

Editors [H. G. Appenzeller and G. H. Jones], "Christian Missions and Social Progress,"
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transcribed by Sung-Deuk Oak

This is a great book--great in subject, great in exposition, great in literary treatment. ¹Not by any means easy reading, yet always attractive and inspiring. There is a refreshing freedom from theological jargon; the language is modern and up-to-date, the references exceedingly apropos; while the many literary quotations often throw floods of light upon the subject. Take, for example, I tie motto on the title page. Could any lines in modern or ancient literature more fitly describe the present condition of mission-work, say in China, than these lines from William Watson: --

"The new age stands as yet / Half built across the sky,
Open to every threat / Of storms that clamour by:
Scaffolding veils the walls, / And dim dust floats and falls,
As, moving to and fro, their tasks the masons ply."

It is a pleasure to recognize the patient, selective care which has gone to the choice of these passages.

But throughout the author's reading and research has been immense and reveals itself on every page. It is not obtrusive felt rather than seen--not merely in foot-notes and references, which might easily be vamped-up, but in the woof and warp of his text, of his thought, and in the far-reaching ramifications of his subject. A practical missionary, for years connected with the American Presbyterian Mission, Beirut, Syria, he is an expert in mission problems. But as no individual experience could cover the

¹ James S. Dennis, *Christian Missions and Social Progress: A Sociological Study of Foreign Missions*. Vol. I. (New York: Fleming, H. Revell Company, 1897).

whole field, so no mission-field could supply the data indispensable for such a study as the part played by Christianity in the social progress of the world. <64/65>

It was apparent from the scope of the subject, and the range of data required to treat it intelligently and with any basis of authority, that no adequate discussion was possible without much fresh and explicit information. The effort was made to obtain this not only from the current literature of missions, but directly by correspondence with missionaries in all parts of the world. A carefully prepared circular, with detailed questions upon special aspects of the theme, was sent to over three hundred missionaries, representing various societies in many lands. The replies were of the greatest value and pertinence, and gave the author an abundant supply of data from which to collate his subject-matter and upon which to establish his generalizations.²

Upon the facts thus obtained he brought to bear a strong philosophic mind and fine gifts of insight, analysis and generalization. His reading enabled him to appreciate their bearing upon current sociological discussions and to state them in terms which makes them acceptable to students of every kind. It is not a surprising result in his work that the author

Has been led in the course of these studies to give to Christianity more firmly than ever his final, unreserved and undivided allegiance as an authoritative and divinely accredited system of truth, full of salutary guidance and uplifting power to humanity.

Nor that, in contrast with the social results of the ethnic religions

The comparison has seemed to the writer to be fruitful in results which were favorable to the Christian religion and virtually to substantiate its divine origin, superior wisdom and moral efficiency.

It is noteworthy however, that while awarding the palm to Christianity the writer can still speak of the ethnic religions with appreciation and respect. The “Confucius-is-in-

² Ibid., Preface, vii. The next quotations are from the preface.

Hell” spirit nowhere finds expression. True, he uses such a jarring phrase as “false religions,” with its suggestion of *petitio principii* but one soon finds that it is rather the final result of careful and prolonged examination--an expert opinion--than the cheap abuse of smug, self-satisfied phariseeism. It is well to be assured on such a point, otherwise no confidence could be anywhere placed in his reasonings or results.

That there are plain traces of truth in all the prominent ethnic systems of religion is a fact which is too evident to admit or denial. This is manifested in much of their ethical teaching and in their adjustment of the duties of human relationships, yet it is just in these respects that some of their most serious failures are observable. It is because the religious basis of their ethics is so defective that the practical outcome is so disappointing. ... Primitive revelation, with its emphatic re-statements covering many centuries in time and reasoning mankind through various direct and indirect instrumentalities, was a mighty and pervading religious force in early history. It lingered long and worked deeply in human experience. Truth dies hard if, indeed, it ever dies. Half truths and even corrupted and overshadowed truths, can influence men, although partially and uncertainly, in the direction of a sound religious faith. Men are made brave and courageous and often ready for martyrdom, by which conviction concerning half truths. The truth sometimes survives and even lives long in an atmosphere of <65/66> corruption and degeneracy. Again, it will kindle an earnest aspiration for reform, and a new religion appears in history, but likely to be imperfectly furnished and so in alliance with error that it can do little for the spiritual and moral good of mankind. ... Monotheism having been cast aside or deserted, something must take its place in the presence of the awful and mysterious phenomena of nature. It may be pantheism or polytheism or nature worship in its varied forms. Man then devises--not necessarily in any dishonest or insincere spirit--a religion of his own, for himself or his family or his tribe, according to the conception which he forms of his needs and in harmony with his own philosophy of nature.

The genesis of false religions is, therefore, to be found in the desertion and corruption of the true, and in man's urgent but unavailing struggle after some substitute for what he has forsaken. They are to be traced to treason and surrender in the religious citadel of human history. It is a story of “many inventions” in order to recover what has been lost or forfeited. ... There is primitive truth lingering in the consciousness and in the religious environment of all races. There is the natural conscience, and, above all, there is the free Spirit of God with immediate access to every soul. God is not bound, and His truth, if He

wills, can be so brought home to the moral nature of man by the monitions of the Spirit, with or without external means, that the saving act of faith may occur even in a partially instructed soul, for whose benefit the atoning work of Christ may be made available by divine mercy.

In justice to the author's position it is perhaps only right to add the sentence which immediately follows, defining and limiting as it does the opinion expressed in the last few lines of this long quotation.

“This is not,” he says, “universal salvation for the heathen; it is, unhappily, the writer fears, merely, a possibility, and only such for those faithful souls who are humble, and loyal to light and privilege. The rest shall be judged justly in view of the light, and that alone, which they have sinfully ignored and rejected.”

The present writer has made this long excerpt in order to present clearly and distinctly the author's qualifications for the task he has undertaken. It would be a poor recommendation and would inspire but little confidence in the candid reader, were the writer unable to acknowledge and recognize some power of goodness and earnestness even in the “false religions.” He can and does make ample acknowledgement of the part they have played in the history of humanity and by so doing contributes largely to one's confidence in the essential truth and justice of his conclusions.

The origin of the book is interesting. The subject was not of the author's choosing, although his reading and thinking had for long been upon these lines. It was suggested to him by the students of Princeton Theological Seminary, especially by members of the Sociological Institute and of the Missionary Society of the Seminary. It is symptomatic of much that the suggestion should emanate from such a source. It indicates, for example <66/7> the strong spiritual and intellectual practicality of the men and the

strength and depth of their realization of the world-wide mission of the Church. In this must be the brightest augury of final success.

“Christian Missions and Social Progress” is a work in two volumes, of which only the first has come to hand. The complete work is designed to contain six lectures, with an appendix. The titles in Volume I. are The Sociological Scope of Christian Missions; The Social Evils of the Non-Christian World, Ineffectual Remedies and the Causes of their Failure; Christianity the Social Hope of the Nations. Vol. II. will contain The Dawn of a Sociological Era in Missions; The Contribution of Christian Missions to Social Progress, and an exhaustive statistical survey of Foreign Missions throughout the world in a series of classified tables. In both volumes there are elaborate bibliographies, indices, synopses of lectures, etc., and a series of capital photographs which not only illustrate the text but materially aid in the understanding of the subject.

Limitations of space will not permit us to dwell much longer upon these lectures, greatly as we would like to do so. There is one point, however, so fundamental to the conception of the book, that it cannot be overlooked even in a review. What is the author's definition of Sociology? And what relation would be established between it and Christianity? Sociology is the science which treats of the general structure of society, the laws of its development, and the progress of civilization. Christianity is the system of doctrines and precepts taught by Christ. Sociology deals with positive and knowable data, and proceeds by strict scientific law. Christianity sets in the power of a new life. No two things could at first sight differ more diametrically, or have less in common.

His definition of Sociology can hardly be quoted here, but his method of union is the old one of widening the accepted definition and this along lines made familiar to us by Mr. Benjamin Kidd. “Mr. Benjamin Kidd is correct in his contention that the religious

forces of history, emphasizing as he does those distinctively Christian, are necessary factors in a full and rounded social evolution." This method of enlargement is not in itself objectionable. It is one with which Science is perfectly familiar, but it is one which calls for very jealous scrutiny. There is always a suggestion of special pleading and of weakness about it, altho of course it may be the legitimate result of enlarged intelligence. In the present instance and to the reviewer, the broadened connotation appears perfectly justified. Just as the "dismal science" has widened her borders and now includes the <67/8> human factor, so Sociology must widen and reckon with the spiritual. But for the full discussion of this point readers must refer to the lecture in volume I.

Lecture II is the saddest possible reading.—It deals with the social evils of the non-Christian world and simply defies all efforts at effective summarization. The author, however, has attempted to help his readers by treating these evils in groups which he labels respectively, the Individual group, the Family group, the Tribal group, the Social group, the National group, the Commercial group and the Religious group.

Lecture, III passes in review some remedial expedients which have been applied to the evils catalogued in the previous lecture. It does not assert that they are in every instance inherently and necessarily without value, but that in view of the ordinary tendencies of human nature, they are found to be for the purposes of social reconstruction defective and misleading, incompetent to cope with the difficulties and demands of the environment, unless pervaded and directed by the moral power and spiritual enlightenment of Christian ideals. With a view to test the social fruitage of these agencies apart from Christianity, the following propositions are discussed: I. Secular education apart from Christian truth does not hold the secret of social

regeneration. II. Material civilization, as exemplified in temporal prosperity, artistic luxury and commercial progress, cannot guarantee the moral transformation of non-Christian society. III. State legislation in and by itself, apart from Christianized public sentiment, is not an effective instrument of social righteousness. IV. Patriotism cannot be trusted to insure the moral or political reform of non-Christian peoples. V. The moral forces of ethnic religions are not capable of an uplifting and beneficent renewal of society.

In Lecture IV the need of a supernatural remedy for the evils of non-Christian society is asserted and advocated, and the adaptation of Christianity to wage a beneficent and effective crusade against the moral lapses and social cruelties of heathenism is argued under the following heads: I. Christianity alone offers the perfect and final solution of the problem of sin; II. It provides a new and powerful motive in the moral experience of mankind; III. It suggest new views of society; IV. The code of social ethics advocated in Christianity is an immense improvement upon that which prevails under any ethnic system of religion; V. Christianity introduces new moral forces into heathen society especially the noble impulse to missionary service. VI. Philanthropic ideas are generated and quickened into activity by the entrance of Christian teaching and example <68/9> among non-Christian peoples; VII. Historic Christianity declared to be equal to the task above outlined.

In bringing this notice to an end the reviewer would like to express his own sense of indebtedness to the author. He has found the book most interesting to read and very provocative of thought. Deeply interested in missions, of which he has seen a great deal, with some store of facts of his own, and with a strong belief in the social mission of Christianity, it has been his great joy and privilege to travel rather extensively in this

part of the world. This book has helped him much to a right understanding of what he has seen and has suggested possible answers to various questions. He would cordially recommend the book, therefore, to every one interested either in Sociology or in Christian missions and very specially to young missionaries. For them it has special value. It is a more or less well-founded complaint among the students of theological colleges at home that the prescribed course of studies is not specially adapted for their requirements. It may be very difficult to decide what changes in curricula are desirable and even more difficult to bring them about when their exact nature has been determined, but the man who has carefully read and thoroughly digested this book will have gained an intellectual appreciation of the nature and extent of the work set before him and a spiritual fervor for its execution which will go far to make him a well-equipped workman, needing not to be ashamed.