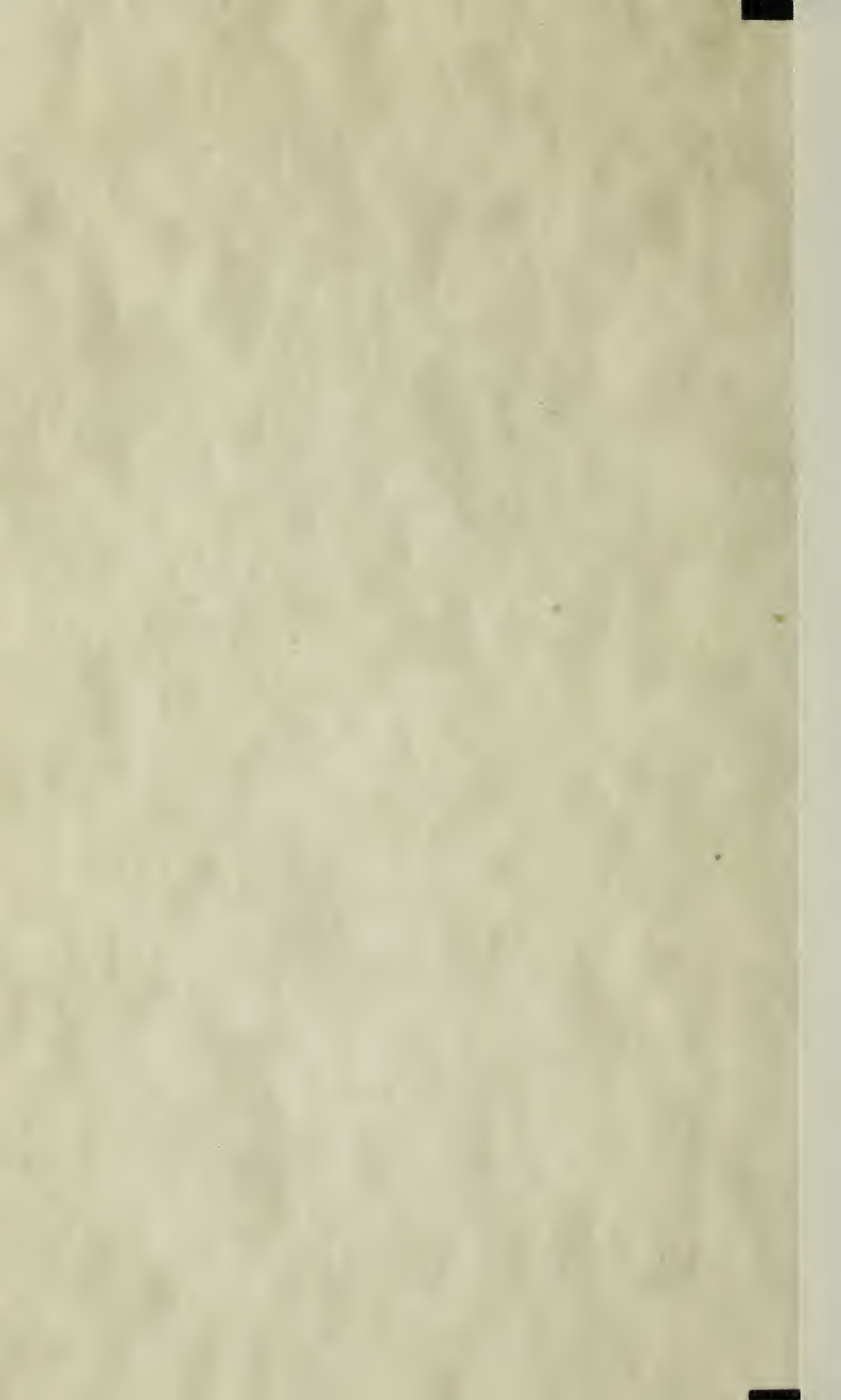


H. H. MONTGOMERY

The self-preparation of the missionary.



The Self-Preparation of the Missionary.

THE RIGHT REV. BISHOP MONTGOMERY

Secretary of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel

London - - - - -
STUDENT VOLUNTEER
MISSIONARY UNION -
93 & 94, Chancery Lane, W.C.



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THE SELF-PREPARATION OF THE MISSIONARY.

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THERE is only one thing for me to do in regard to this subject. I must give my own experience to my brothers, and you will, of course, see that it can be only a partial view. No one can be a true missionary who has not long passed the stage when he could be called only a *herald*—that is, a man who has had a message handed to him by someone in authority. He is paid to do such duties, and he carries his message, but does not profess to claim some vital connection between himself and the message.

Can you call a true missionary an *ambassador*? Much more truly, and, of course, St. Paul uses the word for himself; but you must put into the term all it can hold—far more than the average connotation—if you are to give satisfaction. You now mean one who has had a personal interview with his King, and knows him, is personally trusted by him, and is admitted into the closest secrets of the State. But an ambassador, in the ordinary sense, has not been what the missionary must be—the closest of friends with the King; one who has been in daily, hourly contact with Him for years, has lived on the King's strength, has been saved from destruction both of body and soul by the King, and has come into such close union that he takes the King's strength with him wherever he goes.

So it is not enough for a missionary to have faith. There

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is a faith, a true faith, which does not love. That will not work in the Mission-field. It may be true, saving, respectable, but it will work no miracles, and the one work a missionary has to do for his King is to work miracles. His fire must burn, his voice must have a thrill in it, his life must emit a light which cannot be hid. His faith must pass into sight here on earth, because he has to go and tell that he comes from One Whom he knows, and with Whom he has lived, Whose voice he has heard, and to Whom he owes all he holds most dear—a changed heart, a new hope, an eternal trust. There is nothing in all the world so true for him, so certain, so precious, as the existence and perpetual Presence and power of his Master, the Son of God, Who has revealed the Father to all men. A faith must have seen in order to have reached this point—the point quite beyond the reach of sneers, or doubts, or difficulties, because it has become the primal fact of our life and sensation intellectually and spiritually. To the missionary, of course, then, his message is the *one religion*, most scientific because based on facts. It is not racial or continental or imperial, except in the sense of Christ's empire, which is the sum of all creation. It is the personal claim of the one, only Saviour, and the good tidings of a Father's love, brought to the world by the Only Begotten Son.

Therefore, again, he sees the world with the eyes of Christ, so tender towards all genuine belief, however poor in quality, so sure of his own message, that he can afford to be more generous than anyone else in noting signs of God's inspiration in any of His children, however degraded; and as he broods over the spiritual history of the world, so awful is the mystery of it, so little seems the accepted light of revelation compared to the mass of darkness, that he has no theories about the future except a perfect trust in the perfect love and justice of the Father.

It is not terror, but the sense of the awful, overwhelming love of God for mankind, which makes him a missionary.

With such a message he cannot be silent, he is impelled forward, and no Moslem, not anyone, is so full of fire and devotion and heartfelt joy in his life's work as he.

There are two great founts of experience from which the missionary comes. (a) From men and women who have known a definite time of conversion—there is no doubt such an experience has produced great missionaries. (b) But also the missionaries come from those who have been led on, step by step, by God, with no possible date of a conversion, and possibly with no remembrance of any time when they did not wish to do the will of God and nothing but the will of God. It is impossible to choose between the two types. Each does its proper work. They are different instruments, and produce different sounds. Both are equally penetrating, both may be equally sweet and moving. Both, I think, can be found among the first Apostles, and they are found to-day side by side in Universities and Mission-fields.

If this is what a missionary means, how shall he build himself up? how sustain and develop the level he has attained?

I cannot imagine that he can live spiritually without daily times of silence. I may be wrong. There may be natures which live on noise best, just as I have heard of a riveter who found that the most refreshing sleep was to be obtained inside a boiler when it was being riveted by his mates, but I cannot but think this is an exception. A daily hour of silence for meditation is a necessity for most of us. The life of the spirit is full of delicate things. Just as the silence of the wood brings out of their hiding-places the live creatures of the forest, so silence works upon our souls. God's angel appears (I think he is shy of crowds), and so coming he shows pictures and whispers thoughts. Yes, and the Lord Himself comes. His word in the Book in our hands gets a new meaning never thought of before. It is His doing

when you are alone with Him. Some of us have probably not been trained to get much help from outward surroundings at such a time of prayer. I confess that I am enormously influenced by them. A bedroom cannot compare with an oratory, or a chapel, or a quiet church. The symbols of the faith, sacred pictures, the associations of worship and of nothing but worship, are to one of my temperament quite an invaluable aid. To me the Lord does come much more plainly into places specially prepared for His remembrance.

I think also that two sorts of prayers are necessary. I cannot imagine one training to be a missionary not fully accustomed to the use of spontaneous prayers, in his own language, expressing his own praise and repentance and hungering and thirsting. Neither can I imagine him not using the words of others as being exactly what he needs and far better than he could have put it. The Psalms, of course, are our first treasure-house, and it seems to me that all great masters of prayer have based their utterances, consciously or unconsciously, on the Psalms. They are felt to be of the same type—a dislike for adjectives, too deeply fervent to need them often. These masters are all austere in prayer, with an awful apprehension of the Presence of God, as well as of His love. There is no undue familiarity in the great masters of devotion in addressing the Great Friend, since He is also King.

After two kinds of prayer in a place of silence, it is essential to dwell much on the Gospels and Epistles—on the New Testament especially. Personally, I do not think the Old Testament by itself is enough for our daily communion with God, except for the Psalms and a portion of the Prophets. There is, there must be, a note lacking in the Old Testament for the close friend of Christ. It points to Him, but from a distance. I was almost going to say that the Epistles are essential, but cannot quite say that. The words of apostles are very uplifting, and go very deep. They satisfy because

they reveal Him and explain Who He is. But after every study of an Epistle, I confess I come back with joy to a Gospel. Here is the eternal fount. These are His words—a fact so wonderful that the spirit faints. Is it not too good to be true? There is a quality about them which makes them inevitable words. They could only come from the Only Begotten Son. The same inevitableness is in all four Gospels. There is no proof for their genuineness needed: they are their own proof. Again, we all have our favourite books that help. I confess that I come back with joy to the fourth, fifth, or tenth perusal of Bishop Westcott's "St. John," whether on the Gospel or on the Epistles.

Nor can I find it possible to read many words of the Lord in a silent hour—often a verse, and no more—the words mean so much! Press them—you can press them for years, but the meaning deepens, and one new point gained illumines the day. The Friend has spoken direct on that day, and the benediction of it lasts till evening. But there is still time in the quiet hour for another daily act, to sit and let the eye wander over all the world, to bring out the stores of our reading to make vivid this spot or that, this fight or that, where some hero we know is at work. And this is where growing knowledge tells. By degrees the missionary map imprinted on your heart has few vacant spaces. It is as though the Lord came to you in the silence of the morning, before the stars had paled, and, after speaking to you takes you to the door, opens it, and says, "Look at that which I have redeemed, and for which I make intercession. Look with Mine eyes," and as this habit of surveying the world for a few minutes grows, your attitude towards life grows in depth, you become a world-wide Christian. I have no better expression at hand. Everything you say and do begins to tell of the attitude slowly gained—so hard to gain, because it is the highest—the attitude of one who instinctively acts, lives, and speaks as believing that God

is, that God reigns, that God loves all mankind, and is working for them, and needs our help in His work. This attitude means a loving heart, full of tenderness for every need, especially to the Saviour of all to all.

This daily survey has also this effect, that it makes us ready to go anywhere. The world begins to look small, all we want to do is to be of use somewhere. We go to the Generals who know how the battle fares, and we ask to be sent. I wonder whether the person is present who, I think, some years ago, at one of these gatherings, said: "Is there any place in the world where no one will go? That is the place for me." That is the spirit which evolves itself as we pray, and read, and then look out, in our hour of silence.

I think this hour, upon which I base everything, also helps the young man preparing to be a missionary really to cease from being ambitious in a worldly sense. The joy of Christ's Presence and work really kills ambitions, though it is a tough battle for some. I do feel for those who by nature are personally ambitious. Probably they will make the best missionaries some day, but it is a hard fight for them to put ambition for the Master's Kingdom and its welfare in place of the immediate success of life here. Many of you must feel a pang when a friend at college goes away to become a Member of Parliament, with independent means—likely to be a Cabinet Minister, or a Judge, or a magnate in the City. You would be more than human if you did not feel it. But the hour of silence in the sanctuary of God will restore you; you will come to rejoice that you have become poor here, and if you have wealth and are going to dedicate it all to God, because nothing else is possible for the great love in your heart, remember that you have the chance of showing to the world what I verily believe is the most beautiful type of Christian in the world—the Christian who is very wealthy, but whose wealth, in place of having a bad effect, has become an additional step in the upward progress.

All great temptations have this double use. To have no ambition but one—it is a great gift, and it wins the world.

I fear my next point, as a result of the hour of silence, is rather an old man's experience. As such receive it. It is, to become daily familiar with the thought of death. You know it is the advice of Henry Vaughan to spend an hour in the grave daily. That last angel who comes to us in this world ought not to scare us by his appearance, for he *is* an angel.

Now I emerge from my hour of silence. And the next step is an obvious one. It is to show the devotion that is in you by working for the Mission cause here, to sweep before your own door before you venture to look far afield, to show that you possess the power of leadership, and of a pioneer and builder, to prove that you can endure the strain of prosaic work for the joy set before you, and persevere against opposition and coldness, to prove the heat of the fire within you. No one in his senses would take a man or woman on the promise alone of being one day a missionary, but only on the evidence of home Mission work well done.

Again, that hour of silence is the great aid to your Mission work now at home. That is the hour in the sanctuary into which you take the perplexities, the questions, the scoffings against the faith you have experienced. In fact, you copy exactly the example of King Hezekiah. You take the thing that opposes or scoffs or troubles to your best Friend—to the King Himself. You ask Him how to answer, and what to say ; you take the advice of other and older friends of the King, who are masters of the spiritual life. Some of their answers will be plain : sometimes the answer will be that here you are face to face with a great mystery, insoluble at present—the perplexity of all the ages. Even the Lord has not explained it. Nay, by His own message He may have deepened the mystery ; but it is evident that He did not

mean us to know, since He knew and did not tell us. Perhaps if He could have explained, it would have unfolded a greater mystery, something more than we could bear at present, which might even drive to insanity, some dread facts not fit for a life of faith. Then it is delightful not to know but to trust Him. I am not sure that, though it is delightful to discover, it is not more delightful still not to know, to lie trustfully and joyfully in mysteries too great for us, as children in the Father's house. The intending missionary will at least keep clear of that quaintest of all methods of getting spiritual knowledge—of turning to the next magazine article, or of asking the first man you meet whether he is sure our Blessed Lord really rose from the dead, as though he must be an expert. It is as though if some one reviled your mother you went straight to your greengrocer to ask whether he really considered your mother a disreputable person. No, you will go into the sanctuary of God and ask God Himself.

Lastly, expect opposition always. Your preparation will best be done so. Ever since the Lord came He has sent to men here, not peace, but a sword, as He said He would. Unbelief and agnosticism will never disappear from our race, at all events till He come. It is our natural temptation. Wax tender over it; do not be surprised at it. We are not naturally a spiritual race, and we cannot see without great effort. The form taken by unbelief and agnosticism varies backwards and forwards. It is pathetic how old-world it all is, pathetic, too, how often the perplexed or the confident person is not aware of the ancient flavour of his new Gospel. So read history, do not be down-hearted; let your spiritual life grow naturally and without forcing, and the Lord will use you when the time is ripe. But He does not expect old heads on young shoulders.

I have not said a word about self-preparation by aid of Sacraments, and the grace received through them. It is not my intention to do so. I have kept to the common

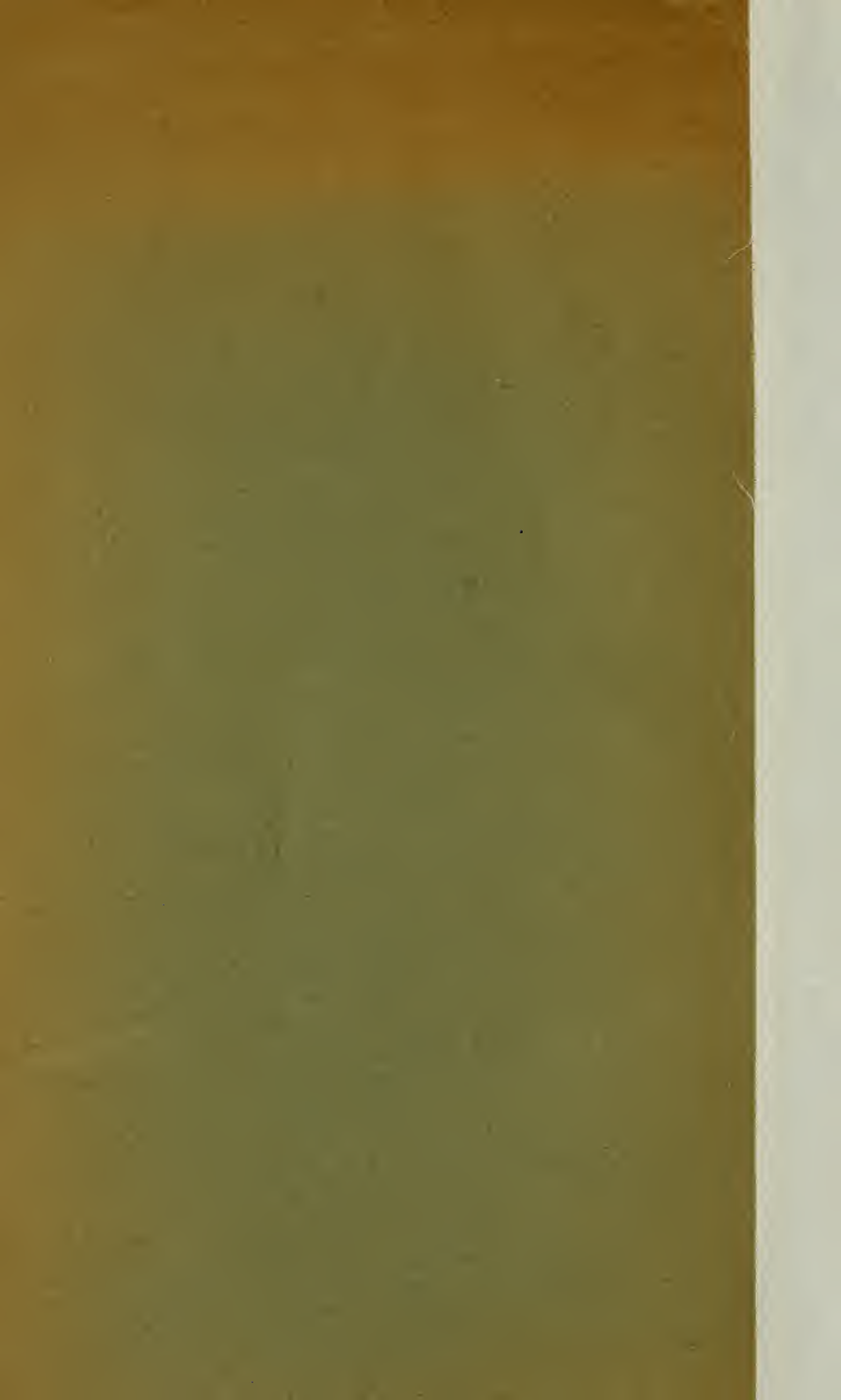
ground, which, in self-preparation, is a broad and extensive kingdom for us all who love the Bible, find in it the words of eternal life, and see in it the vision of the Lord.

It is a solemn thing to look on young men and women in these days, and to behold their heritage spread out before the old who will not themselves inherit. It is a joyful thing to watch the young men and women striving after the spiritual life, for they shall not be ashamed, but stand in the latter day, bringing sheaves with them.

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