

246

24-

THE STORY

OF THE

IRISH CHURCH MISSIONS.

PART I.

AN ACCOUNT OF THE PROVIDENTIAL PREPARATION WHICH LED TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE SOCIETY FOR IRISH CHURCH MISSIONS TO THE ROMAN CATHOLICS IN 1848.

BY THE REV. ALEX. DALLAS, M.A.,

RECTOR OF WORMBOR, HANTS, AND HONORARY SECRETARY TO THE SOCIETY.

"The very hairs of your head are all numbered."—Matt. x. 30.
"Behold, there ariseth a little cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand. . . . And there was a great rain."—1 Kings xviii. 44, 46.

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CHAPTER XV.

It was a very great advance when the Irish Society of London agreed to carry on Missionary work in Ireland, and when the committee of the Special Fund agreed to supply them with the means; it gave us a vantage ground from which there was every prospect of more enlarged success. The feeling of a large number of the Irish clergy were awakened to the necessity for such a movement. This was tested in a striking manner. In January, 1847, the Rev. Thomas Vores suggested a plan for sending relief to the famishing people in Ireland, which was acted upon to some extent, and produced very beneficial results. He proposed that the clergyman of one parish in England should put himself into communication with the clergyman of one parish in Ireland—that the English flock should contribute towards the support of the Irish flock,

receiving from the Irish clergyman authentic reports of the weekly condition of the people, upon which reports the next week's contributions were raised in the English parish. The execution of this scheme was entrusted mainly to the committee of the Irish Society of London, which gave publicity to the plan, received the applications, and put the parties in communication with each other. There were 94 applications from clergymen in England to be placed in correspondence with a parish in Ireland; and there were 250 applications from Irish clergymen to receive the benefit. Of the 250, no fewer than 124 asked to have the services of a Scripture-Reader for Missionary work amongst their Roman Catholic parishioners.

Grants were made by the Special Fund Committee for particular cases. It was thus that a salary was allowed to Mr. O'Callaghan for his work at Castelkerke, which has been recorded; and in January, 1848, the Irish Society of London voted an increased salary to him, which was necessary to secure his ordination.

Gradually the minds of the good men engaged in these two committees opened to perceive the real nature of the work in the

IRELAND. On reviewing that period, the Committee have abundant cause of thanksgiving to God, for the liberal contributions entrusted to their disposal, and for the important aid (amounting to about £9000) which they have thereby been able to afford to the Religious Societies of Ireland in their hour of extreme need and peril. Nor have they less cause of thankfulness, that the same period has enabled them to acquire a much larger knowledge and experience than they originally possessed, of the most pressing spiritual wants of Ireland, and also a stronger conviction as to the character of the remedial agency best adapted to the relief of those wants.

In their Report of last February, and in their Supplementary Statement of July, the Committee announced their resolution to furnish pecuniary aid for the maintenance of Curates, to be appointed to labour among the Roman Catholics. That resolution has been fully justified by more recent events; and now the providence of God appears to afford such openings for the direct teaching and preaching of the Gospel in Ireland, as to suggest to the Committee the propriety of devoting their efforts in future, principally to the prosecution of that object. While the Committee have felt the difficulty of continuing before the Public in the character of a collector only for other institutions, the all-important object of an adequate supply of Curates for the Roman Catholics, which has not hitherto been undertaken by any Society, will, the Committee doubt not, strongly commend itself to the consciences of British Protestants.

The way has been, in God's good providence, remarkably prepared. The religious societies which have long laboured for the good of Ireland, and most of which have been aided by the Special Fund,—the Irish, the Church Education, the Scripture Readers, and the Additional

Curates' Societies, the Achill and Dingle Missions, the Irish Island, the Hibernian Bible, the Ladies' Hibernian Female School, the Cork Pastoral Aid, the Sunday School and other Societies,—have largely been spreading scriptural light and truth, and thus have become harbingers of more direct missionary efforts. The way has been yet further opened by those terrible afflictions, which in the last two years have visited that distressed country. In some parts of the West and South, in places where the darkness of Romanism had been the greatest, the people have cordially welcomed Protestant instruction, and there is good reason for believing this disposition to be more diffused than is generally supposed.

Under these circumstances, the Committee, while heartily wishing a larger support to all the present religious societies, have yet felt the need of a more distinct missionary effort in the Established Church to the Roman Catholic population of Ireland. Accordingly, they have already appropriated funds, to employ faithful and approved men, ordained for the purpose by the Bishops of Tuam, Killybeg, and Cashel, in their respective dioceses; and they propose, as the Public shall enable them, to multiply such labourers. It appears to them that a more direct missionary effort to the Roman Catholics should henceforth be the chief object which the Committee should aim at, under the slightly modified title of "THE SPECIAL FUND FOR CHURCH MISSIONS TO THE ROMAN CATHOLICS OF IRELAND."

The missions supported by the fund in the county of Galway, are already giving the most encouraging prospects of success; and the Bishop of Tuam has manifested his conviction of the reality of the work, by promptly affording facilities for the ordination of Irish-speaking clergy. The missionary Curates ordained by the Bishops of Killaloe

and Cashel, are also already actively engaged in the work.

The following extract from the letter of a very intelligent observer of passing events, who spent part of the last summer in Ireland, addressed to a member of the Committee, expresses what they believe to be the prevailing opinion among the best-informed in that country, as to the duty and probable effects of such a mission as is contemplated by the committee:

"I spent a part of the past summer with——, and was at some pains to gather information as to the hold which popery, as a religion, really has on the minds of the Irish people. I learnt then, what I have since had abundantly confirmed, that the mind of the people seems to have outgrown it. It was my friend's decided conviction, that there never was a time when, humanly speaking, controversial preaching or discussion was so likely to be attended with success; that if taken advantage of, the result could scarcely be over-estimated; but if neglected, the danger was imminent,—that emancipation would issue in tendencies as bad or worse, of an opposite description,—that it would be in fact, but an exchange of Popery for Communism and Infidelity. I have a letter from the Bishop of——, written some two or three weeks back, in which he says the same thing."

Hitherto the united Church of England and Ireland has chiefly confined its attention to the Protestant population, and has hardly at all been employed in the direct preaching of the gospel to the Roman Catholics of Ireland; and this has been stated by some to be its necessary position. The Irish clergy for generations, have, in a great measure, restricted their ministry to the Protestants, so that our Roman Catholic brethren have been generally left without the faithful preaching of the gospel, and in a practical exclusion from the truth as it is in Jesus. Neither English nor Irish Christians ought longer to suffer such a painful state of things to continue. To send missions to the

* One of the most eminent clergymen in Ireland.

distant heathen, and to neglect those in Roman darkness at home, is a glaring inconsistency.

It is allowed that very serious difficulties have hitherto obstructed attempts for bringing the gospel before Roman Catholics in Ireland, and that comparatively few of the Protestant parochial clergy are in circumstances to provide even for the efficient instruction of their widely-scattered Protestant parishioners, and the support of their schools, to say nothing of local and parochial institutions, and the clamorous importunity of a half-pauperized population. The great reduction of their ecclesiastical revenues, and their absolute dependence upon an impoverished proprietary, render it absolutely impossible for numbers of their body to provide the means of instruction for the Roman Catholic part of their parishioners. It is to overcome this preliminary obstacle to the discharge of a great, urgent, and national duty, that such an agency as your Committee would now recommend, becomes not only most important, but indispensable; and they feel persuaded that the proposal will be as cheerfully responded to by many of the most zealous of the Irish clergy, as it will be bountifully supported by the christian public in this country.

Experience has proved that lectures, in large towns, on the differences between the Church of England and the Church of Rome, are not unacceptable to Roman Catholics; and in such manifestations of Christian truth, broadly and strongly contrasted with the fatal errors of the Church of Rome, we may hope for much of the special blessing given at the Reformation. This form of instruction is remarkably calculated to awaken the conscience, and exercise the understanding, of the great mass of Roman Catholics in Ireland;

The regulations on which the Committee purpose acting, are to the following effect:

I. At the request of incumbents, they will support Assistant Ministers, in parishes containing a large Roman Catholic population. The nomination and appointment of these ministers to be subject to rules similar to those of the Church Pastoral Aid Society, with the understanding that ministrations to the Roman Catholics, shall be their distinct and peculiar object.

II. Assistant Ministers may also be appointed under the direction of the Bishop, for the Roman Catholics of a whole diocese.

III. In parishes where the incumbent would be favourable to such efforts, the temporary services of able and experienced clergymen, in visiting districts, giving lectures, and preaching to the Roman Catholics, may be engaged.

IV. Courses of Lectures, by competent lecturers, on the great subjects in controversy between the Churches of England and Rome, will be encouraged and upheld in the principal towns in Ireland.

V. The Committee to be at liberty, according to its resources, to adopt any measures that may tend to the furtherance of the conversion of the Roman Catholic population of Ireland, by means consistent with the principles of the united Church of England and Ireland.

VI. The Committee will gladly be the medium of sending any aid contributors may wish to appropriate to the religious Societies they have already assisted; and a friendly intercourse shall be maintained with other Protestants engaged in the same benevolent design of communicating the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the Roman Catholics of Ireland.

The Committee are fully aware that no plan of such a mission as they recommend, can be definitely laid down, independently of the teaching of experience itself. They confidently appeal to the authority of Scripture, in support

of the duty of a mission to the superstitious and ignorant millions of Ireland; and they call, with equal confidence, appeal to the historical testimony of the Reformation, for proof of the fact that the diffusion of the Holy Scriptures with the preaching of the glorious gospel of the grace of God, is precisely the course which was followed in every country to which the light of the Reformation extended. But there are many circumstances peculiar to the complicated and anomalous condition of society in Ireland, which must exert a modifying influence upon any system of general instruction, applicable to the Roman Catholic part of the population. Yet they feel assured that many of what may be considered the difficulties and impracticabilities of the plan recommended, will be found to vanish before a faithful and persevering preaching of the Gospel, in connection with the united Church. It rests with British Christians, whether the Committee shall be enabled to maintain and increase these truly missionary efforts of our Church for the conversion of the Roman Catholic population. The importance of the work cannot easily be overrated, as it regards the safety, prosperity, and peace of the British empire, and even the temporal interests of the English parishes, now burdened with Irish poor.

The Committee are sure that they express the feelings of a vast majority of their brethren in this country when they say, "we must care for the souls of Irish Roman Catholics; we must do what we can to give them the blessings of the Gospel. They are our fellow-countrymen, they are our neighbours. Next to the neglected masses in England, they have the first claim on our missionary exertions; and it is the most vitally important national duty of British Christians, to care for them. When judgments are being poured out on apostate Christendom, and we are yet so mercifully spared, we must lift up the pre-

dicted voice of heavenly entreaty to those in Roman apostacy, 'Come out of her my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and receive not of her plagues.' May we British Christians, repenting of past neglect, acknowledge we are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, and would not hear. May we now bring forth fruits meet for repentance."

The Committee have now only a balance of less than £700, the remnant of the former fund, to carry on this great undertaking, and they wait for those supplies which Christian faith and love will furnish. If it shall please God to dispose His servants to give largely, multiplied labourers may be sent forth, to fields now white for the harvest, in a country where we are specially bound to labour. But the Committee would still more earnestly implore the prayers of their Christian friends, that it may please God to remove all impediments that may yet be in the way of this work of mercy, and that His word may have free course and be glorified in Ireland.

EDWARD BICKERSTETH,
ALEX. R. C. DALLAS,
HON. SECRETARIES.

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BY THE REV. ALEXANDER DALLAS, M.A.,
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