

AMERICAN BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS FOR
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MISSIONARY PAPER,

No. V.

A COMPARISON OF THE APOSTOLIC AGE WITH THE
PRESENT, IN RESPECT TO FACILITIES FOR CONDUCT-
ING MISSIONARY OPERATIONS.

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A COMPARISON OF THE APOSTOLIC AGE WITH THE PRESENT, IN RESPECT TO FACILITIES FOR CONDUCTING MISSIONARY OPERATIONS.

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It is the opinion of many, that this world can never be evangelized. They have not passed over the land to search it out; but, quite at ease at home, they have learned that the people be strong which dwell in the land, and that the giants, the sons of Anak, are there, in whose sight, as well as their own, they would be as grasshoppers, should they attempt their conversion.

But is it certain that the earth cannot be evangelized? Shall the god of this world for ever wield his iron sceptre over it; and altars smoke with human victims, and the waters be tinged with the blood of infants; and the funeral pile consume the living and the dead? Shall these faint-hearted predictions of sloth and unbelief be received? Is there a heart that does not say—Let us try; and if the redemption of the world be impossible, let us learn it by experiment and failure, and not from idle and ominous prediction?

But why cannot the earth be evangelized? A large portion of it has been; and it is easy to show, that fewer obstacles impede the work now, and greater facilities aid it, than attended the introduction of Christianity, in the primitive age.

1. *Our geographical knowledge is more comprehensive and minute.* Consult an ancient map, which sheds light upon the known, and throws darkness upon the unknown, parts of this world; and nearly one half the territory now explored, was "terra incognita,"* at the era of the intro-

* Unknown land.

duction of Christianity. How could the knowledge of the Lord be made to cover the earth, when one half the habitations of men were undiscovered? And what shall hinder it now, when men have run to and fro, and scarcely a desert, or a habitable spot is left unexplored.

2. *The intercourse between different parts of the globe is becoming daily more frequent and easy*, contracting the dimensions of the world, and bringing the most distant parts into near neighborhood. The proximity of nations is increased, and the antipodes are nearer neighbors now, than the extremities of Europe were in the primitive age. When Paul navigated the Mediterranean sea, they had no compass; and sailed by the stars; and when these were hid, they lost their reckoning, and were wrecked. And as to the broad Atlantic, they dared but just to look out upon it, and creep along the shores of Africa and Europe. But now, the improvements in navigation have made the Atlantic less hazardous than the Mediterranean was 1800 years ago, and have enabled us to circumnavigate the globe as safely, and almost in as short a time, as it once required to coast around that inland sea; while by steam, and by canals and rail-roads, rivers are overcome, and mountains are brought low, and vallies are exalted, to prepare the way of the Lord before him.—By the rapidity and ubiquity of commercial intercourse, the whole world is more accessible to missionary enterprise now, than the Roman empire was in the days of Paul.

3. *The attachment to false systems of religion, and the repugnance to Christianity, are by no means as great now, as they were in the primitive age.* Idolatry then was in the vigor of manhood: it totters now with the imbecility of age. It was sustained then, by the pride and policy of one of the most civilized and energetic nations that ever existed. There is not at this time on earth, so much influence of civilization, and vigor of intellect, and deceitfulness of philosophy, and impetus of policy, and virulence of enmity, to be combined against Christianity, as the Roman empire arrayed against it. Judaism was then fierce and implacable: it is tamed now by persecution, and enfeebled by sickness of heart through hope deferred, and is half prepared to cry, Hosanna to the Son of David. And as to the potent powers of opposition, which have

arisen since the apostolic age—the Mohammedan and the Papal—they, too, are waxing old, and passing away. All systems of error seem to have had their day;—To have made full proof of their tendency to moral dissolution, and to have brought the world into a posture of waiting for that blessed religion, which is for the healing of the nations. The god of this world has no such troops at his command now, as those with which he then attacked Christianity. The very heathen have, in some instances, thrown away their idols without a substitute; and in many instances, have invited the introduction of Christianity, and contributed for the translation and propagation of the Bible.

4. *The resources of the world, physical, intellectual, and moral, are greater now, than in the primitive age, and are chiefly in the possession of nations which are nominally Christian.* England and America, with continental Europe, could sway the destinies of the world, small as the proportion is of Christian population, compared with the idolatrous. In a war for empire, or at least for decisive universal influence, the power and the dominion under the whole heaven would be found with the advocates of Christianity. In other words, Christian nations are able, if they are disposed, by power or policy, to propagate and protect Christianity throughout the world.—But in the beginning, it was not so. The whole civilized world was then in arms against Christianity; and all that policy, and power, and malignity could do, was done to stop its progress. The storms of ten persecutions roared round and beat upon the friends of Jesus, three hundred years, almost without intermission; and yet, in opposition to the tremendous onset, they planted the banners of Christ in almost every portion of the Roman empire, and witnessed at length the downfall of idolatry, and heard the shouts of victory.

5. *The number of Christians on earth now, their amount of resources, and their character and influence on society, give us advantages in propagating Christianity, unspeakably greater than those enjoyed by the little band of primitive disciples.* Christianity commenced its onset upon the world with an army of twelve men, unknown to fame, poor, without learning, and unpatronised. It is now

sustained by the favor, intellect, and wealth of 200,000,000 of nominal Christians, and we may hope by not less than 10,000,000 of the real followers of the Lamb.

6. *The means of extending knowledge, and influencing the human mind by argument and moral power, are multiplied a thousand fold.* The Lancasterian mode of instruction renders the instruction of the world cheap and easy. The improvements of the press have reduced immensely, and will reduce yet more, the price of books, bringing not only Tracts and Bibles, but even libraries, within the reach of every man and every child. But in the primitive age, the light of science beamed only on a small portion of mankind. The mass of men were not and could not be instructed to read. Every thing was transient and fluctuating, because so little was made permanent in books and general knowledge, and so much depended on the character, the life, and energy of the living teacher. The press, that lever of Archimedes, which now moves the world, was unknown.

7. *Modern improvements in civil government facilitate the propagation of Christianity.* When Christianity commenced its career, and ages afterwards, physical power was the chief engine of government. Now, it is intellectual and moral power. The world is passing from the dominion of bayonets, and coming under the influence of a public opinion more potent than fleets and armies. Kings feel the power of it, and are fortifying against it. The slave trade is retreating before it; and despotism and war are destined to be turned out of the world by it. The press has more power than all the despotic thrones in Europe. Not one of them would stand by the side of it for a quarter of a century. But this public opinion, created by the press, and now rising and extending its omnipotent legislation over men, is modified more by Christianity, than any other, or by all other causes.

This progress of civil and religious liberty is laying the world open to the invasion of Christianity. There is a vitality in Christianity, which, if it be left to its own energies, unopposed and unprotected by the civil power, will not fail to extend it rapidly over the earth. As yet, it has had no fair experiment: for no sooner did governments cease to persecute, than they undertook to foster Chris-

tianity. It became an object of civil legislation and of civil patronage. This polluted the church by the introduction of worldly men into the ministry; destroyed her spirituality, corrupted her doctrines and worship, and made her a secular community under an ecclesiastical exterior: and to this time, the *protection* of the church, so called, by civil governments, has been the chief cause of her declension, and the chief obstacles to the spread of vital religion through the earth.

But a new era is opening upon the world. The rights of conscience are beginning to be understood, and religion to be no longer an object of civil legislation. Her chains are falling off; and in her loveliness and strength she is now, for the first time, going forth to redeem the nations, unaided and unopposed by the civil power. All missionary efforts are conducted now, not by governments, but by voluntary associations of the pious and benevolent. This is all Christianity needs. Give her but opportunity, and she will enlighten and emancipate the world.

But it will be said, *The apostles had the gift of tongues to aid them.*

This was because they were persecuted, and had no time, nor place, nor resources for study. But our academies, and colleges, and theological seminaries, and literary leisure, supersede the necessity of these miraculous gifts, and more than balance their advantage; for they had only the gift of *speaking* various languages, while we can not only command by study the speech of all nations, but can give them the Bible and religious books in their own tongues wherein they were born. They, like Alexander, made rapid conquests, without the means of permanently retaining them; but we invade, and by means of the press we fortify, passing onward from conquering to conquer, till He whose right it is, shall reign on the earth.

Will it be said, *The apostles had the power of miracles?*

But this was only to authenticate their commission as the servants of the Most High God, before the canon of revelation was completed, and the permanent evidence of its divine authority consummated. Yet, except the me-

mentary wonder, we have all that they possessed in the testimony of the same miracles to the inspiration of the Bible, and in the accumulating evidence of prophecy, and the moral efficacy of Christianity.

Miracles are not needed now. Our evidence that the Bible is the word of God, is as ample as the apostles' evidence was that they spoke by a divine commission. The man of God, therefore, is, with his Bible in his hand, thoroughly furnished unto every good work.

It is thought by some, that *the sudden convictions and transformations of character, in the primitive age, were miraculous interpositions, and that, on this account, Christianity prevailed then but cannot prevail now.*

But the entire narrative of the Acts of the apostles shows, that miracles only arrested the attention and convinced the understanding, while the power of truth and of the Holy Ghost changed the heart. But be it so, that the power was miraculous. Then we have it still, as really as the primitive church. Under the preaching of the Gospel, men are now pricked in the heart, and inquire what they shall do to be saved, and find joy and peace in believing. Revivals of religion are extending through the land, with increasing frequency and power, producing precisely the moral transformations, which were produced on the day of pentecost; and they will doubtless continue and extend, until a nation shall be born in a day.

Should any be still disposed to insist, that our advantages for evangelising the world, are not to be compared with those of the apostolic age, let them reverse the scene, and roll back the wheels of time, and obliterate the improvements in science and commerce and arts, which now facilitate the spread of the Gospel. Let them throw into darkness all the known portions of the earth, which were then unknown. Let them throw into distance the propinquity of nations, and exchange their rapid intercourse for cheerless, insulated existence. Let the magnetic power be forgotten, and the timid navigator creep along the coast of the Mediterranean, and tremble and cling to the shore when he looks out upon the loud waves of the Atlantic. Inspire idolatry with the vigor of meridian manhood, and arm in its defence, and against Christianity, all

the civilization, and science, and mental power of the world. Give back to the implacable Jew his inveterate unbelief, and his vantage ground, and disposition to oppose Christianity in every place of his dispersion, from Jerusalem to every extremity of the Roman empire. — Blot out the means of extending knowledge, and exerting influence upon the human mind. Destroy the Lancasterian system of instruction, and throw back the mass of men into a state of unreading, unreflecting ignorance. Blot out libraries, and Tracts; abolish Bible and Education and Tract and Missionary Societies; and send the nations for knowledge to parchment, and the slow and limited productions of the pen. Let all the improvements in civil government be obliterated, and the world be driven from the happy arts of self government to the guardianship of dungeons and chains. Let liberty of conscience expire and the church, now emancipated and walking forth in her unsullied loveliness, return to the guidance of secular policy, and the perversions and corruptions of an unholy priesthood. And now reduce the 200,000,000 of nominal, and the 10,000,000 of real Christians, spread over the earth, to a few hundred disciples, and to twelve apostles, assembled, for fear of the Jews, in an upper chamber, to enjoy the blessings of a secret prayer-meeting; and give them the power of miracles, and the gift of tongues, and send them out into all the earth to preach the Gospel to every creature.

Is this the apostolic advantage for propagating Christianity, which throws into discouragement and hopeless imbecility all our present means of enlightening and disenthraling the world? *They*, comparatively, had nothing to begin with, and every thing to oppose them: and yet, in three hundred years, the whole civilized, and much of the barbarous world, was brought under the dominion of Christianity. And shall *we*, with the advantage of all their labors, and of our numbers, and a thousand fold increase of opportunity and moral power, stand halting in unbelief, while the Lord Jesus is still repeating the injunction, *Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature*; and repeating the assurance, *Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world*? Shame on our sloth! shame on our unbelief!

We need not be disheartened. We possess a thousand fold the advantage of apostles and primitive Christians for the spread of the Gospel. And shall the whole church on earth—shall the thousands who now profess the pure religion—be dismayed and paralyzed at an enterprise, which had once been well nigh accomplished by the energies of twelve men?

But what can be done?

There must be *more faith* in the church of God. All the uncertainties and waverings of unbelief must be swept away by the power of that faith, which is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen. Those "scenes surpassing fable," when Satan shall be bound, and an emancipated world shall sing Hosanna to the Son of David, must rise up before us in all the freshness and inspiration of a glorious reality. Such faith, and only such, will achieve again the wonders it wrought in other days. It has lost none of its power. Again, it will subdue kingdoms, work righteousness, obtain promises, stop the mouths of lions, quench the violence of fire, escape the edge of the sword, out of weakness become strong, wax valiant in fight, and put to flight the armies of the aliens. For this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our *faith*.

There must be *a more intense love for Christ* in his church. Such love as now burns dimly in the hearts of Christians; a low, and languid, and wavering affection; halting between the opposing attractions of earth and heaven; may answer for standing upon the *defensive*, but never for making that *vigorous onset* which shall subdue the world to Christ. Effort will never surpass desire. And as yet our hearts are not equal to those efforts needed for the achievement of victory. They linger and look back upon the world. They hesitate; and slowly, and with a sigh, part with substance in penurious measure. Weight hangs, as yet, on the wheels of the Victor's chariot: and never, on earth, as in heaven, will it move,

"Instinct with spirit,
Flashing thick flames, unless
Attended by ten thousand thousand saints."

CONCLUSION OF THE TWENTY-THIRD ANNUAL REPORT
OF THE AMERICAN BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS FOR
FOREIGN MISSIONS.

TWENTY years ago, the fundamental principle of Christian morals, *that it is the duty of EVERY ONE to take some part in sending the gospel to the heathen*, was almost latent in our churches. It attracted little attention in any part of the country, and exerted almost no influence. But there has been a great and happy change. The excitement occasioned by the sending forth of missionaries, produced by the blessing of God, a resurrection of that principle in our churches, and ever since it has been gaining attention; till now, it would be almost as easy to shut up the orb of day as to hide it from view. It is recognized in thousands of pulpits, and lecture rooms, and inquiry-meetings; not only among the denominations with which the Board is immediately connected, but among Baptists, and Methodists, and Episcopalians. Far and wide through the land, it enters into the system of family and Sabbath-school instruction. You meet with it also in tracts, and religious newspapers, and monthly religious journals, and religious books of every size and description.

As a consequence of this increasing knowledge and increasing sense of responsibility, it is coming to pass more and more in our churches, that men contribute in support of benevolent objects from *principle*—from a *deep and settled conviction of duty*, rather than from *excitement*. This is a fact most auspicious in its bearing on the perpetuity and growth of the missionary enterprise. Children trained up for this work, may be expected to feel and do more for it than their parents who were not. The next generation may be expected to prosecute the work with more spirit than the present; and the generation following, with still greater zeal; and so on from generation to generation. A

larger and larger number of individuals will engage in the glorious enterprise, and the devotedness of the real disciples of Christ, in all parts of the land, will approximate nearer and nearer to the elevated standard of the gospel. Such has been the fact for twenty years past; and such it will be, we believe, for years and even ages to come; till the earth is filled with ministers of the gospel, and Bibles, and tracts; and till the Holy Ghost comes down to bless these means for the subjugation of all nations to the truth.

A *second* fact of some importance is, that not less than a fourth part of the pagan world is at this moment subject to protestant governments. It is easy to see, also, that all pagan and Mohammedan countries are coming, one after another, under the power, or at least under the commanding influence, of nations nominally Christian.

Another fact of great interest is this—that by means of a *few* languages we may reach the greater part of mankind. This is true, notwithstanding the very great number of languages in the world. The Chinese language is spoken by not less than a *fifth* part of our race. Throughout the whole of southern Africa there appears to be, substantially, but two languages. The Polynesian islands, though scattered over a great ocean, and embracing different dialects, are believed to contain not more than one or two languages. And the farther researches on this subject are prosecuted, the less formidable does the obstacle appear to be, which is found in the different languages and dialects of mankind.

The power of the press is *another* fact of amazing interest. It is a gift, which we should probably all choose in preference to that of tongues, if we could have but one. It multiplies the Holy Scriptures by thousands and hundreds of thousands, in a single year; and will yet multiply them by millions and hundreds of millions, in the same time: and, so far as the *means* are concerned for sending the gospel through the earth, it suffices, of itself, to place us incomparably in advance of the primitive ages of the church.

Another fact of commanding interest is this—that *very many, if not all the leading superstitions of the world, are comparatively in their dotage*. Not one of them stands forth in the giant strength of youth. Not one of them

exerts the sway it once did over the imagination and passions of their votaries. The contrary is true to an animating extent. Our western Indians, for instance, have scarcely anything remaining of their ancient superstitions to oppose the gospel. The idolatrous system of the Sandwich islanders died of old age. The religion of India, at present, consists more in *usage* than in *passion*; and long is the time since the religion of China was animated by mind and feeling. As for Mohammedanism and Popenry, they are on the wane, and cannot possibly recover.

The *last* and perhaps the most remarkable fact which will be mentioned, is—that *the work of publishing the gospel to the heathen is begun auspiciously, and almost simultaneously and without concert, in most of the great districts of the unevangelized world.* Thus, among the American Indians; the work of publishing the gospel is begun in Labrador, and in not less than one hundred and forty places along our northern frontiers, and on either side of the Mississippi. It is begun, and has made great advances, in Greenland. It is begun in Africa, on the south, and west, and northeast. It is begun in the heart of the great island of Madagascar. In the island of Ceylon it is begun, on the north, in the centre, and on all sides. India is assailed by the soldiers of the cross in not less than a hundred and fifty points, along her coasts, and in her great and populous interior. On the shores of western Asia, the work is begun at the foot of Lebanon, at Smyrna, and in the metropolis of the Turkish empire. Among the mountains of Caucasus, between the Black and Caspian seas, it is begun; and in the ancient seats of the human race, upon the plains of Shinar. It is begun in the elevated regions of central Asia, among the worshippers of the Grand Lama. From thence, China will one day be entered from the north; and some are now preparing, and more are hastening, to assail it from the south. And finally, the work of publishing the gospel in the ten thousand islands of the Indian and Pacific oceans, is begun at both extremities of that vast and interesting archipelago.

A more judicious beginning, as to the posts to be occupied, there could not well be, if our object is to publish the gospel everywhere in the shortest time. Far better is

it to have the seven hundred missionaries, now among the heathen, thus scattered, than to have them all concentrated in one kingdom. It is analogous to the manner in which great countries are usually peopled—by small settlements scattered here and there, each becoming a radiating point. Though the posts already occupied by missionaries among the heathen are less than six hundred, they are providentially such in the different parts of the world, that almost the whole earth is brought within distinct observation. They are such, that the greater part of mankind must soon hear rumors of the efforts made by Christian missionaries. They are such, that by means of these several Christian missions, each pleading in behalf of its respective district, the **WHOLE WORLD** is, as it were, calling for relief, within the view and hearing of the Christian church. Nor can such a plea, coming from so many quarters, urged with so much importunity and by so many eloquent voices, and enforced by the commands and promises and Spirit of Jehovah, long be unheeded by any of the real disciples of the Lord Jesus.