THE MISSIONARY SERVICE OF THE SIMPLE AND THE POOR¹

By G. A. GOLLOCK

IN a Scottish city, bedridden and poor, a woman close on sixty lies to-day. Her early life gave no promise of greatness. One of the six children of a labourer on a wage of twenty shillings a week, she was at an early age crippled by acute rheumatism and had to face a life of suffering inaction, in a home where every penny counted and she was but a useless mouth to feed. But she stayed her sinking heart on the fact that if God let her live on it was because He had something for her to do. By the time she was adult and had lost all power to move the thought of prayer as work began to grip her mind. Missionary magazines first fed her growing purpose ; then friends brought missionaries to see her as she lay crippled but intensely alive ; later on letters began to come from those who knew she was praying for them. Her gnarled hands could write no answers, but as the needs of others pressed upon her, her memory grew and strengthened until it was a wonder to those who found their way within the prison walls of her little room. Night and day were alike to her—for she could not often sleep—so three early morning hours were set aside for prayer for China and other lands, besides many hours of the day. This service has been rendered now for nigh on twenty years, and the woman, though she grows frailer, is praying still. Twice only in all that length of years has she had the ‘awful joy of seeing hills and trees,’ when moved in an

¹ This article is based on information received from representatives of various missionary agencies at work in Great Britain, and, to a lesser extent, in America also. Grateful acknowledgment is due to Mr Harry S. Myers of the Missionary Education Movement, New York, who undertook the collection of American material.

ambulance from one humble home to another. But the triumph of her liberated soul has been complete.

About six years ago—in another town north of the Tweed, ten girls—all but one of them factory workers earning from 8s. 6d. to 10s. a week—met with a leader for informal talks about missions, taking that vivid book *The Story of Islam*¹ for their text. Among them was a silent slow-witted girl of seventeen, brought up ‘on the parish’ and boarded out in a home not her own, who was rich in nothing but a heart which brimmed over where it loved at all. She led the other members in enthusiasm for the book, till the *Story of Islam* spread through the factory, and even captivated four office boys belonging to the small local paper where the one non-factory member of the study circle worked. Little groups of girls banded together to help foreign missions quickly sprang into being. On the fortnightly pay-day the leaders waited to collect ½d. or 1d. or 2d. from the members according as each could give. At the end of a year the task of distributing £7 collected in this manner was faced by the girls themselves. Between thirty and forty—not counting the office boys—were partners in the great concern.

These incidents are representative of multitudes of others which are on record in every mission house in Great Britain and America and can be adduced by speakers who extend their work from the platform into human touch with those whom they address. The service rendered at the home base in prayer, in giving, and in actual work by those who are simple in this world’s learning and poor in this world’s store claims not only reverent admiration but careful study. Facts emerge which have a vital bearing on problems of the home base at this time. It is the purpose of this article to offer some observations based on the material gathered, for the consideration of those who have to carry forward home base propaganda into

¹ *The Story of Islam*. T. R. W. Lunt. Second edition revised and brought up to date. London: United Council of Missionary Education. 1s. 6d. net. 1916.

the great future still veiled in cloud and amid the changed conditions resulting from the war.

1. *The possibility of a new Scale of giving in relation to Income.* In view of the opening of unentered doors in Asia and Africa and the claims of existing missionary work for maintenance and expansion at the close of the war, the problem of financial support is pressing. Can those who give already give more? Have we reached the limit of support from men within the churches and must we look for further resources mainly to the men as yet outside? According to the standard of the poor and the simple, well-to-do church members have scarcely begun to give. Not long since, a great gathering of rich and poor assembled in an English city at the funeral of a working woman who though living in one of the poorest districts had powerfully influenced her church to contribute to foreign missions and to send many workers abroad. Out of a weekly wage well under £1 she regularly set aside 4s. weekly for foreign missions, besides her contribution to her church. A missionary speaker going to a country village found only one subscriber's name in the report. The solitary guinea came year by year from the widow of a gardener, a very poor and almost bedridden woman who saved the money by foregoing comforts of which she stood in need. Two shillings from the widow of a sailor, £2 from sisters struggling to make both ends meet in a little confectioner's shop, 10s. from the invalid wife of a small tradesman, £1 from a man earning small wages with a wife and four children to support, a thank-offering of £5 for recovered health from a farm servant whose pay (in pre-war days) was £20 a year besides board and lodging, annual gifts for a sale of work from a labourer's wife with four children—these instances stand for thousands more on record in British missions alone.

In America it seems to be the same. A widow seventy years of age who earns her living by working and saved \$27 for missions, a school teacher who gives half her income year by year, a stenographer and a nurse who contribute re-

spectively \$75 and \$85 yearly, and a man in a printing office who began by giving yearly \$10, then \$15, then \$30, then \$60 and finally gave himself and is now a missionary in China, are only a few of the instances which we might quote.

Such a scale of giving suggests irresistibly that the poor in this world are still rich in faith, and are teachers in the ways of the kingdom of God. Given their spirit, the Church could quadruple its missionary gifts.

2. *The Sources of Service.* No less suggestive are the sources from which the service appears to come. Indications of unexpected knowledge and of startling ignorance are to be found. A number of small donations are designated for some special object—a station or school or missionary—with intelligent apprehension of an outstanding need. On the other hand, the woman who saved forty threepenny pieces and wanted the actual coins sent forward does not stand alone.¹ Much of the giving is in kind—eggs, apples and the like; some gifts come from unlikely sources, such as a publican's wife. The share of invalids has already been noted, but even more striking is the record of gifts and service from the aged and very poor. The old man in broken health in a seamen's almshouse in the north of England who never fails to bring a contribution to the missionary sale, the woman of seventy-three in the Hampshire almshouse who walks miles to collect for missions, the old woman in an East London almshouse who left all her small savings to missionary work are cases in point. Such instances as those of the former caretaker in a mission hall who made her missionary box the first charge upon her old-age allowance, the old couple in receipt of 3s. weekly relief who saved 1s. 4d. out of that little sum for foreign

¹ This expectation of the transmission of the coins actually given may have serious results. In a parish in the south of England, the lads in a Bible class began to suspect that their pennies 'did not go to the heathen, but were spent by the curate for himself.' The lads put some marked coins into the collection as a test. When these were paid out to their mothers at the fish shop their suspicions were held to be proved. It took months to clear the matter up and re-establish confidence.

missions, the old pensioner who saved £1 and gave it 'with genuine love' to Congo missions, another pensioner aged ninety who gave 2s. 6d. at the close of a missionary address, and the fact that when government old-age pensions were first instituted in Great Britain in many cases the first week's pension was given to missions, suggests that the spirit of giving rests with special richness on pensioners, whether of Church or State.

The question which insistently rises as the sources of service are examined is, Where are the men? Is it mainly to the young¹ and the aged, to women and invalids, that the cause of missions appeals? There are instances to the contrary, of course, notably in the record of generous giving from soldiers who in their village homes had learned to work for missions; but both in American and British records the manhood of the country holds small place. Is it, then, to be deduced that among the poor and simple, as well as in other ranges of life, the missionary cause has been so presented as to win the weaker rather than the stronger, to appeal to those whose life-fires are but half-kindled or waning instead of to those whose vital forces burn high in the prime of life? The facts which lie behind this paper tend to reinforce this fear.

3. *What will the Future bring?* Those missionary workers—and some such are to be found, at least in Great Britain—who see stretching before them a vista of years in which, under the stimulus of the missionary addresses and missionary literature of the past, simplicity and poverty will continue to ripen a harvest are destined to a rude awakening. Already for good or evil—and if the Church plays its part faithfully it will be mainly for good—conditions are rapidly changing; tides of life are sweeping even into rural districts; sons and daughters have touched the life of other lands; wages have everywhere risen and the ability to satisfy desire has awakened it to life; education

¹ The missionary service of children is not dealt with here. It demands a place to itself.

in Great Britain is shortly to be continued in a new and liberating form. Simplicity and poverty, no longer enforced by social conditions, will have to find their home in the spirits of men. But while it is profoundly true that still, as in the Temple of old, our Lord sits over against the treasury with eyes that discern the widow's mite, joying in service rendered out of poverty for love of His cause, and while it is good for the Church to learn and re-learn the lesson that not in prayer or work or giving does the record of its whole membership equal that of the simple and the poor, a startling realization is forced into the light of to-day. It is no longer possible to evade the truth that the economic and social conditions under which much of this missionary service has been rendered are flagrantly unchristian and that the poverty from which the gifts have come should not have been imposed on brothers and sisters in Christ. That under and through these conditions men have so bravely served Him adds to their honour but does not abate our shame. If life had not swept away the old conditions, the Church, open-eyed at last, would have had to face the task.

What, then, must we do? Perish the thought that these men and women, cramped as they were in the past, had more kinship with the Gospel of Life and Liberty than they will have in their expanded future, or that the call of Christ is not able to win from the virile as full a measure of love and sacrifice as from the weak. It is no time to stand timid spectators of a great awakening, fearful lest life-tides rise too high. In the world-wide Gospel, as an earlier article in this number shows, lies the message needed now by the Church at home if its life is to be shaped aright. But the message all down the centuries has been conditioned by the mouth-piece, and it is through us, and such as us, that God has willed to work. During this year—next year may be too late in many quarters—it is open to the Church to send forth missionary propagandists in the name of Christ to the poorer districts of our towns and cities and rural

areas and village homes, to men and women dwarfed in thought through faulty education and ground down in the mills of life, to bring them a message full and rich and real, freshly born in the speakers' hearts through the incoming of the Spirit of God, big with hope and love and patience, strong in brotherhood and the fellowship of man with man, a message that shall call men to find their own salvation in seeking that of the world through the revelation of God in Christ.

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