

**A LETTER TO RIGHT REVEREND THE LORD
BISHOP OF OXFORD CHANCELLOR OF THE
MOST NOBLE ORDER OF THE GARTER,
&C.&C.&C. SUGGESTIVE OF MEANS FOR
SUPPLYING THE PRESENT WANT OF
COLONIAL CLERGY AND MISSIONARIES**

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A letter to right reverend the lord bishop of Oxford chancellor of the most noble order of the garter, &c.&c.&c. suggestive of means for supplying the present want of colonial clergy and missionaries by H. S. Slight

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H. S. SLIGHT

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A LETTER

TO THE RIGHT REVEREND

THE LORD BISHOP OF OXFORD,

CHANCELLOR OF THE MOST NOBLE ORDER OF THE GARTER,

&c. &c. &c.

SUGGESTIVE OF MEANS



FOR SUPPLYING THE PRESENT WANT

OF

COLONIAL CLERGY AND MISSIONARIES.

BY THE

REV. H. S. SLIGHT, B.D.

FELLOW OF C.C.C. OXON. AND CHAPLAIN IN THE ROYAL NAVY.

OXFORD,

JOHN HENRY PARKER.

1848.

MY LORD,

FROM former proofs of your Lordship's kindness and condescension, I feel assured that you will permit me to take the liberty of addressing you in the following lines. It is on a subject which I have long reflected upon with great interest, though without considering myself in a position to place my ideas before the public. But having heard, in the course of your Lordship's Sermon this morning, a sentiment with which my own long-cherished views are exactly in accordance, I venture now to lay them before you.

In your Lordship's powerful appeal, exhorting all to cooperate in the labours and designs of the Church Missionary Society, a hope was expressed, that among other means of cooperation and assistance, some persons might be found to give *themselves* to the work, even if it were "*but for a time.*" The concluding words of this suggestion, my Lord, contain the idea which has been long the subject of my own attention; "If but for a time."

Before entering further into particulars, I may here perhaps be allowed to mention, that having in my capacity, as Chaplain for some years in the Royal Navy, been placed in the way of seeing some of our distant colonies, and of becoming acquainted with

their peculiar wants and circumstances, I shall in the following pages be speaking not altogether from bare theory, but from the experience of an eye-witness. Had it not been for this plea, I should hardly perhaps have considered myself justified in thus trespassing on your Lordship's attention.

It has then always struck me most forcibly, that one of the chief causes which has prevented many of those who have entered into Holy Orders in our Church from choosing the field of Missionary labour as their province, has been the following, or rather what may be explained as follows. A proposal to accept a Missionary station presents itself, not like that of a Curacy in England, where in a great proportion of cases the duties are those of assisting a more experienced Minister, who still bears the chief responsibility of the cure; nor even like that of the sole charge of a small parish in whose neighbourhood clerical friends and advisers, and, if need be, temporary substitutes, are to be easily found; nor again as a post, which under urgent circumstances can at once be given up, and a successor readily procured to fill it; it is not at all in this manner or under this aspect that the idea of undertaking a Missionary's duties presents itself to the mind. We are accustomed to regard it, if I mistake not—and the expectations of friends seem to agree with this view—not only as a post of great hardship, but as a voluntary exile from country, home, and relatives, and that virtually for life. He who regarded it otherwise would be considered probably as one who had begun to look back almost before he had put his hand to the plough;

as one, whose resolutions and intentions were not to be trusted, or who wished to gain the credit of a sacrifice and an act of self-denial, without the cost of it.

To have travelled so far, to have incurred the expense of outfit, to have bestowed the care and attention necessary to prepare one's self for the duties of a Missionary in a distant and foreign country, and yet from the very outset to have cherished thoughts and intentions of quitting the scene after a brief sojourn, seems, and perhaps naturally at first sight, to betoken fickleness, and to occasion no little waste of valuable time and other means. On such grounds, whether really substantial or not, the opinion seems to be founded, that they who in these days undertake the work of a Missionary, should undertake it for life; should leave their native country for the remainder of their days, and abandon all intentions of again returning, for more at least than a short visit to it.

Another element which here necessarily enters into the calculation, and which the general tone of feeling on the subject, as I have above described it, serves materially to strengthen, is, that he who thus once consents to expatriate himself, thereby sacrifices, in all probability, whatever prospects he might have had to look forward to from friends or patrons at home. He becomes as one who has placed himself out of competition. His position is lost, and his place knows him no more. Others have filled it in his absence, and it would be considered usurpation in him to claim it again. If length of service in a diocese seems ordinarily to offer a claim to preferment, or if the

early charge of a laborious parish affords ground for hoping to succeed at last to the Incumbency of it, all such expectations must be foregone ; and after several years of foreign labour, the Missionary returns to commence climbing the steep road of promotion at the very point at which he might have set out upon it on the day of his Ordination. Thus those ' home-loving propensities' to which your Lordship alluded as characteristic of the English, and which, may I be allowed to add, as themselves the source of domestic habits, form probably one grand secret of our national strength and stability, become, in the case of the Missionary, at once and doubly thwarted. For the present they must be wholly abandoned, and the future presents nothing but a cheerless and discouraging prospect for their development.

If the above be a true representation of the case, my Lord, I think it is not difficult to perceive in what manner it acts as a cause of preventing many from engaging themselves as ministerial labourers in the Missionary service. Apt as we all are to shrink from hardships, even when it is most incumbent on us to face them, still more liable are we to do so, when they assume, however truly or not, the appearance of being voluntary, and especially when they are likely to be of long duration. In the case as I have stated it, all these unfavourable circumstances seem to stand prominently forward. That a Missionary's life is rightly regarded as one of hardship, it would be superfluous to mention ; that each person individually feels himself at liberty to decline it, and not really neglecting any

positive duty, or incurring any personal responsibility by doing so, is another fact, which, I fear, must be admitted; and lastly, that under the present circumstances, such a course of hardship ought to be persevered in, and to terminate only with life, seems, as I before said, to be a prevailing opinion. The prospect of a task so laborious and full of sacrifice, so voluntary, so lasting, this doubtless it is which deters many from becoming Missionaries.

But to point out difficulties without suggesting a remedy, would be worse than useless; and I trust, that my having so dwelt upon them may now be followed by my being able to propose at least a partial remedy. What I propose then will be found in exact accordance with your Lordship's suggestion; viz. that while others are co-operating in the work, as we know many readily do, by contributions, and in various other ways, there should still be some who give *themselves* to it, "if but for a time."

In your Lordship's suggestion is of course implied the removal of the chief of the above obstacles, viz. the lasting nature of the Missionary's duties and hardships in any individual case. Once fairly remove this impediment, and the others, I firmly believe, will soon, in a great degree, vanish, or be but lightly regarded. My argument, if I may be permitted to repeat it, or rather to expand what I before stated, is as follows. A proposal is either made, or the idea spontaneously arises in a young and ardent mind, to devote its efforts to the Missionary cause. Under present circumstances, as was above observed, this proposal is equi-

valent to a voluntary and lasting banishment from home and friends. Now even if there be the will on the part of the individual himself to make the necessary sacrifice, and bid a long adieu to his native shores, yet how is his plan likely to be received by his family and near friends? An aged father or mother may perhaps be mainly dependent, if not for other assistance, yet for society and comfort, in the evening of life upon him who is now intending to leave them, without hope of return. Sisters or other relatives, or again the orphan children of brothers, or kindred, may need a friend to help and protect them; but all such ties must be broken, and such claims rejected; and that without a prospect of their being at ever so distant a period renewed or fulfilled respectively. This, I need hardly say, is putting our best feelings severely to the test; and can it be wondered at, if the pleadings of nature in such a case are often listened to, as well in consequence of the many influences from without, as of that perhaps more powerful one from within? Such, we repeat, is the present state of things—a state that has prevailed continuously, I believe, up to this time, and which from the fact of its having been thus hitherto unbroken, seems to have acquired its character of supposed necessity.

It is this necessity then that we venture to question. Herein lies our remedy. Make the Missionary commission, where it may be so desired, not lasting, but temporary. Let it be “but for a time.” Let it be offered and accepted with the understanding, that after a few years it may be resigned, free from all charges