

# A PROBLEM IN MISSIONARY PREPARATION

By FLORENCE MACKENZIE

THE interesting article by Mrs R. H. C. Graham in the January (1920) number of the *International Review of Missions* describes simply and explicitly an aspect of missionary work which deserves more attention than possibly has yet been given to it. Mrs Graham deals with problems of sex morality as she has encountered them in her work on the Congo. These problems, however, are not confined to any one field. They exist in one form or another all the world over, and the task of solving them is taxing many minds at the present time.

It is only comparatively recently, however, largely owing to the conditions which a state of war has revealed, that public opinion—in Great Britain at any rate—has permitted the discussion of these questions to be in any sense general or widespread. Reticence has perhaps been natural but it has also been unfortunate, and in the case of missionary work particularly so. I may be excused for looking at these matters from the point of view of the young missionary going out to the field for the first time as it is in relation to the preparation of women missionaries that my attention has been focused upon them. I may say in passing that what follows applies in my experience in lesser degree to the candidates of continental as contrasted with British missionary societies. This is due, I believe, to the widely conceived duty of the school in relation to public morality which holds, for example, in the Scandinavian countries.

Candidates for missionary service are drawn as a rule

from those homes in the land where the standard of Christian living is high and home-life and parenthood in their beauty and purity most evidently shown. This very fact contributes to a certain simplicity and ignorance regarding any hint of a way of living which is otherwise. Unless in their time of preparation in school, hospital, college or missionary training course those who offer for missionary service can become informed regarding the moral and social conditions of the countries to which they go, the shock of the first realization of things as they are may be very great. Senior missionaries on the field often do a great deal to help young workers in their early days with regard to matters of this kind, but it is doubtful whether it is wise that the whole burden of responsibility should rest upon their shoulders. The younger colleague may feel a little self-conscious about expressing ignorance, the older worker may not feel fitted to give the necessary information in the best way. In any case the whole situation is too important and too complex to be left to haphazard treatment. It requires full consideration and organized effort if it is to be met.

In opening up this subject from the point of view of missionary preparation I should like, in the first place, to define in some detail the scope of the information and instruction that it seems desirable that candidates should receive. The question is not simply one of making candidates aware of the existence in non-Christian countries, and unfortunately in Christian countries also, of evil customs and low social conditions. Its scope covers the normal as well as the abnormal. Candidates require explicit instruction regarding marriage and parenthood from the physical, moral and spiritual points of view. Closely allied to this is the study of infant welfare, including the care of the mother in relation to the birth of her children, and all matters concerning the upbringing and training of children in the home. The missionary's position is one of special responsibility and opportunity just in

these things. Lack of knowledge may mean not only failure to realize the seriousness of certain facts in the life of the non-Christian community, through ignorance of the physical and moral results involved. It limits also the essential helpfulness of missionary work to peoples seeking to build up their social life upon Christian principles and yet ignorant of almost everything which modern research and Christian experience have together discovered of the means by which the sanctities of home and society may be preserved and developed to their highest power. Some illustrations may perhaps make clearer the definite forms which this problem takes in the mission field.

The woman missionary, for example, in regard to the girls in her orphanage or school has almost invariably to take the parents' part when the time for marriage comes. Advice and guidance of a most detailed kind must be given. In every African field, and in other parts of the world also, the question of polygamy is a serious one in relation to church membership. The solution is not easy. Ignorance of the normal facts of life means the crippling of the missionary's influence and power to guide; it may also mean the setting up of standards which are not suited to the stage of development of the community and involve consequent disappointment and failure to make progress along natural and suitable lines. In educational work special difficulties have to be faced. The years of adolescence in a tropical climate and in communities where early maturity is encouraged and expected are peculiarly testing. The missionary has need for a judgment and balance of outlook in dealing with young people at this stage which can only be based upon definite knowledge. The whole moral tone of a school may be adversely affected by the psychological condition of one or two pupils. Recognition of this fact, and a constant application of wise preventive measures as regards games, exercise, diet and the guidance of friendship, give most hopeful results. An extended period of missionary service almost inevitably

brings experience in its train which is of course invaluable. The conditions of missionary work are, however, such that a young worker may often have to bear the weight of a burden of peculiar responsibility, for example in boarding school work, with very little experience upon which to draw. Another important aspect of the subject concerns the health of the missionary and that of the other workers for whom the mission is responsible. In social work at home it is being recognized that it is desirable to give instruction regarding safeguards against accidental venereal infection. This precaution is necessary also for work abroad. Without scientific guidance there may be on the part of workers either carelessness based upon ignorance of danger or over-cautiousness and timidity due to fear. Both attitudes are undesirable and affect the ultimate usefulness of the missionary.

Having outlined roughly the range of subjects in which instruction is desirable for the outgoing missionary, I should like to indicate some ways in which the necessary teaching may be secured. A conference dealing with these subjects which was convened in March 1920 at Selly Oak, Birmingham, by the officers of the Board of Study for the Preparation of Missionaries, revealed the wide range of opportunity for instruction which exists. Certain missionary training colleges have instituted definite courses of study in these subjects. In these there are associated with the theoretical work as regards infant welfare, problems of adolescence and debased social life, schemes of practical training which keep the element of humanity in view throughout and obviate as far as possible the dangers of rigidity and separation from life. The Board of Study for the Preparation of Missionaries in its lecture and vacation courses is also able to meet this need. Further, for those who wish to make a specialized study on a larger scale there are now available fully organized centres of preparation where students are received for longer or shorter periods.

Unless, however, the importance of the subject is realized only a proportion of missionary candidates will have the opportunity of benefiting from the classes and courses available. Unfortunate as the fact is, candidates still leave for their fields, in some cases, without specialized missionary training of any kind. Sometimes also the course of missionary preparation is curtailed and this element omitted. The conference at Selly Oak showed that missionaries on furlough would be glad in many instances to avail themselves of further preparation on moral questions, if convenient opportunity were provided. It was considered, too, that the needs of the situation make a demand for the special preparation of men as well as women. A sentence here may be quoted from the findings of the conference: 'The moral conditions which hinder the Church in the mission field can only be met by a body of men and women, equally informed as to the need, working together for the uplift of the Christian Church.'

In conclusion one further point must be emphasized. The whole problem as it affects the mission field cannot be solved at one end. A great deal can be gained from the experience of workers in the home field. Scientific knowledge is available and also a certain range of practical information drawn from life, which applies universally at home and abroad. There are, however, certain elements in the circumstances of each field which can only be dealt with from the experience of the fields themselves. By means of co-operation on this matter between the home boards and the mission councils on the field a wide range of most valuable information could be gathered and made accessible for those whom it would help. There are no doubt also in certain fields difficult situations for which outgoing missionaries might be prepared in a special way. The whole subject needs discussion and full inquiry. It is in the hope that such may ensue that this paper has been written.

FLORENCE MACKENZIE