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Society for the Propagation of the Gospel
in Foreign Parts.

*FORTY YEARS' EXPERIENCE IN THE WORKING OF
AN S.P.G. ASSOCIATION IN A RURAL PARISH.*

A LETTER

ADDRESSED TO THE REV. CANON OWEN,
Organizing Secretary for the Archdeaconry of Winchester,

BY THE

VEN. ARCHDEACON HUXTABLE,

TOGETHER WITH A PASTORAL LETTER OF THE
LORD BISHOP OF WINCHESTER.

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IN the month of May, 1880, the Standing Committee, seeing that the General Fund of the Society had fallen off under the item of Subscriptions and Collections during 1878 and 1879 to the amount of £1,200 and £2,000 respectively, caused a circular letter to be addressed to the Vice-Presidents, Diocesan Representatives, and Organizing Secretaries, with the view of arresting so very serious a diminution of the Society's resources. It was specially desired that the Society's friends should meet and consider how its existing Organization throughout the country could be better worked so that its income, and consequently its powers of usefulness, should, by the force of a widely-diffused Missionary Spirit and not by the spasmodic efforts of a few, permanently become more commensurate with the calls that are made upon it.

The suggestion was kindly received, and in many parts of the kingdom immediately acted upon. In the Diocese of Winchester a Conference was held in the Cathedral City on July 29, under the Presidency of the Lord Bishop. The presence of the Ven. Archdeacon Huxtable, than whom the Society has no truer friend, was invited, although he is unconnected with the Diocese. Unable to attend personally, he wrote the following letter, which is cordially commended to the Society's friends, and which will continue the good work which the "Country Vicar's" letter on Parochial Associations has wrought for so many years. The "Country Vicar" of 1846 was the late Rev. Canon Seymour of Kinwarton; and during these last thirty-four years many thousands of copies of his letter have been published and with the best results. The letter of Archdeacon Huxtable seemed so important to the Society's friends assembled at Winchester that they requested the Bishop to circulate it, and to commend it to the clergy and laity of his Diocese. To this his lordship kindly consented, and his Pastoral Letter is appended in the hope that it may bear fruit over an area wider than that of the Diocese of Winchester.

H. W. TUCKER,
Secretary.

October, 1880.

LETTER OF ARCHDEACON HUXTABLE TO THE REV. CANON OWEN,
ORGANIZING SECRETARY FOR THE ARCHDEACONRY OF WINCHESTER.

“SUTTON WALDRON, SHAFTESBURY,
“*July 23rd, 1880.*”

“MY DEAR SIR,

“As I cannot profit by your invitation to go and assist at the S.P.G. Conference to be held on Thursday next at Winchester, I will venture to put into writing some of the observations which I should have liked to address to the Meeting if permitted to be present. The purport of my words would have been to set forth the results of forty years’ experience in the working of an S.P.G. Association in this small village; which is wholly agricultural, and has a population of less than 250 souls, being made up of labourers under the direction of two farmers. Those results, though falling short of such as I desire, yet exhibit a proof that our labour has not been ‘wholly in vain in the Lord.’ Indeed, we have been able to remit, on the average of the last five years, somewhat more than 100*l.* a year to the ‘General,’ ‘Special,’ and ‘Appropriated’ Funds of the S.P.G.

“So soon as I came into residence as Incumbent of Sutton Waldron (about 1836), I began to try to awaken an interest in behalf of foreign Missions, and to impress upon the ‘little flock’ that the Lord had given unto them the duty and blessing of sending the good tidings into heathen lands—nor were these efforts fruitless. The first who heard the Call was my youngest brother, H. C. Huxtable, who devoted himself to the work, and was sent by the S.P.G. to South India, where (chiefly at Sawyerpuram) he laboured until failing health compelled his return to England. After a while with recruited strength he went forth again as Missionary to Port Louis, Mauritius. There his ministry was very successful, both among the Coolies and our own people. He was consecrated Bishop of the Island 1870; and, alas! soon afterwards sunk under the climate.

“During several years I had the assistance of two Curates—one a returned C.M.S. Missionary, another went forth to New Zealand, and died in the house of its devoted Bishop.

“Then a pupil teacher in our national school, who afterwards became a schoolmaster, wanted to enter the Missionary field. As he was young I feared that this might be only a transient impulse; but he was in real earnest, and after two years entered the noble institution, St. Augustine’s College. When his proper training was completed, he found employment under the S.P.G. in Burmah. His ministry was successful, and he died in his work. His two orphan sons are now wards of the S.P.G., and are deriving additional benefit

from the 'Missionaries' Children Education Fund,' of which my friend, Rev. J. F. Moor, of Ampfield, is the Secretary, and which, by the way, I hope will receive larger support from the Church than it has yet obtained. Though I am no longer Rector of the parish, my successor, the Rev. S. P. Downing, supports in every way the good Cause; and the old interest in Missions is as effective here as it was forty years ago, though the preceding generation has mostly 'fallen asleep.'

"This continued and steady support of the work is not due to quarterly schoolroom meetings, but to perpetual pleadings from the pulpit. The worshippers in our little church are reminded 'in season and out of season,' that the Lord has taught us to say, 'Thy kingdom come,' before we pray for our daily bread or daily pardon—that 'He is the Head over all Things for His Church'; 'that all things visible and invisible were not only made by Him but FOR Him; ' that when He declared Himself invested with 'all power in Heaven and earth He gave the supreme command to His disciples to go and teach all nations.' It has been sought to prove to the people that the support of Missions by prayers and by offerings is a *primary* duty of every Christian man: and it has been further urged that Churchmen who possess the means of grace 'without money and without price' (in all senses of that text) are specially bound to do more for Missions than is done by Nonconformists, who, in addition to their large Missionary contributions, maintain their own ministers and places of worship. Of course all these are both well-known and obvious Christian truths; but if I may judge from my own experience, they are not adequately enforced on the hearts and consciences of the faithful. I do not hear them often urged by such announcements as these, 'You and I, and the Church Militant, and the whole present system of the world's government, exist only to extend the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour; and that if we fail in doing our part therein we are denying our Christian profession, forfeiting our eternal reward, and frustrating the very end of our existence.'

"For months together in crowded churches in towns I have heard no allusion even to the paramount duty of preaching the Gospel to every creature, *save* at the Missionary Anniversary.

"In order to quicken and sustain the concern of our people in publishing the 'glad tidings to all nations,' we attempt to give information on some sphere of Missionary operation on the first Sunday of every month, in the following manner. As there are two boxes fixed in the church for receiving Missionary alms, and a certain portion is given of every offertory to S.P.G. at Holy Communion, the minister on the first Sunday announces from the pulpit how much has been contributed in the boxes on each Sunday respectively, and the amount of the offertory. This makes a natural introduction to his relating some Missionary intelligence; this preliminary to the

sermon is limited to ten minutes, and of course the sermon itself is proportionately shortened.

“Two advantages seem to flow from this method; first, the subject of Missions is periodically brought before the congregation, and next, the clergyman himself is obliged to read Missionary reports and other sources of information. But these sources are abundant, and are such as the *Annual Report*, the invaluable *Mission Field*, the *Quarterly Paper*, *The Net*, *Mission Life*, and the indispensable *Under His Banner*, Miss Yonge’s *Pioneers and Founders*. These periodicals and standard works, supplemented by extracts from the lives of our great Missionaries, really furnish an *embarras des richesses* of Missionary matter. But the intelligence thus given concerns chiefly the spiritual effects of Missions on the converts, &c.

“By using the pulpit on Sundays at the fullest attended service, the subject of Missions is brought before *all* churchgoers; an end not attained by schoolroom gatherings on week-days, when some cannot and many will not be present.

“We never have had a deputation here, being anxious to save the Society the frightful cost of that system, and one which seems wholly unnecessary, at least in rural parishes, if only the clergyman will interest himself in that all-important department of duty. In former years we used to have a schoolroom meeting annually, in which three or four clergy spoke on certain prepared subjects for twenty minutes each in succession; but for the last ten years we have only had instead a lecture on some particular Mission, illustrated by diagrams.

“There remains one more bit of machinery that has proved very beneficial to our work. About one-half of our houses in the parish are supplied with ‘Missionary boxes,’ and great pains have been taken to show how they should be rightly used. The box-holders are exhorted to place in these little treasuries a weekly offering, however small, on the Lord’s Day; and to make besides a special contribution whenever God has conferred a peculiar mercy, such as an anxiety removed, sickness healed, or letter with good news received, some worldly success vouchsafed, &c., &c. Perhaps many would think it better to reserve such thanksgivings for the offertory in God’s House—but sad experience has shown me that it is best to give to God, on bended knee, *when the heart is warm*—for these grateful emotions are apt to be enfeebled by the lapse of days, which will perhaps bring fresh trials of our Christian life and evoke other states of mind.

“There remains one more source of supply—the offerings on the Harvest Festival—one half of which is given to our county hospital, and the remainder to the S.P.G. This division of the sums then collected is made with the full approval of the churchwardens.

“Probably you will consider, even as I do myself, the outcome of all these lengthened efforts somewhat disappointing; but,

comparatively, I think that the results are considerable ; and I know that our people's zeal has stimulated some other parishes. But, oh ! I long to see the claims of Missions placed on a higher level than they now occupy, and to see it generally recognised that 'Missions should be the chief end of the Christian Church.'

"Pray, forgive the prolixity of these observations. If I had time I should like not only to revise but to condense them too—but a pressure of work at present prevents my re-writing this sketch of our little Sutton Waldron Association.

"Believe me, my dear Sir,

"Yours very faithfully,

"A. HUXTABLE.

"The REV. CANON OWEN."

PASTORAL LETTER ADDRESSED TO THE CLERGY OF HIS DIOCESE BY
THE LORD BISHOP OF WINCHESTER.

FARNHAM CASTLE, *August 12th, 1880.*

REV. AND DEAR BROTHER,

At a Conference held in Winchester on the 29th of last July, called to consider the wants of our Foreign Missionary Societies, especially of the S.P.G., a letter was read from Archdeacon Huxtable to Canon Owen, organising secretary of the S.P.G., which was received with great approval by the clergy present. They requested me to make known my own feelings concerning it, and to circulate it in the diocese, together with the substance of some remarks which I made at the time, giving the results of my own experience, which was very similar to that of the Archdeacon.

Let me first say that the needs of our Church Missions are very great, that, from the depression in commerce and agriculture, from our party strifes, from the general loosening of all religious opinions and from other causes, the funds of most of our Societies have lately fallen off, and that renewed and increased exertions must be made, unless the work of God in our hands is to go backwards, and we ourselves to be found faithless in the day of account.

I have long believed that interest in Missionary work cannot be kept up by a single annual sermon in church and by a few meetings in our towns with deputations sent from Parent Societies. These may have done good work fifty years ago, and may be of some

service still ; but all sermons are not impressive, nor their influence lasting ; all deputations are not eloquent ; very few in the towns themselves, and still fewer from the villages round about will frequent the meetings ; indeed, the general feeling about them is at the best one of listless indifference. I am sure that by far the best way of keeping up interest and increasing funds is by working effectually parish associations, and by trying to bring home to every family and, as far as possible, to every member of every family, a knowledge of, and a feeling for, the work which the Church is doing abroad. I have often expressed my opinion, in public and in private, that every parish ought to have its own Missionary association, regularly and systematically worked.

At the meeting in Winchester I gave an account of my own plan of action when I was myself a parish priest, and it was this which, in connexion with Archdeacon Huxtable's letter, I was asked to put in print. In 1842 I became incumbent of a large town parish ; my predecessor had had an annual sermon, and an annual meeting, in the schoolroom, for S.P.G., and C.M.S., and some of his district visitors collected for it, but the interest excited and the funds gathered were very small. What I tried to do was to improve upon this. We had a meeting in the schoolroom, when I announced my intention to divide the parish into districts, each of which was to be canvassed for missions by district collectors, who would leave cards in every house, circulate missionary publications, and call once a week, or once a month, as the inhabitants might prefer, for weekly or monthly contributions, the sum contributed to be entered on the respective cards. In addition to this, missionary boxes were deposited in any houses or shops where they would be accepted and useful. We had still our annual sermon, and once a quarter instead of once a year we had a meeting in the schoolroom, the speakers being the clergy of the parish and any neighbouring clergyman or layman who would come in and help us. We gave simple addresses, sometimes lectures illustrated by pictures or maps. The result of the whole movement was to quadruple the funds in the very first year.

Ten or eleven years after, I tried the same scheme in a large country parish in Cornwall, and with still more marked success. It was surprising to see how the people flocked from the country round, some from great distances, to the quarterly schoolroom meetings. The result was not only to swell the funds of the Societies, but to interest a great number of the farmers and of the poor in Church missions, and so in Church work generally. Whilst there had been only annual sermons in the church, and annual meetings in the neighbouring town, the people (who in Cornwall are mostly Wesleyans) did not even know that the Church had any missions to the heathen. Such things they believed to be peculiar to the Wesleyans : and I can confidently say that no work in church,

school, or cottage, had so favourable an influence in gathering my people round me, and conciliating dissenters to the Church, as this exhibiting to them constantly the Church as a great Missionary body, and this interesting of them personally in Mission work. They learned for the first time to believe that the Church was working in earnest for the salvation of souls.

I append Archdeacon Huxtable's letter, and commend it to your best attention. It seems to me especially valuable as showing how much may be done in small parishes by means of the pulpit. It details, moreover, a system very like my own, and equally or more successful.

I earnestly commend to every parish clergyman to make trial of some such work. I am certain that the results are all gain, with no loss in any direction. Men give more freely for other work who have learned to give for this. Men love those who teach them to give. One reason of the lukewarmness of our people to the clergy, to the Church and to religion, is, that they have them all so cheap, never have to give for them, and so know but little of their worth.

I would only add that, in my opinion, it is generally wise to collect funds for both Societies, S.P.G., and C.M.S., giving our people a choice as to which they may prefer, though expressing our own preference, if needful. Each Society may have its faults, but both have been working for God; the work will abide, and the faults are not incapable of remedy. There are, and always will be, differences amongst us; and unless we give some choice, we are in great danger of receiving a rebuff, and so of losing influence for good.

Commending the whole subject to your careful thought,

I am, Rev. and Dear Brother,

Your faithful Brother and Servant in Christ,

E. H. WINTON.





