

THE MAKING OF A MISSIONARY

By G. A. GOLLOCK

I

It is obvious that agreement as to what qualities are requisite in a modern missionary must precede the consideration of how these qualities can be acquired and by what agencies they can best be developed. Such agreement may be arrived at by attempting to discern the characteristics of missionaries in the past and making some study of these characteristics in the light of the conditions which await missionaries in the present or near future.

It scarcely matters for our purpose whether we look at the great missionaries who tower like mountain peaks above the foot-hills or at the goodly ranks of faithful but less known men and women who fill up the number of the missionaries of the past. No calling or profession can show among its members a greater variety of temperament, education or gift. Some started life with the heritage of birth and large possessions, others had scanty educational opportunity and were largely self-taught. Some had brilliant gifts destined to distinction in any calling, others had merely average powers. The facts of missionary history and biography finally discredit the theory that missionaries to be successful must be drawn from certain social classes, pass through certain educational processes and represent certain limited types.

Yet in the midst of this diversity certain characteristics emerge with a persistence which suggests that they are those fundamental and essential qualities of which we are in search. The common qualities appear to be these: courage and physical endurance, force of character, mental

adaptability, reality of spiritual experience and devotion, vocation, love.

Here we must pause for a moment to ask how these great qualities were produced. Those who limit their conception of missionary preparation to the acquisition of specialized knowledge are driven to dwell upon the disabilities of the earlier missionaries who, they hold, 'went out untrained'; those, on the other hand, who deprecate specialized preparation point to these same missionaries as evidence that 'missionaries do not need training at all.' We shall hope to show in a moment that the conditions which now make specialized preparation essential for every missionary are largely a development of recent date, but we are more concerned to point out that the highest preparation for the mission field was that which our fathers had. They were learners in God's great school of life. The divine processes which do the main work of fashioning men and women into missionaries worked on them and in them for years. From cobbler's bench, from sheep-fold, from pit brow, from loom, from office desk; by stress of circumstance, by chastening of spirit, by dullness of routine or sudden surprise of opportunity; through sickness and health, sorrow and joy, restriction and liberty, loss and gain—God the great Trainer fitted them by the discipline of life to be instruments of His will. Only at our peril, now or in coming days, can we count any missionary preparation of value greater than this. It is the divine foundation on which all else must be built.

Is it necessary that missionaries of the present and the future should be such men as their fathers were? Is work under modern conditions less exacting than work in the past? Among the qualities named are there any that can be dispensed with or that are needed in lesser degree?

Merely external observation would justify the suggestion that the claim upon courage and physical endurance is less. Means of transit are simplified, there are fewer raw cannibals to be encountered, fewer massacres to be

apprehended, savage beasts do not prowl so near. Sanitation and preventive medicine have made progress, suitable food can be more readily procured. Yet it is a question whether modern conditions bear less hardly on health—as distinguished from life—than did those of former days. The enervating effects of modern habits, which even when they are simple according to current standards are luxurious compared with those of the past, and the heavy strain on nerve and brain leave the missionary for the most part in need of considerable grit and endurance if he is to stick to his task. His danger is not that of falling into ‘the white man’s grave’ but of coming home in broken health, or of just ‘holding on’ at his post, unable through deterioration of his bodily forces to build up a true ideal of physical vigour in lands which languish for healthy daughters and sons. Men of frail physique can everywhere rise above their limitations, but broadly speaking, the mission field calls for men and women of physical robustness, not for weaklings, whatever their other qualifications may be.

Concerning force of character much the same must be said. Certain initial difficulties have been vanquished but others have gained in strength. It is a question whether the resources of Christian character are more tested by fast-closed doors which have to be beleaguered or by unlimited open territory waiting to be possessed. To cast in new moulds an ancient order in process of disintegration through contact with western civilization, to convince men of the power of a real Christianity in the face of a travesty of its form, to nurture Christian graces in masses of immature converts, to lead young churches out of tutelage into disciplined independence, to work not as an individual but as a sharer in corporate life and co-operative administration—these tasks and others like them need for their fulfilment a character rich in the strength and gentleness of Christ. Wherever we make subtraction, it must not be in the character qualities which the future requires.

Turning to mental adaptability, it is evident that the

complexity of the missionary task has increased and is increasing still. Such facts as that non-Christian creeds have been stirred to self-consciousness, that their sacred writings are being reinterpreted and that modern critical methods are being applied alike to them and to the Christian scriptures, that western thought in its cruder forms begins to permeate the East and that agnostic and rationalistic publications in English find ready readers, especially among young men, are familiar to every reader of this Review. It is admitted that non-Christians who can appreciate literature in European languages are not readily accessible to the presentation of the distinctive message of the Gospel by missionaries who halt and stumble in their use of an eastern vernacular or who are unversed in the ancient religious writings which they desire to supplant. Apologetic or propagandist Christian literature is judged to-day by a standard higher than some of its missionary writers have been satisfied to attain. Currents of thought are eddying in channels where a steady stream of opposition flowed in former days, sects and samajes are multiplying, syncretic tendencies are gaining strength, the impact of the nationalistic spirit upon religion is charged with possibilities of evil and of good. Added to all this the growing opportunities for personal friendship between missionaries and educated non-Christian Orientals make an exacting claim upon insight, mental sympathy and adaptability. In this narrowing world provision must be made for the inevitable incoming of modern thought. Witness what is impending in quiet Korea through the pervasion of its life by Japan, or the problems created by echoes of the woman's movement in the seclusion of harem and zenana. Even in remoter districts and in the less intellectually developed mission fields where the rural population is uncivilized and illiterate and there is need for the simplest evangelistic work, the missionary will find himself called to be a leader of native fellow-workers, a trainer of evangelists, a superintendent of village schools, a church builder, possibly a trans-

lator, and in each capacity he will need to adapt himself to the mental attitude of those amongst whom he works. There is a renaissance of thought in all the mission fields, and the missionary who would lay his mind beside the minds of others must have in him the spirit of mental renaissance too.

It does not need to be argued that no lessened reality of spiritual experience or devotion will meet the demands of the present hour. The pious phrases of a former generation would be unnatural on lips accustomed to the use of other terms; but the essentials the words stand for must abide. The unchanged strength of temptation and the insidious atmosphere of evil which he breathes drive the modern missionary to seek the same place of shelter, the same inflowing of purifying grace. Men apprehend divine love only through its embodiment in a brother man, and the missionary has still no one to proffer as witness but himself. He works among men craving to find their rest in the Father, and he has still no way of access to offer them but Christ. The recesses of men's hearts still need to be laid open, and he, like his fathers, has only the sword of the Spirit which can pierce into and sunder the depths. His life may hold little that is outwardly heroic, but it must be true of him as of his Master that if he would save others he cannot save himself. The need for mental adaptability, for ability to use cogent argument or scholarly apologetic, falls far below the need for that singleness of eye—a thing quite other than narrowness of vision—which lets the Spirit of God so shine into a missionary that those who watch him find him full of light.

In estimating the need for missionary vocation in the future we stand on more difficult ground. It is evident that to work so exacting no man should run unless he be sent. The record of the Fourth Gospel proves that it was the sense of His clear mission which strengthened our Lord for His task. In the Middle Ages the truth of vocation was a guiding star in the dark. Even the missionaries of the past generation were clear about their 'call,' which

often came to them in a moment as a spiritual experience defined in form. To-day the sense of vocation has grown faint in the Church. This is in part because men see life less in sections and therefore concentrate less definitely upon what appears to exclude some of the whole ; partly because in the modern outlook responsibility for decision has shifted from the region of the will, where decision may be prompt and final, to the region of the judgment, where maturing processes are slow. We cannot return to the position of our immediate predecessors, but it is impossible to remain where we are. The need for vocation grows more urgent as the artificial separation between religious and secular and between home and foreign service breaks down. We summon spiritual commonsense to our assistance, and urge that it is irrational for a man to spend five or ten years of his life working his way with a living message to the heart of an eastern nation, mastering alien thought and foreign language and specializing to a high degree, and then to drop his undertaking, bringing his experience to grow stale in the home land when it would have grown ripe and fruitful in the mission field. No sane man would contemplate such action if he had acquired proficiency in engineering, medicine or law. But no full solution can be arrived at on this plane. We must seek until we find some counterpart of the medieval vision, some substitute for the direct appeal to will and emotion which won our fathers' response. Vocation may find reinstatement in this present age through a new consciousness on the part of each man of the responsibility of life ; through an unfolding of what is implicit in relationship with a Father who of necessity knows what He would have His children do ; through some new simplicity in intercourse, in obedience, in faith ; or through a new and compelling realization of the greatness of the message given to mankind in Christ.¹

¹ There is a poem in Sir Rabindranath Tagore's *Fruit Gathering* (No. xxxv, 'The Trumpet lies in the Dust') which seems to express with force and beauty an aspect of vocation likely to appeal with special power to men and women at the close of the war.

Thus far it has seemed that the missionary of the present and the future must have, and in increasing measure, the qualities which characterized the missionaries in the past. One only of those we have named remains to be considered—the grace of love. It was richly in our fathers; it is still more needed in their sons. The old relationships based on racial and intellectual superiority are passing, infant churches are growing into manhood, dependents are becoming fellow-workers—rivals, if we have not love. Love is comparatively easy in the days of engaging childhood or even in the face of the naughtiness of an undeveloped child; it is more costly when the unregulated forces of adolescence begin to stir; it is divine if it triumphs when we are no longer turned to as the obvious leaders and find that instead of waxing the time has come to wane. If the missionary of the future have not love—he is nothing. The phalanx of testimony from the mission field in support of this statement is unshakably strong. Love can speak the universal language; it takes no account of racial barriers, submerges temperamental divergences and conquers time itself. But it must be ‘love divine,’ not merely human liking. He who would seek a model for his love to others need only study the wonder of Christ’s love for himself.

It is probable that some are already asking: Is it not after all apparent that, whatever it may have been in the days of our fathers, it is only the few of brilliant gifts or of favouring opportunities who can under modern conditions fitly serve in the missionary enterprise of the Church? Whether the question is asked by those who would restrict the missionary calling to certain classes, or by possible candidates discouraged by self-measurement against a standard which seems beyond their span, a direct negative is justified by two incontrovertible facts: one is the unfathomed richness of the grace of God, the creative power of which we persistently underestimate; the other is the resources latent in average human nature, which has yielded

unsuspected treasure in many lands when tried in the furnace of war. The capacity of God to make, and of man to become, justify us in setting the standard of missionary equipment as high as is needful, in quiet confidence that the conditions can be adequately met.

II

Here we find ourselves at what is the heart and purpose of this paper, the one message which makes its writing or its reading worth while. The destinies of nations are unfolding too quickly to allow of opportunist action or of delay. Responsibility for the preparation of qualified missionaries in a way suited to modern conditions must be faced on a scale proportionate to the need. The task can no longer be deputed by the Church to groups of persons set apart for that purpose, whether in boards of missionary preparation or in the candidates departments of societies or in institutions where missionary training is given. It was, after all, to the Church as a whole that the commission was given, and while the Church may well call specialist agencies to its assistance, ultimate responsibility can never be shifted to them. The conviction grows clearer year by year that missionaries will never be equipped as they should be until their preparation is taken in hand by the Church itself, working in a new and conscious collaboration with the agencies whom it calls to its aid. Up to the present no common agreement has been arrived at between these two. Missionary societies frequently lament that when a candidate comes into their hands, they are forced to address themselves to equipment in a region of character, of Christian experience, of Bible knowledge which properly pertains to the Church, instead of being free to begin upon special missionary preparation. Further, instead of filling the place of senior partner and stimulating missionary agencies to provide an equipment for every missionary related to his capacities and to the nature of his task, the

Church as a whole has tended to put its weight into the other scale. Its standard is for the most part lower than that of the missionary societies themselves. Cases are not uncommon in which local church leaders have resented the suggestion of further training for a candidate sent forward by them, and have even declined to bear the expenses of such equipment, while ready to pay for passage and outfit and to provide maintenance if the candidate is sent quickly to the mission field. It is true that this attitude is passing, but the new order is not established yet.

It may not be unprofitable in the space which remains to attempt to indicate the share in the making of a missionary which might be held to fall to the Church in its general capacity and to the missionary agencies which it employs.

The Church, in its various workshops of home and school and daily calling, as well as in its directly religious influence, is entrusted with the task of making men after the pattern, so far as may be, of its Founder, Himself the perfect man. Now when the Church has made a man it has gone a long way in the making of a missionary, for the human qualities of a merchant and of a missionary are much alike. It is, however, generally admitted that in this work of making manhood the Church has come short. The failure so far as it touches missionaries cannot be put right by segregating a few men and women for special treatment and sending them out into the world, for the missionary should be a fair sample of the Church he comes from, not an exceptional person fed up, as it were, for show. The Church that would equip missionaries must raise the equipment of all its members, and while repentance for past failure may be rapid the way of amendment is slow. Much may be done to-day and to-morrow, but not until the Church has constrained its living membership to work, in co-operation with the creative Spirit, towards providing and safeguarding conditions in which every child can attain and discover the divine purpose for life and character will the fulfilment of its share in the making of missionaries be in sight.

While we have been taught to focus attention—and rightly so—upon means of interesting children in missions, how far have the influences of the home been directed towards developing the qualities needed for missionary life? In the home, simplicity and healthy habits of body can be inculcated; character can be watched and tendencies fostered or disciplined; young minds can be braced to strenuousness of work and duty; obedience, chivalry, unselfishness, love, can be made the atmosphere of a life free from formalism or unreality, which naturally unfolds towards God. The greatest qualities of a missionary can be nurtured by parents in the early years at home, and children can be guided into an attitude of world-wide sympathy which may persist through life. The prison bars of racial prejudice do not encompass children, as any who have observed their relations with oriental students will know.

When school comes to reinforce the influence of home the making of a missionary is advanced a further stage. A measure of independence tests the strength of character that has already been built up; wider ranges of companionship develop the power of choice; new disciplines are imposed on body and on mind; the team spirit, precursor to co-operative work, is awakened; loyalty becomes more binding as it operates apart from love; the relation of work to life becomes more real; the question of a future career begins to take shape and the boy begins to see life as a whole and is ready for vocation. Thus home widens into school, and school into college, medical school, workshop or office, and at each stage fresh influences bear upon the life that is developing the fullness of its powers. Each difficulty vanquished, each temptation withstood, each reverse borne with courage and each success with humility helps to make the man whom some call of God awaits.

But the supreme task of the Church, it must be remembered, is that of making men whose life draws its fullness

from the unseen spiritual world and who are able to point others to that secret source of strength. Only from among such can missionaries be called. Although its rightful place has too often stood empty, from early infancy the Church has shared with the parents in the spiritual guardianship of the child. On the Church rests great part of the duty of instructing in the Scriptures and of making clear the implications of the Christian faith. It is the Church which has primarily charge of training in worship, in intercession, in those spiritual habits which are more important than habits of body or of mind. It is the Church which should turn the minds of its younger members to service, training them to relate the gospel message alike to the need of the individual and to the wider issues of social and industrial life. To those who know to what a large extent the younger missionary candidates who offer themselves for training are lacking, not in earnestness, but in apprehension of the meaning of the Christian message, in Bible knowledge and in experience in Christian work, it is startling to realize how far the Church has come short in its work. It is still more startling to find that the best prepared of those who come forward have not, for the most part, gained their equipment in these vital matters through the ordinary channels of the Church. Much as the great network of church organization accomplishes, it is apparently failing to give its younger men and women members that clear, ordered insight into the real meaning of the Christian message which is an essential preparation for missionary work. There are signal exceptions to this statement, but they only prove the rule. It is a fact that a large proportion of the time and money spent in Great Britain on the missionary training of unordained men and women is absorbed by preparation which the Church, through the agencies of home, school and its more direct ministries, should have already given. Happily there is ground for hope that what has been need not always be. The Church in the stress of these present days is admitting that it has largely

lost its teaching office and its contact with its younger members, and is setting itself to repent and amend.

It must fall to other pens to discuss the work of the Church through theological colleges and divinity schools, where missionaries and men for the home ministry are prepared for ordination. We pass on rather to consider what the Church would be justified in expecting from those agencies which collaborate on the specialized side of the work of making missionaries.

It is evident, from even so brief a survey of present conditions as has been already given, that no matter how faithfully the Church had done its duty it would be waste of time and fine material to send men and women to the mission field with no preparation save that which is common to home and foreign work. This is true whether it be applied to the missionary with theological or medical qualification, or to the simple evangelist; whether to woman or to man. The fact that heretofore mission schools have been taught by those without previous experience of teaching, that vernaculars have been acquired without knowledge of language methods or phonetics, that converts have been won by those ignorant of the thought and religion of the people, is no more an argument for the continuance of the present system than is the fact that in the earlier days of medical missions cures were effected by unqualified persons, who out of their comparative ignorance did the best they could and looked hopefully at what they accomplished, not at what they left undone.

The Church, be it ever so awake and enkindled, can never as a whole be expert in the final preparation of missionaries for their work. For specialized knowledge leading up to adequate action responsibility lies at the door of the missionary agencies called into being for this work. The Church has the right to expect, and even the duty to insist upon, the acquisition by these agencies of all available information, the organization by them of all requisite facilities for study, and the careful relating by them of

special preparation to the capacity of the candidate and to the needs of his mission field and of his probable future work. All time limitations imposed upon preparation should be repudiated, except in rare cases of emergency, for it is never wise to discount the future value of a missionary on the plea of present gain ; still more should no consideration of expense be allowed to restrict equipment ; the Church which has bent itself for long years to the making of a missionary will not desire to withhold the funds needed to prepare him finally for his work. This is the true collaboration in the making of missionaries for which we are waiting, and for lack of which good work done intermittently alike by Church and by missionary agencies has been hampered in the past. With a courage which would be truly heroic if it had not some admixture of ignorance as to what is imperilled for those to whom they have been sent, a splendid body of men and women have year by year been emerging from a Church which has failed to prepare them, and offering themselves to missionary agencies who have had little in the way of specialized equipment to give. That, crippled as they have been, they have accomplished what has been done, is no argument for complacent inaction but rather an incentive to spare no pains in securing full equipment for those who unaided have done so much.

Facing a Church still cold to its supreme call to be a maker of missionaries and agencies slowly kindling to the need for equipping those who are sent forth, stand the missionaries of the future, asking, as their predecessors have asked for twenty years or more, for preparation adequate in some measure to their tremendous task. It would be easy at such a time as this to quench their ardour or deflect their purpose by artificial standards of fitness mechanically applied, but the offer of help to become, through the strenuous use of opportunity, what they might be will not deter a single volunteer. When the Church and its agencies are ready to turn their hand to the making, the missionaries of the future will be found willing to be made.

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