

Some Truths I have learned on the Mission Field.¹

YOU cannot work as a Christian minister or missionary for a number of years in any land without learning some important facts about the people and their spiritual condition, and without having your own religious convictions deepened and strengthened. The first point I want to mention is more political than religious, and has to do with the burning question of "Swaraj," or native self-government.

(a) I will set down what I conceive to be *the Christian attitude towards Swaraj*. When I went to Ceylon in 1906 there was a Legislative Council of about twenty members, mostly Government officials, about half a dozen being "unofficial" and elected by a very small percentage of the people. The Governor of the Island presided. We now have adult suffrage for both sexes, a State Council of about seventy, mostly "unofficial" and elected, and the president is a Sinhalese man, Sir Baron Jayatilaka, who was educated at Cambridge University. Ceylon is much further on than India in political development, partly because it is so much smaller and therefore more easily handled, but also because it is so much further on educationally. Fifty per cent. of the children of Ceylon are now receiving education; in India eight per cent.

Nationalism has become almost a religion in the East. We did not expect this thirty years ago, but it has come to stay, until it develops into something better, namely internationalism. A few years ago I had a long conversation with a Madras Tamil who was a student at King's College, in the course of which he said: "If we had swaraj to-morrow of course we should make some mistakes: but why shouldn't we? It's our country." Many people in England do not understand how deep-seated and passionate is this desire for home rule on the part of the educated Indian and Ceylonese. Now the growth of nationalism is perfectly natural and inevitable. Moreover it is by no means confined to the East, as the present state of Europe reminds us. Paul never apologised for being a Jew; and we are doubtless all thankful to God that we are British. But just as Paul came

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to see that his Jewish privileges belonged to the second and not to the first place, so it is for us to teach others that even more important than home rule and political freedom is the rule of Christ in the heart, the freedom of Christ in the life.

A writer in an English newspaper recently stated that England must be very careful what it does about India, as it makes about £47,000,000 out of that country annually. That kind of thing does not make very good reading in India or Ceylon, and does not make missionary work any easier.

It is quite true that the young hot-bloods who would like swaraj to come to-morrow do not realise the slow growth of the British constitution, or understand the heavy responsibilities of wise and successful self-government. The wiser people amongst them, both Christian and non-Christian, but especially Christian, realise that it should not come too quickly.

So I sympathise with my Sinhalese fellow townsman or villager, and bid him have patience. There is less anti-British feeling in Ceylon than in India; but there is a strong, and as I think, quite legitimate desire for home rule. Ecclesiastically this sentiment fits in well with Baptist Church polity. A virile Church is growing up. So far as I know, Ceylon is the only place in the B.M.S. Mission Field where there is a native secretary who now does the correspondence with London on all matters affecting the maintenance of the work. In fields where the work is sufficiently advanced the native church must increase, and the Missionary Society must decrease.

(b) The relationship of Buddhism to Christianity.

Some months ago a Tamil Hindu with whom I had an interesting and earnest conversation on religious matters, said, "I'm sure God sent you to me to-day." I have not in twenty-eight years heard any such sentence from a Buddhist, the main reason being that a Buddhist, theoretically at least, does not believe in the existence of God. The prophet in Isaiah xlv. gave the great message repeatedly: "Beside me there is no God," "There is none else." Gautama said, There is none at all. That is the most fundamental difference between Buddhism and Christianity, and it is the most tragic blunder a great teacher ever made. It is the thing which makes Christianity have less affinity with Buddhism than with any other religion. Strictly speaking there is no prayer in Buddhism, whereas there certainly is in Mohammedanism and Hinduism. There is no room for faith; there is no hope for the future; and even if Nirvana can ever be reached, it is a state of unconsciousness that makes no appeal to the Western mind. Above all, there is no forgiveness of sins; the moral debt must be paid to the uttermost farthing.

The link with Buddhism must be sought, not in its theology, but in its ethics. The "Pancha Sila" or five great precepts of Buddhism are prohibitions against lying, theft, adultery, murder and the drinking of intoxicants. As Christian missionaries, we do not want Buddhists to abandon any of these excellent precepts, but to keep them. They are in our religion too. Moses received his commandments from God, and so did Gautama Buddha, though he did not know it. If only Buddhists came anywhere near the level of this high teaching, Ceylon would be a far better place than it is. But in point of fact they do not obey these precepts, and that because they cannot. People in the West who sometimes talk about the high ideals of Buddhism simply do not know Buddhism as it is. Its great lack is that it has no moral dynamic. The gospel of a religion which has abjured God is necessarily "Save thyself." Buddha's last words were: "Work out your own salvation"; and that is just what no man can do without the "God that worketh in him, both to will and to work for His good pleasure." And so we see in daily life on the Mission Field the same divorce between creed and character, between religious teaching and actual conduct, that Amos and Isaiah denounced in their day. Every month, particularly at the full moon, the whole Sinhalese population seems to go to the temple, and we Christians seem to be a negligible quantity, at least in the villages. We would not mind if only it did the least good; but the moral effect is nil. Buddhism as one of the best non-Christian religions just illustrates the basal fact that man in his own strength cannot keep the moral law, that without a personal Saviour he is without help and without hope in the world.

After all this is not vitally different from the position that faces the preacher in England. At its best it is the position of Romans vii. over again, the position of the man who knows and approves the right and does the wrong. Both ministers and missionaries have to declare to their fellow men that what the law could not do on account of human weakness, God accomplished through Jesus Christ. And they both have to go on to say further with Paul: "I can do all things in Him that strengtheneth me." I take it that particularly at this point we have to be both declarers of the Gospel and the living proof of its truth. The apostles' preaching had the eloquence of absolute conviction. Men saw the power of the Gospel realised, present, in the preachers. I believe this to be the greatest need of the modern pulpit, whether in the suburban church or the jungle village—the preacher's living witness of the power of his Gospel. This was the Lord's last and surest promise to those whom He sent forth to preach.

(c) In the next place I want to mention that aspect of the Gospel which has become my habitual way of thinking of it. If I were asked to express the nature of my religion in one word, it would be the word "*friendship*," friendship with God and with my neighbour. I received a great impetus in this direction from the teaching and life of one to whom some of us here owe more than we can ever say, William Medley, whose lifelong motto is best expressed in his own words: "Fellowship is the interpretation of life." The Lord gave us His own conception, almost definition, of friendship in those words recorded by the Fourth Evangelist, whose Gospel was to Mr. Medley the climax of revelation: "No longer do I call you servants . . . but friends; for all things that I have heard from my Father I have made known unto you." The Lord's friendship meant the sharing of God with His friends. I like to think of preaching, not so much as the imparting of truth to one's congregation, as the sharing it with them. I rarely say "You," nearly always "We," even in speaking to non-Christians. "For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek (between English and Sinhalese), for the same Lord is Lord of all, and is rich unto all that call upon Him." Living amongst people of another race has helped to bring this home to me. The incarnation, God tabernacling with man, Christ sharing God with man—that is the heart of our religion. And our God gives without measure: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

It is a significant fact that the Lord's closest personal friends, apart from His Mother, were outside His own family. Peter, John, Mary Magdalene, were better friends to Him than His own brothers. Which made Him proclaim that spiritual relationship is a closer and stronger bond than blood relationship. We see this often on the Mission Field. A man's foes are often those of his own household, and his best friends may be those of another race. This friendship can be both the widest and deepest thing in human life, just because it is of God.

I know that you cannot speak of the deep things of your religion to all and sundry. To many it would be like talking in a foreign language, and to some like casting pearls before swine. Yet Christ did offer His friendship to all who could or would accept it; and it was accepted by the most opposite types of people—a Nicodemus, a fallen woman, a Scribe, a publican, a dying robber.

Perhaps the main cause of the rapid spread of early Buddhism was the new brotherliness that it manifested. It was an enthusiasm for humanity, a spiritual movement, much the

finest that India had known. It died down of necessity; for the brotherhood of man can only be founded on the Fatherhood of God; and Buddhism had renounced God.

In religion as in Nature what ultimately survives is only what is worthy to survive. To some Old Testament saints fellowship with God was so inexpressibly precious that it began to produce convictions about its own immortality. At least a child of God here and there dared to believe that Sheol could not set limits to such fellowship. Paul so realised the abiding friendship of Christ that he talked about being "in the heavenlies" in Christ Jesus while enduring the misery of a Roman jail. The degree to which we realise this friendship will determine the intensity of our preaching. The friendship of Jesus our Lord can give a new magnetism and power to our message; it can revolutionise our preaching. We must show His reconciling love as well as talk about it. *Now* are we the children of God, the friends of Jesus Christ.

(d) When this great truth is unfettered by any denominational traditions, unrestricted by any narrowness of thought, it leads naturally to our relationship with other sections at least of the Protestant Church. Friends of Christ cannot be indifferent to any other friends of His. It may be that in England this question of Christian unity, not to say union, is very hackneyed, and that a good many Free Churchmen are saying, "We have done our best, and our advances are not welcomed. Moreover we have enough to get on with in our own denominational work." This last statement is still more true on the Mission Field. Ceylon, for example, is 90 per cent. non-Christian and, of the remaining 10 per cent., 8 per cent. is Roman Catholic, and the last 2 per cent. includes all the Protestants of Ceylon—Anglicans, Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Salvation Army, Friends, Brethren and others. There is no need for overlapping, and there is practically no overlapping. Any one denomination without knowing a thing about any other denomination could work on for generations. But you miss the best that way, and it is not Christ's way. You get an altogether one-sided and inadequate view of the Church of Christ, and the lack of unity spells weakness, if not defeat.

Of course the actual facts are much better than that. Twice in my time we have had an All-Ceylon Conference, the first being presided over by J. R. Mott. A few years ago all sections of the Protestant Church in Colombo united in an evangelical campaign for ten days, and the universal verdict was that quite apart from the direct results in conversions it gave an uplift to the whole Church. Less than two years ago Rev. J. A. Ewing

was President of the Christian Council in Ceylon for the second time, and another Baptist Missionary (Rev. S. F. Pearce) is President this year. This comprises Anglicans and Free Churchmen, and they also work together in the Bible Society, in Christian Literature and in other ways. Still more important is the fact that at Peradeniya a united training work for teachers and evangelists has been going on for more than a dozen years. For nearly eight years I have worked happily with the Church of England and Methodist Societies, and in my classes have had both Methodist and Anglican students as well as Baptist. Possibly we are a little further on with united work on the Mission Field than you are in the home country; and if so, one of the reasons must be that the appalling need of the non-Christian world forces upon us the need for pooling our resources. Of India's 350,000,000, less than 3 per cent. are Christian, and this includes all nominal Christians and all the Roman Catholics.

In my humble opinion there is not enough mutual love and interest between the denominations, and that means a narrower and less powerful Gospel. Love is active and effective, not passive and neutral. The attitude, I am quite willing to work with other Free Churchmen and with Anglicans if they are willing, is not adequate. Of course love cannot force people, but it wins them. It is painful to read in denominational papers sarcastic remarks about other denominations that are unworthy of a Christian. It all means lack of grace and loss of power.

At Peradeniya the daily "Quiet Time" was a regular institution. Students and teachers went to the chapel for half an hour before classes began. We mostly sat on cushions on the floor, leaning against the wall or other support, and knelt for prayer, but each individual did as he thought best, dividing the time between private Bible reading and prayer. Women students did the same at another place. I could wish that all our colleges in England had their chapel where this was possible, as I believe is the case with all Anglican colleges. Some may say they prefer the quiet of their own room. That had always been my custom, and of course, is so now. I can only say that I came to like and value greatly the time thus spent daily in corporate, silent worship, absolutely undisturbed. As Baptists we are convinced that we have a good deal to teach others. Are we as willing to learn from others as we would like them to learn from us? There are multitudes of good and true Christians in other Churches who are doing a noble and enduring work, whom we do not consider to be inferior to ourselves in character or service. I plead that in this whole matter of Christian unity we shall not be content with the past, but that we shall make it our determined endeavour to realise the Lord's desire, His

yearning, whole-hearted desire, for unity amongst His followers; and that humbly, persistently, gladly, we should make that desire our own, and live and labour for its fulfilment.

(e) Lastly I want to raise the whole question of *our own attitude towards World Evangelisation*. To-day the whole Protestant evangelical Church honours William Carey, and his fellow Baptists are particularly proud of him. Carey realised that the Church at home was only doing a small portion of the work committed to it by the Lord; and under his inspiring leadership a good beginning was made with the wider work of giving the Gospel to every creature. The world has now reached the stage when Christianity has more adherents than any other single religion. Yet it remains true that 1,900 years after Calvary two-thirds of the world's population, say 1,200,000,000, are still without the saving knowledge of Christ. I do not want to raise any discussion on the point as to whether the plan of having a Baptist Union and a Baptist Missionary Society as separate but friendly organisations, or the Methodist plan of having one Conference for its Home and Foreign work, is the better. That is a matter of organisation rather than of principle. But I do say that it is the duty of the whole Church to survey the whole Field and act accordingly. Less than 150 years ago our denomination was giving all its thought and effort to the work in this country, and practically no thought and effort to the vast Harvest Field beyond. Of course, we were a much smaller people then, travel was far more difficult and dangerous, and the world was not known in the way it is to-day. But is it not high time that the balance between the effort expended in England and that expended abroad should be adjusted? In the United Kingdom there are a little over 2,000 Baptist ministers (including those retired) and over 3,000 churches. In the B.M.S. there are rather more than 300 missionaries (not counting wives), and there are, of course, a number of Baptists in other missionary societies. This sometimes means one or two or a dozen Christian workers amongst a million people. Without in the least belittling the noble efforts of our churches to support missionary work, can we say that there is a definite, systematic effort on the part of the Baptist denomination as a whole to examine the religious situation of the world, i.e., as you and I think of it, the utter, wide, deep, crying needs of two-thirds of our fellow men?

When the Church at Antioch prayed unitedly and earnestly God's Spirit impelled them to set apart Barnabas and Saul, their two ablest men, for God's work in the regions beyond. The Church's action was more momentous than they knew, and may

be said to have changed the history of the modern world. When Jésus saw the multitudes, distressed and scattered, like sheep not having a shepherd, He was moved with compassion, and He was not overwhelmed by the magnitude of the task. He said: "Pray ye the Lord of the harvest that He will thrust forth labourers into His harvest." What would earnest, united prayer accomplish amongst our churches? Perhaps first of all that scores of young ministers would be volunteering for work across the seas; then, that many earnest young men in the churches would be rising up to take their places. Funds would, of course, be needed; but when there is a great movement of the Spirit of God there is never any serious trouble about money. It is nowhere recorded that there was any great financial difficulty in the early Church. Paul speaks warmly and proudly of the Macedonian Christians, "how that the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality." They had almost to force him to take their gifts. The attempt to redress the balance and have a larger and more adequate representation of the Home Church on the Mission Field would not impoverish the Home Church but enrich it. It would simply mean that there was a greater tide of the Spirit of God in the Home Church, and then on the Mission Field.

May I venture to say one thing to all the brethren here who are under thirty years of age, that if God speaks to you in an imperative way, as He spoke to Carey and Livingstone and Wilfred Grenfell and Albert Schweitzer and many others, you should reply as Peter did in justifying his first preaching to Gentiles: "Who was I that I should resist God?" Please allow also this personal word. It was a great disappointment to me when at the end of my Rawdon days the B.M.S. doctor counselled against my going to the Mission Field immediately. I have been thankful to God ever since for that unexpected compulsory guidance. I owe much to my five years' experience in a village church, and would counsel every missionary student who is young enough to have two or three years' experience in a home pastorate before going abroad.

My last word is this: it is my sincere conviction that it doesn't matter a jot on what patch of earth you live and die if only you live and die well. For all of us, since we are the friends of Christ, the best is yet to be; and we only have the best when we give it freely and gladly to others.

We lose what on ourselves we spend;
We have as treasure without end
Whatever, Lord, to Thee we lend,
Who givest all.

H. J. CHARTER.