearly five thousand people. Do families from choice share their front door with from fifteen to thirty-one other families? Are parents so dull of wit and hard of heart as to desire for their children the temptation to crime, the contact with vice, the indifference to decency which such conditions of life surely entail? No; a thousand times, no! But poverty, under the grinding necessities of what we proudly or devoutly call our Christian civilization, leaves the multitudes of New York no alternative. And the reality of poverty is central in the work of the missionary to the city. He knows the facts which statisticians tabulate; he faces the foe which political economists describe; he shares the burden philanthropists are striving to weigh and to lift. Who better than he can study the problem of poverty?

3. But rum and poverty do not furnish the only questions which enter into the daily experience of the city missionary. The child scorched with scarlet fever or choked with diphtheria, at whose bedside he kneels, dies and is buried; but the foul abuse of the laws of health declares the necessity of the gospel of sanitation. The scientist who is hunting microbes and experimenting with "lymph" and "cultures" finds no truer ally than the man whose commission drives him into the very centers of contagion. The laws of heredity constantly illustrate themselves before his eyes. He is forced to appreciate racial distinctions. In a cosmopolitan city he must minister to the superstitious Italian, the

simple-hearted Scandinavian, the phlegmatic German, the restless Frenchman, the long-suffering Russian. In New York mingle the peoples of the earth in strange confusion. Aryan and Semite shoulder each other on the streets and in the shops. Greek Christian and Romish Christian, Protestant and Jew, trade, argue, sin, vote, laugh, grumble, and sometimes pray together. Here are an Italian city nearly as large as New Haven, a German city surpassed only by Vienna and Berlin, a colored population equal to the number of people in Poughkeepsie, Bohemians enough to occupy Bridgeport. Every third person is a Roman Catholic, and out of every ten one is a Jew. In a large section on the east side one is continually reminded of Evelyn's description of his visit to the Jews' quarter in Rome or of scenes in *Daniel Deronda*. He reads over the door of a synagogue, "Incorporated 5643 Hungarian Congregation, Bet Hamidrash Hagodol," and over that of a shop, "Budapester Wurst Geschäft," and reflects that the ends of the earth have come hither. To reach these varied peoples requires not only the Holy Spirit but the gift of tongues. With their children swarming about his path the problems of education become startlingly important to the thoughtful man. He must form opinions touching the function of the State in the training of citizens. Industrial education, the primary, parish, and public schools must be objects of his solicitude. The relation between the religion he is sent to inculcate and the morality upon which citizenship must rest demands his consideration. In a word, there is no question growing out of the distinction of races, no problem of heredity, no principle of education that does not root itself in the very soil which it is his to cultivate for the great Lord of the vineyard.

4. There is one other phase of current agitation with which none can be more familiar than the city missionary. He is the companion and sometimes the confidant of the workman. He feels the throb of the great and burdened heart of labor. The hall of the socialist who preaches anarchy adjoins the chapel where he preaches Christ. He is accustomed to the red flag. Few so well as he comprehend the meaning of such novels as *Murvale Eastman* and *Metzerott, Shoemaker*, and *Alton Locke*. The contentions of the labor unions, the hopes and miseries of exasperated strikers, and the horrors

of the sweating system and child labor are the food of his daily thought. The grievous injustice, sometimes open, sometimes subtle, which flouts in the face the righteousness of the Bible and diminishes to the minimum the possibility of the individual to master life; the barbarism of a competitive system which reduces men to machines and buys and sells their labor as a commodity in the market place; the mockery of law and custom which produces and perpetuates the unnatural inequality of possessions and organizes into **social** institutions gross infringements of the decalogue—these are the facts which stir his indignation, move his tears, and burden his heart. It is impossible for a man to walk through Mulberry Bend or to fraternize with the denizens of the Fourth Ward without coming to conclusions touching *laissez faire* and the new political economy. When he looks for the landlord who secures twenty per cent from his wretched tenants, yet never repairs the premises and exposes scores of lives to the perils of defective sanitation, and after most industrious search cannot even find out who the rich rascal is, he is bound to have readjusted views of what is called the sacred right of property. Miss Kate Field, who uses a pen with a sharp nib, says in a recent number of her paper:

In fact, they [the rich landlords] often fatten on the misery of less fortunate fellow-creatures, as many tenements belong to them, and the rents collected therefrom are so much greater than those collected from high class dwelling houses in proportion to the capital expended as to make them desirable investments. Take New York, for example. I have tried in vain to find out who owned filthy tenements swarming with humanity. The owners are represented by agents who will not divulge the names of their employers. It is the business of these agents to do the dirty work of well-to-do citizens, who no more concern themselves with the welfare of their tenants than they concern themselves with customers buying from them dry goods and groceries. In the latter case customers get their money's worth; in the former they are at the mercy of landlords, and must pay what is asked or be turned into the street.

The landlordism of Ireland creates a national issue and makes and unmakes administrations. The landlordism of our great **cities** is a menace to the peace of communities, and urges on to its crisis what may easily become revolution if it be not diverted by reform. Certain it is that, whatever opinion concerning personal and property rights a man may hold, there is

no such opportunity for applying the logic of facts and testing theory by observation as that offered by a life among the teeming peoples of a great civic center.

If now the position assumed be secure, that the work of city missions is inextricably intermingled with the problems which are throbbing in the heart and brain of humanity, a further truth may be justly urged, namely, that the application of the new forces and methods developed by the very emergency of the case is to be made in the same field and in a large degree by the same hands. How close to the questions involved Providence has placed the solutions! No man yet has seen them all, but some of them are already within reach.

When, fifty years ago, Froebel opened in the German village of Blankenburg the first kindergarten, he little thought what his system would mean to the polyglot myriads of New York's children. Even now few of us appreciate the divine fitness of need and instrument. But, on the basis of the kindergarten, children whose languages vary but whose instincts are one can find the best powers of their minds and the highest uses of their bodies. There are to-day Christian men and women, fast increasing in number, who are giving money, talents, life itself, to the unschooled children of the slums, convinced that the Christian kindergarten will sow seed and develop convictions which can never be destroyed.

To many university extension is the fad of a few educational zealots. The worker in large cities welcomes it as an ally of great power. Every religious center should offer a stimulus to mental life. The so-called lower strata of society are seamed with the precious metals. Workingmen think. The beershop is often chosen, not as an alternative, but because no alternative is offered. The avidity with which the public has grasped the opportunity to hear the excellent lectures provided by the New York School Board during this winter is significant. Instructive exposition of the facts of nature and history and of current thought will find hearers where the people seem most reckless, and many a student whose greasy cap covers an active brain.

And that most humane form of university extension—the college settlement—is in the beginning of a great career. Before a decade has passed among the most useful missionaries in

our cities will be many of the brightest scholars of our universities. The course of theological training will be incomplete without months of personal contact with the people. The sociology of the books will be supplemented by that of the life. The great point in reaching men is the point of contact. The convictions which are establishing chairs of social science in every institution of respectable repute are issuing also in the consecration of some of the best students who through the lecture halls to practical, hand-to-hand efforts for human welfare.

Then, too, there are new orders of Christian service whose characteristics are determined by the demands of our cities. The meaning of such gatherings as the convention of the United Christian Workers in Boston a few months ago is becoming more clear. The development of independent rescue missions, with their splendid corps of lay workers, the revival of the order of deaconesses in the Protestant Episcopal and Methodist Episcopal Churches, the activity of the King's Daughters, of the Brotherhood of St. Andrew, of the Christian Endeavor Society, of the Epworth League, and the self-denying service of the Salvation Army are all indications that the Christian Church is responding to a new conviction and is concentrating upon our cities as the strategic points.

The specialization of charity, also, is not only a sign of the sanity of modern philanthropic effort, but is a first concern of city missions. Through no mediation can the facts of need so surely reach the heart of mercy as through that of the wise missionary. Generalized benevolence has had its day; the man who is commissioned to preach the Gospel to the poor is likely to be expected to declare what the poor need.

Many, too, are urging the practical experiment of Christian socialism. The term is obscure and the practice difficult. Yet must we not with a jest or a sneer dismiss the deepening convictions of men everywhere that some reconstruction of the social order is at hand. Less than many other servants of the Church does the city missionary realize the sacred prerogatives of capital and the supreme necessity of preserving the traditional social order. He should not be an alarmist, and surely not an agitator; but more than other Christians he is apt to perceive that God cares as much for the personal rights of each man in the million who have not a bank account

as he does for those of each man of the hundred who have. The possibilities of the applied Gospel in curing social iniquities seem to him less distant and the socialism of Christ more reasonable than to many who are following the Master and studying his teachings where the crowds cannot jostle thought or disturb complacence. If any changes are to come in the relative privileges and obligations of men this messenger of the cross will prove an agent of immense influence in shaping human practice to the ideals of the Gospel of Christ. Verily, let the "if" be stricken out. Such changes must come. Says Locke: "Every one ought to have as much property as is necessary for his support." Fichte declares:

Christianity yet carries in its breast a renovating power of which we have no conception. Hitherto it has only acted upon individuals, and through them on the State indirectly. But whoever can appreciate its power, whether he be a mere believer or an independent thinker, will confess that it is destined some day to become the inner organizing power of the State; and there it will reveal itself to the world in all the depth of its ideas and the full richness of its blessing.

Christianity must accept the challenge thrown down to it by the spirit of this age and become the antagonist of all evils, the protector of all the unfortunate, the avenger of all the wronged. It must wipe out the fine distinction between iniquity and inequity. It must not lag in secular philanthropies nor leave to others the initiation of movements which should have upon them from their inception the imprint of the cross. No organization or order of men on the face of the earth must be permitted to usurp the place of the Church of Christ as the champion of human rights. The pride that despises labor must be crucified. The selfishness which seeks men simply to use them must die. The customs which put the silken glove upon the iron hand of human greed must be abolished. The laws which ennoble riches and degrade manhood are to be abrogated. The wealth which belongs to all must be held for all, and the rights which belong to each must be withheld from none. The rivalry which begets hate and issues in death must be supplanted. The avarice which buys up virtue for gold and makes merchandise of vice must be foiled. Entailed poverty and enforced starvation must be prevented by the community which

now barely relieves them. For each soul there must be a living chance in this world and a reasonable opportunity to secure in the world to come "life everlasting." Verily, changes must come, so fundamental and wide-reaching that there will be in the **social** world a new heaven and a new earth. And let it be repeated with stronger emphasis that, in this process of **social** transformation, no man can better serve God and humanity than he who stands as the apostle of Jesus amid the surging crowds of our great **cities**.

If the facts and inferences thus far set forth be conceded they make their own plea. They urge, in the first place, that the ideals of Christian work among the masses be changed, ceasing to be chiefly *ecclesiastical* and *edificatory*, and becoming more truly *evangelistic* and *humanitarian*. The need of to-day is not the Church of the disciples but the Church of the apostles. The Church must seek men, not wait for them. Its commission should put it, not upon its foundations, but upon its feet. And the object of Christian solicitude should be *human need of every kind*. To that Church which solves the difficult problem of harmonizing the most intense and spiritual evangelism with the broadest humanitarianism the future belongs. They who are asking what the mission of Methodism is to the twentieth century will find it here.

But the plea goes beyond ideals and asks for men. It requires of the Church, in its press, its administrative officers, its schools, that it influence its best men and women to prepare themselves for this new day. Specialized service means a specialized ministry. If intellect seeks a wide field, if humanity pleads for multiplied opportunity, if culture desires its own highest uses, if the modern spirit demands free play for its formative influence, the adequate domain for all lies waiting where human life, with its baffled but unslain hopes, with its desperate yet immortal needs, lifts and falls, advances and recoils, as with the mighty movement of the storm-swept sea. Just as the pioneers and organizers of opinion have made a beaten track for the hosts who would save the ends of the earth, so also let them reiterate in all the circles of thought and devotion the demand now made by our **cities** upon the very best ministry of our day. It is too late for untrained zeal to take the world. The unarmed ship is quick to sink under the enemy's fire. If the

“undevout astronomer is mad” the unintelligent missionary is his fellow. As the mysteries of the skies yield themselves to no man whose keenest vision is not interpreted by his faith, so the real secrets of humanity are withheld from him whose faith is forced to act through a sightless brain.

Christ's command of the future is conditioned upon his conquest of the cities. That conquest is impossible unless the spirit of the Gospel penetrates into every ideal and institution of human life. That spirit can find access to the multiplied forms it would control only through the contact of hearts that know Christ and understand humanity with the hearts which yearn for both without comprehending either. The first need of this decade is that men and women of culture and godliness, disciplined equally in mind and heart, who can be indifferent to nothing that concerns human welfare, shall with profound devotion to Christ consecrate themselves to the life of contact with the multitudes in our cities over whom the Master weeps. The signs multiply that God is calling many to this glorious service. It behooves the Church to give voice to that inward persuasion. Her faith must inspire, her wisdom direct, the awakened servants of Christ. “Prepare ye the way of the Lord” is no obsolete command. That way is not alone “in the sea,” “through the desert,” or “upon the mountains;” it runs through “the streets and the lanes” of the city, and as “beautiful” upon the crowded thoroughfares of teeming human life are “the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace,” as upon the sacred mountains of the prophet's vision. It is the glad privilege of the Church to hasten the time when the cities of men shall become the cities of God, when the promise to Israel shall have its broader fulfillment, “I will also make thy officers peace, and thine exactors righteousness. Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders; but thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise.”

A large, elegant handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Frank Mason North". The signature is written in dark ink and features a prominent, sweeping flourish at the end.