

Seventy Years of Blessing :

THE STORY OF GOSPEL WORK CARRIED ON BY THE IRISH CHURCH MISSIONS.

THE BIRTH OF THE I.C.M.

GREAT things spring from small beginnings. The visit of a certain South of England clergyman to Ireland in 1845, as deputation for the London Jews' Society, would long since have been forgotten but for what came out of it. The Rev. Alexander Dallas went with his eyes open. And in the South of Ireland he saw intense darkness, profound ignorance, gross superstition. His spirit was stirred within him. The burden of souls was laid upon him, and the responsibility of those who know the Truth as it is in Jesus. He saw the need for an aggressive Gospel propaganda, for a definite setting before the people the contrast between Roman error and Bible truth, for a call to men and women to shake off the bondage of centuries, and to seek the liberty wherewith Christ sets His people free.

The first step taken was the posting of 20,000 copies of a striking letter, written and prepared in a little cottage in his parish of Wonston, Hants, entitled "A Voice from Heaven to Ireland," with certain texts from Holy Scripture. These were received on one day, January 16, 1846, by that number of Irish families. On a visit to Ireland shortly afterwards, Mr. Dallas found how great was the interest which had been aroused. Other letters followed. It was soon felt that there was a readiness and a ripeness for definite missionary effort, and in March, 1849, the Irish Church Missions came into being as a definite effort of the Church of Ireland to reach the Irish Roman Catholics with the light of the Gospel. The first Mission was at Castelkirke, a beautiful spot on Lough Corrib.

Other Missions throughout Connemara were soon started. That early work in the West was much aided, through God's providence, in two ways. The relief given by Protestants to the distressed and suffering people in the time of the Great Famine softened many hearts, and made them receptive to the message brought by the Protestant Missionary. The almost complete lack of schools in that great district made it easy to gather numbers of children into the new Mission Schools which were then opened.

Dublin was not long behind Connemara. A Mission was soon opened in the metropolis of the country. Here Training Homes for men and women workers were founded. Various agencies for reaching old and young were established, and a great and lasting work was commenced. In several other centres the new missionary enterprise was soon at work.

The spirit in which, and the lines along which, the work was carried on in those early days have remained till now. They may be summed up in two texts. (1) *Speaking the truth in love*. There has been no compromise with error. The truth has been faithfully spoken. Yet this has always been in love. It has been by men constrained by the love of Christ to love Him with all their hearts, and to spend and be spent in love for the souls for whom He died. (2) *He began at the same Scripture, and preached unto him Jesus*. I.C.M. workers have used the sword of the Spirit, and they have found it work. They have believed and preached the Gospel, the glad message of Jesus Christ, and they have proved that message to be the power of God unto salvation.

THE CARE OF THE CHILDREN.

In those early days of Mission effort, the spirit of Him Who said, *Suffer the little children to come unto Me*, was manifest in workers and supporters of the I.C.M. Truly there was need. Many were the destitute children, ill-clothed and ill-fed. Many were those growing up in ignorance, not attending any school. So Schools and Homes were started, the prime mover in this beneficent work being the late Mrs. Smyly, whose name in Dublin will never cease to be honoured.

As we think of the many thousands who during seventy years have been trained in these Schools and Homes, great numbers of whom are to-day respectable and loyal citizens, hundreds of whom are bravely serving King and country in Navy and Army, and hundreds of whom are proving good soldiers of Jesus Christ, we ask, *What would they have been but for the I.C.M.?* Some would undoubtedly have grown up in the service of sin. Some would be still in the darkness of Romanism. Some would no doubt have taken their part with the Sinn Feiners in the Rebellion of Easter week last year.

Many are the happy results of Scriptural training. We think of a lad still attending a Dublin Ragged School, who in the Rebellion risked his own life in carrying to a wounded Sherwood Forester lying in a Dublin street a drink of water, and had no sooner done so than he was wounded himself, and would probably have been killed had not a second Sherwood Forester come between and received a second bullet in his stead.

Amongst many old Home-lads of the I.C.M. we recall the bishop of an important diocese in one of the British Dominions, the Evangelical rector of a populous English parish, a Church of Ireland dignitary who is rector of a famous church, a godly officer in an Irish regiment, and many other valiant soldiers of the Cross. In one and all we find unabated love for the Home in which years of childhood were spent, and gratitude for the Scriptural teaching and Christian influence there enjoyed.

Amongst old Home-girls we recall one family of five sisters of Roman Catholic parentage, all of whom now work for Christ. One of them is the head of a Children's Home in Scotland; another of them a devoted lady missionary in the south of Africa, who, a short time ago, when sending a gift to the old Home in Dublin, said with thankfulness that the way the Bible had been taught her as a child had shown her how to teach the same Bible to the little heathen children in the dark Continent.

NEW METHODS.

Seventy years have brought many changes. From Connemara, the first centre of I.C.M. work, thousands of converts have been forced to emigrate. They have carried the Gospel in their hearts, and to-day they or their children serve God in a freer land. This has depleted the Connemara churches of their congregations, while the multiplicity of national schools under priestly control has diminished one great means of missionary activity. We thank God for faithful work still being done in that district, though under peculiar difficulties non-existent in the early days.

But if some doors have been partly closed, others have been opened. New methods have been adopted from time to time. The I.C.M. is as firmly attached as ever to the old Reformation principles and Gospel truth. She keeps to the old paths. But in those old paths she is ever ready to go forward. Some Forward Movements may be mentioned, which have been attended with great encouragement.

OPEN-AIR PREACHING.

For many years Mission workers persevered in this through much opposition. For a long time now, in Dublin at least, the opposition has practically ceased. More than that, through this instrumentality not a few men and women are known to have been led to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

The writer knows a young person who five years ago was transformed by this means from being a careless Romanist into a genuine Protestant and true follower of Jesus Christ. On a sick-bed she had vowed that if raised to health she would serve God and live a new life. Restored to health, she knew not how to keep her vow. One evening she came across a crowd at Foster Place. She heard the preaching. She came again. She received and read a New Testament. She conversed with a Mission lady. So she was led to come to Jesus, and found the secret of the new life.

WORK IN FAIRS AND MARKETS.

The bookstall in the market has proved in numerous districts an admirable means for the sale of the Scriptures and Gospel literature. Frequently the itinerant workers in explaining the books have been able to preach for hours the wonderful words of life. In fourteen consecutive fairs last summer the sales amounted to 1,371. A few sentences from a worker's journal give a glimpse of this work.

"I have a splendid book on *Pardon and Assurance*, and frequently dwell on each letter of PARDON, thus, Purchased, Abundant, Royal, Divine, Offered, Now. It is grand to see the crowds listening and drinking in the message. One country Roman Catholic who bought a Testament and a *Talk of the Road* said, 'I must hide the Testament like I would gold, not for the priest to see it, nor my wife either, for if she saw me reading it she would tell the priest, and he would make me burn it.' Another said he bought one before but had to burn it. This man bought another. A man who had bought a Testament and was reading it popped it behind his back when a priest came by, but when he was gone put it in his pocket."

LANTERN MISSIONS.

In many country districts nothing has surpassed the Lantern Missions for making known to the Roman Catholic people the Way of Salvation. About twenty of these are held each winter. For five evenings in succession the simple Gospel is made known through their ears and eyes to those who gather. These Missions are usually held in their school rooms at the invitation of rectors. One rector wrote after his parish had been visited a few weeks ago: "The meetings in this parish were an unqualified success. I did not anticipate that half the number would attend. There must have been fully 100 Roman Catholics present at the two last meetings. They joined heartily in the singing of the hymns, and seemed to enjoy the whole programme. I thank God for the work these two faithful servants of our Lord did in that week. I am sure it will do lasting good, both among my own people and the Roman Catholic community. I trust in the near future they may be permitted to come again."

PUBLIC RECEPTIONS.

In recent years it has been the custom in the Dublin Mission Church from time to time publicly to receive into the Church of Ireland converts from Rome who have been under careful instruction and have given evidence of definite acceptance of Christ. This has been found a real help in many

individual cases. A book with the signatures of such converts contains 360 names. One of the most recent is the name of a well-read man about sixty-five years of age. In his early days he was a server at Mass. He afterwards became a socialist, an anarchist, a fenian. Twice he was a political prisoner in Kilmainham Gaol. Twice he fled the country. Nothing satisfied him till some months ago he began attending the Mission Church and heard the Gospel message. He testifies to having a peace he had sought for thirty years, and, though for doing so he has been cast off by his family, he has openly broken with Rome and taken a definite stand for Christ. Amongst other names are those of a one-time nun, now a district nurse and a bright Christian, and a lay brother from a Dublin monastery, now an earnest colporteur.

MEDICAL MISSION.

Twenty years ago a Medical Mission was opened in Limerick. Through much opposition in the early years, Dr. Long persevered in his noble and Christ-like work. The physical relief, practical kindness, and simple Gospel talks freely given, have opened many hearts and led to real fruit. Just as many have found in the doctor's remedies what they failed to find through oil from "Our Lady of Limerick," earth from the grave of "The Little Flower," a Cork nun, the relics of the Blessed Gerard, crucifixes and prayers to St. Anthony, so they have found through the waiting-room addresses, and no less through the personal talks in the consulting-room, that Jesus Christ is the only Saviour, and their own Saviour. The writer has met several who through this agency have been led into the light.

WORK AMONGST SOLDIERS.

War time and the unrest in Ireland have necessitated the presence of large numbers of British troops. This has meant to the I.C.M. a special call and a special opportunity. In Galway and in various Irish camps through her workers she has lifted up Christ. The writer thanks God for what he has seen; crowds of men listening with deepest attention to the Gospel message, hearty and living prayer meetings, and not a few who have definitely enlisted under the Banner of the Cross.

UNITED EFFORT.

Three formerly separate Missions in connexion with the Church of Ireland are now linked with and carried on as part of the Irish Church Missions.

The Irish Church Colportage Mission, which for a long time has done an excellent work through selling portions of God's Word at the people's own doors by men ever ready for personal dealing with precious souls, was joined to the I.C.M. about twenty years ago.

Not long ago the forces of the Scripture Readers' Society and the Irish Society were united in one. The first of these has employed earnest men, attached to various parishes in the North, who as visitors and in other ways have set forth before Protestant and Roman Catholic alike "the common salvation." The Irish Society was founded in 1818 and for almost a century has sought especially to win to the Good Shepherd the lost sheep amongst the Gaelic-speaking people, teaching them to read, and by its workers and text-teachers leading them to learn in their own language passages from Holy Writ. From April 1 in this year this united Society has itself become part of the I.C.M., which stands now as the one main instrument of the Church of Ireland for the evangelization of those who are commonly regarded as non-parishioners, but to whom a National Church has surely a message and a responsibility.

The Primate of All Ireland and the Archbishop of Dublin have shown a real and personal interest in and approval of this amalgamation. It is hoped that it will result, not only in economy of working, but in a real advance in the work of winning to the light and the liberty of the service of Christ those who at present are in the darkness of superstition or the bondage of sin.

THE PRESENT CONDITION OF IRELAND.

Several generations have come and gone since the spirit of rebellion in Ireland was so strong and so determined as it is to-day. It has rapidly grown since the failure of the attempted Rebellion in Dublin in Easter week, 1916. The riots in the streets of Dublin on Easter Monday this year remind us how ready many are at any moment to give further trouble. Hatred of England is intense and widespread. Recently a young woman who went to her work in a munitions factory wearing a small Union Jack was so insulted that she felt compelled to remove the flag. One day this conversation was overheard in a Dublin street :

A. *This war will last ten years.*

B. (a woman). *Indeed, and I hope it will. I've been better off since the war than I ever was before.*

C. *And there'll be another war over here before long. And it won't be a failure like the last one. We'll conquer England yet.*

This is typical of a widely prevalent spirit, which necessitates the keeping of a large number of British troops in Ireland, leads at least 250,000 men of military age to remain quietly at home, and makes the extension of the Military Service Act to Ireland a practical impossibility.

The hardships experienced by Ireland in past centuries, the disloyal teaching given in the National Schools, the present poverty and lack of employment, have all contributed to this state of things. But as long as we leave out the religious question we do not get to the bottom of the Irish problem. It is plain that where Rome is strongest, as in Cork, there the spirit of rebellion thrives most ; and, on the other hand, where there is the open Bible, and it is read and followed, as in Ulster, or amongst Southern Protestants, or amongst those brought up in I.C.M. Schools and Homes, there loyal citizenship is found, and the British flag is honoured. On this ground alone, if ever there was need for the I.C.M. in Ireland, that need is surely greater than ever to-day.

REMEDIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES.

For Ireland's ills various remedies are suggested. Some propose a change of Government, a Home Rule settlement. But no such settlement will be acceptable to the multitudes who will have nothing short of an Irish Republic. Others seek the furtherance of agriculture and industry. This is all to the good, and we wish their plans success. But something deeper is needed to touch the spot and heal it. That something is the Gospel.

On a Lancashire platform there stood side by side a few days ago one who had been brought up a decided Protestant and Unionist, Dr. Long, and one who had been brought up a bigoted Romanist and at heart as much a Rebel as any Sinn Feiner today, the Rev. Joseph Connellan. As each said, they stood there as brothers. The Gospel had made both one—*All one in Christ Jesus.*

As it has been with individuals, so it would be with multitudes. The Gospel is the uniting force which Ireland needs.

And on none does the responsibility to give that Gospel rest more heavily than upon the Protestants of England. For England has been the cause of many of Ireland's woes.

In the words of the late Bishop Wordsworth of Lincoln : " To our shame and sorrow be it remembered we—we of this land—were the first agents and instruments that brought the Irish nation under a foreign spiritual yoke. England Romanised Ireland, and England ought to un-Romanise it. She owes this debt of justice and reparation to Ireland ; and may we not ask whether she can hope for the blessing of God before she has paid it ? "

No wonder if England finds Ireland to-day a thorn in her side. She reaps what she has sown. The guilt of past wrongs and past neglect will remain upon her head till she share with the sister Isle her Gospel light and her Reformation blessings.

The Secretaries, I.C.M., 11 Buckingham Street, Strand, London, W.C., will be delighted to receive the co-operation and support of those who value the Truth. They will heartily welcome all such who are able to attend, to the Annual Meeting, which will be held in Sion College, Embankment, London, on Friday, May 4, at 11 a.m. Canon Joynt will take the chair, and accounts of the work will be given by Mr. T. Murray, a worker in the Dublin Mission, and by the Rev. J. R. Howden, Vicar of St. Jude's, Wolverhampton, who has spent part of April visiting the Missions in Dublin and Limerick. The following words of the great Dr. Salmon show the spirit which should prevail : " I count it a very good work to release a man from Roman bondage. I hold that it is unworthy of any man, who possesses knowledge, to keep his knowledge to himself, and rejoice in his own enlightenment, without making any effort to bring others to share in his privileges."

A. E. HUGHES.

