

## MEMORIES OF CANON CHRISTOPHER.

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[Continued from THE CHURCHMAN of June, p. 323.]

[It may perhaps be permitted me to say that as Canon Christopher wrote to me many of his memories, the material now presented is usually very largely and sometimes identically in his language.—W. H. G. T.]

### IV. CURACY AT RICHMOND, 1849-1855.

THE Bishop of Calcutta had also given Mr. Christopher a letter of introduction to Bishop Sumner of Winchester, who recommended him to the Rev. John Dixon Hales, afterwards Canon Hales, Incumbent of St. John's, Richmond, as a candidate for his Curacy. Mr. Hales called on him, and, to use Mr. Christopher's own words, "being a very prudent man, asked to see my wife." He added, "I believe that interview inclined him the more towards me." Another characteristic incident is that, during a stay with Mr. Hales, Mr. Christopher suggested that he should be given some questions to which he might write answers, lest the Incumbent "should be disappointed afterwards." But this was not likely, and the Curate's experience, on the other hand, was equally satisfactory, for, as he used to say, he could not have been with a better man or in a more interesting sphere of work. There was a district containing four thousand people attached to St. John's Church.

When he entered upon his duties as Curate Mr. Hales was away for his holiday, and the Rev. Henry Venn Elliott, of St. Mary's, Brighton, was occupying his parsonage for his annual rest. He was to take the preaching and Christopher the visiting. Mr. Elliott initiated the Curate by accompanying him on his first pastoral visit and giving him the benefit of his experience.

Some weeks before the time arrived for the examination for Priests' Orders, Bishop Sumner required each of those whom he had ordained Deacon to send three sermons which had been preached on three specified Sundays. After he had looked through them all, he chose one of the Deacons to preach one of the sermons at the evening service in the Chapel of Farnham Castle after the Ordination, and Mr. Christopher was selected for this in July, 1850.

It is interesting to know that on this occasion he met, as one of the Bishop's Chaplains, Dr. Trench, afterwards Archbishop of Dublin,

who was the uncle of the lady, Miss Melesina Trench, who is now the wife of Canon Christopher's second son, Captain Alfred Seton Christopher.

Less than a year after this, Bishop Wilson of Calcutta wrote to Bishop Sumner asking him to try to persuade Mr. Christopher to accept the post of Rector of St. Paul's School, Calcutta, the Church of England Grammar School for European and Eurasian boys in Calcutta whose parents desired that they should receive a liberal education. The Bishop invited Mr. Christopher to visit him at Farnham Castle to talk over the matter, but he had no hesitation in deciding to decline the offer, for he felt he could not again expose his wife to an Indian climate, from which she had already suffered. Moreover, he desired to devote his life to the ministry of the Gospel, and not to resume the work of a schoolmaster.

Soon afterwards, the failure of the health of Mrs. Hales obliged Mr. Hales to arrange with the Bishop for Mr. Christopher to take charge of the Church and district and to live in St. John's Parsonage. Mr. and Mrs. Christopher lived there rather more than three years. In addition to the ordinary work of a parochial clergyman, he had Bible Classes at several private schools, which contained, in the aggregate, two hundred girls, and there was also a weekly service at the Police Station. He had, of course, a junior curate working with him.

In 1851, instead of an ordinary holiday, Mr. Christopher took a fortnight's tour for the C.M.S., preaching sermons and addressing meetings.

Whilst he was Curate-in-charge of St. John's, Richmond, the parish was visited by the cholera.

When he came home from visiting one afternoon he felt ill and went upstairs to bed, and did not come down again for months. He became worse every day, and appeared to be on his deathbed. As he was the Church of England Honorary Secretary of the British and Foreign Bible Society for Richmond, he had become associated in God's work with the Nonconformist ministers, and these did not fail to pray publicly for his recovery. There were prayers for him in all the Nonconformist Chapels of Richmond, as well as in the Parish Church and St. John's District Church. He always rejoiced to speak of this as a testimony to the way in which union in work for the Bible Society promotes real heart-union between Christians

of different denominations. His long life confirmed his early experience of this, and he felt assured that united work is pleasing to Him Who prayed to His Father that all His people might be one, for, as the Canon never tired of saying, if we cannot be "one" in all respects, we may at least unite in the circulation of Holy Scripture. His state becoming one of great danger, Mr. Christopher's medical man, Dr. Julius (father of the present Bishop of Christ Church, New Zealand), called down an eminent London physician to a consultation. The consultant said on leaving, "He can't live." Dr. Julius did not mention this, but went home and said to his wife (Mrs. Christopher's dearest friend in Richmond), "Nothing but prayer can save him. Medicine has no effect whatever upon him. Go round and get up another prayer-meeting." Mrs. Julius called many praying Christians together for a prayer-meeting that evening, and sent over to Teddington to the Vicar, the Rev. Alfred Wilkinson, to help to lead the prayers. Although it was Saturday evening he came at once, and the schoolroom was full. An idea of the influence of the Curate can be gathered from the fact that working men came to that prayer-meeting in their working clothes, and some of them were deeply stirred in their sorrow. When Dr. Julius came at eleven o'clock that night (for his fourth visit) he found that the change he had longed for had taken place, and from that improvement the patient never went back, though six weeks afterwards he was still so weak that he had to be lifted by his wife and the nurse from the bed to the couch. Yet he never ceased to progress towards recovery from the hour of that prayer-meeting, and all through his long life he thanked God for those united prayers and for the gracious answer to them.

During this time (1854) Mr. Christopher edited the Memoir, long since out of print, of John James Weitbrecht, written by his widow. He had known Weitbrecht in Calcutta, and it was, therefore, a joy to him to be of any service in helping forward the missionary cause.

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#### V. C.M.S. ASSOCIATION SECRETARIAT, 1855-1859.

No sooner had Mr. Christopher recovered from his illness in the Spring of 1855 than the Rev. Henry Venn, the Honorary Secretary of the C.M.S., asked him to take charge of a large district for the Church Missionary Society, as one of its Association

Secretaries. The extent of this can be understood when it is mentioned that the district included Oxfordshire, Berks, part of Bucks, Hants, the Channel Islands, Dorset, Wilts, and Gloucestershire. Although he was greatly helped by several local clergymen, the new Secretary had to provide deputations for the whole of his huge district, and probably no one who has not had a similar responsibility can realize the difficulty of finding efficient deputations, for a district of six counties and a quarter, with the Channel Islands in addition. The task is all the more arduous because every clergyman naturally prefers a missionary, though, obviously, it is utterly impossible that more than a fraction of the number of meetings held can be addressed by one who has had personal experience of missionary work.

Before relating the few available details of this secretarial work, mention may conveniently be made of one matter which Mr. Christopher was accustomed to associate with this period of his life. In connection with this missionary work, he used to refer to the question of what is often called *ex tempore* speaking. He would speak of those who say that they have "not the gift of *ex tempore* speaking, though they probably mean that they have not the gift of eloquence." Now eloquence is a very rare thing, though, as the Canon shrewdly remarked, it is perhaps not so rare for a young man to fancy he possesses this gift. But while eloquence may be used profitably for God, it is not essential to an instructive and interesting missionary address, since most men can speak easily enough if they have anything good to say, and by practice can obtain the necessary confidence and facility in speaking. To illustrate this, Canon Christopher told a story against himself, because he believed it might be useful to "some of the young soldiers who are coming on to replace the old soldiers, who are very soon going off." He made his first attempt at *ex tempore* preaching on a week-day evening, after he had been some little time in charge of St. John's, Richmond. An intelligent lady, the mistress of one of the High Schools at which he had a monthly Bible Class, said to him afterwards, in the kindest possible way: "Dear Mr. Christopher, I hope you will never preach *ex tempore* again! You know, dear Mr. Christopher, some clergymen have gifts!" The preacher said he entirely acquiesced in her judgment of his first effort of the kind, and afterwards said, "She could not

think it a poorer thing than I did myself." But, although he did not think then, and, indeed, never thought that he had the gift of preaching or speaking with what is called "eloquence," he was convinced that a clergyman would miss many opportunities of usefulness in the course of his ministry if he could not, after careful preparation, preach or speak with facility from notes. He therefore smiled at his kind adviser, expressed his entire agreement with her unfavourable opinion of that sermon, but, nevertheless, went on preaching from notes every Thursday evening, though he was not uncourteous enough to tell her that this was his decision. He felt he was very slow in improving, but in time he acquired more confidence, and if on any occasion he did not speak or preach with facility from notes, he regarded this as a sure sign that he had not given sufficient time and care to the preparation. One thing is certain, that if he had not persevered in overcoming his difficulty in speaking, it would have altered the whole course of his life, and might have deprived him of the success he obtained in it. Had he not acquired the power of expressing with confidence, clearness and fluency, whatever he had to say, he would not have been asked to be an Association Secretary of the C.M.S. If Mr. Christopher had not persevered in trying to preach from notes in the face of what he called "that sisterly discouragement," he would never have been suggested to Mr. Venn as a suitable man to be an Association Secretary of the C.M.S., and if he had not been an Association Secretary of the C.M.S., he probably would not have been invited to accept the living of St. Aldate's, Oxford. An address of his at Shanklin, in the Isle of Wight, at a C.M.S. meeting in a barn, which he could not have given if he had not by perseverance acquired the power of telling with facility facts and principles familiar to his mind, led a clergyman, who happened to be present, to suggest him as one suitable to fill the vacant Incumbency.

It is, therefore, not surprising that he always maintained that most clergymen could with facility and usefulness acquire the power of preaching from notes, and he often recommended undergraduates, who were looking forward to the ministry of the Gospel, to acquire the power of speaking in this way. He went so far as to prescribe a formula for so doing, in the shape of a study and imitation of Bishop Ryle's "Expository Thoughts on the Gospels."

Mr. Christopher was once told by Canon Garbett, a Bampton lecturer, and for many years an Incumbent at Surbiton, that he could **not** "think well without a pen in his hand."

It is only possible to relate a very few incidents in Mr. Christopher's work as an Association Secretary. In the first year he was one of the deputation to Weymouth, and the well-known writer, Charles Bridges, was at that time Rector of Melcombe Regis, now better known as Weymouth. The visitors were received at supper after the meeting by the local Treasurer of the C.M.S., Mr. Eliot, a banker, the father of the late Dean of Windsor, and of the late Canon Eliot, of Bournemouth.

The grace Charles Bridges said after supper that evening was this: "We thank Thee, O Lord, for these and all Thy *undeserved* mercies, through Jesus Christ." And the numerous guests at St. Aldate's Rectory will recall that Canon Christopher **always** used the word "*undeserved*" before "mercies." He said it seemed to magnify our conception of God's mercies to think **how** "*undeserved*" they are.

Mr. Christopher was greatly struck, in the first year of his travelling as a C.M.S. deputation, by the Christian happiness of the home of the Rev. Henry Moule, Vicar of Fordington, Dorchester. He and his wife were two of the most remarkable of the many Christians with whom Mr. Christopher became acquainted in his travels. Mr. Moule took some pupils whom he educated with his own sons. One of his sons was the Senior Classic of his year, and became Fellow and Tutor of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. Another is Dr. Handley C. G. Moule, the present honoured and beloved Bishop of Durham, who was bracketed Second Classic. A third son, George, who was in the Second Class of the Classical Tripos of his year, was the Bishop of Mid-China for many years. A fourth son, Arthur, was the Archdeacon of Ningpo.

In 1857, Mr. Christopher had a letter from the Rev. C. J. Glyn, then Rector of Witchampton, Dorset, asking him whether he **would** like to undertake the Secretaryship of the Bible Society. The **reply** was characteristic:—

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I value more than I can express this fresh proof of your confidence. I had been sounded by a member of the sub-committee of the British and Foreign Bible Society some time ago, when the vacancy first occurred; and

Wilkinson, Vicar of Teddington, urged it upon me, but I feel that I have been Providentially prepared for the work of the C.M.S., and called of God to it, and I do earnestly hope that, whilst it is His good pleasure that I continue in the work, He will give me grace steadily to persevere.

Affectionately yours,  
ALFRED M. W. CHRISTOPHER.

P.S.—Of all I know, I think — is the best man for the post. He has much more power than you think. The C.M.S. work has brought him out. As Mr. Venn says, "He has great powers of organization."

The gentleman here suggested was appointed, and Canon Christopher added that it was only due to special, and, as it seemed to him, sufficient circumstances, that he himself gave up the idea of this work.

In 1858 he was requested by the Committee of the C.M.S. to take charge of the London District, twelve miles round St. Paul's, and there again he worked with all his immense energy. Some idea of the extent of his work and its development may be gained by the fact that on his resignation, in 1859, the area had to be divided into three separate Secretaryships.

W. H. GRIFFITH THOMAS.

*(To be continued.)*

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### THE PILGRIM FATHERS.

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