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EDITORIAL

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It seems to be the teaching of the parable of the sower that fruitfulness depends upon the character of the soil as well as on that of the seed. A broken and a contrite heart receives the very message of God which can find no entrance in the heart hardened by sin and unbelief or pride. The ploughman must, therefore, precede the reaper and break up the fallow ground preparatory to the sowing. The oldest, the most universal, and the most indispensable tool of good husbandry is the plough.

There is no more fitting symbol of pioneer mission work than that of the ploughman. Paul himself must have felt it on his long missionary journeys when he wrote to the Corinthian Church, "He that plougheth ought to plough in hope." It is a laborious task. To drive the plough through the virgin soil, to remove obstacles, to break up, to let in the air and the light—all this is a work of necessity. It is the preparatory ministry to those who bear the seed-basket and who will once come home rejoicing, bringing their sheaves with them.

Great sections of the Moslem world are still virgin soil. There are portions of Central Africa and of Central Asia to which the words of Livingstone, God's ploughman, still apply: "The end of the geographical feat is the beginning of the missionary enterprise." One has only to read the travels of Sven Hedin to see how much fallow ground there still is in Chinese Turkestan, in Afghanistan and its borders, awaiting missionary occupation. The tour of exploration into some new district, the mapping

out of a field for future effort, the opening of a dispensary in some new centre of population, of a book and Bible depôt at the cross-roads of commerce—all these are missionary methods for breaking the virgin soil of prejudice or misunderstanding and preparing a lodging-place for the seed of Truth.

God's providence is also a plough. It is His method that the nation and the individual shall learn righteousness when His judgments are in the earth. After the earthquake, and the fire, and the tempest, men hear the still, small voice, which had spoken before and to which they had given a deaf ear. The breaking up of Turkey is more than a phase of politics. It may mean the preparation of heart and the readiness to hear, the spiritual accessibility and responsiveness of a whole people. We must not dread God's ploughshare.

"The ploughing of the Lord is deep
On ocean or on land ;
His furrows cross the mountain steep,
They cross the sea-washed sand.
Wise men and prophets know not how,
But work their Master's will ;
The kings and nations drag the plough
His purpose to fulfil."

God is hastening His word to perform it, and making the wrath of the folly of men to praise Him. "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that the ploughman shall overtake the reaper." The spiritual forces long latent in what was once the Turkish Empire will yet come to their own, and we may well hope to see a rich harvest where so much has been sown in tears, both of the seed of the Word and of the children of the Kingdom—the martyr church of Armenia.

Ploughing is always hopeful work. The labourer knows that the furrows he makes with so much toil and pains will in due time be covered with golden corn. How different from the digging of trenches at the front of battle, which prophesy only a harvest of death. The hope of the ploughman was never put to shame. At the end of every furrow the eye of faith can catch the vision of garnered sheaves. We must keep our eyes on the future. The Lord of the husbandmen is with us.

No lonely worker at some distant outpost whose hope has been deferred and heart made sick, need be discouraged. Raymund Lull's life is still bearing fruit after six centuries, and the message of that life remains true : " He who lives by the Life cannot die."

Finally, we need to learn the lesson ourselves that the ploughed field is most fruitful. Perhaps at a time like this when our own plans are frustrated and the methods of our work rudely disorganised, it may be only that God is driving the coulter of His plough deeper amid the grass and weeds of our own hearts to tear the clod asunder and cleanse the soil for a new sowing.

" Lord, drive Thy plough through all my pleasant fields,
Howe'er the pleasantness may flee away ;
I would be fruitful, Lord—my heart would yield
Some good to Thee when comes Thy harvest day."

S. M. ZWEMER.