

THE SPREAD *of* CHRISTIANITY IN THE MODERN WORLD

By

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TO
MY COLLEAGUES
WITH WHOM I HAVE SERVED FOR TWENTY YEARS
IN THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE
AMERICAN BOARD

PREFATORY NOTE

I delivered in October and November, 1913, in Mansfield College, Oxford, the Dale Lectures on "The Expansion of Christendom and the Naturalization of Christianity in the Orient in the Nineteenth Century." The book was finished in 1915. Its publication has been delayed because of the war. The publisher has consented that certain general considerations which are elaborated in that book shall appear in brief in the introduction to this. The publishers of this book have acceded to the same request. Apart from the statement of their common point of view which is thus provided for, it is hoped that the two books may serve as complementary the one to the other. This book attempts a survey of the history of missions since the beginning of the modern era. It aims to depict the missionary movement against the background of general history. It seeks to present an outline of the main facts so far as this is possible within so small a compass. The other book assumes knowledge of the facts, both those which relate to the spread of the influence of European civilization and as well those which directly concern the propaganda for the Christian religion. It proposes to interpret this history and to discuss the philosophical and religious principles involved.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART I: GENERAL OUTLINE

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE EXPANSION OF CHRISTENDOM	5
II. THE EXPANSION OF MODERN EUROPE: BEFORE THE MIDDLE OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY	25
III. THE EXPANSION OF MODERN EUROPE: THE PERIOD SINCE 1757	37
IV. THE EXPANSION OF EUROPE IN AMERICA AND RUS- SIAN ASIA	61
V. THE OPENING OF AFRICA	71
VI. MISSIONARY THEORY AND INSTRUMENTALITIES	79

PART II: HISTORY OF THE CHRISTIAN MOVEMENT WITH INDICATIONS OF THE PRESENT SITUATION IN DIFFERENT LANDS

VII. INDIA	109
VIII. JAPAN	141
IX. CHINA	177
X. THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE AND THE MOSLEM WORLD	211
XI. AFRICA	251
XII. THE AMERICAS AND THE ISLANDS	285
CONCLUSION	318
REFERENCES	321
INDEX	347

PART I
GENERAL OUTLINE

CHAPTER I

THE EXPANSION OF CHRISTENDOM

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1. Periodicity in the Christian movement
2. Relation to other world-movements
3. The first period
4. Characteristics of Christianity in this period
5. The first era of arrest
6. The second period
7. Characteristics of the second period
8. The second era of arrest
9. The third or modern period
10. Characteristics of the period
11. The Roman church
12. The Protestant bodies
13. Changes in the colonial empires
14. An era of world-evangelization
15. The unity of history
16. Otherworldliness
17. Religious propaganda and modern history
18. The human factor
19. Missions and civilization
20. Humanitarianism
21. Co-operation with missions
22. Conclusion

CHAPTER I

THE EXPANSION OF CHRISTENDOM

1. *Periodicity in the Christian movement.*—It might be supposed that the obligation of Christians for the dissemination of their faith would have been felt by the more ardent and responsible among them at all times and in every place. The history of Christianity shows that this has been by no means the case. There have been periods in which the enthusiasm for the carrying of the gospel of Jesus to those who had it not was a conspicuous trait of Christian mind and life. Such eras of missionary activity have alternated, however, with others in which even the most zealous piety took quite another form. There have been ages in which propaganda for Christianity among new peoples practically ceased. There have been centuries during which the boundaries of Christendom were not enlarged. At times even the area won for the faith by earlier efforts was diminished.

2. *Relation to other world-movements.*—These eras of stationariness or of retrogression are not always to be ascribed to a diminution of the vitality of the Christian movement. Ages of arrest in the expansion of Christendom have sometimes been those in which high vitality was absorbed in a different task. The energy of the movement was taken up in the consolidation of gains already made. Races won for nominal Christianity were being slowly assimilated to its spirit. Christianity was undergoing a gradual adjustment to the

culture and civilization of these races. It was becoming naturalized and nationalized among them. They were being Christianized and not merely evangelized. There is thus something altogether normal in this alternation which has marked the Christian advance. There is a close relation of this periodicity in the expansion of Christendom to other world-movements. The relation of missionary endeavor to contemporary conditions, political and commercial, social and intellectual, is one which in the history of the Christian movement has not always been sufficiently emphasized. It is one of the purposes of this book to set forth that relation.

3. *The first period.*—Broadly speaking, the first three centuries of the Christian movement were characterized by a great enthusiasm for the dissemination of the faith. The Christian passion was evangelism, the telling of the message of redemption. Before the end of this period the gospel had been preached everywhere in the basin of the Mediterranean and in the western parts of the ancient Asiatic empires. The spread of the influence and teachings of Jesus was, however, in the earliest period, owing in but small part to men whom we should call missionaries. It was the achievement of men of every trade and occupation and of every order in society. Soldiers, scholars, travelers, even slaves, carried to the farthest limits of the empire that secret of the inner life, that new attitude toward the world, which in their experience constituted salvation. The means of communication in the empire facilitated such a movement. Other oriental religions had spread in much the same way. Something like a uniformity of law, language, and civilization obtained at that time within the limits of

the empire in a manner which has had no parallel in the world until our own day.

4. *Characteristics of Christianity in this period.*—The new religious movement, great as was its ultimate effect upon the classic civilization, was of itself world-shy. It was not primarily a new doctrine or culture. It was hostile to many aspects of the current civilization. That civilization was profoundly hostile to it. It did not seek to establish a new world-order. It sought rather to flee the world and to prepare its votaries for another and better existence. It was profoundly convinced of the approaching end of the present world-order. It believed in the sudden and miraculous setting up of a new world-order. It was a gospel of the inner life. It was a message from a despised corner of the earth to a world in which a high and self-conscious civilization already prevailed. Only gradually did Christianity become conscious of itself as a principle for the transformation of this present life and world. Only slowly did it gather adherents from among the cultivated and powerful. Not till the end of the period of which we speak did it cease to be the faith of a persecuted sect and become one of the religions acknowledged by the Roman state.

5. *The first era of arrest.*—The decline of the Roman Empire, the invasions of the barbarians, the natural development of the church as a great institution, caused the church in some sense to take the place of the decaying empire. The demoralization of the ancient world, the necessity of training the new northern peoples who had seized upon its mastery, set the church which was now an organized and self-conscious hierarchy a new task. That task was no longer the enlargement of the boundaries of

nominal Christendom beyond the basin of the Mediterranean. It was that of the Christianization both of the peoples of the ancient civilization and of the new elements which were found in such strange admixture in all the lands which bordered upon the inland sea. It was the problem of making a really Christian world out of those areas to which Christianity in name at least had been carried before the decline of the empire had begun. Meantime the church had changed its own idea as to what constituted a Christian world. It was not therefore altogether a contradiction that the missionary period of the early church ended abruptly almost at the moment when the church attained a position of outward power and influence. That the church was able in the interval between the middle of the fourth and the middle of the seventh centuries to Christianize the world even in the measure that it did and after the pattern that it chose was a very great achievement. That it was itself in startling degree secularized and assimilated to that world was an inevitable consequence. It was, however, a consequence of which Christians were almost wholly unaware.

6. *The second period.*—When, toward the end of the sixth century, the Christian propaganda was resumed, it had for its aim the conversion of the races of Northern and Western Europe, which had lain outside of the ancient Roman Empire or only nominally within it. The emissaries of the gospel went out from three centers. Southern Russia and the Balkan Peninsula were evangelized from Constantinople. Germany and the Low Countries, northern Gaul and Britain, ultimately also Denmark and Norway and Sweden received most of

their emissaries from Rome. A portion of this area was, however, the field of devout labor on the part also of Celtic monks, who represented a British Christianity antedating the dissolution of the ancient province of Britain. The conversion of the Northern European races to Christianity brought gains to Christendom which in some measure offset the tremendous losses suffered through the conquest of the old seats of Christian faith and civilization in Northern Africa, in Syria and Asia Minor, in Persia, and in the valley of the Euphrates by the forces of Islam. It completed that occidentalizing of Christianity which had been in progress ever since the western journeys of St. Paul.

7. *Characteristics of the second period.*—In striking contrast with the method of the earlier era the men engaged in this grand mission to the Northern European races were almost invariably ecclesiastics. They were the agents of a highly organized institution of religion. They were priests, indeed in large part they were monks. They represented an ascetic view of life, in the West at least a celibate practice, a theory of the relation of religion to the world which had come to be recognized as the superior form of piety and the more spiritual interpretation of Christianity. This theory had certainly not been put forth by Jesus nor by the earliest church. Nevertheless, such were the needs of the peoples among whom these monks and missionaries went that, in spite of their view of the relation of religion to the world, they became practically everywhere teachers of the elements of culture, exponents in these new fields of an old and high civilization. They became the founders of a

world-order. In large part they determined the political and economic, the intellectual and social and moral characteristics which are familiar to us as those of Europe in the Middle Ages. They preserved and transmitted a learning which was fundamentally Hellenic. They perpetuated the power and order which mankind owed to the Roman genius for organization. They gave to much of the life of the Middle Ages the ecclesiastical cast which it never lost until the Renaissance.

8. *The second era of arrest.*—The period of the conversion of Northern Europe covered about four centuries. Then just as before there followed an interval of approximately four hundred years when practically no effort was made to carry the gospel to regions beyond. The Russian and Balkan area took on a religious stationariness from which it has not yet emerged. Mediaeval Europe, so religious and Christian in its own way, possessing a civilization so much more wonderful than we are apt to acknowledge, had lost almost all remembrance of a non-European world of which the classic civilization had been so well aware. The East, which it vividly realized, was only the margin of Islam, the region in which it had conducted the wars of the Crusades. Those wars themselves had built a barrier between the West and the Near East which has begun to crumble only in modern times. The Far East, India, China, Japan, and even Africa were almost a realm of legend. They were nearly as much unknown as if they had been on another planet. Little islands of Greek and Eastern Christianity still stood out above the rising tide of Mohammedanism. Constantinople remained until 1453 the last bulwark against Islam. Yet, in the Fourth Crusade, Venice

betrayed Constantinople as if she had been her chief foe. Neither from Constantinople nor from the ancient churches of Syria or Asia Minor went out any effort toward regaining the East which had once been Christian. The Crusades, the European effort within this area, were the very opposite of a missionary movement.

9. *The third or modern period.*—The middle of the sixteenth century witnessed a great revival of enthusiasm in the Roman church for the spread of the faith among non-Christian peoples. Jesuit and Franciscan missionaries followed the discoverers and explorers, the conquerors and traders who in Portuguese, Spanish, and French ships traversed every sea and brought to Europe the knowledge of the lands of two hemispheres. Of this movement navigators and traders had been the precursors since the middle of the fifteenth century. Their aims had been those of conquest and commerce. These adventurers had claimed continents for one and another of the crowns of Europe. They had opened the way for colonial empires which were presently to enrich many European states. The world-movement which was thus ushered in ultimately brought among other things the knowledge of the gospel to every people on the earth. It was, however, primarily a secular movement. It sought to add to the domain and to the wealth of the sovereigns of Europe. It became a phase of the rivalry of European states among themselves. The exploitation alike of the ancient civilized peoples of the Far East and of the half-civilized or uncivilized aborigines of the West was but an instrumentality of the aggrandizement of the European peoples. These last had for various reasons emerged from the Middle

Ages relatively more powerful and aggressive than all other peoples of the earth.

10. *Characteristics of the period.*—The conquerors and traders of whom we speak had but little religious impulse, at all events of the sort which we should now recognize by that name. They sought, indeed, to conquer in the name of Christianity. The sovereigns whom they represented made much of these conquests for the cause of Christ. The adventurers had primarily no impulse to transform the ancient civilizations of India or China or Japan in the spirit of Christianity. In fact, the provincialism of these representatives of Christendom was such that they showed but slight comprehension of the fact that India or China had any civilization, just as they would certainly have assumed that these nations had no true religion. They had little zeal to bestow what have since been called the benefits of Christian civilization upon the nations of the Orient. Indeed, they were so intent upon conquests and profits that they showed mainly the dark side of that civilization.

11. *The Roman church.*—The priests who accompanied the adventurers had also something of the mediaeval conquerors' instinct. They planned completely to displace the indigenous faiths. They were anxious to add multitudes to the numbers of the adherents of their own church. They were eager to offset the losses which at that time the Protestant Reformation was inflicting upon their church in Europe. Yet they also left the question of the relation of the faith which they ardently preached to the civilization and culture of the peoples among whom they preached it very much on one side. They entered into easy accommodations